Britainthinks

Life Offline | What life is like for older people who don't use the internet

A report prepared by BritainThinks on behalf of Age UK

May 2015

Contents

1. Executive Summary

- **Evidence from this research shows that this audience, while not necessarily opposed to ever going online, have many deeply entrenched barriers to using the internet. Overall for this group, the downsides of going online outweighed the perceived advantages. Key barriers include:**

  - A lack of knowledge and experience of the internet
  - Low to no 'top of mind' awareness among this audience that they are missing out by not being online
  - A perception that the internet is 'not for them', notwithstanding an appreciation of it as an overall positive phenomenon
  - A feeling that the internet is an 'unsafe place'
  - A strong feeling that using computers/the internet is very much outside their comfort zone
  - A perception that cost and access are prohibitive
  - A feeling that using internet for certain things would mean they would miss aspects of life they value and enjoy
  - Being able to use the internet 'by proxy' through family or others doing things online on their behalf

- **It is possible that if these barriers could be addressed, some older people might start to see the advantages that they are not currently aware of and become more interested in going online. It will, however, be necessary to ensure that attempts to encourage online use go beyond the provision of information and support services because, as for the reasons set out above, older people are unlikely to proactively seek support.**

  - Participants thought that sustained and focused and appropriate face-to-face support might help build confidence and skills around IT use and internet access
  - Some participants argued that the cost of getting online should be shared by/borne by service providers, while better understanding of actual costs and potential savings could also have an impact on the perceived cost-benefit of using the internet

- **Whereas it may be possible to address some of the barriers over time, it is apparent that for many of this audience, being forced online by withdrawal of alternative means of accessing goods and services will be very problematic, with a potentially damaging impact on health and wellbeing.**

  - For those who are forced to access services 'by proxy' through family or others, this leaves them vulnerable to loss of privacy, control or independence and potentially to financial or other exploitation.

- o Age UK should make government and businesses aware of the impact that moving services exclusively online or making offline access harder can have for older people living offline.

- o Age UK should advocate on behalf of this group to businesses and government:
    - To ensure that offline options remain available for older people - this is especially important in relation to essential public services
    - There is also a need to let business and government know that offering incentives such as preferential savings rates or discounts linked to online access are unlikely to act as effective drivers to this audience to get online, but instead may simply exclude them

2. Background

Wider context of this research

Age UK aims to provide equal opportunities for older people and ensure they have access to the services they need and want. Our increasingly digital world has arguably 'left behind' those in older generations who are not online. Almost 30% of people aged 65-74 have never been online, with this proportion significantly increasing with age; for example 61% of over 75s have never used the internet.[1]

Government and businesses are increasingly shifting products or communicating new services online, which reduces costs, and for their majority customer base - who are regularly online - can provide a more efficient service. For example, the Government Digital Service website refers to 'the digital transformation of government, making public services digital by default, and simpler, clearer and faster to use'[2]. While there will be 'assisted digital' support to access Government services, increasingly, the move within national and local government and private businesses is towards digital access.

The ramifications of this are that those people who do not have access to the internet miss out on products, services, notices and information directed via the internet. Age UK is specifically concerned that older people who currently live offline are more likely to miss out on products or services that prioritise online consumers and end up paying more.

Older people have many barriers to going online. Quantitative research shows that the most common reasons households do not have internet access is because they say they do not need it (53%), they lack skills (32%), and due to the cost of equipment (12%) and the cost or access through broadband or telephone (11%)[3].

Given these barriers and the increasing shift towards online services, Age UK would like to understand what everyday life is like for people who live 'offline' and particularly how they currently access goods and services without the internet. Age UK commissioned BritainThinks to undertake qualitative research to explore what life is like for digitally excluded older people and uncover their feelings and expectations in an increasingly digital world.

Age UK will use the research to inform their strategy for engaging with government and business to ensure that older people living offline are not being excluded or severely disadvantaged by the issue and highlight suggestions and concerns to government and businesses who are increasingly moving information and access to products online. The research will also inform Age

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[1] "*Internet users 2015* Office of National Statistics 2015
[2] https://gds.blog.gov.uk/about/
[3] *Internet Access – Households and Individuals 2014* ONS 2014 (all ages and people could give more than one response)

UK's continuing work to help older people who would like to get online to do so by identifying the support they would require.

Research objectives
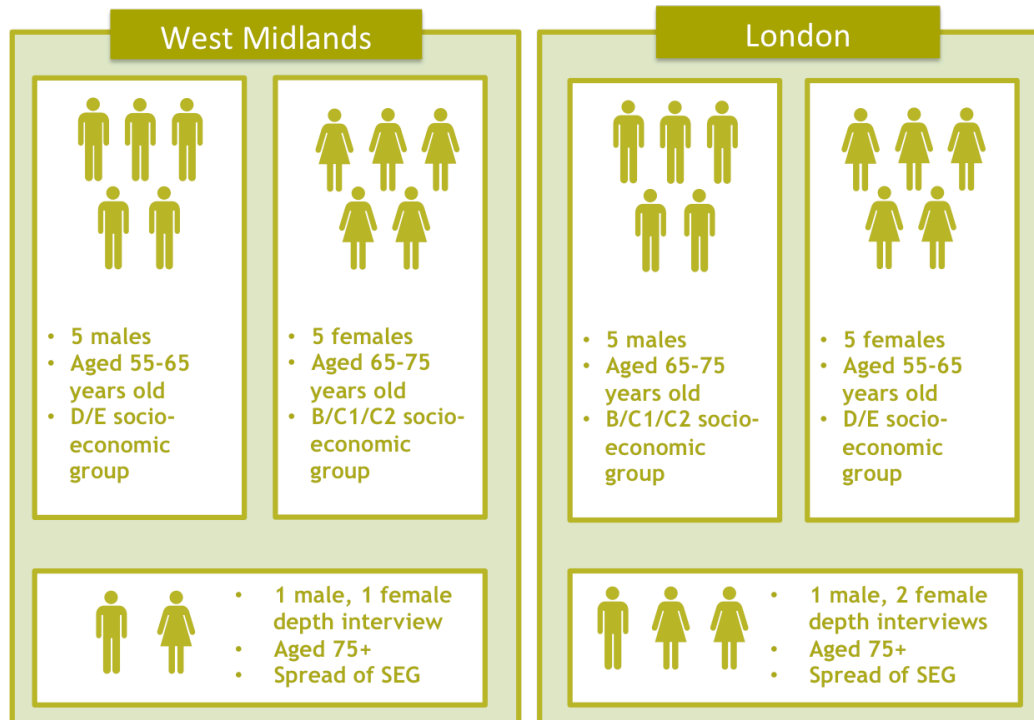
The research aimed to understand:

1) What day-to-day life is like without using the internet, specifically how older people currently access goods and services[4], examining:
   - The relative pros/cons of accessing goods and services offline

2) How older people think and feel about being offline in an increasingly digital world and the implications for them, including:
   - How far they identify with being 'offline' or feel that the world is becoming 'increasingly digital'
   - What the emotional/mental associations with being offline/online are
   - What the perceived benefits/drawbacks to being offline/online are

3) Reactions/suggestions to services shifting online, including:
   - What support they would need to encourage them to go online
   - Uncovering any digital activities older people have engaged in (directly/indirectly) and their reactions and suggestions to accessing goods and services online in future

Sample and methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen using two methodologies to ensure a breadth of respondents across the sample and the depth required to truly understand each individual:

- Firstly, four mini-groups were run, each containing five people and lasting 90 minutes:
  - Two groups comprised older people aged between 55 and 65 and two groups were with those in the 65-75 age bracket
  - Groups were also split by gender and SEG and were conducted in two locations – Edmonton in London and Solihull in the Midlands

- Secondly, five individual depth interviews were conducted with people of 75 or over. These depths comprised:
  - Three participants living in an urban environment and two in a rural setting
  - Three females and two males

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[4] Goods and services defined to include a range of services including: Central and local government services (such as bus passes, refuse pickup, etc.), information (such as searching for the best rates, diagnosing health symptoms), essential private services (such as utilities, banks, etc.), other consumer goods and services (such as food/clothes/homeware shopping)

West Midlands

- 5 males
- Aged 55-65 years old
- D/E socio-economic group

- 5 females
- Aged 65-75 years old
- B/C1/C2 socio-economic group

- 1 male, 1 female depth interview
- Aged 75+
- Spread of SEG

London

- 5 males
- Aged 65-75 years old
- B/C1/C2 socio-economic group

- 5 females
- Aged 55-65 years old
- D/E socio-economic group

- 1 male, 2 female depth interviews
- Aged 75+
- Spread of SEG

Within the sample we also ensured inclusion of the following characteristics:
- Range of ethnic backgrounds
- Range of attitudes to the internet
- Usage of the internet (i.e. whether low/by proxy/none)
- Household status (i.e. whether living alone/with others)
- Health condition (i.e. whether living with a long term condition)

Fieldwork took place between 30th April - 12th May 2015.

3. Thoughts and feelings about the internet

3.1 Understanding around what the internet is used for

Across the sample, understanding of the internet was low, both in terms of how to navigate it and the commonly-known range of opportunities that it provides to users.

Participants could name a number of general things that people could do online, but awareness of specific online activities tended to be limited to the types of things that they have seen or heard friends/family members doing. When actually imagining sitting down in front of a computer screen, participants tended to draw a blank and struggled to think what exactly they would want to do.

*"I would have to sit down and think 'what would I do with this computer?'
The thought of coming in at night and staring at the screen, pressing a
keyboard…ugh"*
[Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

"They do a lot of Skyping. I can't Skype. I can't send emails."
[Female, 75+, Midlands]

*"I wouldn't go on Twitter. I wouldn't go on Facebook. Well I don't even
know anything about Twitter."*
[Female, 75+, London]

In addition, the uses of the internet named by participants were mainly peripheral activities which were neither central nor essential to their daily lives.

Those with the lowest knowledge levels were only really able to suggest that the internet could be used to 'look up information'. Being able to shop/bank online were also familiar online activities for most older people in the sample, although it is worth noting that participants were primed with these examples via the pre-task. Those with a little more knowledge were additionally aware of the internet being used to find timetables or book travel (e.g. trains), send/receive emails, Skype, look up or book holidays, check-in to flights, apply for visas, go on Facebook, look up sports news, look up cinema listings and search or apply for jobs. There were a small number of participants who also knew about catch-up TV, downloading music, playing games and reading magazines/newspapers online, but these types of activity were typically not top of mind in the sample overall.

This word cloud shows the type of things that participants spontaneously suggested when asked what people use the internet for:

EBAY
DOWNLOADING FORMS SPORT
FINDING OUT ABOUT THE FAMILY TREE
FACEBOOK NEWS
DOWNLOADING FILMS KEEPING IN TOUCH
BOOKING HOLIDAYS
ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING
TWITTER FINDING OUT INFORMATION
DOWNLOADING MUSIC SHOPPING SKYPE
CINEMA
GROCERY SHOPPING
EMAIL COMPETITIONS

"The first thing that came into my mind was 'explore' – because you can find out news abroad, see what's happening in the Caribbean, in America, sports."
[Female, 55-65, DE, London]

"I have heard of internet shopping, but I know very little of the internet."
[Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

"My daughter books my tickets to go to Spain…boarding passes and everything."
[Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

3.2 Perceived benefits and drawbacks to being online

This relatively limited understanding of what the internet is used for and what it can offer meant that the perceived benefits and drawbacks were similarly limited, based on second-hand experience and ultimately quite vague. Participants were not typically 'anti-internet'; in fact, they suggested a number of benefits of doing things online and spoke in broad terms about the internet being a 'good thing'. What is particularly important though is that the benefits were seen as *relevant to others but not to them* and the drawbacks were seen as *powerful reasons for them to stay offline*.

This word cloud shows the spontaneous associations that participants came up with when asked to write what they thought about the 'internet'. It contains a combination of positive and negative associations:

HOLIDAYS
NOT SAFE FOR CHILDREN   GAMES   CHOICE NEWS
NEW KEEPING IN TOUCH   COMPETITIONS
EXPLORE SHOPPING BIG BROTHER
USEFUL   FEELING EXCLUDED
NOT FOR ME SPEED CAN MAKE LIFE EASIER
DOWNLOADING ENTERTAINMENT
INFORMATION
ANTI-SOCIAL CONFUSING
FRIGHTENING FRAUD
OBSESSION

Specific positives associated with the internet were the speed, ease and convenience with which certain tasks could be completed. The idea that the internet had made available greater choice and availability of information was also identified as a major benefit.

However, these benefits were not seen to be relevant or particularly valuable to them *as older people*. There was a strong perception that computers/the internet were useful for those in younger generations specifically, be they office-workers, parents, disabled people or otherwise those who live busy lives. It seemed logical that the internet would have a lot to offer to these types of people, and that because they had grown up with the internet, using it was very much like second nature.

> *"For people that are working full-time, young couples that don't have time to do the shopping on the weekends with the kids around"*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> *"People lead such busy lives now, the internet is so much quicker."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"Because they've been brought up with it, it's like second nature to them, they type so fast"*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"For people who can't get out of the house quickly enough, who are ill"*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

There was similarly a strong view that the internet is not for people of their age. They felt that they were part of a generation that had not been raised on the internet and for whom this was not a natural or easy thing to pick up. There were also some comments from participants about having not used computers as part of their jobs and that as a result they were even less familiar with the technology than perhaps others in their generation who had worked in an office environment.

> *"People my age if they've worked in an office they've used it, but as a carpenter I haven't come into contact, other people my age been brought in gradually through work."*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

> *"Somebody well educated would use the internet, but then I don't want to say uneducated people don't, but then if you haven't done that, things are moving so fast. It's not easy."*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

> *"The internet is open for anyone to use, older younger big and small, but because some of us haven't been brought up like that, we don't know how to use it"*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

Being aware of their own limitations, both in terms of interfacing with a computer and being able to navigate the internet with ease, participants did not feel that transferring daily tasks or activities online would in any sense be quicker or easier for them. In fact, they expected it would take a lot longer for them than completing the same task offline and in addition be a much more unpleasant experience – confusing, frustrating and stressful. Moreover, saving

time or avoiding having to leave the house were not considered important for them or for other older people.

> *"It's only quicker if you know what you're doing, like everything, if you don't know what you're doing it's not quicker, it's not faster, it takes longer, so for me it's actually quicker just to go in person and sort it."*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

> *"Lots of people do shopping on the internet, from groceries to anything. I don't think there's anything bad about it. It's convenient. But I don't feel I have any need for it at the moment. If I need any information my son or daughter can look it up."*
> [Male, 75+, London]

> *"They assume everyone has a computer and everyone can use one, it's frustrating, especially for the older generation it's frustrating, I mean kids of 4 years old have started learning. It's their way but it's not ours."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

It is worth noting that there were some benefits of being online that did feel relevant to them as older people. These activities were highly valued, but having to access these only via friends/family was accepted:

- The ability of the internet to help you keep in touch with friends and family
- Being able to get 'good deals' online, specifically in relation to 'luxury' goods such as holidays, clothes or shoes

> *"Sometimes we pay a lot more [buying holidays offline]. But we don't worry too much…My son plays about on the computer for two or three weeks to get the best price."*
> [Male, 75+, Midlands]

Negative associations were largely focused around specific drawbacks for individuals using the internet. They had great resonance with this audience and they acted as powerful motivators to avoid going online:

- The risk of fraud and lack of security - entering credit card or bank card details online was considered highly unsafe and something they personally wished to avoid. In instances where a participant had experience of buying something online, they had typically asked someone

else to make the electronic payment and then reimbursed that person in cash

- The danger of making a mistake and being unable to correct it easily, especially when arranging a payment or transferring money, was considered to be another disadvantage to doing things online
- Participants felt that shopping online instead of in person would make it more difficult to find good bargains

> *"I don't trust this PayPal business that they've got, I don't want to use my card, I just give them money and they do it."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"It's frightening if you don't know what you're doing."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

> *"I always think online if you press the wrong button it might go into the wrong account, I'd be worried, I'm a bit silly like that."*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> *"You can see the quality [shopping in person] and sometimes you get bargains you can't see on the internet."*
> [Male, 75+, London]

> *"I don't like doing it because you've heard of so many things of people hacking in and going in and they have viruses and your computer can break down and you don't know why."*
> [Female, 75+, London]

Participants also touched on a range of broader negative associations drawn from general observation of others using the internet or reports they had heard via the media. Older people in our sample felt that the internet had led to an increase in antisocial and often rude behaviour, for example:

- Young people constantly checking phones/computers whilst in the company of others and ignoring the people they are in the room with
- Replacing face-to-face interaction with social media communication
- Mitigating the need to leave the house

> *"I read in the paper, teens are far more comfortable meeting people on Facebook than in person, they've lost that skill."*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

> *"With the internet you lose personal contact with people, you do even with your family because they email you or text you and you think it would be nice to hear your voice."*
> [Female, 75+, London]

> *"Your grandchildren come in use their phones, they don't talk to you and apart from being rude, I can't believe they've got such an interest in this thing"*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

There were also a number of spontaneous associations between the internet and criminal activity, that in particular put older people like them and young children, at risk. For example, there was an awareness of various scams and fraud online, as well as media stories relating to child safety issues, grooming and radicalisation, strengthening participants' perception that the internet is a hazardous and even dangerous space.

> *"You can get the wrong stuff on the internet, con artists on the internet, you might go in and choose the wrong sort of people to do things for you"*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

They also expressed concerns that spending time online is in some way unhealthy, being associated with laziness and lacking physical exercise; there was a strong perception that being online meant spending a lot of time indoors on the computer away from other people. There were also concerns that people get addicted to the internet or develop 'an unhealthy obsession' with it.

> *"The only thing with the internet, it's communication, it's gone, nobody communicates anymore, it's all done through a computer."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"I think all this is keeping people indoors. It's like you're not able to go out. You can't go out, you sit in your chair and do everything on TV or on the computer. You're not going out or getting any exercises."*
> [Female, 75+, London]

4. Understanding life offline

4.1 Understanding day-to-day life offline

There were a range of lifestyles across the sample, but what linked them was that those core activities, vital for the day-to-day management of their lives, had been maintained offline. In the discussions we had with older people about their lives and routines, the internet was not spontaneously mentioned. In addition, there was little sense that the internet was in any way an 'absence' in their lives or that there was a pressing need to move online.

However, upon prompting, there were instances where participants had felt they had missed out by not being online, or where they had felt the need to ask someone else to do something on their behalf. When exploring these experiences and associated feelings it became more apparent that there are strong negative emotional implications to living offline in an increasingly digitised world. This feeling was even more deeply felt when it related to services considered essential to day-to-day living.

Overview of offline lifestyles

In terms of levels of mobility and social activity, there was a mix amongst the older people in our sample. Across this range, however, a common thread was that the rhythms of life had slowed in older age and that life was less hectic than it had been in their younger years. Whilst keeping busy and active outside the house was considered important, participants described how they enjoyed having time to themselves and had largely been freed of the need to watch the clock or rush around.

Many participants had regular contact with their children and grandchildren, as well as enjoying pursuing their own interests and activities including gardening, going to the cinema, going to bingo, attending poetry group, going to the gym, knitting, sewing, metal detecting and furniture restoration. There were a number of older people who described their lives as active and fulfilling.

> *"There's just not enough hours in the day!"*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

Others led quieter, often more isolated lives. This meant taking part in fewer activities outside the house or social activities not involving their family. These

individuals spent their days listening to the radio, in meditation, watching television, reading or perhaps doing some DIY or gardening. In our sample in general the male participants were more likely to lead less active and less sociable lives.

Carrying out day-to-day tasks offline

In terms of being able to carry out day-to-day tasks, there was some diversity in the sample. Most were maintaining primary responsibility for their daily chores or sharing responsibility with a partner or other family member. There were, however, examples where participants reported having to rely more heavily on others to complete tasks. The need for help tended to be linked to diminishing physical capabilities, but in some instances was related to a more general decline in the ability to organise and manage personal affairs. Any help they received was accepted and appreciated, but maintaining independence and control in their lives remained extremely important.

Overall, participants reported being broadly satisfied with the way they approached and managed their day-to-day affairs offline. When it came to explaining *why* certain methods or routines had been adopted, participants struggled to articulate their rationale – weighing up the pros and cons was not how they had settled upon a particular approach. Rather, the approach taken had developed over time to fit into their lives and the routines that had been established were simply considered to be the most convenient, quickest and easiest options available to them:

Overview of audience's approach to grocery shopping:
- Done in person - either alone, with a partner or a helper
- Some participants did one bigger weekly shop, but all were picking up 'bits and pieces' over the week
- Some would drive to the shops, others took public transport and some walked

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Overview of audience's approach to banking:
- Generally done in person – either involving a trip to the bank, post-office or cash-point
- Visiting the bank was typically part of a 'trip into town' – participants reported regular, often weekly, visits to check their balance, withdraw/deposit cash
- There was some experience of telephone banking but this method was not widely or regularly used

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"I feel quite safe going into the bank and handing my money over."
[Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> "When you're out shopping you pop into the bank, it's no trouble."
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> "I feel safe going into the bank, I don't like giving my details over telephone, seeing someone in person feels safer, on the telephone you don't know who it is and you hear such terrible things."
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

The older people in our sample approached daily tasks from a very practical point of view, by which *getting them done* was the main measure of success rather than how enjoyable, or otherwise, they were. As such, the negative aspects of tasks such as grocery shopping or banking – such as long queues, carrying heavy bags or negotiating busy car parks - were accepted as simply a 'part of life' rather than having any real emotional impact.

- For those participants for whom mobility or physical strength was becoming more of an issue (for example, amongst some of those in the sample over the age of 75), these negative aspects were beginning to have a more significant impact. In response, what they had typically started to do was to rely more heavily on friends, family or carers to help carry out these tasks *offline,* rather than starting to consider online solutions. Therefore, at the point of interview, none reported feeling they could not continue living offline.

There were a number of benefits associated with their current offline methods, though these tended to be viewed as 'perks' rather than being key determinants as to why a certain approach had been taken. Participants saw their shopping trips as an important motivator to get out of the house and some, typically the older women, spoke about bumping into friends and acquaintances in the shops and going for an impromptu coffee as well as having a chat with shop staff. For those older people living alone, especially those over the age of 75, there was an even greater importance placed on the those parts of a day-to-day routine that got them up and about.

> "I'm quite happy - after all these years, you're just used to it."
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> "Sometimes I meet people in there I haven't arranged to, you bump into them, stand and chat."
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> *"A lot of people try to go to the same cashier, call them by their first name."*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> *"I don't go very often because I don't need so many things. Once a month. I like going there. It's a day out for me."*
> [Female, 75+, London]

What emerged was the importance of *familiarity* associated with doing things in a certain way. Feeling in control of daily tasks and being able to execute them with confidence was extremely important to participants' sense of self, dignity and their ability to live independently. Specifically, participants talked about the comfort of knowing the layout and staff in the shops they regularly visited and being able to make informed decisions about the products/bargains available to them. In contrast, they spoke of their deep annoyance when supermarkets changed the layout of their stores.

> *"I like to know where everything is, I just feel at home when I know where everything is. I hate M&S when they move things and big supermarkets when they move [things around] I hate it, it's annoying."*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> *"For years I've done it that way, that's just how I do it"*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

In fact, there was willingness to accept a number of irritations associated with their current routines rather than attempt to seek out a new, more efficient strategy that might nevertheless leave them floundering, confused, embarrassed or vulnerable. This attitude very much informed the way in which they approached the idea of carrying out tasks online – a method that felt so far out of their comfort zone that they were willing to accept some of the inconveniences of living offline rather than attempt to use the internet to carry out day-to-day tasks.

> *"You can see what you're buying [when you go into the shop]. It's something I've always done… I like to know where everything is, I just feel at home when I know where everything is"*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> *"You feel like you're in the hands of robots, you know I wasn't brought up in the land of the internet"*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

> *"Only shopping [online], would make it worse, you wouldn't know what you're doing. It's not easy to shop online, from what I've heard, you can do a whole list of what you want, press the wrong button, and it all goes, [you can] delete the lot quite accidentally, or double everything, even before you go to put your card details, that would worry me..fear"*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

It is also important to note that a more general aversion to computers also played a large role in their negative feelings towards the internet. One participant spoke of her deep sense of panic and distress when she walked into her local bank branch to find that the bank clerks had been replaced by a set of computer monitors. More generally, participants spoke of a profound disconnect with using computer devices, finding them counter-intuitive and often baffling. Participants reported struggling with the basics of interacting with a computer or tablet, such as using the keyboard and mouse, or navigating the computer screen.

> *"When I went in [the bank], there was all machines everywhere. I didn't know what to do because it did look like a computer in front of me. I went all hot and had to wait until someone came up to me and asked if I needed some help."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"I've never had any contact with computer, not in school or work. My grandson is only 3 and he seems to know how to do it, it's only games or cartoons or whatnot, but it makes you feel old"*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

Feeling safe and secure were also important drivers for the people in our sample. This was especially pertinent for any financial activity. For example, physically going into the bank or post office was considered to be more secure than telephone banking or banking online. This was partly to do with the strong perception that fraud was a significant risk to those carrying out financial transactions over the internet, but also because they felt uncertain and unconfident about how to effectively protect themselves online.

> *"Before I'd start using it, I'd beware of fraud, internet banking, get in touch with someone to make sure you've got proper security."*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

> *"But I wouldn't do any banking because as I said to you before I'm not that confident. Because you're dealing with money – that just frightens me. Lot's of friends of mine said don't buy anything on the internet."*
> [Female, 75+, London]

Time was sometimes mentioned as an element in their decision-making, but broadly recognised to be less important to them at their stage of life than it had been when they were younger. In fact, participants spoke of enjoying leisurely shopping trips and taking their time to browse items.

> *"I'm quite happy with the time it takes…it takes as long as you want it to...you don't take it into consideration really, it doesn't matter now you're retired."*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

4.2 Understanding how people think and feel about being offline

Participants were all broadly aware that the internet has been a phenomenon that has grown to play a larger and larger role in people's lives. However most participants did not feel it had dramatically affected them. In fact, they did not describe their lives as being 'offline' and typically viewed the internet as something at the periphery of their lives rather than offering alternatives to their current way of doing things. At face value, any online methods were considered to be related to things in life that are 'nice-to-have' rather than essential.

However, on prompting, there emerged a feeling amongst participants that the internet has started to encroach on their lives and that the increasing move to doing things online might mean they were at a disadvantage. Participants mentioned instances where they had realised that by not being online, they were missing out:

- One person mentioned that her GP surgery now took online bookings and that as a consequence it was now harder to secure an appointment by calling the receptionist
- Another participant said she had bought expensive perfume only to be told by a younger relative that she could have saved a great deal of money by purchasing it online

- Several participants talked about shop assistants advising customers to go online to order a size they do not have in the store but not being able to do so
- One participant said that her mobile phone provider had moved all their billing online meaning that she could no longer access her itemised bill or verify what they were charging her
- Participants also mentioned that in general they would like to be able to access the wide range of products available online and get the best deals
- Having to fill in application forms or official documentation online, e.g. for council services or the Freedom Pass, and finding this a challenge
- Finally, some participants said they felt unable to find information relating to a hobby or interest that they were sure would be available online

"You know when you have to phone [the doctor's surgery] at 8am, all [the appointments are] gone for the day, because people have internet access and they can take them before 8am."
[Female, 55-75, DE, London]

"I bought some expensive perfume I've bought all my life, and my daughter asked me how much it cost from House of Fraser, she scoffed, 'Wait until you see how much I paid online' and found a whole list of cheaper ones."
[Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

"Couple of months ago my Freedom Pass wrote me a letter, they say if you do the online, you get it quick. But I say I don't know how to do this, I have no computer, I don't know. So they sent me a form."
[Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

"That happened to me in Next. 'You can go online', and I said, 'Well I can't' and she said, 'Oh well.' That's all she said. So I had to go to the other Next store."
[Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

"I had to download a form – I think it was something to do with the council. I haven't got a printer as well. I wouldn't know how to use a printer either. What to do once you download it, I had to get a friend to do it."
[Female, 75+, London]

> *"If there is something you're interested in, you can obtain that information a lot quicker, like on the boxing, the next heavyweight champion."*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

The experience of feeling that they were missing out, or at a disadvantage by being offline had a strong effect on the older people we spoke to. Either:

- They were left with a feeling of impotence that they would be unable to access the benefit associated with being online
- Or, they had asked someone else to go online for them which had left them feeling ashamed or awkward as discussed below.

> *"I don't even use a computer. I feel so out of date right now, it's like you're going up a hill and everyone's jogging and you're lagging behind."*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

> *"Feel a bit useless sometimes, sometimes I want to know something and I've got to wait for someone to come in, if I knew myself I could Google it and find it now."*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

Seeking help from friends and family to mediate online activity generated complex dynamics and emotions between individuals. In some situations, this was not seen as a problem for participants, rather an issue of give and take within normal family life. The skill of being able to complete things online was considered equivalent to some of the offline skills that they had and therefore could be part of a legitimate social exchange; one woman for example spoke of making her son in law a pie in exchange for him filling out a form for her online.

> *'My son in law found everything out about the train tickets and that was alright – I feel fine about asking him to sort it, I take him a pork pie as a favour"*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

On the other hand, asking someone else to do something online for them also generated negative emotions and participants said they worried about being a nuisance or feeling ashamed and embarrassed to ask. Participants talked about the vulnerability and lack of control they felt when faced with not being able to execute a simple task by themselves, especially if this related to something of a personal or financial nature. This underpinned a more general feeling of

distress that they were losing their independence and ceding control over parts of their lives. Participants used strong and deeply emotive language to describe their feelings of being in a situation of having to rely on others to mediate online goods/services. They talked about feeling 'old-fashioned', like a 'dinosaur', 'stupid' and 'vulnerable'. Specifically, participants also expressed:

- Their discomfort in feeling like they were being a nuisance or burden to others
- Frustration of having to do something on someone else's terms. For example, participants reported their irritation at having to rely on someone else and fit into that person's routine; in particular having to wait until the person 'got round' to going online for them and not having any way of getting it done more quickly
- Deep concerns about asking someone else to carry out online tasks that revealed personal information e.g. details relating to their finances or health
- Feeling patronised or undermined by younger people who treat their inability to use the internet as comical, quaint or frustrating.

In our sample, the sense of vulnerability and unease that arose from having to rely on others to mediate their internet usage, was seemingly felt more strongly by male participants, and especially amongst those who relied on a female partner to undertake online tasks.

> *"I don't like being a nuisance really, you feel like you're bothering them, when my daughter comes round I say, 'Can you show me this?'"*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"You feel the like you've got a disability because you haven't got the ability to get up and do it yourself."*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

> *"I have got a grandson, one 13, two 8, and they're on the computer, it's second nature to them, they've been brought up with it. But I haven't and they say look I've told you once Nan, I'm not telling you again"*
> [Female, 75+, London]

> *"It makes you feel vulnerable, because you can't do it yourself, and have to divulge a lot of your business to that individual."*
> [Male, 55-65, BC1C2, London]

> "My daughter, she's such a quick learner, she says, 'how many times am I going to have to tell you?' I feel like an idiot."
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> "My sons say 'why are you doing it like this? Going on the laptop would be so much easier'"
> [Male, 75+, Midlands]

> "Sometimes my daughter goes, 'Aw mum you're so cute.' It makes me feel silly."
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

5. Reactions to organising tasks online

5.1 Understanding attitudes to moving online

Across the sample there was a strong aversion to doing things online that are currently done offline. There was some divergence in terms of types of online activity that might be considered, versus those activities that were considered to be beyond the pale. Using the internet to make video or phone calls to friends or family abroad (most commonly exemplified via Skype) felt feasible to some, as did searching online for useful information e.g. cinema listings, train times, the weather forecast, etc. But any online activity involving having to enter credit card or bank details was simply written off by this audience as too risky. Further, there was an unwillingness to replace opportunities to get out of the house or see others with online alternatives and concerns about lack of privacy.

This aversion was not only linked to the negative associations, it was also linked to a range of practical barriers that, to this audience, felt completely insurmountable.
- Limited access to a computer, e.g.:
  - Being unable to afford one
  - Being unwilling to buy one/pay for an internet connection
  - Not wanting to use a public computer for personal activities
- Being unable to use a computer or navigate the internet, e.g.:
  - A general lack of knowledge or confidence in using computers
  - Even those with some small experience of using email or reading news stories online reported how difficult they found doing something more complicated such as filling out a form or making an online appointment

o Those with no experience of the internet expressed a basic lack of IT knowledge such as not being able to use a keyboard, mouse or internet search engine

> *"First of all you've got to know how to use a computer, then you've got to go and buy one. They're so expensive…you've got to go into debt to buy one"*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> *"Dexterity comes into it, you've got to be able to manage the mouse."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"Well I went to lessons and I hadn't got a computer so I couldn't remember what they were saying."*
> [Female, 75+, Midlands]

> *"I've used the library a few times. I didn't use it [on my own]. I did the old man thing, plead stupidity. I'm computer ignorant."*
> [Male, 75+ Midlands]

5.2 Response to case studies

We created three case studies to understand reactions to specific ways in which business and government might start to shift access to services online, by withdrawing other forms of access (e.g. telephone). We clearly explained that these were hypothetical examples, rather than specific plans for change, in order to reassure participants.[5]

Each case study described a different example of a service being moved online and detailed the information and support services that would accompany the shift in order to encourage those currently offline to use the service[6]. An overview of each case study is outlined below:

- A GP surgery closes its telephone booking system and stipulates that patients must either book an appointment online or in person
- A local council phases in exclusively online payment of council tax and offers a 10% discount to encourage people to move across (before it

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[5] It is worth noting that in both research locations participants reported that GP appointments at their local surgery were available for booking online
[6] Please see the Appendix for full case studies

becomes mandatory). Those not able to go online would be given details of advice agencies and centres that would help.
- A bank offers a new savings account with a preferential rate that can only be accessed online

Thoughts and feelings about moving services online

The overwhelming response to the case studies was that they represented a real threat to people who are currently living offline and see no way of getting online. Participants commonly felt that they would be unable to use that service any longer – for essential public services this was felt to be particularly problematic:
- In response to the GP example, participants said they would either expect to go to the surgery in person or forego primary healthcare altogether. There were some comments about the increased likelihood of delaying seeing a healthcare professional unless/until the problem was serious enough to present themselves at A&E.
- In response to the council tax example, participants said they would either be unable to pay or be forced to find someone they knew who could help them. Imagining themselves in these scenarios, participants said they would feel extremely anxious as well as angry and upset. They would feel their needs and interests were being ignored or dismissed.

> "[If you had to book GP appointments online] *I'd go to A and E, wouldn't you?*"
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> "*I feel cross – I've been here a long time…I don't want to be pushed into anything I don't want to do.*"
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

> "*Well if you're forced into you'd have to sort it out one way or the other, friends, family, youngsters.*"
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

They not only felt it was unfair not to offer an alternative to online services, but that it was profoundly unjust. To their mind, these developments would work to exclude them entirely from accessing that service and in instances where the service was seen as essential, e.g. paying council tax or visiting the doctor, older people thought that exclusive online access would likely be against the law, given the severe implications it would have for them.

> *"They take it for granted that everyone can do it."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"If I had to go online [the council tax] wouldn't get paid, because I couldn't be bothered with it."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"If you can't use the internet, you cannot walk, you cannot go any place, you are vulnerable, so you are just left alone, if I'm not coming up there, no one can stay with me, then I'm going to be left without."*
> [Male, 65-75, BC1C2, London]

> *"They can't do that surely…I should think that would be against the law."*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

When it came to what was considered a non-essential service, the offer of an online bank account at a cheaper rate, the response was less angry. There was however still a strong sense of frustration and unfairness that people offline would miss out on a good deal.

Thoughts and feelings about the support offered to help people get online

In each of the case studies there was a description of potential support services that might be put in place to help people such as themselves move online. These included:
- A poster informing people of the changes
- A leaflet with step-by-step instructions to accessing the online service
- A telephone helpline to guide them through the online service
- An online demonstration of how to use the online service

Whilst there was some feeling that these initiatives would offer a level of support, participants reported that none of the examples felt like they would be remotely effective in actually getting them online. The practical barriers they felt in terms of accessing/using a computer were not fully addressed by any of these suggested ideas. Further, the emotional barriers to using computers and the internet were not sufficiently addressed.

When asked what support they would need to get online, participants stated their need for intensive and on-going face-to-face tutoring with someone who could talk them through the basics of how to use a computer and navigate the

internet.[7] This type of activity or class was envisaged being held in a local community centre or library. For some, Age UK felt like an obvious choice to deliver such a programme of classes or support services. There were some participants, however, who felt that even with this kind of instruction, they simply would never have the capability to confidently and effectively use the internet.

There was also significant reluctance from this audience to buying a computer or spending money on monthly internet bills. There was therefore a strong sense that if they were to be 'forced' to go online there was a responsibility on the government/business to pay for them to do so. The understanding was that the benefits of moving online would be not to them, but to the service provider (in terms of being able to reduce the costs associated with providing telephone services or face to face support). As a measure of the strength with which older people felt about being 'forced to go online' there were several comments made across the sessions, supporting the idea that any mandatory transition to online services should be cost-free to customers/clients.

> *"Let them pay for my internet connection. If they want me to make appointments online, how am I going to pay for it?"*
> [Male, 55-65 years old, DE, Midlands]

> *"Think about the older generation - a lot of them can't afford to buy computers and laptops, printers. They need to give us old ones or free ones."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"Who's it helping? It's helping them, not me, it's cutting down their payments"*
> [Male, 55-65 years old, DE, Midlands]

> *"If we have to go online, make everything cheaper for us."*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

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[7] Previous research has shown effective use of community centres to provide help and support to older people: *Left behind: Older people and digitalization – Solutions for moving forward in a digital age,* Holy Trinity Thurgoland Community Action Group (2014)

"They should have more free workshops for the elderly who want to learn, because if they're going to advance in technology, they've got to provide training and support."
[Female, 55-65, DE, London]

6. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

Barriers to going online

Evidence from this research shows that this audience, while not necessarily opposed to ever going online, have many deeply entrenched barriers to using the internet. This includes:

- **A lack of knowledge and experience of the internet, for example:**
    - Not being aware of the opportunities and activities that might be relevant or valuable to them
    - Not knowing how to use computers in general, or the internet specifically

- **Low to no 'top of mind' awareness among this audience that they are missing out by not being online:**
    - They typically report being satisfied with their life 'offline'
    - They could not imagine what they would use the internet for
    - The audience are unlikely to see themselves as digitally 'excluded' but can admit to feeling disadvantaged in some areas by not having online access
    - However, any feelings of being at a disadvantage do not work to encourage them to go online

- **A perception that the internet is 'not for them', notwithstanding an appreciation of it as an overall positive phenomenon:**
    - A key driver among this group appeared to be age or life-stage (e.g. taking more time doesn't matter when you're retired; the internet is good for busy younger working people, not for them; younger people have 'grown up' with computers)

- **A feeling that the internet is an 'unsafe place':**
    - For themselves, in terms of being vulnerable to fraud or being more likely to make mistakes when purchasing products/services and end up spending more than they meant to
    - For others, especially children/young people who can be vulnerable to exploitation of various kinds

- **A strong feeling that using computers/the internet is very much outside their comfort zone:**

- o Familiarity emerged as a key driver to carrying out day-to-day tasks in a certain way, and there was a deep aversion to any unfamiliar methods/approaches likely to render them vulnerable or confused

- **A perception that cost and access are prohibitive:**
    - o In terms of the cost of the equipment and internet connection (notwithstanding knowledge that you can save money shopping online)
    - o This audience seemed unlikely to buy a computer for themselves and were unwilling to use computers in public spaces

- **A feeling that using the internet for certain things would mean they would miss aspects of life they value and enjoy, for example:**
    - o Getting 'out of the house' (which was most important for those no longer in work)
    - o Meeting people face-to-face or talking on the phone
    - o Physical activity

- **Being able to use the internet 'by proxy' through family or others doing things online on their behalf:**
    - o Which reduced the impetus for them to learn something new or really engage with the process
    - o Although there were concerns and disadvantages related to having to rely on others

Overall for this group, the downsides of going online outweighed the perceived advantages.

Addressing barriers to going online

It is possible that if these barriers could be addressed, some older people might start to see the advantages that they are not currently aware of and become more interested in going online. It will, however, be necessary to ensure that attempts to encourage online use go beyond the provision of information and support services because, for the reasons set out above, older people are unlikely to proactively seek support.

- Participants thought that sustained and focused face-to-face support might help build confidence and skills around IT use and internet access. It is important for such support to be appropriate for older learners and to be on-going as they attempt to go online by themselves.

> *"There has to be somewhere where you can go and learn to do it. Because if you're not au fait with it, I mean I have people on the phone telling me things and I say I don't know where the button is, I can't see this, I don't know what you're talking about."*
> [Female, 75+, London]

> *"They should have more free workshops for the elderly who want to learn, because if they're going to advance in technology, they've got to provide training and support."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"I paid to go on a crinkly, silver surfer type thing, and I paid, but it all moved too quick and I couldn't keep up, it was useless"*
> [Female, 65-75, BC1C2, Midlands]

- There may be ways to address concerns about the cost of equipment and broadband charges. Some participants argued for this to be free or subsidised while better understanding of actual costs and potential savings could also have an impact.

> *"Think about the older generation - a lot of them can't afford to buy computers and laptops, printers. They need to give us old ones or free ones."*
> [Female, 55-65, DE, London]

> *"I haven't got a computer and have no intention of buying one."*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

Ensuring access to goods and services for people who do not use the internet

Whereas it may be possible to address some of the barriers over time, it is apparent that for many of this audience, being forced online by withdrawal of alternative means of accessing goods and services will be very problematic.

This is likely to lead to inability to access services for some, which will have damaging impact on health and wellbeing.

For those who are forced to access services 'by proxy' through family or others using the internet on their behalf, this leaves them vulnerable to loss of privacy, control or independence and potentially to financial or other exploitation.

> *"I feel horrible really, I'm having to ask someone to do it for me and I don't like asking anyone to do anything for me – it's your independence it's gone, you feel embarrassed, asking your son to pay for something for you, or show you how to do something…I feel like such a dinosaur."*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

Age UK should make government and businesses aware of the impact that moving services exclusively online or making offline access harder can have for older people living offline.

Age UK should advocate on behalf of this group to businesses and government:
- o To ensure that offline options remain available for older people - this is especially important in relation to essential public services
- o There is also a need to let business and government know that offering incentives such as preferential savings rates or discounts linked to online access are unlikely to act as effective drivers to this audience to get online, but instead may simply exclude them

> *"Age UK should stand up for people who don't use the internet, say not everybody can use the internet."*
> [Male, 55-65, DE, Midlands]

7. Appendix

Case studies

Case study 1: Doctors Appointment

Your local GP is phasing out the option to call the practice and book an appointment and encouraging people to book an appointment using their online booking service. People would still be able to book an appointment in person if needed.

Practices will have a poster making people aware of the changes and printed leaflets in the GP reception area explaining step-by-step how the online booking service works, for people to take home and refer to.

Case study 2: Council Tax

Your local council are phasing out options to pay your council tax bill by post, over the telephone or in person and encouraging people to go online. To encourage online use, they are offering a 10% discount to make a payment online.

In order to support people who have not used this service online before, the local council are providing a telephone helpline. Council staff on the end of a telephone will guide callers through the process of paying the bill online, using a personal or public computer. Callers will not have the option to pay over the phone during this call. If they cannot use a computer or do not have one staff will give them details of local advice agencies and centres that can help.

They will make local people aware of this change by sending out a letter in the post, detailing the telephone number if people have queries or need support.

Case study 3: New savings account

Your current bank is offering a new savings account with a preferential rate. However this is only available when customers apply online for the account. To encourage people who do not regularly use internet banking, they are providing a demonstration service on their website to talk customers through the process. The new account and the online demonstration service are both advertised through the television.

This would require customers to go to the website and click on a button to start the demonstration. The demonstration would then talk them through step-by-step how to apply for the account on their website, using pointers to each area discussed.