Nationale Agentur beim Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung

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United Generations

Mapping Intergenerational Learning focused on Basic Skills - Germany

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1. Introduction

Digital literacy requires access to a digital device, such as a smart phone, tablet, and laptop, as well as reliable and strong internet. Many users of digital devices among those age 60 or older have reached a saturation level, but lower usage levels are found among older users. The technology decisions among older age consumers vary depending on their exposure to different types of technology, their experience with different types of technology, their familiarity with them, and their expected benefits. The demand for digital learning among older people is growing rapidly. This is because some of these factors are declining as middle-aged people age, and also because of pressure created by the pandemic. Older people tend to use technology on their own terms.

Senior citizens represent the fastest growing demographic worldwide. In 2021, the Institut für Verbraucherpolitik published survey results on digital skills in Germany. The results show that German consumers over the age of 60 would rate their own digital skills as merely sufficient (with low scoring). With the increasing population growth and exposure to computers and technology, it is important that they are aware of what computers can do for them (e.g., Email, document creation, games, internet, and educational training). According to the survey people over 60 years rated their own digital skills as mediocre. People over the age of 75 rated their skills as rather poor. Across all age groups, Germans rated their digital skills as good. Out of the total number of respondents, 37 percent would like to have a place where they could try out new technologies and learn new skills. At 49 percent, this desire is greatest among people over 75. The age group of people aged 75 and above is generally in support of such services, 68 percent of whom would also welcome such services nationwide[1].

This report has been developed in the framework of Erasmus+ funded project United Generation. It gives an overview of the data collected from adults (60+) and Youth (18+) in the form of online and offline surveys. The surveys were mutually developed by the 7

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partners of this project to assess the digital and English language skills among adults and young people in 6 EU countries (Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, France, Hungary, and Latvia). From the ability to use computers/laptops to the questions on data protection and the need for enhancement of specific skills, the surveys have been filled by adults and youth. In addition, we also engaged with people working for or with adult education in the Berlin region to know and assess the ground for adult education in the region.

[1]ConPolicy GmbH. (08.17.2021). *Older people rate their own digital skills as just sufficient. ConPolicy Institute für Verbraucherpolitik*. Available from: https://www.conpolicy.de/en/news-detail/older-people-rate-their-own-digital-skills-as-just-sufficient/

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2. Intergenerational Learning in Germany

The industrialised societies are starting to experience a demographic transition as their population is ageing. This is leading to a significant impact on the way that these societies' function and the ways in which they are used. The median age in the European Union has increased from about 34 to 43 years since 1985. There are some trends that seem to be happening in other economically developed regions of the world like Japan, which has seen an increase in the share of its population that is aged 65 and above. Since World War II, fertility rates in some regions have increased sharply. This trend has been referred to as a baby boom: people who are born during the baby boom are often labelled as the baby boomers. The baby boomers are currently in their last years of working age.

The baby boomers are currently in their last years of labour force participation in Germany. The 1964 cohort, which has seen the highest postwar birth number, turned 55 in 2019 and is expected to regularly retire at age 67 in 2031. In the short term, the German economy will need to focus on the ageing of the workforce while in the medium and long term, the shrinking and rejuvenation process will prevail. One important issue to consider, in the context of this research, is to bring the ageing population to the speed of the internet and online world by which it is exponentially advancing. Hence, Lifelong learning becomes important to integrate the adult population's needs to those which are not only already availing them but also becoming increasingly dependent on them.

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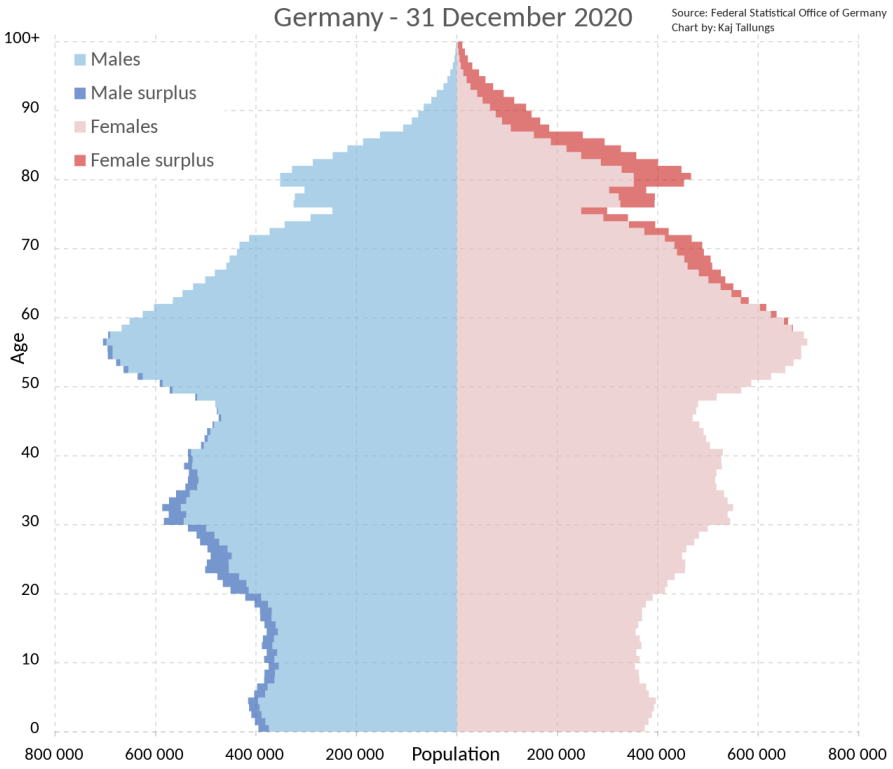

Figure 1: The above figure, issued by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (2020), shows an obvious bulge in the population between ages 50 and 70 in both men and women.

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3. Lifelong Learning (LLL)

Lifelong learning helps to maintain the balance between life and technology-driven change in the world. Digital competence results in the successful use of digital technologies to complete daily tasks. Competencies comprise different levels of digital literacy, skills, and knowledge. Digital skills focus on how to use digital tools to get things done. Digital literacy, on the other hand, focuses on why, when, and for what reasons digital tools work. Digital knowledge provides the ability to think critically, solve problems, and contribute valuable information and services to others in the contemporaneous world. Staying offline means being cut off from a multitude of options and watching the world go by without you.

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4. State approaches to Senior Digital Education

There are good chances of achieving a good life with access to education and digitalization, but older people need to have access to digital tools and abilities. The Bundesseniorenministerium is supporting the government with the right offers. The Federal Ministry of Senior Citizens is striving to make it easier for older people to get access to digital and educational opportunities, regardless of their gender, level of education, or income. It is promoting the active participation of older people in social life by providing various measures and enabling them to shape their own lives in an increasingly digitised society. There are three projects that belong to the "Digital Engel" team: "Digitalization and Bildung for Older People" and "Digitalpakt Alter".

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5. Good practices:

- **Digitaler Engel**

The mobile counselling team of the project " Digitale Engel '' provides helpful tips for older people in person and at the same time helps them modernise their daily life by using digital tools. This infomercial travels throughout Germany and is funded by the Bundesseniorenministerium (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth) and the carrier of the project is the association Deutschland sicher im Netz e.V. The “Digital Angels” are visiting different places where Seniors use to gather, like Seniorentreff (seniors social gatherings). They inform you about digital offers near you, answer questions and discuss their wishes and fears. The main focus lies in rural areas and low-income regions. For the Digital Angel, cooperation with existing structures and institutions such as councils, homes, senior women's and men's clubs, or universities is key.

- **Service Centre “Digitization and Education for Older People"**

The " Digitization and Education for Older People" service point at BAGSO - Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Seniorenorganisationen e.V. is assisting people in digitising their personal records and education files. The Federal Association of Senior Citizens' Organizations supports the desire of many older people to learn and engage with new digital media. Their website provides information and offers on digitization and education for older citizens. The online information portal “Wissensdurstig” has a nationwide event database that seniors can access to find offers in their vicinity. Additionally, contact partners from initiatives, counselling centres, and regional educational institutions can be found in the database. This means that free publications support the online offers by helping people access information more easily. For example, the "Wegweiser durch die digitale Welt" (Guide to the Digital World) or "Nie zu alt fürs Internet" (Never too old for the Internet).

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- **DigitalPakt Alter**

The DigitalPakt Alter is an initiative to help older people get more involved in the digitised world. The Federal Ministry of Senior Citizens and BAGSO - Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Seniorenorganisationen e.V. created an alliance in order to help improve the quality of life for seniors. The Federal Association of Senior Citizens' Organizations specialises in providing resources and services to older adults. The aim is to create more local services that can help people aged 80 or older live more comfortable and fulfilling lives. In this way, older people across Germany will be able to find suitable offers for acquiring digital skills. In order to provide a more digital-friendly environment, a funding program will be launched to establish and expand low-threshold digital experience sites. A company competition will honour companies that have already made great strides in helping older consumers digitise their lives.

- **Stiftung "Digitale Chancen"**

Telefónica Deutschland and the Digital Opportunities Foundation are offering a digital care package specifically designed to meet the needs of older people and help them through the ongoing Corona crisis. The package contains five components: Telephone advice on questions about cell phones and tablets, rental of smartphones and tablets for senior citizens' homes, explanatory videos, a podcast, and training sessions for senior citizen trainers.

- **Digitaler Kompass**

The Digital Compass provides free services for seniors on the Internet and other topics. At 100 locations across Germany, Internet guides help older people try out digital services for themselves. The Digital Compass is a meeting place for personal exchange, for on-site and online training, and for obtaining materials. It is is a project of BAGSO - Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Seniorenorganisationen and Deutschland sicher im Netz e.V. in partnership with the Consumer Initiative with funding from the

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German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection.

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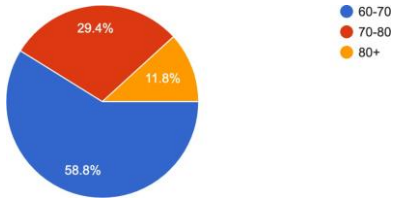
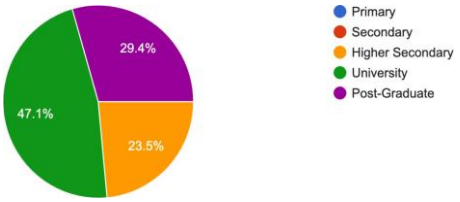
6.Profile of the Adults (60+) and Youth (16+)

The data for digital and English Language skills of the adults (60+) was collected through online and offline questionnaires developed with our partners. The questionnaire was translated into German for local target groups in Berlin and Brandenburg. The questionnaire had three sections: digital skills, English language know-how and their willingness to change and improve things. A similar questionnaire for survey was developed for youth (16+) with most of the questions remaining the same. The difference between the two surveys was mainly in the last section where the respondents were asked about their willingness to contribute to improvement in the digital skills of adults.

Data collection was a challenging task in Germany as most of the people, having knowledge of the GDPR, find it difficult to share information. Furthermore, the interest in filling surveys is not as exciting as can be observed in other parts of Europe. After lengthy waiting, delays beyond deadlines, we were able to collect 19 adult and 20 youth responses on the surveys in addition to 2 interviews, as replacement of Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

The profile of adults (60+), in some cases 55+, and youth (16+) is presented in the table below with comparative analysis.

ADULTS	**YOUTH**
Age and education	
	

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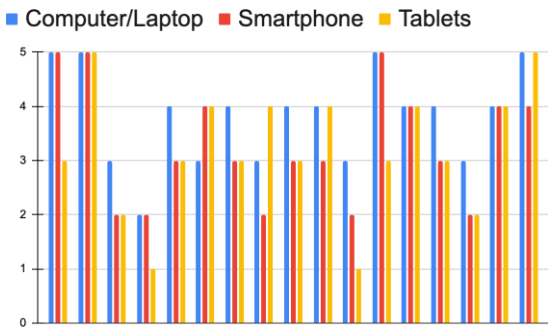
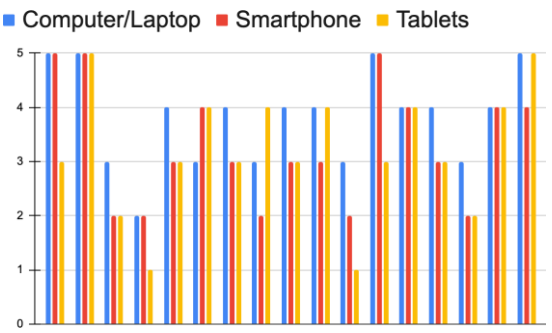
According to the results of the **SENIORS Questionnaire,** 58.8% of responses come from people between the age of 60 - 70, with 52.9% holding a university degree (undergraduate) as well. 29.4% of the respondents had completed their post-graduation, meaning they had a Master's degree or PhD title. This made our adult sample among the learned and qualified people with 81% having completed their graduate studies or above.	According to the results of our **YOUTH Questionnaire**, the majority of the respondents are between the age 26 - 30 (70.1%) followed by 17.6% responses from the youth between 16 and 20 years of age. Among the 20 respondents 47.1% have either completed university level education or are currently enrolled in the universities. This is followed by 29.4% of the youth having a post-graduation level of education. The youth sample is very diverse in terms of age and education.
Ability to operate a computer/laptop, Smartphone, Tablet, Camera, etc.	
	

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The responses from the age group of 60 - 80+ are diverse, showing that 41.2% (scale 4 out of 5) have a good ability to operate a computer or laptop. Whereas only 29.4% (scale 3 out of 5) said they have average skills to operate a smartphone. However, 35.3% (scale 3 out of 5) mentioned average operation capabilities of using a tablet. Less than 20% of the respondents can use computer/laptop, tablet and smartphones with excellent skills (scale 5 out of 5). Though the electronics gadget use is not unknown to adults in our sample, the use varies from average to excellent with more weight towards the average use of these.	The replies in the youth questionnaire indicate that the majority (70.6%, scale 5 out of 5) of young people until 30 have excellent or very good (29.4%, scale 4 out of 5) skills in operating a computer, while there are no replies indicating less familiarity with computers in that age range. Similar results for smartphone and tablet use can be see where 100% of the respondents have registered their responses between 4 and 5 out 5 on the scale from bad to excellent where 5 indicates excellent use of the gadgets. The youth also showed 90% can use cameras and other electronic outputs and inputs with very good and excellent skills.

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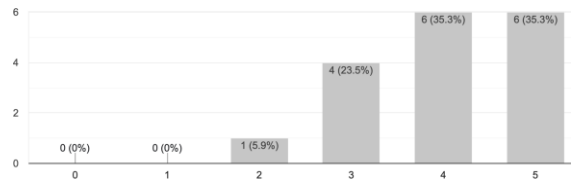
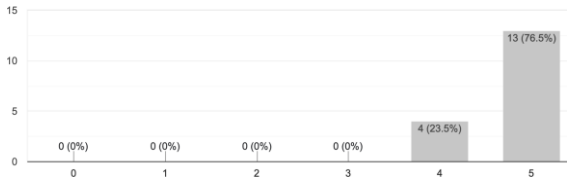
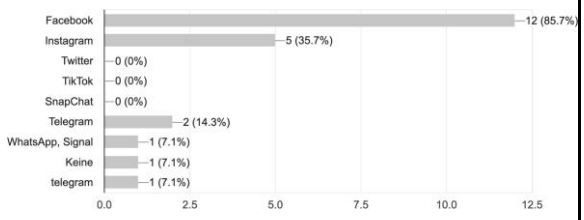
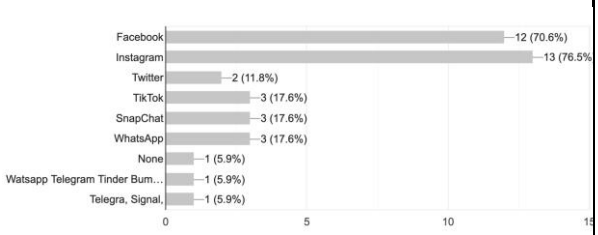
Ability to navigate through the internet to search relevant information (news, videos, articles, etc.)	
	
35.3% of the adult respondents marked their skills of internet surfing to be excellent and 35.3% deem them very good. Only 23.5% (scale 3 out of 5) of the respondents replied with an average score for their internet navigation.	As expected by the researchers, 100% of the responses were marked excellent and very good understanding of navigation through the internet. 76.5% (scale 5 out of 5) of the respondents showed excellent use of the internet for finding information.
Ability to use Social Media and its different platforms	
	

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The first major difference between the two groups comes with use of social media. 41.2% (scale 2 out of 5) mentioned that they have below average understanding on using social media platforms followed by 29.4% (scale 3 out of 5) having average knowledge. Out of the 20 respondents only 2 mentioned having good or excellent command on their social media skills. Among the social media platforms, Facebook dominated the first choice followed by Instagram. Whereas use of other social media platforms seems to be of less interest in the adult age group.	94.1% of the youth respondents mentioned that their use of social media skills are above average: 29.4% (5 out of 5), 29.4% (4 out of 5) and highest 35.3% (3 out of 5). We were not surprised by these results though did not expect the average skills of social media to dominate the chart here. However, that is a relative scale compared to other youth rather than comparing it with those of adults. Unlike the adults, there was more diversity in the use of different social media platforms. Instagram and Facebook dominated this chart with TikTok, Snapchat and WhatsApp also getting users among the youth.
Ability to protect personal data online (passwords, bank details, etc.)	

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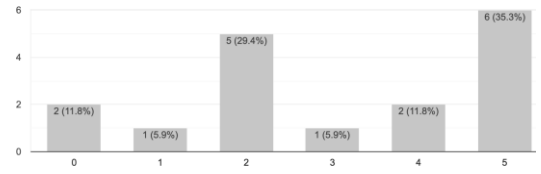	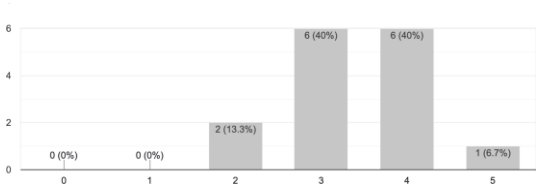
More than half of the respondents 52.8% responded to this question with a score 3 or below out of 5. Whereas 8 respondents show very good and excellent skills when it comes to protection of passwords and personal data in the online world. Majority marked in the areas of average and weaker skills in terms of ability to protect their personal data online. This marks the ability to protect passwords, bank details and other personal information as one of the weakest skills according to this survey.	Contrary to the skills of adults, youth show that 86.7% have skills to protect their passports and other personal data on the internet. However, out of which 40% (scale 3 out of 5) marked just above average skills. Though there were no candidates showing 0 or poor skills, yet the number of excellent skills is also marked by only 1 respondent.
Ability to recognize threads on devices (viruses, malicious emails, etc.)	
Like above, the adults are not confident in their skills to recognize viruses, malicious emails, scams, etc. 52.9% of the respondents marked them below average (0 to 3 out of 5). Only 35.3% respond to this question with high skills (scale 4 out of 5).	The youth, however, marked their ability to recognize viruses, malicious emails, scams, etc. as being high and excellent. 23.5% and 23.5% respectively marked 4 and 5 out of 5 to their answers. Whereas only 23% marked their answers with 2 or below.
English Language Skills	

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The English knowledge skills are relatively higher in Berlin in comparison to other cities and non-metropolis regions in Germany. More than 70% rated their written and oral skills as very good (4 out of 5) and excellent (5 out of 5). More than 58% however marked English as one of their spoken languages with good understanding. In Fact, the majority of respondents interacting with us in the data collection process spoke in English despite having the options to interact and fill the survey either in German.	More than 80% of young respondents marked their understanding of English in written and oral language excellent (5 out of 5). 88% marked English as one of their spoken languages. All of the interactions and surveys filled were in English despite the fact that each respondent had the chance to fill the survey in German. 42% respondents think their ability to recognize and understand abbreviations is average (3 out of 5).

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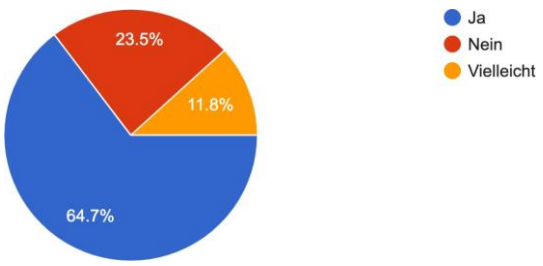
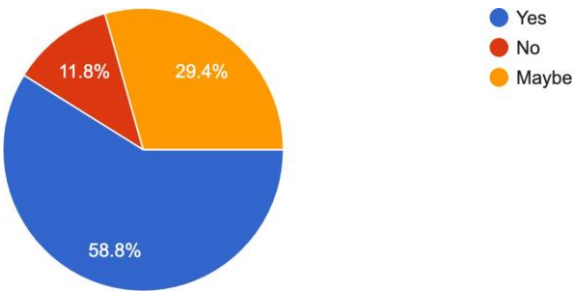
The ability to understand English abbreviations like brb, lol, asap, idk, afk, etc. is however rated average and below (0 to 2 out of 5) by 89% of the adults.	
Future Engagements	
In this section about intergenerational learning and interaction the respondents had to answer with 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe' responses. When asked if "you be interested in taking a seminar to improve your digital skills" 64.7% of the adults responded yes. 76.6% showed interest in improving their English language skills. Whereas 52% showed interest in taking part in the intergenerational learning places where interaction with youth is important. 58% agree with sharing some skills with young people during intergenerational interactions: history (53%), cooking (38%), language (46%), storytelling (16%), cycling(8%) and art(8%). 	In this section about intergenerational learning and interaction the respondents had to answer with 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe' responses. 76.5% of the young respondents do not have any experience involving or supporting seniors (60+). Out of the 12% who said yes they referred to support with social activities as their way of interaction. In answer to participating in intergenerational learning seminars to improve adults' digital skills, 58.8% of the respondents showed interest. 

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7. Critical areas of improvement

The digital and English language skills of the adults (60+) in the selected sample in and around Berlin are relatively better than thought of earlier than the research. However, the respondents marked some of the areas in which they see themselves weak. During the interaction with the majority of the respondents while filling the surveys in one-to-one interaction, some lacks in digital skills were specifically part of the discussion: scamming of the elderly via emails, phone calls and mail, password and personal data protection, use of diverse social media platforms, and online payments and appointment booking.

The social media use among adults is less and some things many were not really keen on having in their life. However, few mentioned they would like better skills at it even though they would not prefer using it most of the time. This interest was also sparking with them listening to new social media platform names like Tiktok, Snapchat, Instagram, Telegram, etc.

Another area of interest for the adults to excel their digital abilities was in ability to recognize viruses, scams, malicious emails, etc. The low numbers in surveys are also confirmed by survey follow-up discussions. The knowledge of viruses was relatively higher than recognizing malicious emails or calls. Most of the respondents were either not aware of the current call centers scams or reported less knowledge of effectively dealing with them. Moreover, the ability to protect personal information, identity, passwords, bank details, etc. was also an area of discussion with the respondents. This was something seen relatively weaker in youth responses as well.

Finally, adults showed interest in having the means and tools at their disposal to learn easily about online payments and booking appointments. They see it difficult to navigate for appointments online as the traditional methods of calling and in person visits are more preferred. However, increasing intervention of screens for appointment booking and online payments forces adults to adopt these changes. No matter the reluctance to change, many adults showed their interest in adapting to this necessity in a better way with visual tools.

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