



# Communication Preferences For Older People Report 2024

**Council on The Ageing  
(COTA)**

Western Australia

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## Background Issues

The emerging growth of digital technology has opened up various possibilities for long distance communication because people rely heavily on technology on a day to day basis. The requirement for people, including older people, to communicate through technology, is essential in today's society. Rapid changes intensified by the emergency of Covid-19 have forced older people to learn and adapt to new technology. These changes may seem overwhelming at times.

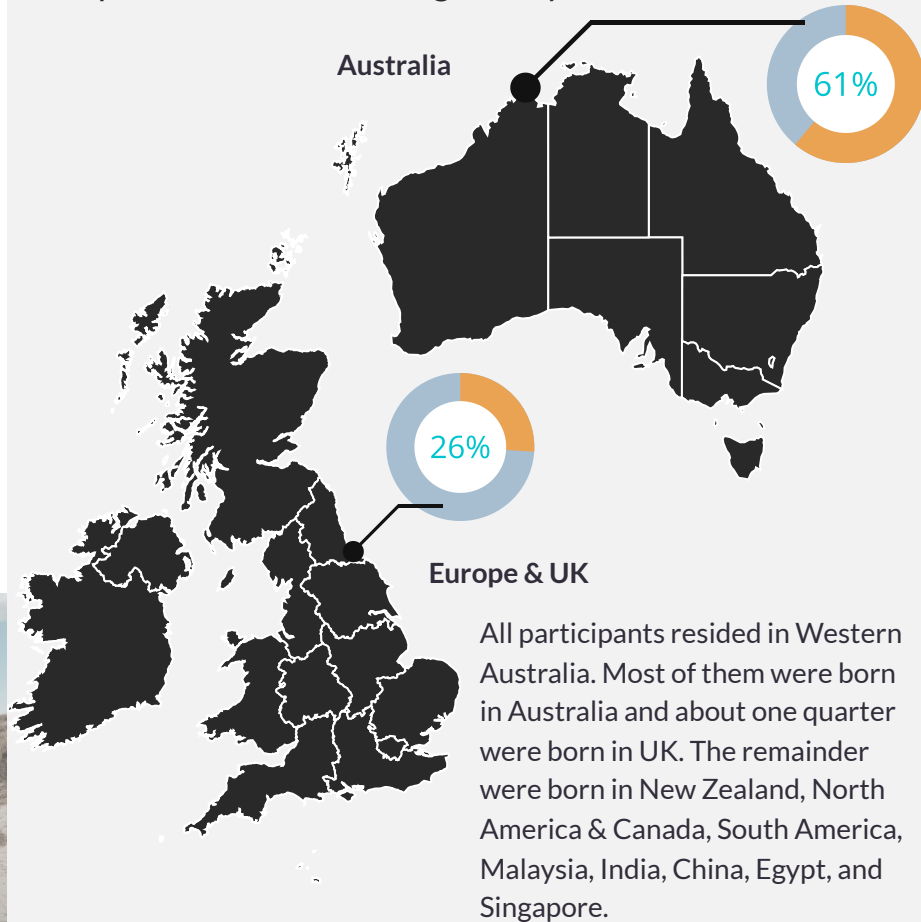


## Challenges Affecting Communication Preferences For Older People in WA:

- ▶ Lifestyle and Habits
- ▶ Fear: Uncertainty, Scams
- ▶ Technology Adaptation
- ▶ Ageing: Medical Issues

## Methodology

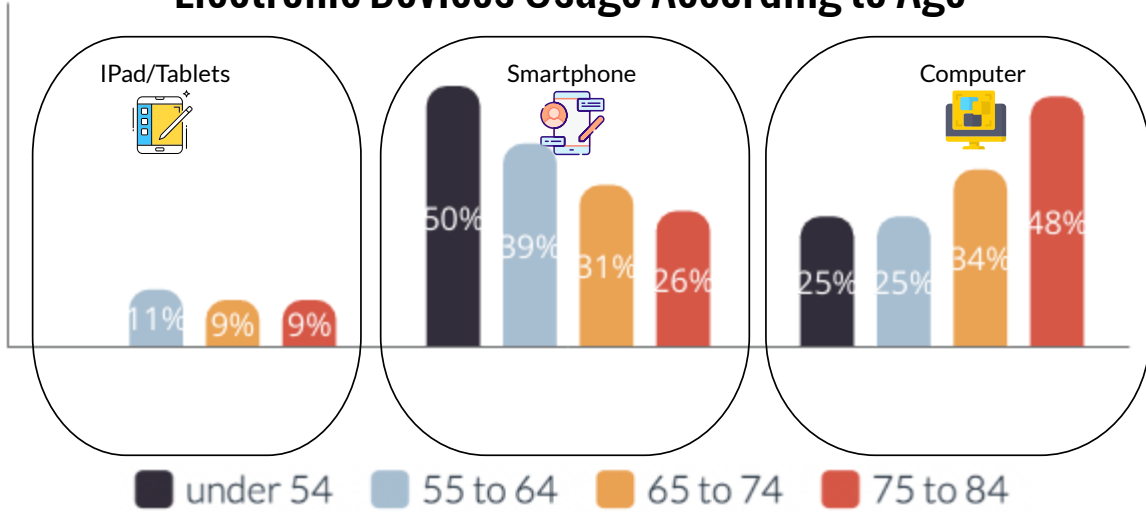
The survey was conducted through both online and via hardcopy in Western Australia. The 10 to 15 minute survey was completed by approximately 560 respondents who were aged 50 years and above.



## Key Findings

- Younger people in WA use smartphones the most, whereas older adults in WA prefer computers.
- Females are more involved in social media compared to males.
- The main technology barriers for participants are the complication and confusion of user interface as well as the phone call related problems and long waiting times.
- Email is the most preferred tool to receive information. However, emails are often bombarded with too much information.

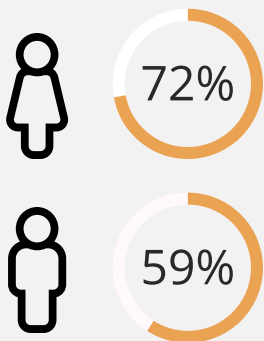
## Electronic Devices Usage According to Age



Of the respondents, **50%** of the users of smartphones are under 54 years old. The percentage of smartphone users decreases as age increases.

Of the respondents, **48%** of the users of computers are 75 to 84 years old. The percentage of computer users increases as age increases.

## Social Media Usage



Female use social media more often compare to male

## Reason for Not using Electronic Devices

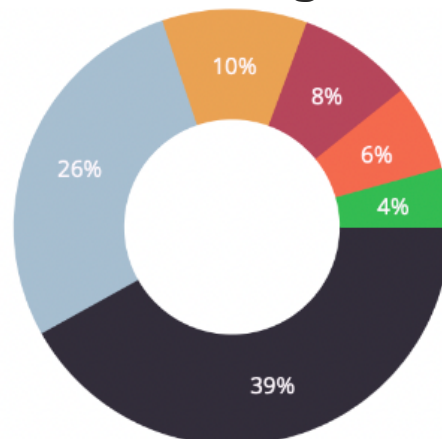
**31%** Of participants said  
**Technology changes too quickly**

**10%** Of participants said  
**High Cost**

**16%** Of participants said  
**Complexity**

**4%** Of participants said  
**Can't be bothered**

## Main Barriers in Communicating with Organisations:



Lack of clarity/ or confusion in user interface websites
  Long waiting times
  Limited Technology knowledge
  Dealing with geographically distant call centres
  Over use of emails
  Concern about Scams

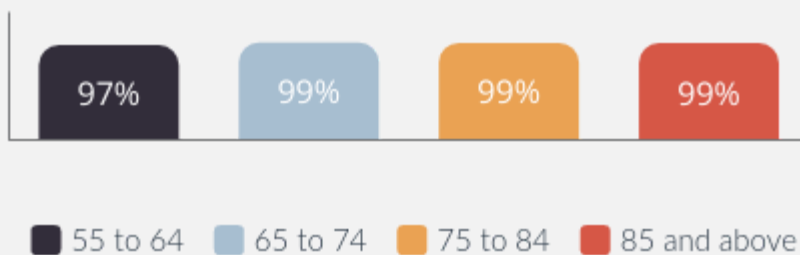
# Communication Preferences



Email is the main preference for receiving most information EXCEPT for Legal Advice

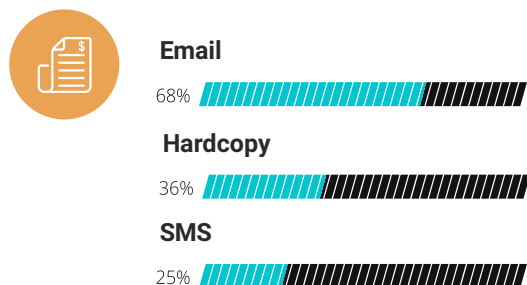
**100%**  
of participants under 54 use email multiple days a day

## Email Usage

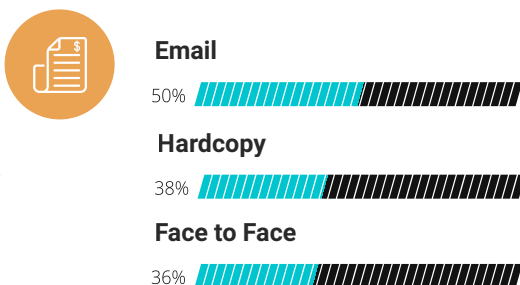


## Communication Preferences for Different Types of Communication

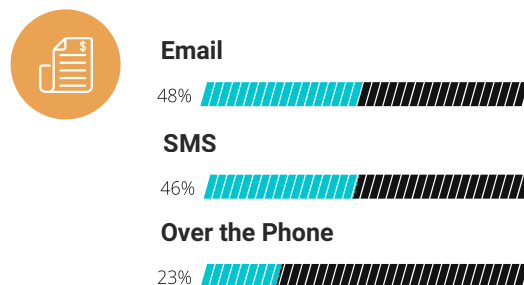
### Bills and Payments



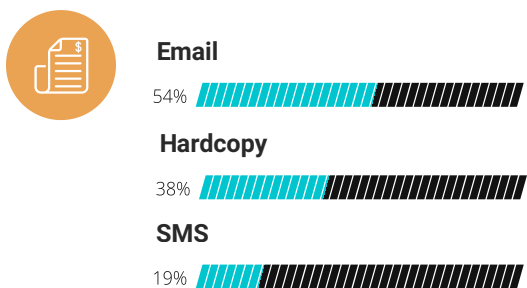
### Financial Advice/Information:



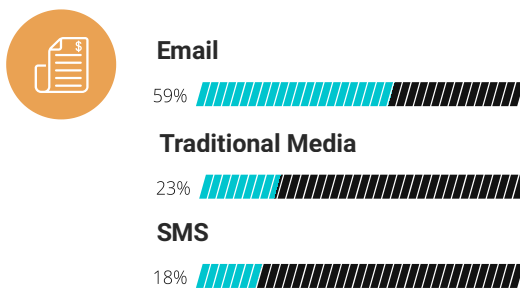
### Emergency and Privacy:



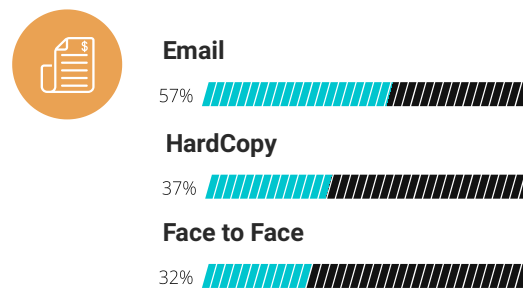
### Information from Government



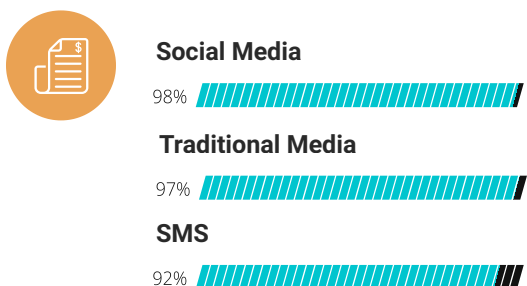
### Social Information



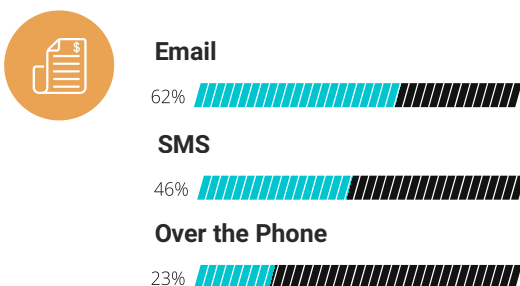
### Health Care Information:



### Legal Advice



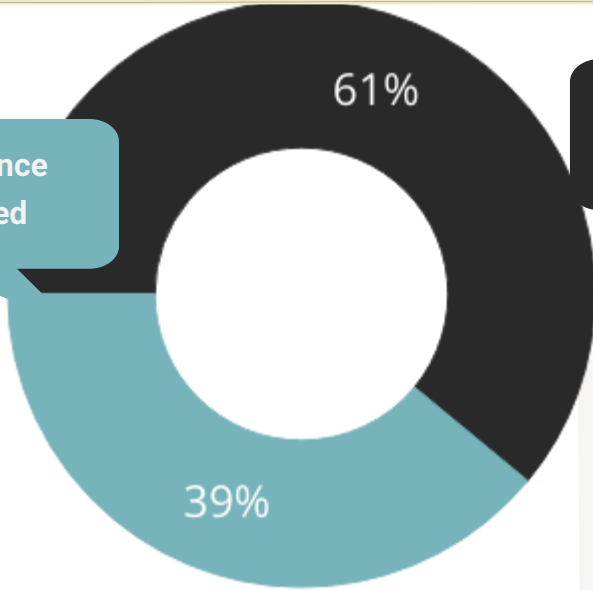
### Community Service Advice



# 74%

of the respondents said they encounter difficulties trying to access information, and communicating to large organisations and government agencies

Major difficulties experienced in dealing with organisations and government agencies:



39% of the respondents said that they need assistance to get in touch with organisations and government agencies.

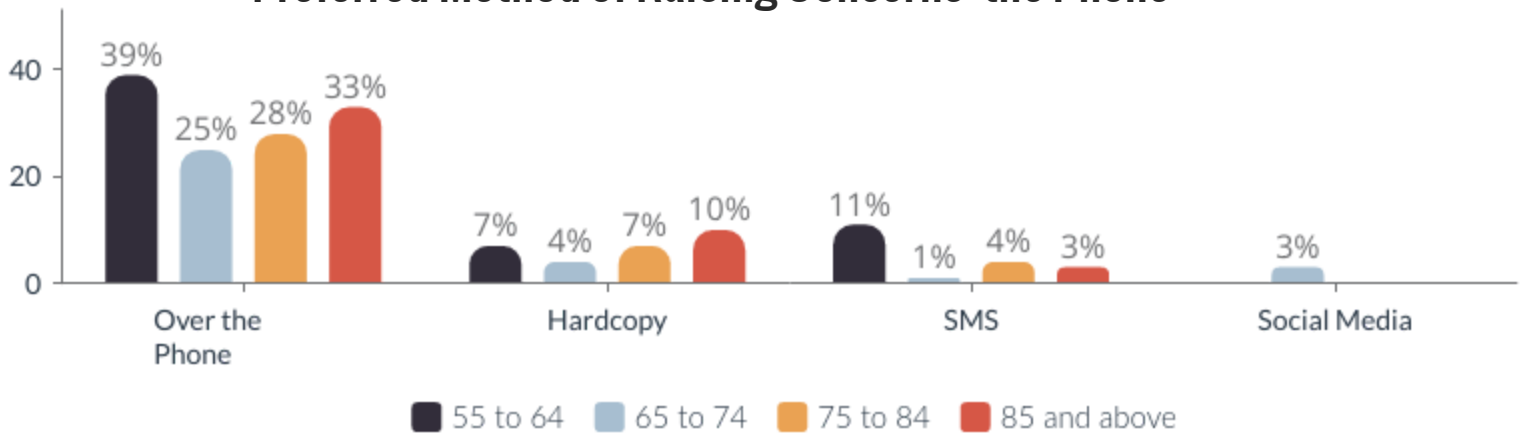
**Assistance Needed**

**User Interface**

- The reason contributing to these mentioned in our survey include:
- lack of knowledge/ confidence in using technology, electronic devices
  - medical issues
  - fear of scams
  - need for personal contact
  - prefer traditional methods: face to face and hardcopy

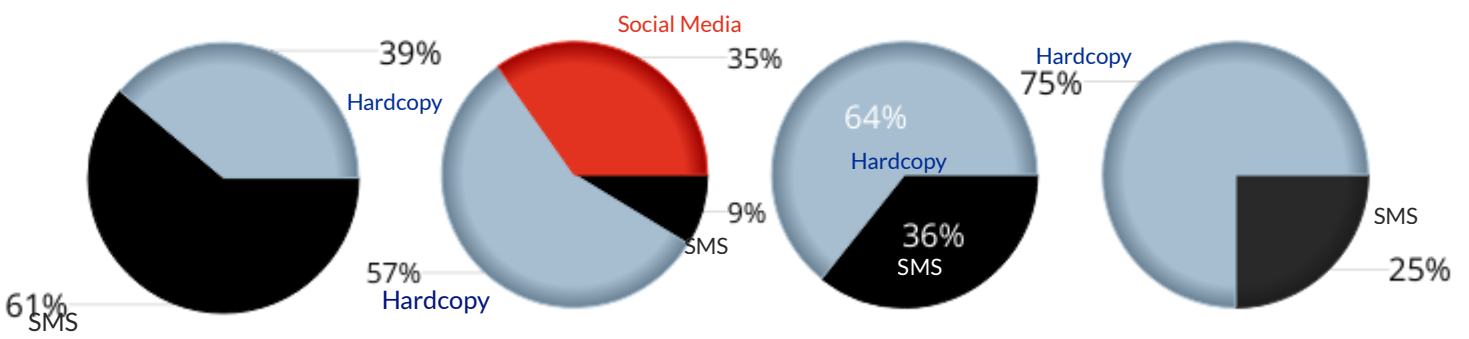
- The User Interface difficulties mentioned in our survey include:
- complexity
  - changes and updates
  - lack of transparency
  - hard to navigate
  - time out system
  - jargon/ IT language
  - password setting

## Preferred Method of Raising Concerns: the Phone



The Phone is the preferred way to raise concerns among most seniors in WA. This preference changes to hardcopy as people age.

55 to 64      65 to 74      75 to 84      85 and above





# Non English Speakers

# 67%

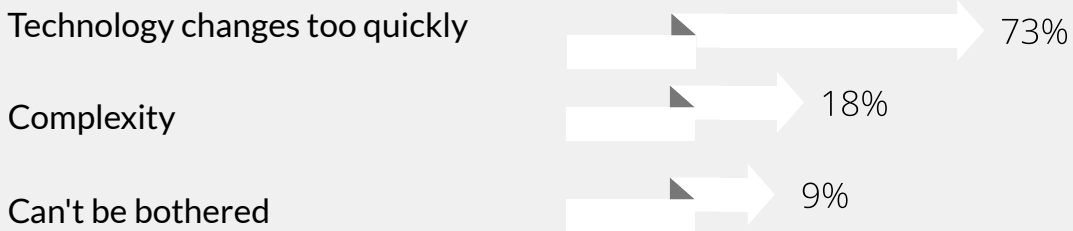
Do Not use email

# 72%

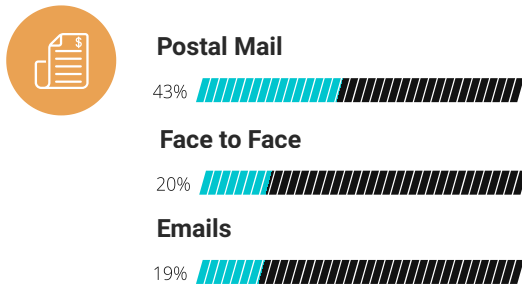
Do Not use any electronic gadgets

## Reasons for not using electronic gadgets

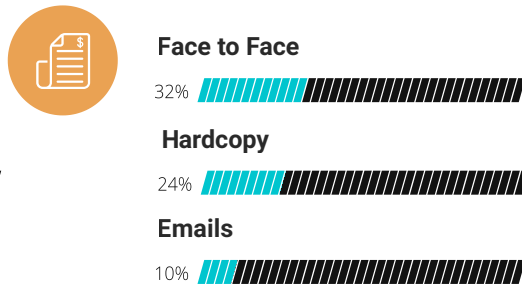
Main Barrier: Language



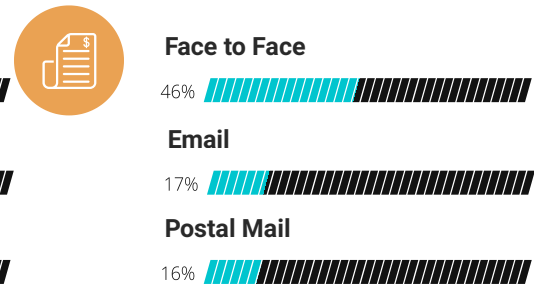
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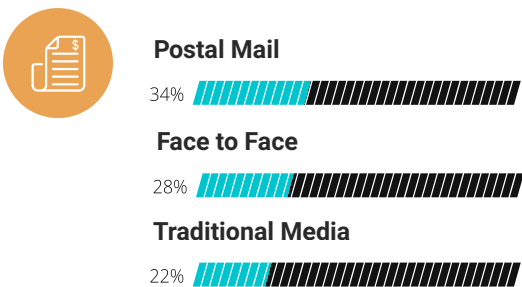
### Financial Advice/Information:



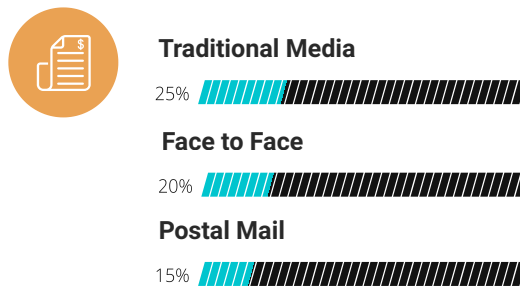
### Emergency and Warning:



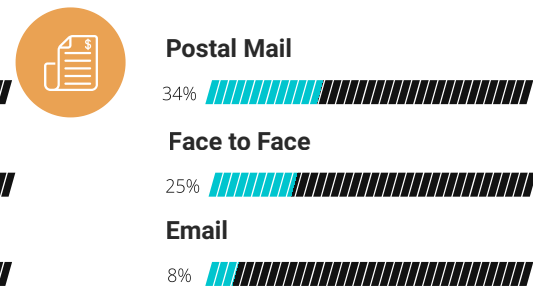
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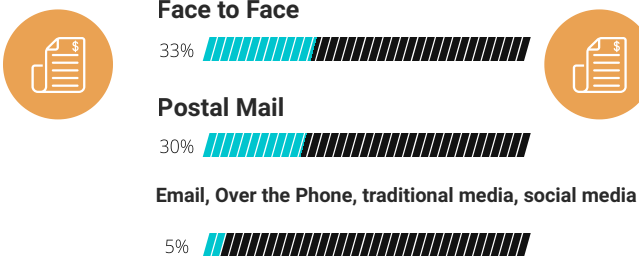
### Social Information



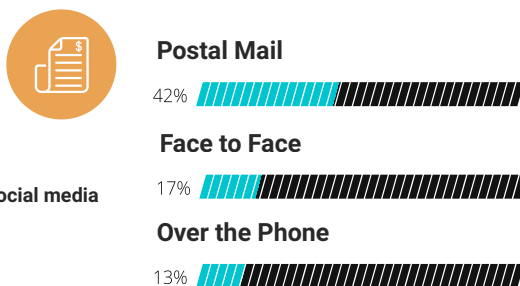
### Health Care Information:



### Legal Advice



### Community Service Advice



# Limitations of the Response Group

- More than 50% of participants filled out the survey online, some with the help of their families for those who did not use any technology. Time and budget constraints prevented contact with all senior citizens isolated from technology. Many older adults with complicated medical issues were excluded.
- The sample selected for this research included senior citizens in WA, including COTA members, and members of other advocacy groups. Consequently, the findings in this report may not represent individuals who live in rural and remote areas.

## Suggestions

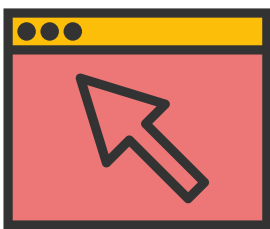
Email is the most accepted method for all age groups to receive information. However, our research shows that both the increase of scams, and the increase in advertising have led to hesitancy in the use of technology. Another factor contributing to a reluctance in using digital technology is information overload. Therefore, in dealing with seniors, organisations need to consider the impact of increasing scams, excessive advertising and information overload, when communicating with this cohort.



Some specific suggestions for communicating with older people include:

### Improving User Interface

To make information easier to access:



- Use simple, clear instructions/ options directory
- Include headlines
- Adopt simple colour contrasts, preferably with a white background especially for hardcopy. Avoid pale backgrounds such as pink, blue and green
- Avoid materials that are glossy.
- If the process is complex, provide tutorial videos
- Ensure time out session is not too short, and allow auto save system

### Phone calls



Music selection:  
Use calm music or no music  
The survey shows current music options can lead to frustration while waiting on the phone.



Language:

- Use simple, clear English
- Avoid jargon
- Speak at a normal to slow speed

Some participants reported requesting a transfer to speak to a call centre located in Australia due to difficulty in understanding strong accents.