

Digital mobility in old age_

How seniors use the Internet.
Key findings of a study.



Lessons Learned_

Clear strategies for digital inclusion are needed to guide and support as many seniors as possible to get online. There are many opportunities and possibilities.

01

Age is not the sole deciding factor in Internet use. Other important aspects include the degree of mobility and social contact.

02

Mobile technologies can enhance the mobility of seniors and help them to play an active part in public life.

03

Seniors with limited experience of the Internet prefer to use simple applications such as games and information on timetables. Greater experience is needed for complex apps that offer advantages when coping with everyday tasks (e.g. online banking).

04

Digital competence must be augmented with greater confidence in using the Internet. Seniors can acquire both through appropriate training programmes. As well as technical skills, such programmes should also convey problem solving abilities.

05

Digital training services must take as their basis the practical experience of seniors and the benefits the Internet offers them.

06

Seniors can be helped to adapt to the digital world with easily-accessible, individual advice services that are designed to meet the needs of older people.

Seniors barely use the Internet

It is still the case that the Internet and digital media are actively used by far more young people than old. While the vast majority of young people in Germany actively and regularly use the Internet, only about one-third of people aged over 70 take part in digital life. This age-gap with regard to the over-70s has not diminished over the past 15 years, which indicates that the measures used until now to promote use of the Internet by this age group must be reviewed and improved.

As part of the 'Digital Mobility in Old Age – Tablet PCs for Seniors'¹ project, Telefónica Deutschland and the Digital Opportunities Foundation (Stiftung Digitale Chancen) set up a study to find out how much older people use digital media, what are the advantages they gain from them, and what needs to be done to induce more seniors to take the step into the digital world.

Study into seniors' online behaviour

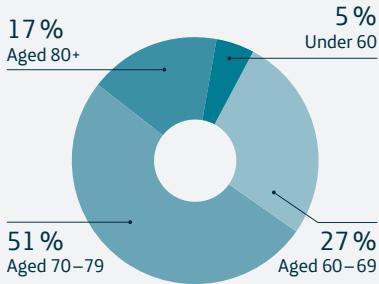
Unlike previous surveys, the results of this study deal with the personal experiences of the seniors who took part. From April 2016 to May 2017, the study offered around 300 older people (N = 299) in four cities the opportunity to use a tablet PC with mobile Internet access for a period of eight weeks in total, enabling them to find out about the benefits of digital media. The programme was accompanied by a support programme which aimed to introduce participants to the Internet and help them to get started using it. The seniors who took part were asked about their experience before and after the survey.

A comprehensive picture of the use of digital media by seniors was created using standardised questionnaires, personal interviews and selected video statements. Besides the normal socio-demographic data, extensive information on personal circumstances (e.g. family and social contacts, mobility, housing, etc.) was also gathered and revealed potential reasons for use of certain apps. This showed that some circumstances can bear a relationship to the experience of various benefits. For example, older people who value close

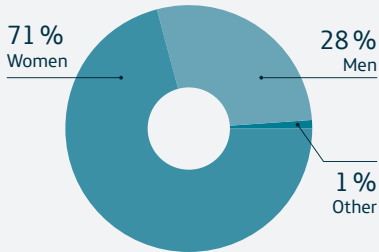
¹ German title: Digital mobil im Alter – Tablet PCs für Senioren.

Profile of participants

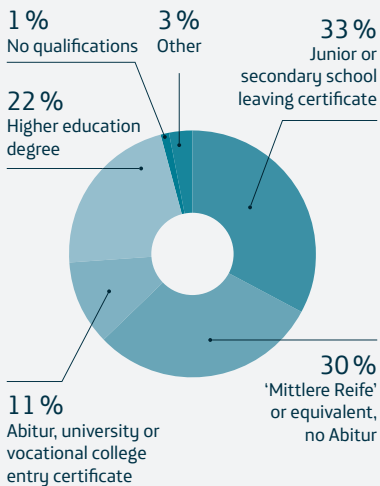
BY AGE GROUP



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contact with their family use communication services such as Skype or WhatsApp more often.

Following the survey, the interim results and consequent questions were discussed by three guided panels of study participants in Berlin, Düsseldorf and Hamburg during March and April 2017.

How do seniors use the Internet?

Using a checklist, the seniors who took part in the study could state which apps they had used during the eight-week period of the project (see table above right).

While participants mostly used their tablets to communicate by e-mail, the communication services that are heavily used by young people were far less used by seniors. Only around one in four stated that they used WhatsApp and about 10 per cent of respondents named social networks such as Facebook. Two-thirds of the seniors who used WhatsApp have grandchildren and this can be seen as a particular inducement to use messaging services.

Position**Use of apps during 8 week period, any device**

1	Sending and receiving e-mails	72 %
2	Accessing timetables or journey times from public transport services	66 %
3	Navigation (e.g. Google Maps)	53 %
4	Games	48 %
5	Travel and accommodation information	46 %

Older people's high need for mobility is evident in the frequent online use of timetables and navigation tools such as Google Maps. Around two-thirds of the seniors in the survey had used their tablet for the former, and half of them for the latter, which shows that the Internet can offer positive support for the mobility of older people. People with memory problems in particular stated that they also use these services whilst travelling, giving them a little bit more independence.

In general older people use the Internet and digital media far less than the young. Many seniors said that digital apps were impractical or too complicated.

These opinions changed after eight weeks' experience with tablet PCs and Internet use (see table on next page).

The variety of digital services that can also be interesting to older people clearly shows that very different needs and aspirations can be met. In order to attract more seniors to use digital media, there needs to be a specific focus on explaining the range of digital services to them as well as the consequent variety of uses to which digital media can be put.

Thinking about your use of the Internet in the past few weeks, how accurate are the following statements in your opinion?

**Agreement in %
(Agree + Mostly agree)**

I can increase my knowledge and keep learning using the Internet.	93 %
The Internet saves a lot of time and trouble.	83 %
The Internet enables me to stay independent for longer in old age.	69 %
The most important aspect of the Internet for me is that I can stay in contact with my family, friends and acquaintances.	66 %
The Internet offers me good opportunities for entertainment and pastimes.	63 %
With mobile Internet I can find my way around new areas faster.	58 %
The Internet is important to me because I can present my professional and personal profile there.	14 %

Challenges faced by seniors when using the Internet

Many seniors have specific expectations of online use. The wish 'to stay in contact' (expressed by 66 per cent) is met for example by use of e-mail (named as used by 72 per cent), see graph on the right.

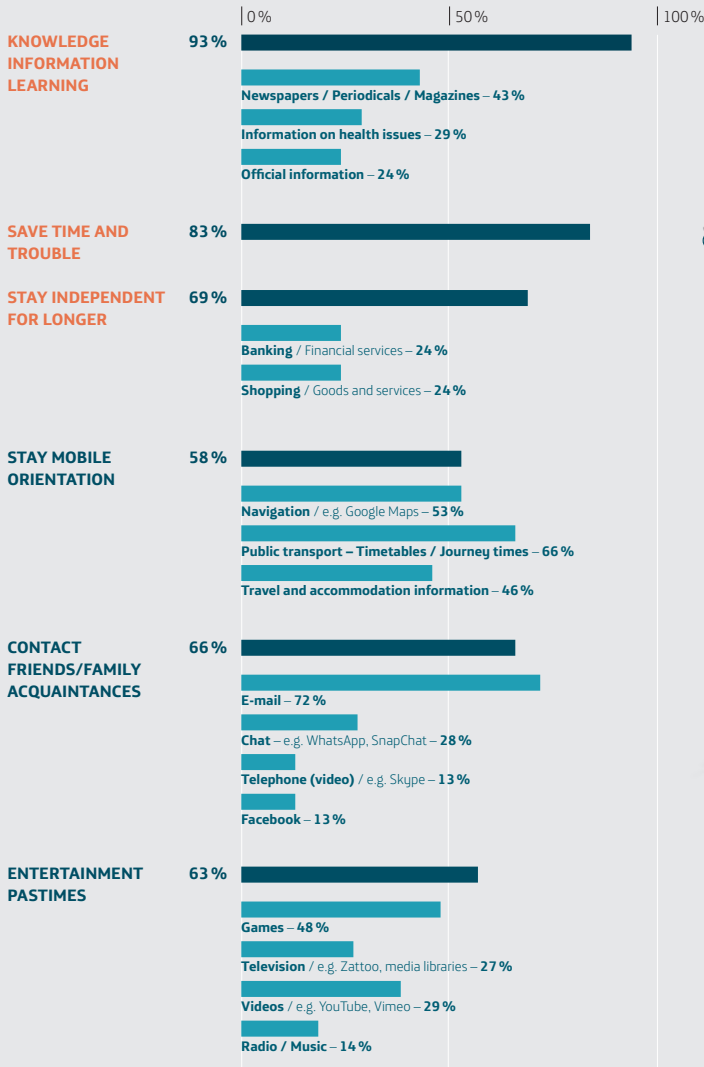
By contrast there was an obvious discrepancy in the benefits 'Save time and trouble' and 'Stay independent for longer'. The seniors who took part in the study felt that both can be enabled by the Internet. However only 24 per cent stated that they shopped online. There were many reasons for failing to use shopping opportunities

despite the obvious benefits. Firstly, setting up a user account and inputting personal data and means of payment represent special challenges for many older people and also give rise to concerns about security. In addition there is often a lack of confidence that they will be able to deal with any problems independently. So it is even more important to support older people on the path to digital independence with targeted services. Besides questions of proficiency, increasing self-confidence also plays a big part. Computer clubs for seniors and consumer advice centres with shared training in online shopping can make a crucial contribution here to overcoming this discrepancy between expected benefits and use.

What benefits does the Internet offer me and which apps have I used?

299 seniors surveyed in the period from July 2016 to April 2017

EXPECTED BENEFIT / ACTUAL ACTIVITY



There is in some cases a gulf between what seniors would like from the Internet and what they actually do online.



Photo: Fernanda Vilela

**A summary of the key findings of the study
can be accessed as a brochure from:**

www.telefonica.de/studie-internetnutzung-senioren
www.digitale-chancen.de/tabletpcs

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