

What factors have impacted on older people's (75+) access/experience of digital public services during COVID-19?

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Background

In Greater Manchester, as many as **1.2 million residents are estimated to be limited digital users** as a result of exclusion or personal preferences, with a substantial proportion of these being people in later life.

During the pandemic, many activities transitioned rapidly to online platforms which greater exacerbated inequalities in digital use.

Age remains the biggest indicator for digital exclusion within the UK.



Key themes

Theme	Initial motivation to participate digitally	Narrow use and restriction of activity online	Public services and freedom of choice	Impact of digital participation on well-being	The last generation	Making digital accessible
Relates to...	To maintain social connections and gain skills to be able to connect with family and friends.	Concerns around the safe sharing of personal information online was highlighted as a key barrier.	There was very little in the way of interaction with public services online. The one exception to this appears to be ordering prescriptions.	For some, not using online services, e.g. to make a GP appointment, was seen as positive in that they had to get 'out of the house' and in doing so, had the benefit of getting 'a little bit of exercise'.	Participant's perception that all younger people are fluent technology users is inaccurate.	Older adults valued the one-to-one support given to them but stressed this needed to be ongoing support.
Quote	"I'm never isolated because I can always get in touch with somebody. So, to me, it has literally been a lifeline" (Female, 82 years, Trafford)	"No I definitely won't have anything to do with online banking, and it's a shame because I know that I would shop online and it would save a trip to the Post Office or the bank or whatever, but I just wouldn't trust it" (Female, 79 years, Manchester)	"I don't think people should be pressurised into feeling their only option to get help or complain or get things done is by going online" (Female, 76 years, Stockport)	"I think its spoiled sociability. I think it's horrible the way they're all on their phone" (Female, 81 years, Stockport)	"The youngsters, from school onwards, they know nothing but the internet. So everything is being geared towards them" (Male, 83 years, Stockport)	"I'd love someone to sit and show me so I can write it down and if I get stuck I know how to do it myself" (Female, 82 years, Trafford)

Project overview

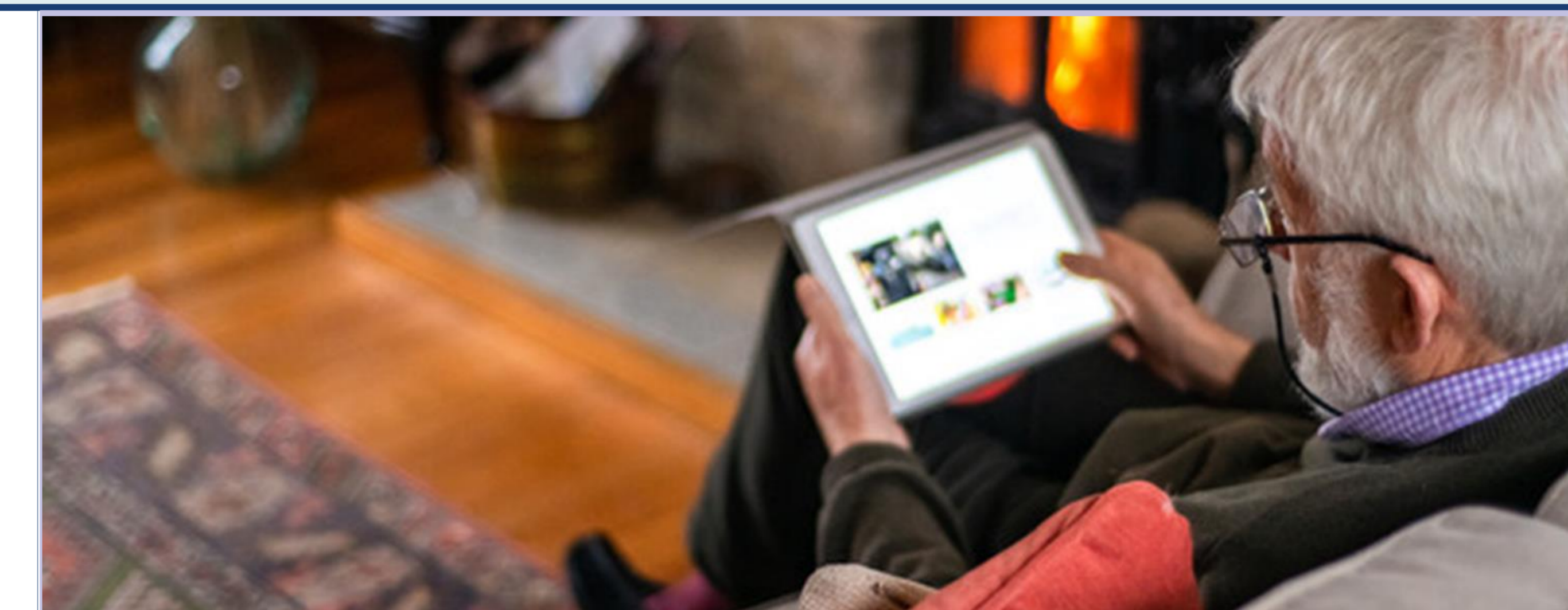
Aim: To understand what factors might have prompted an older adult to begin to participate digitally, and to understand both the barriers and enablers that might impact on older adults' access to, and engagement with, digital public services.

Study design:
Phase 1 – Rapid Evidence Review;
Phase 2 - **Semi-structured qualitative interviews.**

Interviews were undertaken with two groups:

1. Those participating in digital activities and were enrolled in a local programme of learning and support.
2. Older adults who were not engaged digitally, either through choice or because of a lack of opportunities/skills/services.

Who took part?
24 older adults were interviewed in Phase 2 of the project: 58% of respondents were female with a mean age of 81 years



Recommendations for...

Policy makers and practitioners:

- Concentrate on helping people do the things they want to do via technology, rather than on the technology itself.
- Consider the impact of other policy changes on digital inclusion for example online appointments may reduce waiting times but exclude patients who are digitally limited.

Technology developers:

- Acknowledge that people aged 75 and over do not all have the same digital skill set and that a range of options with future digital healthcare services should be offered.
- Provide support to older people to gain digital skills.
- Accessible offline alternatives must always be offered, and then maintained.

Researchers:

- Further learning across the realm of digital technology provision is needed; in particular, further understanding of acceptance and use of online prescription ordering in over-75s.

The pandemic exacerbated digital inequalities



Digital divide: Older people in the West left 'lonely'



"My grandson bought me an iPad when he joined BA as cabin crew and was going all over the world and wanted to show me places" (Female, 82years, Trafford)



Addressing health inequalities

- There needs to be a range of options, both digital and non-digital, that recognises the diversity among older people,
- Support and services must be made available in an offline format and proactively disseminated to reach those who otherwise would not have access to it.



Scan the QR code above to read the full report and to access phase 1 of this study.