

*N. Charness. Computer and internet use in the USA: influence of age, attitude, employment status, and education. Gerontechnology 2008; 7(2):92.* Age-related differences in the use of computers and technology have been shown to be related to cognitive variables such as fluid and crystallized intelligence as well as to attitudes toward technology<sup>1</sup>. However, this and similar studies draw on biased samples of older adults (e.g., highly educated ones) and thus may not be representative of the general population. The Pew Internet & American Life tracking survey<sup>2</sup> provides a large (n=2000) representative sample of US adults. We examine age trends in computer and technology use and an attitude toward technology question from the February-March 2007 survey. We assess predictors of computer and Internet use such as age, education, attitude, and employment status.

**Method** We recoded age to provide more range than the usual reports that create a single category for age 65+, and created a technology use item by recoding and summing questions asking about computer use, Internet use, and E-mail use. We also recoded question three (Q3:Overall, do you think that computers and technology give people MORE control over their lives, LESS control over their lives, or don't you think it makes any difference?) to score direction of control from less to no difference to more control. We plot Internet use by age groups in Figure 1. We use linear regression analysis to predict attitude about whether computers and technology improve control over life, and whether control and other demographic variables influence technology use. **Results and discussion** Prior publicized findings that less than a third of adults age 65+ in the USA use the Internet provide a misleading picture. Only the 85+ age group falls below 33% occasional Internet use (Figure 1). Regression analysis shows that the significant predictors of Q3 (influence of technology on control) are age ( $\beta = -.127$ , old less likely to believe that technology provides more control over life) and education ( $\beta = .110$ ; more educated adults believe that technology provides more control). Race, gender and employment status were not significant predictors. Significant predictors of technology use were education ( $\beta = .313$ ), employment status ( $\beta = -.123$ ), race ( $\beta = -.043$ ), and Q3 beliefs about control ( $\beta = .094$ ), and age ( $\beta = -.336$ ). Results indicate that increased technology use is associated with positive attitudes about technology effects on control, higher education level, and being engaged in work, but older age is associated with decreased technology use independently of these other factors. Attitudes are not the sole explanation for less use of technology by older adults. Providing greater experience with technology (e.g. job status) and education about benefits may promote use.

**References**

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2. Pew Internet & American Life Project. [www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/64/dataset\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/64/dataset_display.asp), accessed 1/25/2008. The author acknowledges that the Project bears no responsibility for the interpretations presented or conclusions reached based on analysis of the data.

**Keywords:** age, technology, computer use, internet use, education, employment, attitude

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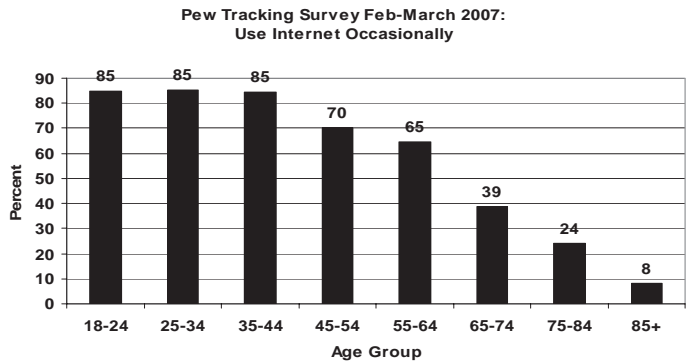


Figure 1 Age differences in computer use