

Ethics and DEI

Finnish older people with digital devices – Experiences of acquisition, implementation and use

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Purpose Finland ranked first in the Digibarometer 2023 in many categories [1]. Yet only half of those aged 65–74 and only a fifth of those aged 75–89 have at least basic digital skills [3]. Trust in digital security has decreased among people aged 75–99 [4]. Several studies show various digital inclusion challenges for older people [2]. The Finnish Union for Senior Services VALLI has been working to improve digital inclusion for older people for over a decade. Elisa Oyj, which is a Finnish market leader in telecommunications and digital services, is committed to promoting digital well-being as part of its sustainability work. After years of cooperating together with common goals, it was essential to fully understand the experiences of older people with digital devices and services. **Method** The method of the survey was a quantitative cross-sectional study. The study was conducted on national consumer panel in June 2025 with a sample of 500 people over 65 years old. The participants answered an electronic questionnaire that included open-ended questions. The questionnaire was developed based on the identified needs of older people. The needs were mapped out using pilot questionnaires as well as customer events for older people. The questionnaire included the background information of the respondents and questions with three themes. The background information included age group (65–74 years or 75+ years), gender, county of residence, need for help with digital devices and ability to identify cyber scams. Participants were also asked to list their household devices and digital services telecommunication operators are offering in Finland. The themes of the actual questionnaire were on: 1) acquisition, 2) introduction and use of digital devices and services, and 3) digital security. The questionnaire particularly emphasized the role of telecom operators in customer service regarding the mentioned themes. **Results and Discussion** The use of digital devices other than smartphones, tablets, or computers, as well as household digital services, differs among respondents (n=500) depending on whether they acquired digital services independently or received help from, for example, relatives. Those who have acquired independently have more digital household devices and services, such as smart TV, smart watches and streaming services. This is more prevalent among men (68%) than women (46%). The results show that the younger age group (65–74 years) prefers more independent acquisition and use. Respondents over 75 years prefer (61% of respondents) to acquire digital devices from the teleoperator's store. Older people's purchasing decisions are best supported by clear product descriptions and personal interaction with an expert. In general, respondents (58%) have positive experiences with telecom operators. Positive experiences are more pronounced among those over 75 years. This can be partly because they may have someone close to support them during the procurement situation. In their open-ended responses, respondents report both positive and negative customer service experiences. Respondents value personal and expert service. Respondents also long for unhurried encounters, without pressure or overselling. The positive customer experience of the older people is strengthened by the fact that the customer service representative can offer products or services that meet the customer's needs and explain the features and purposes clearly and understandably. As many as 36% of the respondents find it challenging to understand the terms used by customer service representatives when purchasing digital devices and services. 34% of the respondents are also afraid that they will end up buying something they don't need, and 40% fear purchasing a device and not knowing how to use it when they get back home. Respondents need help in different problematic situations, especially when the internet connection is lost (47%), when setting up a smart device (31%), when identifying scam messages (31%), and when updating a smart device (25%). 60% of respondents (n=439) have positive experiences with resolving problem situations with their telecom operator. When it comes to cyber security, the respondents are most concerned about online scams, identity theft, and personal information leaks. Concerns about remembering your own passwords are more pronounced among respondents over 75 years old. Those acting independently with digital devices and services (n=245) assess their ability to identify cyber scams as higher than those who need help (n=194). Only 51% of the respondents (n=500) report using any kind of security services on their digital devices. The results show that those who cannot identify security threats and scams avoid using digital services and devices in general. The results will help telecom operators implement more age-friendly customer service and forms of support for older people. For example, based on the results, the affiliated organizations started a production for learning video series for older people. It is recommended that telecom operators develop a checklist to further improve age-friendly customer service. While supporting older people using basic digital devices and services, we help them to accept and to adopt gerontechnology in the future. Many basic or everyday technologies can also support functional abilities, safety and independent living for older people.

References

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