

COMMUNICATIONS
CONSUMER
PANEL



The Journey to Digital Participation

Conducted by



The Communications Consumer Panel is an independent panel of experts established under the Communications Act 2003. Its role is to influence Ofcom, Government, the EU and service and equipment providers, so that the communications interests of consumers and citizens are protected and promoted.

The Panel pays particular attention to the needs of older people and people with disabilities, to the needs of people in rural areas and people on low incomes, and to the needs of small businesses, which face many of the same problems as individual consumers.

The Consumer Panel is made up of part-time members with a balance of expertise in consumer issues in the communications sector. There are members representing the interests of consumers in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England.

Consumer Panel Members are appointed by Ofcom, subject to approval by the relevant Secretaries of State. They are appointed in accordance with Nolan principles and are eligible for re-appointment. The Consumer Panel is assisted by a small advisory team.

Research conducted by Essential Research,
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Harriet



Harriet's Journey

I am in my 70s and I really do think that youth is wasted on the young. I would love to be more lively, although I do my best to enjoy life. My husband and I do everything together: travelling whenever we can; doing lots of different things in our local community; and spending time with our family and friends. We keep ourselves busy and like to keep our minds active by taking books out from the library. I love to learn.

Stage 1: getting interested

I was interested in the internet for a few years but I put it off. I sat with my sons but I wouldn't touch the computer. They move their hands so fast. I felt intimidated by that. It wasn't until I realised people my age were learning it that I felt I could do it and I started to look for courses. It seemed like there was lots to take in. We couldn't find one. No one had funding anywhere, not even the library. There were so many things I wanted to do, like communicate with friends and family abroad. I was just afraid of starting out at my age.

Executive Summary

Research background and objectives

The role of the Communications Consumer Panel (the Panel) is to influence Ofcom, Government, the EU, and service and equipment providers in order to protect and promote the communications interests of consumers and citizens.

The Panel believes that success in promoting widespread digital participation depends on a full understanding of what people themselves say they need to get online and get the most from the internet.

To this end, the Panel has developed a Consumer Framework for Digital Participation, based on a review of existing consumer research.

Essential was commissioned to conduct qualitative research to help bring the framework to life and ensure that it fully reflects people's needs and experiences as they embark upon the journey to digital participation.

The findings from this research were used by the Panel to refine the framework.

The key messages from this research, and from the Panel's review of the existing consumer research, are summarised in *Delivering Digital Participation: the consumer perspective*, which it has published alongside this report. All reports are available on the Panel's website. A video featuring the research participants is also available on the Panel's website¹.

Research approach

The research was carried out across the UK from December 2009 to January 2010. It comprised 12 two-stage in-home visits, which included a video diary component, and four focus groups. The sample was designed to be broad-ranging in terms of demographics. Participants were recruited to represent four stages of digital participation:

1. Those currently offline and not interested in going online.
2. Those currently offline but interested in going online.

¹ The Panel's website is www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

3. Those currently online with limited use.
4. Those currently online, proficient but with low confidence in protecting themselves or their personal information online.

Brief portraits of the twelve research participants who took part in the ethnographic component of the research are spread throughout this report. These include details about the individuals, the role the internet plays in their lives and their digital participation journeys so far.

Summary of key findings

The research identified four key stages in the digital participation journey:

1. Getting interested.
2. Getting online.
3. Being online.
4. The trade off between benefits and risks.

The report deals with the key characteristics of each stage in turn.

Stage one: getting interested

Fortress Mentality: individuals who reject digital participation over a long period of time often create a ‘fortress’ mentality. This is manifested as defensiveness; individuals feel they are ‘in a corner’. They look to external sources to rationalise or bolster their position, citing negative media coverage about fraud or online paedophilia, or pointing to examples of similar non-participation among their peers.

At the heart of this defensiveness are some fundamental emotional conflicts: embarrassment, fear, anxiety and pride. People find it difficult to see a way out that does not compromise their pride, especially if these views have become entrenched over a long period of time.

These attitudes are more extreme in some cases than others. Most among this group feel indifference or ambivalence towards the internet. A minority feel active resistance, which is an attitude that is difficult to shift.

Importance of personal benefits: in order to switch this uninterested audience onto the internet, there must be a clear personal benefit. They will only get online if they are convinced that they are missing out or that the internet will significantly improve some aspect of *their* life. Without a direct personal need or motivation to use the internet no further action will be taken.

Demonstrating to someone that the internet can be relevant to them is a fundamental challenge because:

- it requires an intimate understanding of what makes each individual tick;
- the perceived benefit *MUST* be seen to outweigh the perceived investment required to get there; and
- often individuals do not *want* to see the benefits.

The incentive can come from an overwhelming single motivation or multiple smaller motivations, such as:

- keeping up with others;
- being part of society;
- connecting with others;
- survival; and
- enhancing knowledge.

Benefits vs. cost of investment: once people identify a personal need to use the internet, the perception of the necessary investment required to get there can be overwhelming.

There are both practical and emotional reasons for this. Practical reasons include:

- potential costs; and
- lack of technical understanding or ability and the likely time required to overcome this.

Emotional reasons include:

- low confidence; and
- fear of failure.

For most, the issue of cost is a relatively superficial barrier. More fundamental issues relate to lack of ability and emotional barriers.

Friends and family: friends or family who understand an individual's personal motivations and fears almost *always* have a key role to play in generating a spark of interest.

But friends and family can also be a barrier, usually inadvertently:

- They may exacerbate a 'fortress' stance through teasing or validating the perception that the internet is for other people.

- They can prevent an individual's participation by doing things for them online, removing their need to do it for themselves.

Stage two: getting online

Support is critical: a lack of external support can stop even the keenest people in their tracks. *Everyone* needs support of some kind. No one gets online without it. But it's important to have the right kind of support, which can be summarised as follows:

- Technical knowledge;
- Availability;
- Patience; and
- Enthusiasm.

The right kind of support makes the difference between a positive and a negative first experience and shapes an individual's future level of engagement with the internet. But the right kind of support can be surprisingly difficult to find - and friends and family are often not the ideal choice. Support can come from a single or multiple source. Typical sources of support might include:

- children or a partner;
- friends or friends of friends;
- local courses; and
- local libraries.

It does not matter who the source is, as long as they have the key TAPE requirements outlined above. A single person might serve a range of support needs, or a series of individuals might help at different points.

Technical support is needed by many who want and expect this to form part of the retail service. Many do not know what specific equipment they need and want someone else to guide them.

Having access does not guarantee use: despite having computers with internet access at home, some people still do not use them or go online. The differentiating factor is having a personal reason to invest in learning to do so.

In some cases, people have equipment that is not fit for purpose. Examples of this include old computers, virus-ridden machines and slow internet connection speeds.

Individuals bring a lifetime of experiences with them: people's perception and experience of the internet is defined by their life to that point. The attitudes of many we talked to were coloured by negative past learning experiences (computer-related and otherwise), low literacy levels and lack of self-confidence.

Progress can be quick: A great deal of progress can be made in very little time. An individual's perception of their own ability is often out of line with reality. Many magnify the barriers and effort in their own minds; they believe they are less capable than they are. This can be overcome with the right support.

Stage Three: being online

A fork in the road: even after people have got online things do not always go smoothly and the research has identified that for many there is a fork in the road and they can then become occasional or regular users:

- **Occasional users:** those who have a less positive initiation to the internet, whose motivation was not voluntary or who have just started out, can become occasional, and in time uninterested, users.
- **Regular users:** those whose initiation was positive and well-supported, whose motivation was personal or whose self confidence and learning ability was higher tend to become more regular, engaged users.

Having the right support makes an enormous difference to how a person will use the internet and which path they are likely to take. The research gave further insights into the characteristics of occasional and regular users.

Occasional users

Lack of Confidence: some are characterised by a high degree of self-doubt, largely owing to an inadequate first initiation to the internet. Others can have broader anxieties based on unhappy previous learning experiences and low literacy levels. This group can be disinclined to experiment or explore, which hampers their online experience and development.

Anxiety: an unsatisfactory initial online experience means that many individuals often do not know where to go. They get stuck easily, and are less able to protect their computers from viruses. Their experience is often underpinned by constant anxiety and they frequently feel overwhelmed. They are inclined to compare themselves unfavourably with others who they perceive as more proficient.

Continuing support: to encourage this group to adopt more regular use there is sometimes a need to start from scratch to re-ignite interest and demonstrate what the internet can really do for them. This involves:

- reinforcing positive messages about the internet, including personal benefits; and
- promoting access to the right level of support (TAPE).

Regular users

This group tends to exhibit a higher degree of confidence. They are far more comfortable with using the internet, and with making mistakes online, than occasional users. They have devised methods to deal with situations where they feel 'stuck', for instance using the back button, closing down a browser window in order to progress or starting again.

Stage 4: the trade off between benefits and risks

Risk aversion: Even if people go on to become confident, regular users they may not access the full benefits because of their attitudes to risk.

Refusing to submit personal or financial data online is often symptomatic of wider caution in other areas. Here the barrier to taking things further is self-enforced; users create a protective bubble within which they operate and are uncomfortable stepping outside it.

This risk aversion meant that even some regular users had a very limited repertoire, happy to enjoy the benefits they initially identified but seeing no need to experiment for its own sake. Others would like to extend their internet use but anxiety holds them back; they fear losing control.

This anxiety stems from natural caution; this group is not comprised of risk-takers. It can be reinforced by negative media coverage about, for instance, fraud or identify theft.

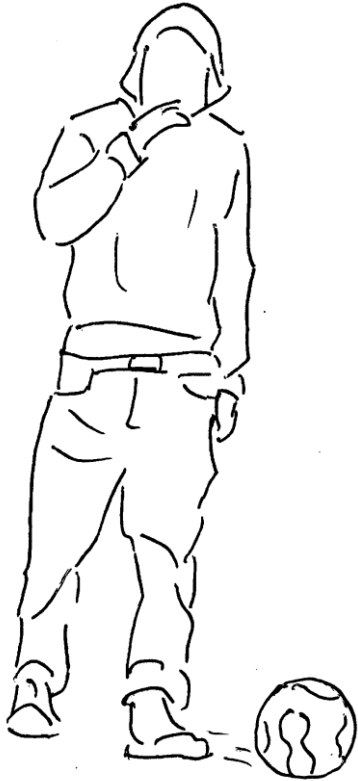
Reluctance to submit personal data can be overcome through reassurance or through force of circumstance, but care is needed to ensure people have the necessary skills to protect themselves.

The Consumer Framework for Digital Participation

The Panel has used the findings of this research, together with consultation with experts from government, business and the third sector, and analysis of existing policy and academic research, to develop and refine its Consumer Framework for Digital Participation. The Framework sets out the different things people need to get online and get the most from the internet.

James

Not online, but not interested



My name is James and I'm 18. Although I have lived in this neighbourhood for a few years, I still don't feel I fit in here. I am currently unemployed. I left school as soon as I could, with no qualifications. Everyone else in my family works, including my girlfriend, so usually I'm just left at home watching TV or playing the X-box.

I have really tried to get a job, by going down the job centre as well as handing out CVs to local shops, but no one ever gets back to me. My life is football, plain and simple. I see it as the best way of getting out of here, and to make something of myself.

James' journey

Stage 1: getting interested

I've only started using the internet recently because I wanted to get a job. So far the job centre has been useless in helping me get one, so I thought it was time to take matters into my own hands. Previously I had tried to do my job hunting by simply calling people up, but no one answers your call. Also more and more jobs now want you to apply online, so that is why I am trying to get online. The internet would also be good for making money, or for looking up nights out.

Stage 2: getting online

If I had the internet here, right now, in my house, I would learn to use it. But no one wants to pay for it, and I can't afford it, so the only place I can go is my relation's house, and that is over half an hour away. I would never learn to use it publically, like in an internet cafe or a library, as I am too scared that I would look stupid, or even worse break it. If I wanted to learn how to use the internet, I would have to do it myself in my own time. I would hate to ask my mates, as I don't want them to think I am thick.

Stage 3: being online

Although I know how to use a computer for Word and Excel, I had never been on the internet by myself or even been shown how to use it at school, so when I did go online, I was surprised by how easy it actually was. I think in less than an hour I had grasped the basics. Also, once I have used the internet a few times and made a few mistakes without someone watching me make those mistakes, or just getting impatient with me and taking control of the computer, I think I would grow in confidence and use it for more than just looking for jobs, such as buying and selling stuff online, chatting to friends, stuff like that.

Stage 4: benefits and risks

Having an internet connection in my house right now would really be a benefit to me, as it would allow me to search for jobs or course online. To do that, I would need some financial assistance as currently no one in my family has any spare cash to pay for a broadband connection.

Key themes

- The school internet policy contributed to a lack of familiarity with and confidence in using the internet. There was no specific internet training and access was entirely blocked.
- Learning to use the internet involves admitting ignorance and making mistakes. Doing so in front of friends and relatives can be embarrassing, which is a major barrier for some.

Background and objectives

Research background

The Communications Consumer Panel (the Panel) is a panel of independent experts. It was established under the Communications Act 2003. The role of the Panel is to influence Ofcom, Government, the EU, and service and equipment providers in order to protect and promote the communications' interests of consumers and citizens.

The Digital Britain report, published by Government in June 2009, identified a new term, *digital participation*, defined as:

“Increasing the reach, breadth and depth of digital technology use across all sections of society, to maximise digital participation and the economic and social benefits it can bring.”

The National Plan for Digital Participation, which set out the Government's approach to increasing digital participation was published in March 2010.

The Panel believes that success in promoting widespread digital participation depends on understanding digital participation from the perspective of citizens and consumers. To this end, the Panel has developed a Consumer Framework for Digital Participation. The framework sets out what people themselves say they need to get online and get the most out of the internet.

The Framework was revised to incorporate the findings of this research. The revised Framework was included in the Government's National Plan for Digital Participation and is reproduced in Figure 1.

Figure 1: the Panel’s Consumer Framework for Digital Participation



Research objectives

The Panel commissioned Essential Research to carry out qualitative research in order to explore consumers’ experiences of digital participation.

The overarching objective of the research was to provide insight into the journeys individuals take towards digital participation, including what facilitates that journey and the barriers that they encounter.

More specifically, the study sought to:

- test the validity of the Panel’s framework from the perspective of consumers;
- understand the extent to which different research participants possess the attributes set out in the framework;

- provide an indication of the nature of the support that different groups need to enable them to participate digitally; and
- produce compelling evidence of consumers' experiences to support advocacy and policy making.

Section 3

The digital journey: the research process

The report focuses on the nature and shape of the digital participation journey as it emerged across the four key audience segments. Barriers to digital participation are highlighted throughout, together with motivational drivers.

In order to fully understand the nature of the journey to digital participation, four segments were targeted for this research:

1. Those currently offline and not interested in going online.
2. Those currently offline but interested in going online.
3. Those currently online but occasional users.
4. Those currently online, proficient but with low confidence in protecting themselves online.

The research methodology comprised three ethnographic visits and a focus group per segment. Research across these four segments enabled us to develop a full picture of the digital participation journey, from the initial identification of a need or driver to access the internet to the factors that restrict even a regular user from fully exploiting its opportunities. This is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: overview of the journey to digital participation

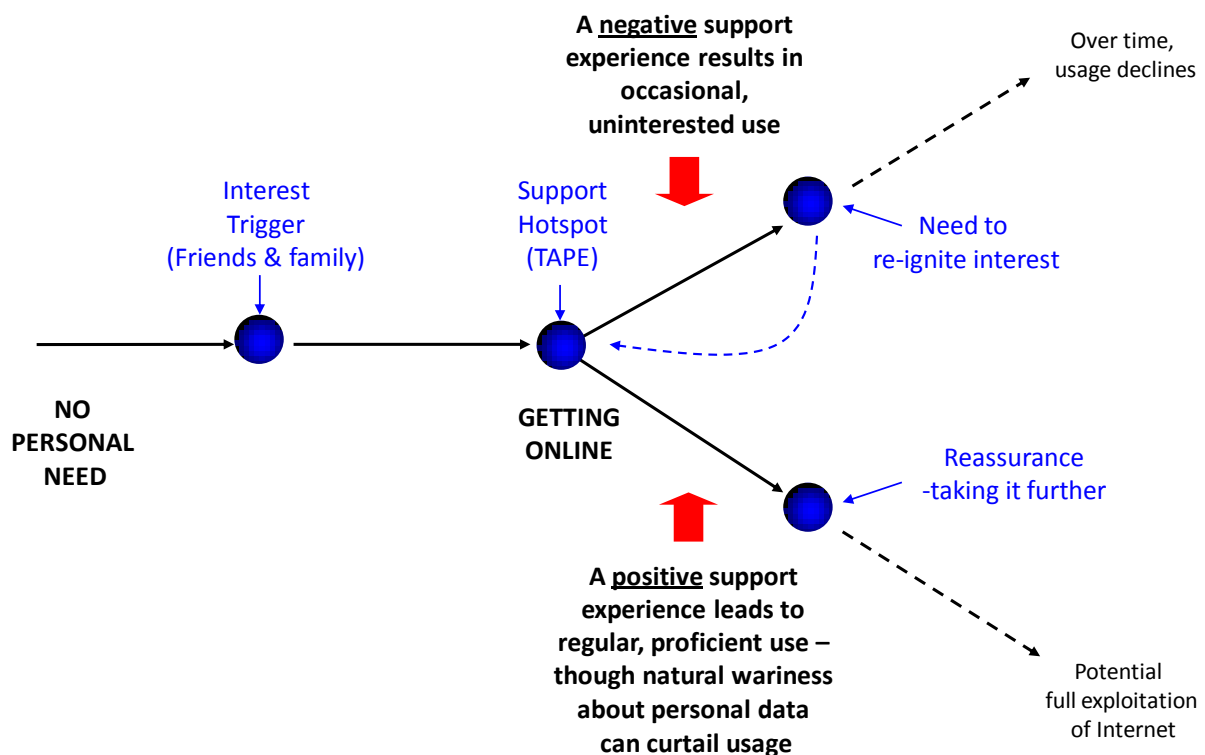


Figure 2 illustrates the journey towards digital participation. It highlights the difference that adequate support can make in shaping an individual’s long-term use of the internet.

It is important to note that the four segments of people are not completely distinct; similar behavioural and psychological characteristics can be observed across them. For instance, someone using the internet occasionally may suffer from the same anxiety regarding literacy as another who is interested in getting online. Both are struggling to overcome the same barrier but under different circumstances.

During the course of the research we asked participants to either recall early stages of their journey or project what they imagine their future journey might entail. In doing so, we were able to build a complete picture of the overall experience, drawing on views across all the groups.

This report describes the stages of the journey, using direct quotations in support of our analysis.²

² Quotes without ages ascribed are from one of the workshop sessions, which included a broad spectrum of ages.

Section 4

The research participants

The research participants - a diverse sample

The study was designed to incorporate as broad a spread of individuals as possible, both across the ethnographic and focus group samples. Respondents were from a wide spectrum in terms of age, socio-economic group, location and degree of digital participation. Correspondingly, experiences and attitudes, at least in some respects, varied significantly. The path towards adopting internet technology was very much dependent on the various complexities and patterns of the day-to-day lives and past experiences of participants.

Barriers to use appeared on the surface to range greatly according to the individual concerned. Digging more deeply, it was clear that there were a number of important factors which united all our participants, and many of the seemingly disparate attitudes and behaviours witnessed in the research could be related back to a smaller number of fundamental issues. These are explored in detail in the following section.

Brief portraits of the twelve research participants who took part in the ethnographic component of the research are spread throughout this report. These include details about the individuals, the role the internet plays in their lives and their digital participation journeys so far. They are located as follows:

Not online, but not interested

- James, pages 12-13;
- William, pages 28-29; and
- Frank, pages 68-69.

Not online, but interested

- Joan, pages 20-21;
- Shirley, pages 42-43; and
- Mandy, pages 50-51.

Online but limited use

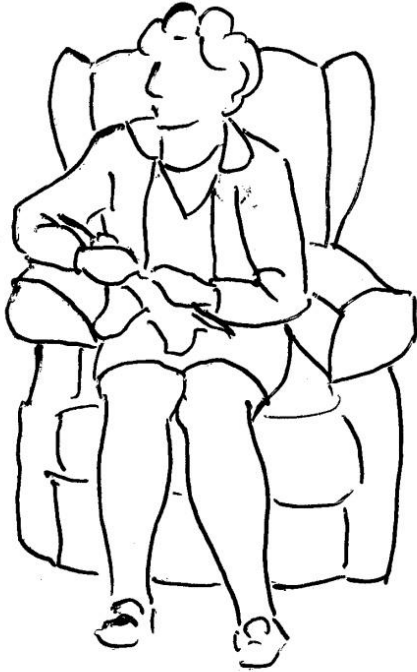
- Harriet, pages 4-5;
- Robert, pages 36-37; and
- Joe, pages 70-71.

Proficient but low confidence in protecting themselves online

- Sarah, pages 64-65;
- Ian, pages 72-73; and
- Tara, pages 80-81.

Joan

Not online, but interested



My name is Joan. I am in my 60s and have been married for fifty years and am retired.

I have three wonderful children and five grandchildren who I absolutely adore. I also have a massive extended family in Ireland. I am a very sociable person and I make friends with people really easily. I love to talk. I can talk about anything.

I do not have many hobbies as my grandchildren take up much of my time.

Joan's journey

Stage 1: getting interested

The internet is good. There are a lot of things you can do like book holidays, buy books, get bargains and most importantly you can talk to friends and family. In fact I have heard a lot about this thing called Skype which I would love to do - love to be able to see my friends and family. I also think the internet is great for the younger generation. They can do so much online, which is a good thing. However, I do get embarrassed when my five year old grandchild asks me to play games on the internet and I don't know what buttons to press.

Stage 2: getting online

I wasn't very academic at school and sometimes I think at this age I really can't be bothered. But I can see the good in the internet and all my sisters say to me, 'when are you going to go online?' This makes me feel very embarrassed because I start to think if everyone my age can manage it why can't I? Is it because I am not bright enough? It is not like I'm stupid. I do actually have keyboard skills and I can turn a computer on. It's that I just don't know what to do next. It is frustrating and annoying that I can't go online. It's just that I don't know what to press and it all seems so hard.

Stage 3: being online

My family have tried to get me online. They have even sat down with me and shown me what buttons to press. However, the problem is that my family are really impatient. They always take control and this puts me off.

However, once you [the researcher] went online with me and showed me patiently what to do it made me realise that it can be done and that it is not that hard. It is all a matter of practice. As they say practice makes perfect.

Stage 4: benefits and risks

I used to worry about buying online, but I think that now I am more confident I might even buy things.

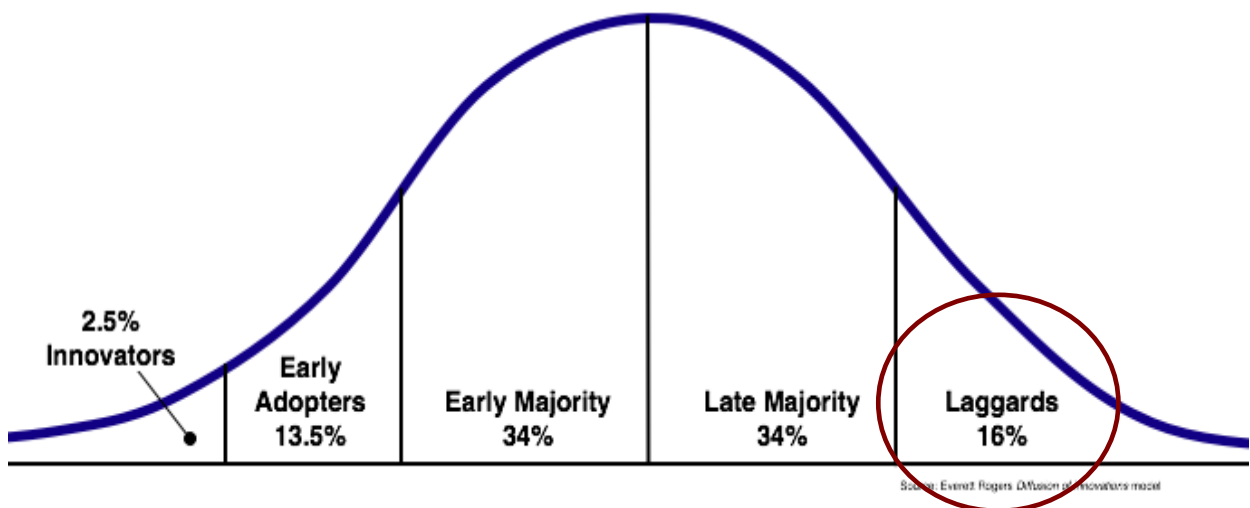
Key themes

- The communication possibilities of the internet are particularly compelling benefits.
- Fear of the learning process can be crippling. Individuals can carry it throughout their lives and it colours attitudes to learning about the internet. A bad experience of an internet course can cement this fear.
- Family and friends can make the learning experience worse. Younger family members can intimidate with their fluency. Lack of patience or teaching skills in potentially well meaning family members can make learning seem harder than it really is.

Resistance to the digital participation journey

The internet has been a widely-used, widely available tool for a number of years. It will soon be essential for everyone to have the access to the internet at home and people who are not online will be at a disadvantage. As services increasingly move online, the stance of non-use is becoming more difficult for many. Those research participants who were not online and not interested were laggards, according to the technological adoption lifecycle shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Everett Rogers Technology Adoption Lifecycle model



A graph of Everett Rogers Technology Adoption Lifecycle model

This was a minority group, often with staunchly-held convictions about the internet and their own (lack of a) relationship with it. Within this ‘*not online, not interested*’ sample, the research participants could be broadly divided into two groups - albeit with some degree of crossover: *traditionalists* and those with *low confidence*.

Traditionalists

Traditionalists were keen to preserve the status quo of daily life. Old habits, rituals, identities and relationships were of central importance; this was not an audience who embraced the idea of a new world or adopting new behaviour. Some exhibited anxiety about the consequences of using the internet and what it might mean if they invited it into their lives. They tended to regard the world in black and white: things were either good or bad, with little room for grey areas. This was not confined to older generations; it could also be seen among people in their 30s. Strong degrees of resistance were observed among younger participants precisely because their age meant they felt a higher degree of pressure or expectation that they should be online.

In some cases, individuals were heavily reliant on what they saw as alternative options to the internet, such as Teletext, which in their eyes met all their needs for news and information about sport, entertainment and even financial markets. Services such as Teletext and telephone banking were held up as safe and non-fraudulent alternatives to the internet;

“I have always done my banking over the phone and I just don’t see the point in changing that. It seems like change for change’s sake.”

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

Low confidence

Low confidence was another characteristic among this group. Several had past unhappy learning experiences, which had dented their confidence in their ability to learn. Others lacked the confidence or willingness to stretch their comfort zone and trial something new. Their lives were often embedded in longstanding daily routines, with little evidence of a desire to step outside this safety ‘bubble’ or challenge their status quo. They often exhibited discomfort at the idea of doing so. The process of learning the skills necessary to use the internet seemed particularly daunting to this group:

“My education holds me back. I was shown how to use a computer, but no one at school ever showed me how to use the internet. The classes we had were all about teaching us how to use Word and boring stuff like that. The internet was cut off from our school, in case we looked at stuff we shouldn’t or we downloaded a virus.”

Male, 18, not online/not interested, England

“I’ve no confidence. I have trouble with the remote, if I’m honest... I am not someone who learns things easily - in one ear and out the other.”

Female, not online/not interested, England

At a fundamental level, everyone in this segment appeared to share two common traits. They held a markedly conservative outlook regarding almost every aspect of their lives, and were not an audience who readily embraced change or were willing to stretch their comfort zone. Their lives were characterised by familiar rituals and patterns - whether through a desire to cling to traditional behaviour or a lack of confidence. Their resistance to the internet was heavily ingrained in their sense of identity. In some cases, their rejectionist stance almost seemed to define who they were:

"I am not swept along with the mob - I am fighting against the tide."

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

"(The internet) is just keeping up with the Joneses isn't it? Once one person starts they all do. If someone's got a four bedroom house their neighbour's got to have one too."

Male, 45, online/limited usage, Wales

Although these attitudes were primarily found among the not online/not interested group, similar attitudes could be identified among others in the research sample, particularly those who use the internet but lack confidence in protecting themselves online. This suggests that resistance to digital participation can persist even after initial adoption, with some users reluctant to expand their use and take full advantage of all the benefits the internet can offer.

Long-term internet rejecters: 'fortress mentality'

It was apparent that for people who were 'not online, not interested', long-term rejection of the internet could result in a 'fortress' mentality. On the surface, this was manifested as defensiveness. During interviews, non-verbal behaviour during discussion of the internet was frequently closed and uncomfortable, such as folded arms and a tendency to shift position frequently or tap on the table. It seemed that these participants felt as though they were trapped in a corner. On the surface they appeared stubborn and with firm conviction in their stance, but it was clear that underlying this was a considerable degree of discomfort, as though even discussing use of the internet was in some way pressurising.

There was a clear annoyance among some participants that the rest of the world was embracing this new technology that they were not part of. They felt excluded, which in many cases fortified their position into one of active resistance, rather than encouraging participation:

"I get the impression that people take it for granted that everyone has a mobile phone or the internet. If I call a company and they ask for my email address they are shocked if I don't have one. You hear them pausing and thinking, 'Uh-oh, weirdo here.' It's like you are no one if you don't have it."

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

“It’s everywhere now isn’t it? All those ads - dot com this, dot com that. It’s really annoying, you feel left out.”

Female, not online/interested, Wales

“I think it is too much. I think people now use Facebook as a way of expressing how great their life is - ‘Look at all these pictures and how much fun I had’. I think it is a points thing. I really don’t care that much - my pictures are my pictures.”

Female, 22, proficient/low confidence protecting themselves online, Scotland

Many among this group looked to external sources, in particular the media, to rationalise and bolster their position. The phenomenon of confirmation bias was widely apparent here. Participants appeared to screen out any positive or persuasive information which might counter their belief that the internet was not ‘for them’. Instead, they cited negative media coverage or vaguely sourced stories as evidence to reinforce their view:

“I hear stories about husbands being on the computer until 2am in the morning. I don’t think you should do something that takes over your being.”

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

“A lot of companies have gone out of business because of the internet. Also I think it is unsafe for children.”

Female, not online/not interested, England

“All the secretive things - there are lots of secret things going on online.”

Female, not online/not interested, England

Several respondents rejected the internet on the grounds that no one in their peer group was using it. Reduced visibility of the internet in their daily lives made it seem less essential. There was also a sense of reassurance in knowing that they were not the only ones offline. As long as someone else was not using the internet either, non-use was an acceptable choice:

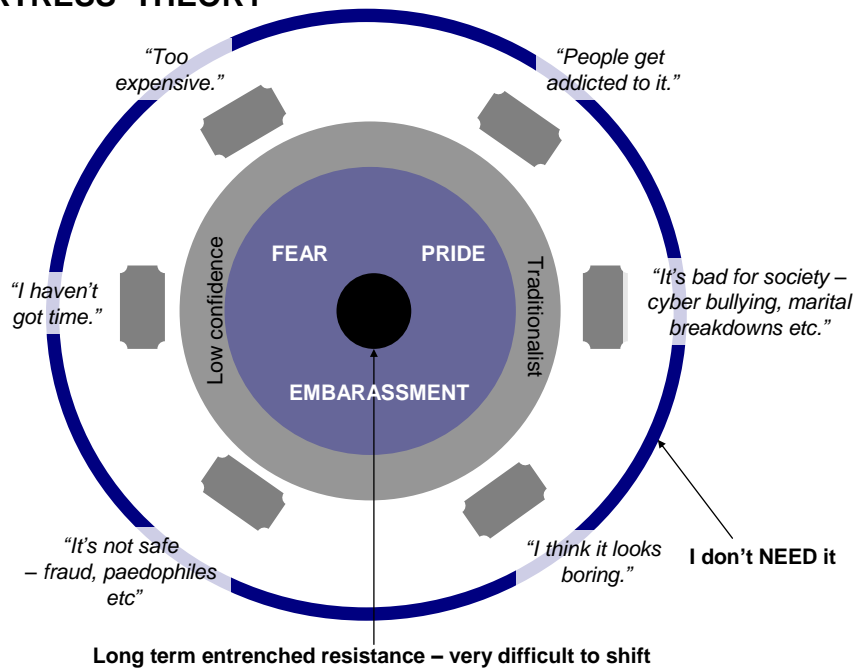
“The expectation is that every old person knows how to use a computer but they don’t, very few of them can. There was a group of us out last night and only half of them can use a computer.”

Female, 62, not online/interested, Scotland

There was a degree of group polarisation at play here; where an individual was surrounded by other non users, their anti-internet position was reinforced.

Figure 4: The fortress mentality

'FORTRESS' THEORY



It was clear that this stance could eventually become part of an individual's psyche - *'I am not someone who uses the internet'*. It was striking that this could be true even among those surrounded by internet users in their peer group or in their own home:

"I feel like I am a dying breed - everyone really heavily relies on the internet but at the same time I am like, 'No, I do not want to visit Facebook and I'm not interested in having an iPhone'."

Female, 22, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, Scotland

These individuals were often among the most deeply entrenched in their resistance to digital participation, and their identity in their household was often strongly correlated to their non-use of the internet - even a family joke.

At the heart of their behaviour were some fundamental emotional conflicts; notably embarrassment, anxiety and pride. There was a tangible sense of embarrassment at being 'left behind', even among those most staunchly against using the internet. This was intertwined with fear about what being left behind might mean for them in the longer term. Those who lacked faith in their ability to learn feared they would be exposing themselves to ridicule and would fail to grasp the basics:

"It makes me feel a bit of a failure - but it makes me feel annoyed that the expectation is that you can all use the computer... I got to the stage where I was slightly embarrassed that I was not online."

Female, 69, not online/interested, Scotland

Underpinning all of this was personal pride; an unwillingness to compromise their current position of resistance to digital participation. It was clear that, over time, it had become difficult for some individuals to see a way out which would not compromise their pride. This was particularly the case where views have become entrenched over a long period of time, and where resistance was most active:

“My wife read somewhere that the government said every household in the UK was going to be online. I said, ‘Ours won’t!’”

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

This set of attitudes was more extreme in some cases than others. The majority simply felt indifference or ambivalence towards the internet, failing to understand what all the fuss was about or how it would bring an advantage to their lives:

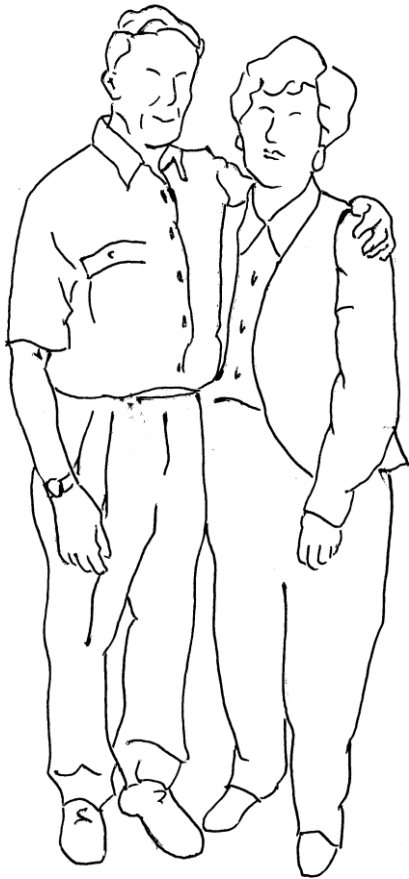
“It doesn’t interest me that much...not really many ways to describe it apart that I’m not bothered...I wouldn’t chose to sit on my lap top for four hours...doesn’t appeal to me...I’d rather be out socialising meeting friends or reading a book”

Female, Scotland, 22, proficient/low confidence protecting themselves online, Scotland

A minority - often older - felt a strong active resistance to the concept of the internet; it was clear that this group would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to shift towards digital participation. The ‘fortress’ mentality displayed by long-term rejecters of the internet is described in Figure 4.

William

Not online, but not interested



I'm in my 70s and have lived in the same house with my wife for 30 years. All our children have left home and some work abroad. It is fair to say I am conservative and I like to stick to what I know. Since I retired, I have become less ambitious and content to just live out the rest of my life spending as much time as I can with my wife. This has become even more important since being diagnosed with a terminal illness a year ago. I have always been suspicious of what technology does to our ability to think for ourselves.

William's journey

Stage 1: getting interested

When my sons asked for calculators at school I thought it was ridiculous. I hate mobile phones and how desperate everyone is to stay in touch with other people all the time. I hate this artificial sense of urgency modern technology has created, and people who are strapped to these things are ill in some way. I have been happy living my life the same way for years. There is absolutely no reason for me to change.

Stage 2: getting online

Realistically, it is unlikely I will ever bother. I have been given mobile phones and they just sit gathering dust in a bedside table drawer. The only way I would ever consider touching a computer is if there was one fully paid for and connected to the internet in the corner of my living room. Even then I am not sure I would actually bother with it. I just don't have the desire or the need for it.

When people buy their own machines, computer stores should connect them up for you as a part of the service. I imagine it is a serious bit of technology and I would want to learn how to use it properly, which would take time and energy I don't want to use on it. I just can't see enough of a reason to go through all that.

Stage 3: being online

The only thing I can imagine being useful is being able to communicate on a camera to my sons when they are abroad with work. I know someone who uses cameras to do that. The thing is, I have been using telephones throughout my life and it hasn't done me any harm so I can't imagine ever needing to do it any other way.

Key themes

- The 'push' of new technology can be taken as an insult to an individual's intelligence and a challenge to their sense of autonomy, causing aggressive resistance.
- Once a position is taken against the 'march of technology' it can become entrenched, being applied to all new technological developments.
- Some are uncomfortable learning in a piecemeal fashion but the investment needed to do justice to the equipment can seem very high.

Stage one: getting interested

Effort versus benefit

Without a perceived need to take action, the journey towards digital participation could not begin. It was apparent that, on some level, every one of our audience had had to make an investment versus benefit evaluation when deciding whether to take the plunge or not. Where the investment or effort of learning to use the internet was perceived to outweigh the benefit, no action would take place:

“It would be a waste of money. I am thinking about myself, and I am not going to get enough back... [It will be] a lot of unnecessary information that will not influence your life one iota.”

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

In the case of some the perceived investment was greater than for others. The perceived benefit therefore needed to be particularly compelling:

“It’s Double Dutch. I don’t have any skill in that - finding all the keys and numbers, whatever, all the little bits where you have to tap in or tap out. I don’t know - that’s another lot of learning.”

Male, 45, online/limited usage, Wales

“It is a long climb for me to get there. A long struggle to take it all in... It would take up too much of my time.”

Male, not online/not interested, England

The challenge of identifying a need

In order to switch this uninterested audience onto the internet it was clear that they need to see a personal benefit. This could be motivated by a positive or negative trigger. Either they had to feel that they were missing out through non-use, or that the internet would significantly improve some aspect of their lives. The range of triggers witnessed in this research was striking not only in its breadth but also in the

specificity of some motivations. For example, one respondent overcame dyslexia and poor computer skills because he was determined to use email to communicate during a court case he was embroiled in. The important point here was that it would not have been sufficient to tell this respondent about the advantages of email generically; there had to be a specific way in which it would blend with his own life and needs.

The other key requirement when it came to engaging interest was that non-users needed to be offered a way to escape their 'fortress' in a way which would allow them to make a U-Turn without losing face or compromising their pride. They had to be allowed to change their mind in such a way that it was an active personal choice that was in their control, rather than feeling as though they had been pushed into it.

Demonstrating to someone that the internet could be relevant to them was a fundamental challenge for three reasons:

- it required an intimate understanding of what makes an individual tick;
- the perceived benefit **MUST** be seen to outweigh the perceived investment and effort of getting there; and
- often individuals did not *want* to see the benefits because of confirmation bias and they screened out or rejected any information which did not conform to their existing belief.

Perceived investment

As noted, the trigger or spark of interest needs to be significant enough for it to override any perceived investment involved in achieving the end goal.

Perceived investment can take different forms:

- Time: have I got time to learn this, is there a better use of my time?
- Energy: do I have the energy to do this: Can I make be bothered or is there something else I would rather put my energy into?
- Money: do I have the financial resources or should I spend my money on something else?
- Swallowing pride: can I swallow my pride to ask someone else for help to get online?

Triggers to take action

Triggers to take action could be broadly divided into two key areas:

Internal needs: doing things for me

- Survival: e.g. I've lost my job and have no money; I need to take part in the digital revolution to get a job and in order to pay my bills.
- Knowledge: enhancing skills and knowledge of a particular hobby or passion.

However, very few people were driven by internal needs; most were driven by external needs.

External needs: doing things to show the world

- *Connectivity*: this was the most widely observed and relates to connecting with others e.g. friends and family. For example, a mother was driven to adopt the internet because her daughter went travelling in Australia and she wanted to communicate with her.

"I have brothers in Canada. I want to be able to share photographs, see each other."

Female, 77, online/limited usage, Northern Ireland

- *Keeping up with others*: i.e. keeping up with others who are enjoying the financial benefits of being online or feeling compelled to keep up with grandchildren / the modern world.

"I just feel a bit robbed really, when my friends talk about how they got cheap flights or better insurance deals. I feel like I'm missing out."

Male, not online/interested group, Wales

Friends and family: allies or barriers to use?

Friends or family who understood an individual's personal motivations and fears almost *always* had a key role to play in generating the initial spark of interest. Very few, if any, discovered a need to use the internet without a friend or member of their family playing a role.

However, friends and family could also present a significant barrier. This occurred in both a positive and a negative sense, and was almost always unintentional. On the positive side, friends and family often reinforced a non-user's offline position by carrying out online tasks for them, whether this was ordering a new microwave or doing online research. In trying to be helpful, they were effectively removing the need for the individual concerned to do it for themselves. The non-user would therefore enjoy the benefits of the internet without ever needing to engage with it personally:

"I have other people who can go online. I do use my family just to say, 'Can you book a flight?' or 'Could you do this, that or the next thing for me?' and

they always do. If I want books my daughter will get them for me - theatre tickets and holidays and so on."

Female, 62, not online/interested, Scotland

"I find someone to do it for me. If I need something, there are plenty of people I know who have computers, so I just ask them."

Male, 45, online/limited usage, Wales

In many ways this is a perfectly satisfactory situation. However, it was clear it could also be problematic for a number of reasons. It placed a burden on the friends and relatives concerned. It was also sometimes the case that the 'helper' individuals were not always available to help the non-user because of other commitments. Life-stage changes could also have an impact. Children moved out, partners became ill or passed away and the non-user was in danger of being left stranded - potentially at a point where they had become dependent on accessing the internet through others.

A more negative side could be observed through the interactions between members of a family or peer group. The 'fortress' stance adopted by many non-users was often exacerbated through teasing by other family members. This was evidenced in this study on a number of occasions, through children tittering in the doorway as Dad attempted to use the home computer, or the guffaws of friends upon learning that the individual was involved in a research project about the internet. In other cases, any spark of interest in using the computer was stifled by the unwillingness of household internet users to share it or help them learn:

"Our boys gave us their old mobile phones. They said, 'Look we're dragging you into the 21st century. We have a laugh about it all and they'll say, 'Have a look at Dad's face!'."

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

"(My friends) just laugh I suppose. It's just not me - it doesn't suit the person, can you understand that? I'm not technology-minded in that sense, so it just doesn't suit me."

Male, 45, online/limited usage, Wales

The most striking observation across all of this behaviour was that in almost every case, the friends or family concerned were unaware that their behaviour was perpetuating a situation which could ultimately be to the detriment of their loved one. The responsibility for adopting the internet was perceived to be entirely in the hands of the non-user; rarely if ever did friends or family acknowledge that they too had a role to play in encouraging them to change their views.

The influence of the media

It was clear that negative media coverage of the Web was particularly influential among those who did not use the internet. Since this group did not use the internet personally, they often did not have the experience of appreciating the benefits and opportunities it could offer. Instead, their exposure relied heavily on two sources: what their family and friends had to say about the subject and what they had experienced via the media.

“I’ve read in the paper about older people dating younger ones and saying that they are younger than they really are.”

Female, not online/not interested, England

For this audience, media coverage of the internet was almost entirely negative. There was a degree of confirmation bias at play here; many members of the audience had a pre-established view that the internet was negative and seemed to selectively recall stories that reinforced this view. There was plenty of evidence available supporting the argument that the internet could have a destructive impact - online bullying, porn, paedophile rings, anti-social behaviour, marriage breakdowns and fraud to name but a few. It was clear that for those not using the internet and enjoying its benefits on a regular basis these vivid stories comprised the vast majority of associations that they had, confirming suspicions that it was bad for society.

Stories drawn from the media tended to provide ammunition to hide more fundamental barriers to using the internet. Nonetheless, it was clear that if an individual’s main exposure to the internet was driven by media reports rather than personal experience, their perception of the risks inherent in using it were likely to be higher.

Some will never go online

It was clear from this research that there were individuals who would never use the internet. Because the effort required to use it was perceived to outweigh the benefit, their journey towards digital participation would never begin. This group tended to be older and were all too aware of the finite time available to invest in spending their lives as they wished. They found it particularly hard to justify taking on the challenge of learning something new.

“The other thing is it’s too complicated. If I wanted to learn it I could learn it, but it’s too complicated to be bothered. Can I be bothered to learn all this stuff, and for what point at my old age? ... To what point do I want to understand this? At my age I can work without it and it is putting an extra strain on your brain if you like. You just want to work with the things that you know - books that you know, instead of going into a whole lot of new terminology.”

Male, 81, not online/not interested, Scotland

Non-use of the Web was not problematic as far as they were concerned, and it is unlikely that they would ever be persuaded otherwise. The role of this technology in their lives was not perceived to be sufficiently significant, interesting or beneficial to outweigh the perceived effort of mastering it.

“I didn’t jump out of my chair when my son showed me what it could do. I am just not interested. I wasn’t in awe of it. You have to have a need, and I don’t have one.”

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

Robert

Online but limited use



I'm 46 years old and I'm a farmer. I was born into farming and it's pretty much my whole life. It's very physically demanding. I get up early every day to feed my cattle and at the end of the day when I come in I'm tired and all I want to do is relax in front of the TV. The TV is my favourite thing in this house! My kids are all into all these techno gadgets like the Internet and the Wii and so on, but I'm not interested. I've no energy for it. I only have a mobile because I have to. It's just the way it's going these days isn't it - everyone has to be connected all the time.

Stage 1: getting interested

I do see the benefits of using the internet, but I never need to use it myself because my son or my wife will look things up on it for me. We bought a fridge and we got a good deal on that; about £40 off. But my wife ordered it. And if I want to look at something on Farmer's Weekly my son will find the website for me and do all the work. There's always someone around, so there's no need for me to learn. And it does seem like a lot of learning - using the keyboard and all that. I'm tired at the end of every day. I don't have the energy to learn.

Stage 2: getting online

For me to get online I'd need to be in a position where I had to use the internet, probably for my work. For example, there'd be some new government legislation which said I had to fill out my tax forms online or something like that; though if my son were around I'd still ask him. To be honest, as long as there is someone here in this house who'll do it for me I really don't have any need for it. Why would I go through all that learning when I'm busy enough as I am? I don't have any need to do it myself personally. I get so confused - there's so much to look at on the screen and I don't know what half of it means. And I'm very slow with the keyboard, so it's all a bit painful for everyone concerned.

Stage 3: being online

I don't really know what I'd use the Internet for apart from looking at Farmer's Weekly and local cattle auction sites. I'm quite interested in auctions generally so I suppose I might start using eBay. I look at it occasionally now, though it's always my son who's actually pressing the buttons. I feel it would be a very slow process to learn and I'd be very slow. The kids would be on at me to get off the computer so they could use it!

Stage 4: benefits and risks

I wouldn't know anything about the risks. When my wife ordered the computer she sorted out the anti-virus software and she had some sort of child protection thing put on it too. But I wouldn't know anything about it.

Key themes

- If friends and family provide access to the benefits by conducting tasks on behalf of the potential learner the incentive to learn can be reduced, particularly if the perceived effort required is high.
- Being surrounded by friends and family who are confident users can result in the non-user taking a back seat and ceding responsibility for the internet to others.

Stage two: getting online

High levels of emotion

This stage of the process is characterised by curiosity and interest but also nervousness at the prospect of getting online. Research participants were highly dependent on others for support and reassurance. This was a pivotal moment in the process; they were interested and wanted to participate, but also frightened:

“I just think, ‘Other people my age can manage it fine’ and I think, ‘Well am I not trying hard enough maybe? I feel that I am not intelligent enough - which I am, I could do it. I just feel embarrassed sometimes that’s all.’”

Female, 62, not online but interested, Scotland

“We see other people using (computers) so quickly - it is a bit intimidating... the instructions make you feel like you need to be a robot or plug yourself into a machine. ‘Software is functioning normally’. ‘Creating recovery disks’. It is all Double Dutch! We need a human.”

Female, 77, online/limited usage, Northern Ireland

“I’ve chosen this image [to describe feelings about the internet] because it shows two small people and a very high mountain of rice and there are so many wee bits to it and it’s all about working out how to get to the top.”

Female, 62, not online/interested, Scotland

This anxiety often extended to computers as well as the internet, and for many there was not a clear distinction between the two.

The conviction that they would damage the computer - or even the internet itself - led to nervousness about using other people’s equipment. There was a real risk that the perceived investment and effort required at this stage could be overwhelming.

Investment versus gain

The point at which people were interested but had not yet taken steps to get started with the internet was when the perceived investment of getting online was greatest. For some, this was partly about the financial costs. However, cost alone was rarely the main barrier to getting online. Individuals' lack of technical understanding and their perceived inability to learn were often magnified in their own minds. They believed the process would be harder and take far more time than in reality. This was often related to low confidence and a fear of failure, frequently stemming from previous unhappy learning experiences:

"I suppose that that is a bit of embarrassment too. I would worry that if I was in a class they would be all learning it and I would be thinking, 'Oh my God what do I do next?' and I might not be able to keep up with the other members of the class."

Female, 62, not online/interested, Scotland

Those with learning difficulties or who had no prior computer or keyboard experience felt that they had a particularly steep mountain to climb. All of which led many to question whether it was all really worth it - particularly the older members of our sample.

The right kind of support

To overcome this, support was critical. This was evidenced at numerous points throughout the research; whether trying to decipher in-store jargon, understanding which anti-virus software to choose - even knowing what Google was. A lack of external support could stop even the keenest potential user in their tracks. Everyone among our research sample who had begun using the internet regularly had received outside support of some kind:

"I knew friends who had computers for years before I did, and they gave me things to look at, the best sites and things. If anything happened, they would tell me how to fix it."

Male, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, Northern Ireland

"I knew a man who was a friend of my son's. And he helped set me on my way... I was rubbish, and it took a long time. But I persevered and I realised it was all about trial and error."

Male, online/limited usage, Wales

It was also clear that it was important to have the *right* kind of support. In order for someone to get online and go on to use it fully, they required someone with the following attributes:

- Technical knowledge;
- Availability;
- Patience; and
- Enthusiasm.

If any of these core attributes were absent, it could result in a poor initial internet experience which might have long lasting repercussions and ultimately put the individual off using the internet again. Having the right kind of support at this stage was critical. It could make the difference between a positive and a negative first experience and importantly, shape an individual's future level of engagement with the internet. Finding the right kind of support could be surprisingly difficult - and friends and family were often not the ideal choice.

“My husband is like, ‘Click on this, click on that, don’t do that’. And I am thinking, ‘I can’t be bothered’ because he frustrates me - he kind of puts the fear up me. He’s very controlling in that way, he’s scared of getting a virus. He thinks he knows everything but he doesn’t, and I think that makes him worry about what I might do to the computer.”

Female, 57, not online/interested, Wales

“Mark is very good and very nice but he just says, ‘You just press this and you just press that’. I really need someone to sit and say, ‘Well you try it - you didn’t do that bit right’. But Mark was a bit impatient - not meaning to be, but he was like, ‘Mum you should know that’.”

Female, 62, not online/ interested, Scotland

Support could come from a single source or multiple sources. Typical sources of support might include children, a partner, friends or friends of friends. More formal support choices included local libraries or courses. It was notable that it did not appear to matter who or what the source was, as long as key TAPE requirements were met. A single person could serve a range of support needs, or a series of individuals might help at different points of the journey.

This support was needed throughout the process. However, the different phases might be taken on by different people. Key points at which help is important include:

- The initial set-up: people need help purchasing equipment, choosing an ISP and setting equipment up at home.
- Acquiring and developing skills, such as keyboard and PC skills, building internet knowledge, and building confidence.
- Ongoing support: one of the biggest fears many had was of becoming stuck and not knowing what to do to progress or ‘un-stick’ themselves. They needed a means of moving past hurdles or disentangling themselves from unknown situations.

“It is important to feel comfortable. We don’t know anything. These keys are getting to us. We can turn it on and off. But we press things and wipe everything. That’s what’s happening now.”

Female, 77, online/limited usage, Northern Ireland

“My family keep saying, ‘I keep showing you’. But you don’t remember.”

Female, 62, not online/ interested, Scotland

Many in our sample were not getting the support they needed. They were often reluctant to ‘bother’ people with what they saw as trifling (yet, in reality, fundamental) problems and found it difficult to ask even close family and friends to teach them the way they wanted to be taught:

“It was frustrating knowing it would be good but not knowing how to do it. When I did have a go it was exciting, but as soon as I became adventurous it became frustrating and got worse... Bev doesn’t sit at my side while I have a fiddle with it, which is what I want.”

Male, 42, online/limited usage, England

A striking finding from this research was that, with the right kind of support, a great deal of progress could be made in very little time. As noted, an individual’s perception of their ability was often out of line with reality. There were several instances during the course of the study in which an hour with our research team was enough to demonstrate to participants that they could progress far more quickly than they had imagined. An understanding of basic navigational icons and tools such as the ‘Back’ button and how to close down windows was sufficient to enable them to feel they could now explore on their own.

“I’d say I made quite bit of progress there. You have given me that bit of confidence so that I feel I can go on it now and just go for it, have a good look around.”

Female, 57, not online/ interested, Wales

Without this knowledge, the user found it hard to progress:

“I don’t know what all these symbols and icons mean. I need to become familiar with them and get more knowledge on how to use the thing. I don’t know what half these toolbar options are.”

Male, 42, online/limited usage, England

Shirley

Not online, but interested



I'm 45 years old and have lived on the same housing estate since I was a child. Five generations of my family live here, including my daughter and her baby, who recently moved into a flat of their own. I work part time at a local supermarket and between that and looking after my partner and teenage son, my life feels incredibly hectic. When I'm not looking after my family, I like to watch television and keep up-to-date with events in the local community.

Shirley's journey

Stage 1: getting interested

Both of my kids were taught how to use the internet at school and always seem to use it to gossip with friends. Also a friend of mine has it at home and uses it to do her shopping, her banking and buy things on eBay. She's even ordered a couple of items for me before. There is a lot that concerns me about how safe the internet is, but I would like to be able to use eBay and to keep up with the gossip on Facebook (although I would probably just read what other people are saying rather than give away personal information).

Stage 2: getting online

I'm thinking about getting a computer at home, but I don't really have a clue about these things so I would need the advice of someone who knows what they're doing. I'm not really sure what else I would need to get the internet. I wasn't brought up with computers so I'm nervous about using them. I've had a couple of goes on my daughter's laptop before but whenever she shows me what to do I tend to mess it up and we end up having an argument. I could do with going on a beginner's course so that I can build my confidence up and learn how to use things like the mouse properly.

Stage 3: being online

If I had the internet it would make me less reliant on other people. I know I'm missing out on things by not being on it, although I suppose there's a danger that I'd become one of these people who's always on it.

Stage 4: benefits and risks

I don't own a credit card and would feel uneasy about using my bank details online. I can't imagine myself ever buying something via the internet - I just don't trust that my money would be safe and I'd be nervous about having to return things.

Key themes

- A formal course or external source of support may be better than friends and family for helping people to learn how to use the internet.
- People need help with the process of getting set-up and connected, as well as with learning the skills to use the internet.
- Many non-users are concerned about the risks of using the internet and express concern about the idea of giving out personal information online.

Stage three: being online

Having the right support makes a significant difference to how a person will use the internet in future. Through this research we observed what appeared to be a fork in the road on the journey to digital participation, which occurred at the point of introduction to the internet. At this stage, new users would tend to follow one of two paths: regular or occasional usage.

Occasional users

Those who had experienced a less positive initiation to the internet, or whose motivation was created by force of circumstance rather than being interest-led, tended to become occasional, uninterested users. This group's internet use was characterised by disinclination to experiment and explore and by a high degree of self-doubt:

"I am having to start using the internet in the office, having put it off for so long. My boss is starting to get me to do more with it and I sit there tentatively, wondering how it's going to work out."

Female, online/limited usage, Scotland

"I am just so bad at it. I go on to shop, and I think I'm doing so well, but I just end up crashing on it."

Female, online/limited usage, Scotland

Confidence was required for an individual to feel able to explore at will; without adequate initial support this was not possible and internet usage would dwindle and possibly cease altogether:

"I am kind of computer illiterate and I swing towards my daughters to help if I want to find cheap car insurance or something. I just don't want to pick it up myself because I think there is so much to do."

Male, online/limited usage, Scotland

This group used words such as "apprehensive", "scared", "stupid" and "disappointed" to describe their feelings during their first experiences online. Their

initiations to the internet had generally been characterised by embarrassment and uncertainty. Several said they thought it would be easier than it was in reality. This was because they had not received the support they needed during this crucial time:

“It was never a professional who taught you - you taught yourself.”

Female, online/limited usage, Scotland

“I felt wary - I wasn’t sure what was coming up. There were people over your back looking down on you.”

Male, online/limited usage, Scotland

Disenchantment with their initial internet experiences had a number of consequences. They were unsure about which websites to visit and were more likely to pursue irrelevant, unhelpful leads that would take them to badly-designed websites. This resulted in the individual feeling underwhelmed by their internet experience and blaming themselves for failing to grasp what was in reality a poorly-designed website.

Not knowing how to understand a site’s layout could cause major problems. During observational exercises it was apparent that many participants did not know what to look at or what to ignore in the online environment. Some struggled to identify what was advertising versus relevant content, while others did not know where to look to identify keywords, headings or categories. This research demonstrated that giving new users some basic navigational guidance could make all the difference in terms of their internet experience and their ability to manoeuvre about in the online environment; yet this kind of awareness was often lacking.

Occasional users tended to find themselves stuck and struggled to disentangle themselves. Their computers were more vulnerable to viruses because they were more inclined to upload inappropriate software. Their internet experiences were underpinned by constant anxiety and they regularly felt overwhelmed, in particular by alien jargon, icons and dialogue boxes which they did not know what to do with. As a result of all this, occasional users were inclined to compare themselves unfavourably with others around them who they perceived as more proficient. They increasingly backed away from the family computer, deferring to more competent family members.

A further common trait among this audience was fear of fraud or being exploited online. This linked back to low confidence; this group felt they were likely to be victims of online scams because they did not have the experience to detect them:

“Fear stops me giving out my details. There are so many people being taken for a ride.”

Female, online/limited usage, Scotland

It seemed that in order to encourage this audience to adopt more regular use there was a need to start from scratch, re-igniting interest and demonstrating what the internet could do for them. This would entail reinforcement of positive messages about the internet and promotion of access to the right level of support (i.e. TAPE).

Regular users

Those whose initiation to the internet had been positive and well-supported, or whose motivation was personal tended to become more regular, engaged users. As with occasional users, they too experienced initial nervousness and apprehension; however, there was also excitement and a willingness to explore. Importantly, they had been given the necessary tools and support to do so:

“I would ask my family. They helped me make sure all the wires were in the right places. I was happy to search, but if I wanted to find something specific I would ask their advice.”

Female, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, Northern Ireland

Section 9

Stage four: the trade off between benefits and risks

Among those research participants who were online, a desire for control combined with natural wariness tended to curtail the extent of internet engagement. Many of this group were regular internet surfers who were generally happy with the extent of their usage. They were characterised by a higher degree of confidence in their abilities and an acceptance that mistakes can be made but ultimately overcome.

The notion of control is critical here for two reasons. In some cases, despite being proficient, the breadth of their internet use had not increased over time. Secondly, and more commonly, this group did not submit personal or financial data online. Here, the barrier to taking things further and heightening engagement was self-enforced; they created a protective bubble within which they felt comfortable operating:

“I don’t shop online. I don’t feel competent enough. You’ve got to give out your bank details, and I’m not giving anybody my bank details.”

Male, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, Wales

“The comfort comes from using the internet for a limited point of view. I don’t go outside what I know.”

Male, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, Northern Ireland

“With e-banking the problem is the fear. Our security is the most important thing, and we need to feel it is there before we use it.”

Female, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, Northern Ireland

Some felt they enjoyed the benefits they want from the internet already; they saw no need to take their usage any further. For example, one participant recalled how he had recently bought a car using the internet. He used the internet as a research tool to identify the car he wanted, but refused to buy it online. For him, the value of the internet was in the research process itself; he saw no advantage to buying it online as well. There were several instances of this:

“My husband booked a hotel for a wedding in Aberdeen. We decided later to stay for another night but he had trouble doing it online so he called and found out that the initial booking hadn’t worked! I think it is often necessary to double check so often it is better to just look online and then book yourself on the phone.”

Female, online/limited usage, Scotland

Others felt that they would like to extend their internet use but anxiety held them back; the fear of losing control or being exploited in an unknown environment outweighed the potential benefits of using services like online banking or social networking.

“I recently went on Facebook. I typed in the name of a friend that I have not seen for about fifteen years and on it I could find out that she was married, had three kids, the area she lives in. I thought, ‘I don’t want everyone knowing these things about me’.”

Female, 28, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, England

“I don’t want anyone I don’t know having information about me. I think all these young people who can probably do all these marvellous things with the internet can probably get on where I wouldn’t want them to be.”

Female, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, Northern Ireland

“In the future I want to shop online, but it needs to be really secure.”

Female, proficient/low confidence in protecting themselves online, Northern Ireland

While there are clearly risks associated with the internet, for many a more pervasive wariness was at play here, not necessarily confined to the internet. This was not a risk-taking group. At worst there were cases of paranoia; a couple of participants among our sample did not use outside cash machines or sign cheques for fear of fraud. It seems unlikely that individuals exhibiting this kind of paranoia could be persuaded that online banking was a safe option.

The role of the media

This deep-seated sense of risk aversion is compounded by information about the risks of using the internet for transaction-based services highlighted in media coverage about fraud and identity theft. Horror stories about fraud were far more ‘sticky’ in respondents’ minds than any number of statistics about how safe the internet was. Again, confirmation bias could be seen at play here, with respondents selectively choosing to pay attention to those stories that reinforced their existing conviction that the internet was unsafe.

Challenging this reluctance to submit personal data online is a difficult task, because it is inextricably linked to an individual's own natural sense of caution. This research suggested that the most effective way to combat reticence surrounding personal data online was through experience gained over time. Experience gave users a stronger sense of what was safe versus what was likely to be less safe in the online environment. Clearly this cannot happen overnight.

Also, while the risks posed by the internet are less prevalent than many participants believed, they are real and can have serious consequences. It would also be risky to issue communications messages that might encourage people to submit more data without also taking measures to help ensure they have the skills and confidence to do so safely.

What can be achieved, however, is support to help users know what to look for in order to transact safely, such as a padlock sign, and to develop their personal sense of what is likely to be safe. Above-the-line communications to this effect may play a role; however it is likely that more detailed guidance or instruction will also be necessary.

Mandy

Not online, but interested



Mandy's journey

Stage 1: getting interested

I can see how using the internet would improve my life and make me feel more independent. The problem is that whenever I have gone near it in the past, my husband gets very impatient with me. He's convinced I'll break it or catch a virus or something. He leans over me and barks orders at me. He thinks he's an expert but he's not really, so that makes him nervous when I'm using it, I think. I just get so frustrated and cross with him, and I feel like I can't be bothered.

I am 56 years old and live with my husband and my 28 year old daughter. I moved here from Jamaica about 30 years ago and most of my family still live over there. I work in social services. I'm quite independent though I can't drive. I am quite nervous around new technology at first, though if someone sits down and talks me through it I am willing to be patient as long as I can see a benefit for me. But it does take time.

Stage 2: getting online

As with everything technology-related, I need someone patient who will sit down and teach me. I am willing to learn, but I know nothing about it, and I am scared of breaking things. I'd like my daughter to help me because she knows more about computers than my husband, but she's very busy and I don't want to interrupt her. I think that teaching me will take a long time. I'd ideally like my own laptop so that I could take it away to my own space. The computer really belongs to my husband. I'd like to know enough so that I could go away and explore by myself. Then it wouldn't matter how long I took to find my way around. I'd be willing to persevere, I just need to know the basics.

Stage 3: being online

Once I am online I can imagine the world would be my oyster. I have been surprised at how quickly I have learnt lots of useful things just through doing this research. It has built my confidence. I already have an idea of the kinds of things I'd like to look at - booking holidays, shopping. Most of all I'd like to be able to communicate with my family back in Jamaica. My mother is very ill at the moment and it would help me to feel closer to her. I like the idea of Facebook as well. I'd also use it for things like looking at the local Jamaican newspaper. It would be a great way for me to stay connected to my life over there.

Stage 4: benefits and risks

I don't know anything about managing risks. I'm not even sure I know what that means or what risks I would be protecting myself from. I would need to talk to my daughter about that and they would have to help me choose the software I need. My main interest is enjoying the benefits - reaping all the good things from my hard work learning how to use it!

Key themes

- A budding interest in the internet can be stifled by a negative initial exposure to it, for instance an impatient partner.
- If given the basic tools to explore alone, interest can grow at the pace of the user.
- People can learn the basics of internet navigation far more quickly than they think.

Summary of the common ground

Web usage / non-usage is heavily intertwined with an individual's sense of who they are

As with many forms of new technology, an individual's propensity to use the internet relates directly to their sense of personal identity. An individual who is heavily embedded in past rituals and patterns, and whose natural inclination is protect the status quo is unlikely to embrace the internet unless they have a very strong reason for doing so. Adopting the internet requires an acceptance of change and willingness to adapt to new patterns of behaviour. This is a bigger stride to take for some than for others. For many, using the internet simply does not correspond with 'who they are'. Adopting it would mean a fundamental change in who they perceive themselves to be and who their friends and family perceive them to be. This is particularly the case for those who have to some extent built a reputation grounded in their resistance to all things technological. Likewise, those who had embraced the internet more readily tended to be more open to new concepts and patterns of behaviour in their lives generally, and were more able to adjust to new situations.

The journey to digital participation cannot begin without a recognised personal need

The single biggest barrier to digital participation is a perceived lack of personal need to use the internet. The ever-expanding diffusion of the internet into daily life is making it increasingly difficult to adopt a non-user stance; however, unless a potential user recognises a specific and personal benefit to their using the internet, their journey cannot begin.

At some level, all potential internet users weigh up the perceived effort versus the personal benefit

A major barrier to digital participation is the perception of the effort required. Every potential new user of the internet has to learn something new. For those who have no prior experience of using a computer, this is a particularly intimidating prospect.

Mastering the keyboard alone is regarded as a major undertaking, and many fear that they will look slow or stupid in front of other more competent users - including family and friends. Many assume they will need to attend a course at the very least, and invest a great deal of time in the process.

In the face of all this, it is perhaps unsurprising that many conclude it is simply too much effort - particularly if the personal advantage to be gained from digital participation is felt to be unclear or relatively minor. Those with a compelling reason to use the internet, who believe the benefits outweigh the effort required in learning how to use it, find ways to overcome these barriers. Where the effort required is perceived to outweigh the benefits, however, it is unlikely that an individual will embark on the journey towards using the internet. This is true across age groups, though older individuals are particularly inclined to regard the effort of learning as being too high.

Ongoing support is crucial to the digital participation journey

The barriers to internet adoption are vastly reduced if the individual concerned has support to help set up and to hold their hand during the learning process. The fear of becoming irrecoverably stuck was a major recurring barrier, which could only be overcome through ongoing support. All of our internet users had such support during the process of trying to get online.

However, finding the right individual was sometimes easier said than done, however. In addition to possessing the requisite level of internet knowledge, the 'buddy' needed to have sufficient time available to help the new user set themselves up and to support them as they attempted to progress. A number of important qualities were required for this task: patience, tenacity, enthusiasm, the requisite level of knowledge and the time available to help.

It was striking how few non-users had access to someone who fitted this description. Many were worried about taking up too much of another person's time, while others felt their immediate family members would be impatient or unwilling to teach them. Some felt they would be an unwelcome additional presence on the family computer, particularly if its use was already in demand by a number of household members. Friends and family can therefore be a double-edged sword for digital participation.

Expectations of how difficult it is to use the internet are often exaggerated

Perceptions of how difficult it would be to learn to use the internet were often out of line with the actual experience. Internet use is now widespread and the research participants were well-aware that they were laggards in its adoption. It was easy for them to feel that their capacity to learn basic Web navigation was more limited than it was in reality. Many non users or occasional users imagined that the way in which most people used the internet was far more complex and involved than it was in reality.

This research demonstrated that basic internet navigation can often be taught in far less time than many believe, and that attending a course is not always necessary *as long as* the individual has suitable equipment available in the home already and a suitable 'buddy' on hand to support them. Spending an hour in the driving seat, using the internet and being talked through the process can go a considerable way towards building confidence and enabling people to feel they can do it.

"I've chosen this snowman image [to describe feelings about the internet] because I suppose the snow gradually melts away. It's just about starting to get through in the first place."

Male, not online/not interested, England

Section 11

The Communications Consumer Panel Framework for Digital Participation

The Communications Consumer Panel's Framework for Digital Participation was developed to set out what people themselves say they need to get online and participate. This research sought to evaluate the validity of the framework with consumers. This section uses the research findings to challenge or reinforce each section of the framework to ensure it reflects what people really need at each stage of the digital participation journey.

The Panel's original Framework is set out below. It identified five key stages to the digital participation journey, with a number of different elements required at each stage.

Figure 5: Original Consumer Framework for Digital Participation

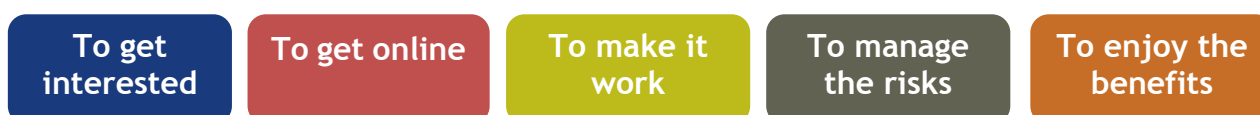


This research identified that the Framework already contained many of the key digital participation needs. However, there were some areas where the research suggested that it could benefit from simplification or small amendments. These are set out below.

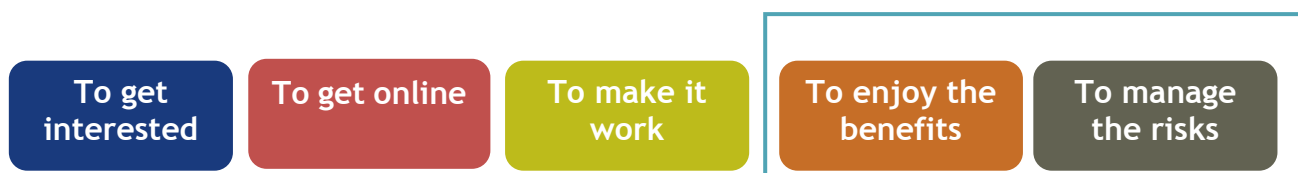
The framework in the context of research findings

Overall journey flow

The first observation is a structural one. In the framework, the order in which the stages occur is as follows;



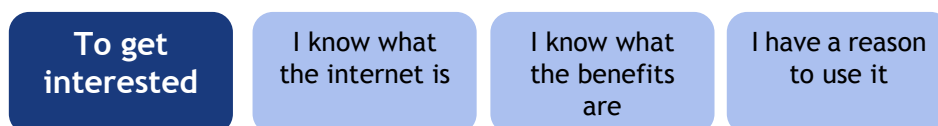
The Framework indicates that new users manage the risks of being online before they enjoy the benefits. This research suggested that, in reality, these two phases were often reversed, and that new users tended to begin enjoying the internet before taking active steps to manage risks. This was partly because, for many, online risk meant fraud or personal data theft. Managing or combating ‘risk’ was a question of simply refusing to submit personal data online, curtailing their usage of the internet in order to remain in control.



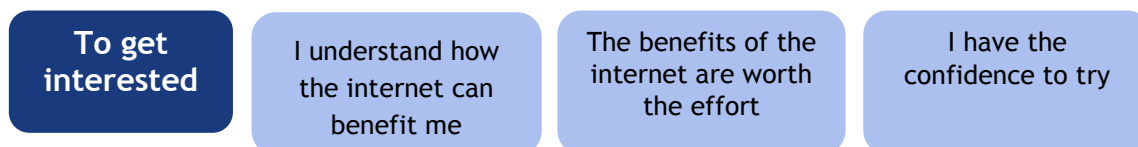
The only exception to this was in the setting up of anti-virus software at the outset, since viruses are a common concern among new users. The detail of these two stages is explored below.

To get interested

The original framework for this section is as follows:



This research suggests that this phase actually looks like this:



Knowing what the internet is did not feature highly in the journey to digital participation. Across our sample every participant knew broadly what the internet was, at least enough to know why they might or might not be interested in accessing it. It is worth noting that even regular internet users often struggle to articulate what the internet is, even though they use it every day. Not knowing what the internet is, therefore, does not seem to pose a barrier to usage. Rather, understanding that it is a tool people use for a personal benefit - be that communication, financial management or shopping - is more pertinent to the new user:

“I still don’t know what the internet is, but I know I want to use it. I know there are things I want to see.”

Female, 77, Occasional/low confidence, Northern Ireland

Merely knowing the benefits of using the internet is not sufficient to engage interest. Understanding generic advantages such as communication, financial savings and convenience are not enough to enable an individual to begin their journey because often there is no emotional hook or personal compulsion inherent in these. The starting point to internet usage is one of *personal need*. Hooks which truly engender interest are often highly specific, even though they may ultimately relate back to one of the above broader benefits. For example, an individual may be aware that a benefit of using the internet is to send email; however this does not necessarily engender interest until they are shown a personal advantage of doing so e.g. keeping in touch with a daughter who is going travelling in Australia.

“The most important thing is having a reason to use it. You would then pick up the benefits as you went along.”

Male, 74, not online/not interested, Northern Ireland

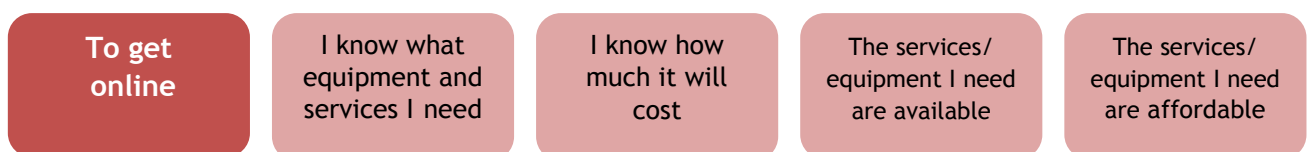
The perceived benefit must outweigh the perceived effort of getting online. This is achieved in the first instance by sparking interest in meeting a compelling personal need, and then by demonstrating that learning to use the internet often requires less effort than many think. In this way, perceived benefit grows in the mind of the user, while the effort required to enjoy the benefit shrinks.

Finally, the box ‘*I have the confidence to try*’ was added by the Panel at a later stage of the research and was not tested with respondents. However, the findings of the research would validate its inclusion. Confidence levels are important in the decision to start using computers and the internet. Many are held back because of this, and others can be affected adversely once they are using the internet; therefore, it is worthwhile including it at the earliest stage. Doing so reflects the fact that new users may have deep seated anxieties that need to be overcome before they consider using a computer and the internet.

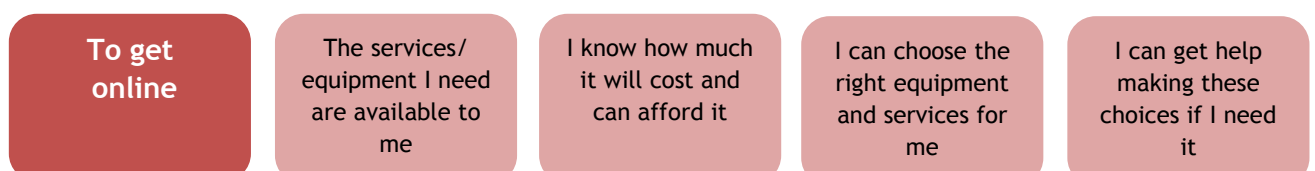
In summary, we suggest that ‘*I understand how the internet can benefit me*’, ‘*The benefits of the internet are worth the effort*’ and ‘*I have the confidence to try*’ are used instead of the sub strands of the original framework for this section.

To get online

The original framework for this section is as follows:



This research would suggest that this section might more accurately look as follows:



The services / equipment I need are available is important; in order for potential users to adopt the internet they must know where these can be found and they must have access to them. It is also important that the equipment is fit for purpose. Many respondents had had bad experiences or witnessed others suffering at the hands of slow network connections, computers riddled with viruses or just old, poorly maintained machines. Having up-to-date equipment and adequate broadband speeds were important in terms of demonstrating the usefulness and efficiency of the internet. In particular, it was clear that an inadequate connection speed could result in frustration and loss of interest.

The services / equipment I need are affordable is also key. Whether an individual chooses to purchase equipment of their own, use existing equipment at home or access the internet via their local library, they must be able to do so without the cost of doing so being prohibitive.

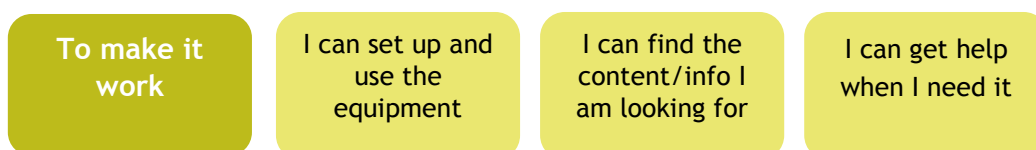
This research suggested that most users do not know what services and equipment they need. The process of choosing is considered too complex for new users to do this alone. There is also a high likelihood that they will choose inappropriate equipment. The suggested amendments to the framework reflect the fact that people might not know what they need at the outset, but need to be able to be in a position to choose the right equipment. This is to be achieved largely by having appropriate help and support.

Knowing how much getting online will cost has been folded into the affordability box since it overlaps significantly with knowing that *the services / equipment I need are affordable*.

The most important addition to the framework is included at this stage. *Being able to get help* was the most important single factor in getting online. No one among our sample had succeeded in getting online without external support. As noted, it was particularly important that this support should meet all the necessary criteria for encouraging long-term online engagement i.e. technical knowledge, availability, patience and enthusiasm. The wrong kind of support could have long-term consequences for an individual's future engagement with the internet.

To make it work

The original framework for this section is as follows:



This research would suggest that here, the original framework should emphasise barriers posed by setting up equipment and starting to use the internet for the first time:

To make it work

I can get set up and get connected

I can use the equipment

I can find the content and information I am looking for

I can get help when and as often as I need it

New users rarely, if ever, *set up their equipment* alone. As with the process of choosing equipment, it is considered too complex an undertaking. It was therefore felt appropriate to separate set up and use to emphasise the difficulty people had with the set up process.

Once equipment is set up, users need to be able to use the equipment. This includes keyboard and computer skills as well as the basic principles of navigation.

I can find the content/info I am looking for is important. The individual needs to understand the principle of search engines and key word search. They also need to understand that different websites serve different needs and that some are more efficient or popular than others. Having a basic understanding of the major or most popular websites is useful. We witnessed several respondents struggling with poorly designed or irrelevant sites because they did not know about search engines and were unaware which sites were most relevant to the task at hand. This led to frustration and a sense that the internet was far less useful than they had been led to believe.

Getting help when I need it is critical. All new users fear getting stuck and not knowing what to do. Ongoing support is key; again this relates back to the identification of a suitable buddy or support network, available on hand to help new users progress to the next stage of their task. We recommend changing this box to emphasise that for most people the need for help is not a one-off; people need ongoing support.

To enjoy the benefits

This research suggests that this section should precede '*To manage the risks*'. Once new users have reached the point where they can begin enjoying the benefits of using the internet, they rarely think about managing risks (with the notable exception of installing anti-virus software). This stage of the process is about reaping the benefits from the effort put in to get to this point. In some cases, the question of dealing with risks does not occur until a specific problem emerges.

The original framework for this section is as follows:

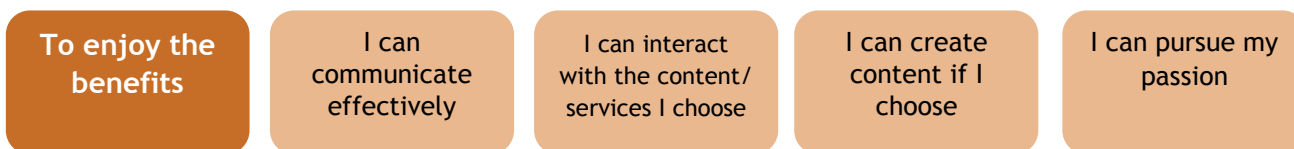
To enjoy the benefits

I can communicate effectively

I can interact with the content/ services I choose

I can create content if I choose

This research would suggest an alternative structure:



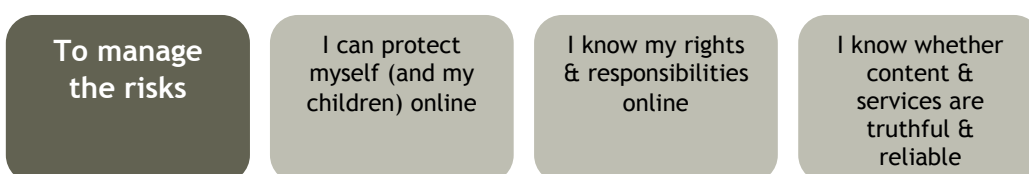
I can communicate effectively and I can interact with the content/services I choose are clearly important and relevant.

As we have shown, the research participants were at the early stages of their digital participation journey. To them, creating content online was not considered a key stage of the overall journey. The ability or need to create content was viewed as a personal choice that some might decide to embark upon. If a user chose not to create content it was not felt that this in anyway hampered their ability to enjoy the benefits of the internet. However, as people become more proficient their interest in creating content could increase. It is kept in to reflect this, under the assumption that further development, for some, will include content creation.

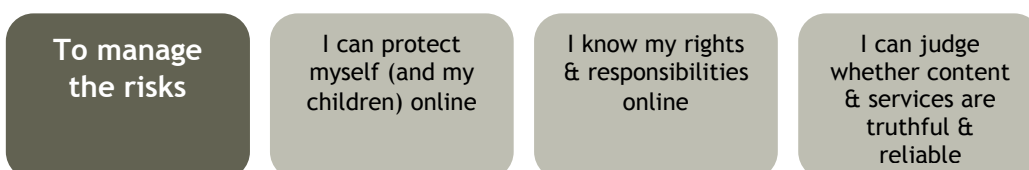
Since the major motivator is achieving the goal each individual sets themselves (in relation to a benefit that justifies the investment of getting online), the third most common category (after communicating and information gathering) has been added to this section: pursuing passions and hobbies. This also serves to underline the uniquely personal nature of the journey to digital participation.

To manage the risks

As noted earlier, this research would suggest that this section follows 'To enjoy the benefits'. The original framework for this section is as follows:



This research would suggest it should appear as follows:



As noted, for many the concept of *protecting themselves online* is a question of installing the appropriate anti-virus software at the outset and, in the longer term, staying within their comfort zone with regards to submitting personal data online.

Again, the person or service that is providing support plays a key role in helping users install suitable software. Those installing a computer which their children will have access to also tend to explore child protection options - again with the help of someone more informed.

Knowing my rights and responsibilities in the online environment was largely perceived to be irrelevant in terms of the journey to digital participation. Most struggled to understand what having rights and responsibilities meant in the context of the internet, even those who were regularly online. As far as they were concerned, online behaviour was an extension of their normal offline behaviour; no separate rules or guidelines applied. However, some of the discussions surrounding shopping online did revolve around not knowing where they stood in relation to returning unsatisfactory goods. For those who attain the appropriate levels of confidence, competence and who feel comfortable enough to begin to transact online, this may become more important.

Having online responsibilities was widely interpreted as being a question of behaving appropriately e.g. not disseminating obscene or slanderous material, which for the vast majority of new internet users was a matter which did not concern them.

The majority of participants were not confident that they could always know whether content and services were truthful and reliable. Well-known, widely-used website brands were thought to ensure a greater degree of user protection; however, this depended on knowing which these providers were. It was felt that, over time, users acquired a 'radar' for detecting less trustworthy sites; however this could only be achieved through longer-term usage of the internet. This would lead to an increased confidence in one's own judgement or ability to detect less trustworthy sources or scams. However, even experienced Web users could misjudge content. It was felt, therefore, that it was more a question of judging whether a service was *likely* to be trustworthy, rather than knowing for certain.

Revised framework

To summarise, this research has identified a number of areas where the Framework might be adjusted to reflect the reality of the digital participation journey. The final Framework is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Final Consumer Framework for Digital Participation



Sarah

Proficient but low confidence in protecting themselves online



Sarah's journey

My name is Sarah. I am 22 yrs old and have just finished university. Since leaving university I have not been able to get a job due to the credit crunch and unfortunately I don't have enough money to set up a business on my own. However, I have not been lazy. In fact I have just got back from South Africa. I have a lot of interests. My main interests are cooking, film, shopping, reading and music. In terms of film I hate big Hollywood blockbusters, they are so boring but I really like world cinema - I love French films. In terms of music I like indie music.

Stage 1: getting interested

I first went online at school, where I was shown the basics. I first got a computer when I was at college so that I could do my college work.

Stage 2: getting online

I have been using the internet for years. I first started when I was at school then used it at university. The internet does not really interest me that much. In fact there are not many ways to describe it apart to say that I'm not bothered. There is no way that I would sit on my lap top for hours on end. That just doesn't appeal to me. I'd much rather be out socialising, meeting friends or reading a book. In fact, anything other than going online.

Stage 3: being online

For me the internet is functional. It is a tool that serves a specific purpose. I don't understand these people who use it for fun. As such, I actually hate social networks. I think they are pointless. They are just for people who love themselves too much and just want to brag about how great their lives are. However, I do use it to find out information about what is going on.

Stage 4: benefits and risks

I am really wary about giving out information. I really do not like doing it. I get worried that people might take my data and information and use it. I know I am probably wrong but this is the way that I feel. I think that this wariness comes from my parents. They are so into this Big Brother mentality.

Key themes

- Fear about online security is widespread, even among otherwise confident internet users.
- Risk adverseness can be learned from others, and friends and family can influence attitudes to risk.

Section 12

Conclusions

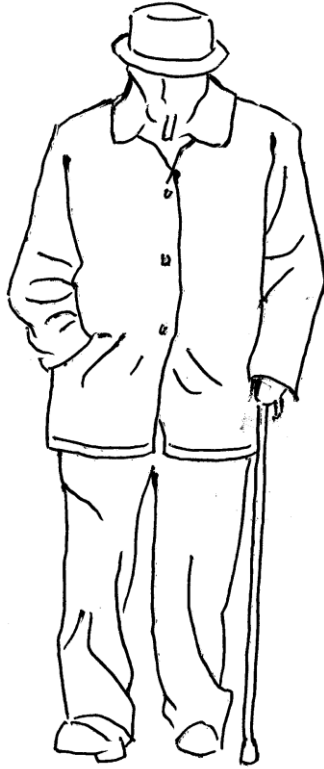
- A relatively small, highly resistant core of people will almost certainly NEVER use the internet, owing to deeply entrenched anti-internet sentiments and a conviction that the effort involved in getting online vastly outweighs any benefit they might gain from it. However most non-users are merely ambivalent, and can be persuaded if given the right motivation.
- The identification of a compelling personal benefit or advantage to using the internet is key to initiating the journey. Without this, no action can be taken towards digital participation. The challenge lies in persuading individuals that this benefit exists, and that it outweighs the perceived effort of getting involved. Since interests / passions vary greatly, it is difficult to achieve this through a general communications campaign aimed at non-users.
- Help is critical throughout the process. People need access to different kinds of support at different stages:
 1. Deciding to take the plunge;
 2. Choosing and setting up the equipment;
 3. Learning how to use it effectively;
 4. Having somebody to turn to when they get stuck;
 5. Striking the right balance between benefits and risks; and
 6. Achieving their goals and being inspired to broaden their repertoire online.
- Many research participants had access to the internet at home but did not use it, while others who had had bad experiences had stopped. This would suggest that the level of digital participation cannot be gauged simply by whether the household has an internet connection.
- Lack of confidence and anxiety are not only about technology; they can often reflect the way the person relates to the world more generally and can be deep-seated and difficult to address. In some cases they are a legacy of previous poor learning experiences.
- The journey to digital participation is not linear; people can regress as well as progress. Users who have not identified a strong enough benefit can lapse and

if they do not have sufficient support those trying to learn can become frustrated and revert to, or develop, a fortress mentality.

- Those who lack confidence in protecting themselves online are often risk averse. This can mean that they have a limited repertoire of sites or activities that they are happy to stick to and do not go beyond. Many believe the internet is inherently risky and always will be. They will need exceptionally high levels of reassurance if they are to develop transactional behaviour.

Frank

Not online, but not interested



My name is Frank. I am in my 80s and have had an excellent innings. I retired in my fifties after being a successful businessman. My main hobbies are collecting antique objects, reading history and debating. I also love black and white movies and my hero is John Wayne.

I have lived a great life. I have achieved everything that I wanted to. However, I have worked really hard to get where I am. Now all I want to do with my life is relax, I don't want any stress I just want to do the things that I want.

Frank's journey

Stage 1: getting interested

The internet is not for me. I don't need to change the world. I can't be bothered. I want to do what I want to do - I don't need any stress in my life. I feel at my age I should have an unstressed, bright future. I think learning the internet would be complicated and I can't be bothered at my age to learn new things. That's not to say I couldn't do it, I could. But could I be additionally bothered? No. What is the point of learning all those new things? At my age there is no point.

Stage 2: getting online

My dear wife has just got a computer. She is really struggling with it. She wants to use it to contact relatives abroad. This is something that I will leave to her. As for me I am just not interested. There is nothing on it that excites me. I just want to work with the things that I know. I like to read - why would I want to read on the computer when I can sit in my armchair and read a book?

The whole thing about going online is complicated and if I did it I would have to do it 100 per cent. I do not have the time to do this - it would take too long.

Stage 3: being online

When you showed me the internet there were some interesting things about antiques on there. But to be honest even this is not enough to get me to go online. I just want to read my books and relax.

Key themes

- The perceived investment is accentuated in old age - technology is commonly seen as for the younger generation.
- Learning something new can uncomfortably challenge those who feel independent, successful and confident.
- Failure to identify personal benefit is central to resistance.

Joe

Online but limited use



I am 42 and have lived in the same remote rural area my entire life. It is rare for me to leave the county and I don't spend much time outside the local area. I recently got a taste for travel and would love to work abroad for part of the year but it is hard to make it happen. For the first time in my life I am unemployed, which is tough but I have lots of family and friends around me. I am really struggling to get things going again and finding life incredibly frustrating.

Joe's journey

Stage 1: getting interested

I knew the internet would help me change my life. I knew I would be able to access job sites, apply for jobs easily, find out how to go about getting permits to work abroad and generally get things going again. I knew that learning a computer would also make me more employable. I wasn't that interested in Facebook and things like that. All I have to do is walk around the block or go to the pub next door and I bump into friends.

Stage 2: getting online

Not having my own computer is a real pain. I don't have a phone line and would struggle to pay to get set up. I tried to access it on my mobile phone and got a friend who knows how to work that kind of thing to set it all up for me. It is a real pain to use - so fiddly. I wasn't that much better when I sat at friends' computers though. I would get experimental and try new things and quickly get lost. I got so angry I pulled the plug out of the wall once. People have been supportive but have not really taught me; they either leave me to it on their computer or do it for me. I do have trouble spelling things and it takes me a long time to learn how to do new things on it. I feel stupid asking for help.

Stage 3: being online

I realised quickly that I needed to learn how to use a computer properly so I enrolled on a course through the Job Centre. It was extremely hard to get them to help with that and if it wasn't for their help, the learning process would probably have been more painful. I sit back and take a deep breath before using it because I have to concentrate so hard. I still make mistakes and I am looking forward to being on the course so I can ask questions of someone who is at arm's length, without being embarrassed. I can't wait to get good enough to just sit there on my own and get better through practice.

Stage 4: benefits and risks

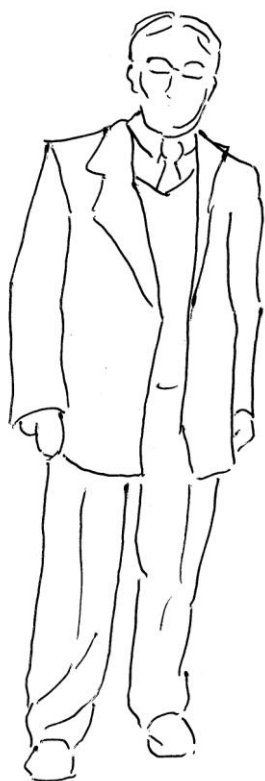
I can't say I think about the risks. Most sites seem trustworthy, if they are proper ones. I wouldn't really ever risk more than £50 if I did buy something online. I just can't wait to get on with it all! It would be great if could have help buying a computer so I could access the internet at home whenever I want.

Key themes

- The internet can be seen to hold the key to unlocking difficult personal circumstances - changes in life circumstances encourage adoption.
- The right support is crucial. Without it the learning process can be slow and users can become frustrated.

Ian

Proficient but low confidence in protecting themselves online



I am in my sixties and I live alone. I'm divorced and I have several grown-up children, though I'm sad to say I also lost two of them within the past few years. I've had a difficult life in a lot of ways, but I always think there are people out there much worse off than me. I worked on farms and market stalls for most of my life till I had a back injury which forced me to stop. I'm really interested in learning and did a law and business course a couple of years ago. That's when I was told I had dyslexia. I'd always believed I was just a bit thick. I'm not into technology at all. I have a mobile phone but I hate it. I can't even text with it.

Ian's journey

Stage 1: getting interested

I became interested in using the Internet for one very specific reason. I was pursuing a court case and I was determined that I wanted to be able to communicate by email, so I'd know the people concerned had received my correspondence. That was the main thing that drove me.

Stage 2: getting online

It was a long uphill struggle for me I have to admit. I made a lot of mistakes but I learnt from them. You have to accept that there's a certain amount of trial and error with these things. I had the help of one of my son's friends, who taught me the basics. He was very patient with me and he really knew what he was talking about. And from there I attended a local course to take me a bit further, which was very cheap. That helped build my confidence too. But it did take a long time - I had to be patient.

Stage 3: being online

Now I'm online I use the Internet for all sorts of things: chat rooms, email, research. I bought a car last year using the Internet. I would never pay for anything online. I don't trust the Internet for that, much as I don't trust most of the banks or politicians around here. I used the Internet to find me the good deal, so it served its purpose as far as I was concerned. I still trip up online occasionally, but I've found little tricks to help me when I've gone to the wrong page or something. I even help others out at the library - not as a teacher, but as an ordinary bloke who's learnt the hard way. I prefer to use the library computers for that social aspect. I wouldn't want to be isolated in my house with a computer - that's not healthy.

Stage 4: benefits and risks

In terms of risks - well I self-manage that by never paying for anything online or giving out my personal details. I'm very cautious when it comes to that kind of thing in everyday life - there's no way I'd ever dream of doing online banking. This way I keep myself safe. As for viruses and such, I don't need to worry because I use the computers at the library.

Key themes

- The benefits to getting online often need to be very specific, fulfilling a clear need in the individual's life.
- Levels of trust in the internet often reflect wider attitudes to risk: people who are risk averse in general bring that attitude to their internet use.

Section 3

Methodology and sample

Methodology

Qualitative research was used to fully explore the range and depth of views among the research participants.

The emphasis of this research was on exploring the full spectrum of digital participation experiences. To this end, an ethnographic approach was necessary in order to understand what lay behind attitudes towards the internet and get beyond superficial 'stated' barriers to participation.

The research programme comprised:

- 12 semi-ethnographic interviews; and
- four focus groups

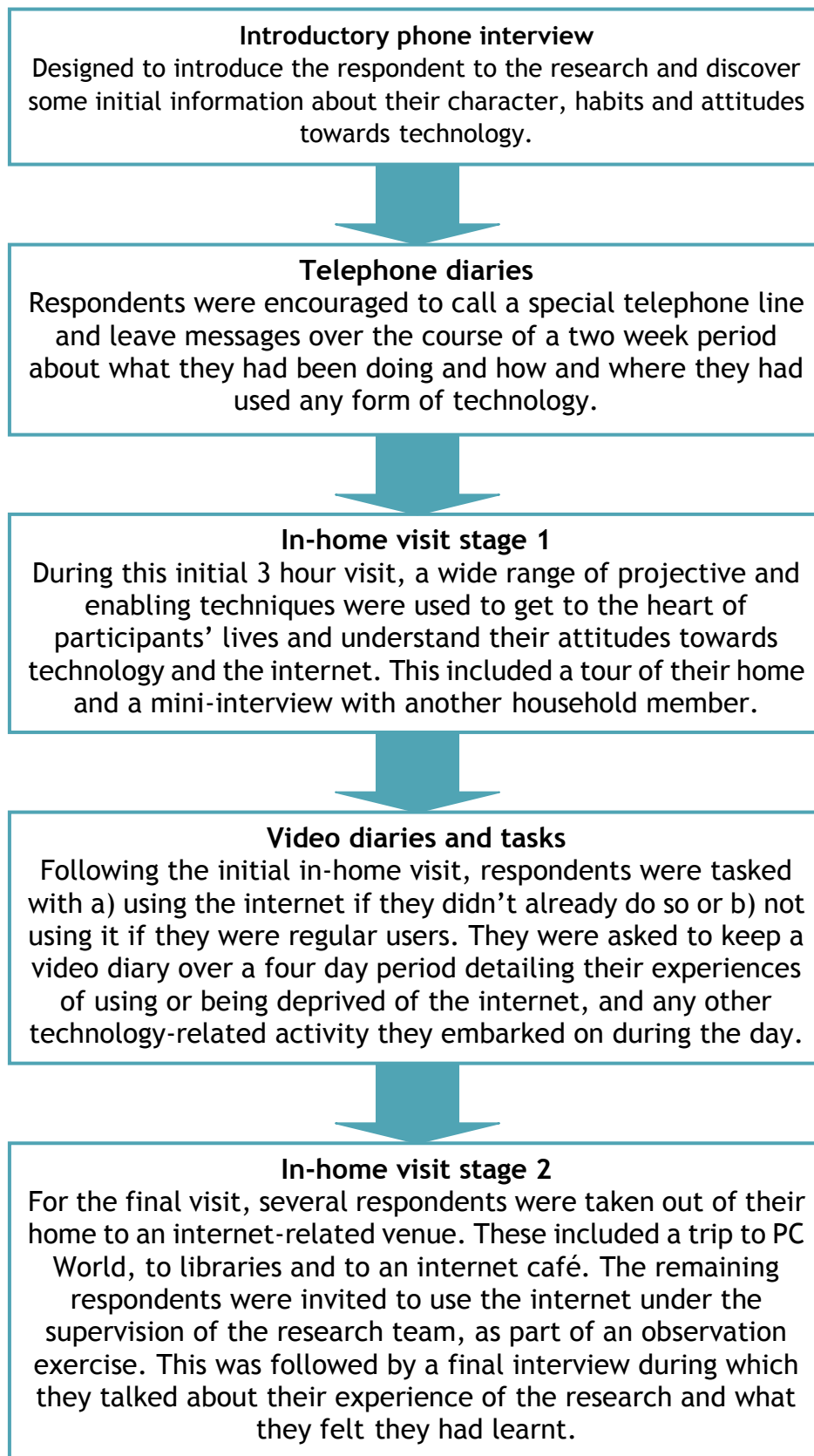
Given the emphasis on depth rather than breadth in the research approach, observations made in this report cannot be extrapolated across a wider sample. It is not possible to draw robust conclusions about how widespread the behaviours outlined here are. Nevertheless, we draw attention, where appropriate, to patterns of behaviour or apparent commonalities.

Interviews

These interviews were multi-stage and comprised a range of research methods, including video diaries, in-home visits, observational work and external accompanied visits. The aim was to capture a strong sense of each individual's life over a period of time (in this case, pre-Christmas December 2009 to the end of January 2010).

The stages of the ethnographic phase are outlined in Figure 7:

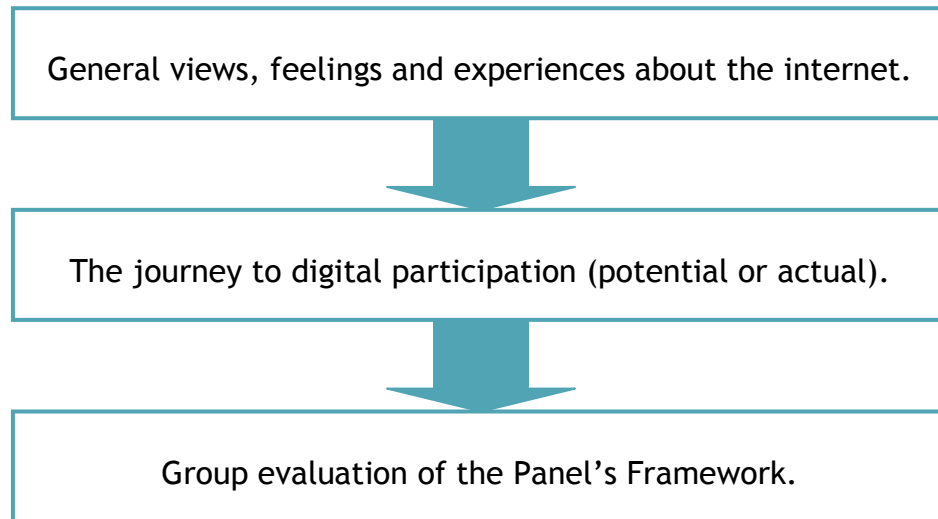
Figure 7: Ethnographic research stages



Groups

A total of four two-hour focus groups were also carried out across the UK. The discussion flow within the groups varied according to the participants. However, it can be summarised in Figure 8:

Figure 8: Focus group discussion flow



Sample

A wide range of individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds were interviewed during the ethnographic visits. Interviewees were segmented demographically and in terms of the degree to which they were ‘digital participators’. The sample included people in all four nations and in urban, rural and suburban areas

The sample structure for the ethnographic visits is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Sample structure ethnographic interviews

Location	Digital participation	Gender	Age	SEG	Additional information
England	Not online but interested	Female	45-54yrs	DE	n/a
England	Online but limited usage	Male	35-44yrs	C1C2	n/a

England	Proficient but low confidence	Female	25-34yrs	C2D	n/a
Wales	Not online and not interested	Female	55-64yrs	DE	n/a
Wales	Online but limited usage	Male	45-54yrs	BC1	n/a
Wales	Proficient but low confidence	Male	65-74yrs	C1C2	n/a
Scotland	Not online and not interested	Male	75+yrs	AB	n/a
Scotland	Not online but interested	Female	65-74yrs	C1C2	n/a
Scotland	Proficient but low confidence	Female	20-24yrs	C1C2	Learning difficulties
Northern Ireland	Not online and not interested	Male	65-74yrs	BC1	Mobility impaired
Northern Ireland	Not online but interested	Male	16-19yrs	DE	n/a
Northern Ireland	Online but limited usage	Female	75+	C2D	Visually impaired

Participants in the focus groups were segmented in terms of their degree of digital participation. Each group was mixed gender and comprised a range of individuals in terms of age and socio-economic group, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Focus group composition

Location	Digital participation
England	Not online and not interested
Wales	Not online but interested
Scotland	Online but limited usage
Northern Ireland	Proficient but low confidence in protecting themselves online

Tara

Proficient but low confidence in protecting themselves online



My name is Tara. I am in my late 20's and have a learning disability. I feel really stupid sometimes. All my family are really clever. In fact it is really only my dog that does not think that I am stupid. Other people in my family read the Guardian but I can only really read the Sun. I have interests but my main interest is celebrities. At the moment I live at home, but I am about to move in with my boyfriend.

Stage 1: getting interested

I started going online at work. At first I was really excited about it. I thought that I would be able to do so much more on it than I can actually do. The problem is my dyslexia.

Stage 2: getting online

After a couple of years my mum got me a computer. I did find it difficult not knowing what buttons to press, but my mum was very patient and showed me how to use it. However, my computer broke, so now I use my mum's computer and I am, and have really been, scared of viruses.

Stage 3: being online

I use my mum's computer about two or three times a day. I use it mainly to check emails but I do have a look around other sites. The biggest problem that I have is that my spelling gets in the way. An example of this is when I wanted to look up some caterpillar shoes so I searched on google but can't spell caterpillar so put in cat instead - I was there for hours.

Stage 4: benefits and risks

I really worry about personal safety. I don't trust anyone. Even on Facebook I use a false name. I don't trust the internet and I hate people knowing things about me. Even in the real world I won't give out personal details, because I don't like people knowing my business.

Key themes

- The internet can pose particular difficulties for people with literacy problems.
- As well as a fear of fraud and security, many also worry about viruses and breaking the computer.

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