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The Impact of Communication Technology in Empowering the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Nagish Survey

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Executive Summary

This report outlines the challenges in communication experienced by members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, with an emphasis on their impact in the workplace.

By analyzing the data from a survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, we uncover critical barriers that hinder their ability to communicate effectively in ways that can impact their economic and career mobility, healthcare access and outcomes, emotional well-being, and independence. Our research also explores the role of assistive technology in helping to bridge these gaps, emphasizing its potential to empower Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals in navigating daily life - in the workplace and beyond.

Our Methodology

The data presented in this report was collected through a comprehensive survey of over 200 Deaf and hard of hearing individuals who are utilizing hearing assistive technology. The survey was designed to be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that participants from both communities could provide their insights without barriers.

319 total survey respondents

179 Deaf

140 Hard of Hearing

We see these survey results as a call to action: deepening readers' understanding of the challenges Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals face, highlighting the ongoing success of accessibility tech in improving the lives of these communities, encouraging non-Deaf or Hard of Hearing readers to be more inclusive in the workplace - including supporting assistive technologies that provide equitable access and opportunities for their friends, loved ones, employees, peers, and beyond.

Key Findings

Communication barriers are a challenge across all aspects of life for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities:

Career Limitations

60% Experienced by over **60%** of all respondents

Challenges Receiving Optimal Healthcare

60% Experienced by over **60%** of all respondents

Roughly 1/4th anticipate difficulties contacting professionals in emergency situations

Emotional Strain when Communicating with Family and Friends

55% of deaf respondents experienced emotional strain

85% of hard of hearing respondents experienced emotional strain

Assistive technologies reduce the challenges of communication barriers:

- Increased independence & autonomy
- Improved users' independence by nearly **2x**
- Strengthened social & professional networks

46% of deaf respondents

32.9% of hard of hearing respondents

Key Findings

Communication Barriers in the Workplace Limit Career Mobility

The majority of both deaf participants (**55%**) and hard of hearing participants (**94%**) reported that communication challenges in the workplace limit their career opportunities and professional growth. The need to rely on regular assistance from hearing individuals in work-related communications remains a major obstacle for both groups, preventing them from fully participating or maximizing their potential in the workforce.

Challenges in Communication in Healthcare are Putting Lives at Risk

63% of Deaf users and **95%** of Hard of Hearing users reported that communication challenges in healthcare settings negatively impacted their ability to receive proper treatment. Nearly a quarter of all Deaf (**24%**) and Hard of Hearing (**24.3%**) users also expressed serious concerns that communication barriers would prohibit them from contacting healthcare personnel in an emergency healthcare situation, highlighting a dire public safety concern.

Assistive Technology Has Significantly Increased Independence

Before assistive technology, **37%** of Deaf users and **32.9%** of Hard of Hearing users said they were able to manage daily tasks independently with minimal assistance. Adoption of assistive technology rapidly increased independence among Deaf users (**55%**) and Hard of Hearing users (**59%**). These significant improvements in self-sufficiency showcase the potential of assistive technology to empower these communities.

Assistive Technology Has Opened New Social and Professional Opportunities

49% of Deaf users and **51%** of Hard of Hearing users reported that assistive technologies helped enrich their social lives and increased professional opportunities. Remaining communication barriers stress just how important accessibility is for these communities, as it fosters personal connections, career growth, and deeper social engagements as well.

Emotional and Psychological Strain Due to Communication Barriers is Substantial

99% of Deaf users and **83%** of Hard of Hearing users experienced frustration when trying to communicate with family and friends. This emotional toll underscores the broader challenges these communities face in maintaining the well-being of isolation and stress among members of these communities. Access to assistive technologies that facilitate direct communication can alleviate these challenges and the psychological toll they may take.

Communication Barriers in the Workplace

Communication barriers are proven to limit career mobility for many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. Delayed career growth, missed opportunities, exclusion from roles that require seamless communication, and reliance on hearing colleagues for assistance impact are all top common pain points members of these communities experience.

Economic/Workplace Impacts for Deaf Users:

62% of Deaf respondents said communication barriers influenced their career decisions, making it harder to pursue certain job paths or advance professionally.

42% of Deaf individuals said they need assistance from a hearing person at least once per week to communicate effectively, which creates barriers in professional settings, especially in roles requiring frequent interaction or decision-making.

Economic/Workplace Impacts for Hard-of-Hearing Users:

68% of Hard of Hearing respondents face similar challenges in the workplace, relying on others for communication support.

Assistive technology (see page 11 - Empowering independence with assistive technology) has been shown to alleviate these challenges, allowing individuals to pursue a broader range of job opportunities.

Nearly 2/3 of Deaf respondents need communication assistance at least once per week

Communication Barriers in Medical Settings

Communication gaps for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals can result in suboptimal medical outcomes, delayed critical care, and difficulty in reaching medical personnel in emergency situations. Such limitations amount to more than mere disparity in accessibility - they pose life-public safety concerns for members of these communities.

Deaf Community

62% of Deaf respondents reported facing communication barriers in healthcare setting, leading to such things as missed appointments, miscommunication about medical treatments, and feelings of exclusion.

24.3% found they would be unable to make an emergency call if needed, with 14% having already struggled with this challenge.

Hard of Hearing Community:

95% of Hard of Hearing users also experience communication barriers in healthcare settings, often impacting their access to accurate medical information.

24.3% of Hard of Hearing users reported concerns about their ability to make emergency calls.

Accessible communication tools are critical for ensuring that Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals can effectively engage with healthcare providers and receive timely, accurate care when needed.

14% of Deaf respondents have already struggled to contact healthcare professionals in an emergency situation

Emotional and Psychological Impact

The emotional strain from communication barriers in social and familial circles often leads to a sense of isolation and frustration, leading to strained personal relationships and increasing the anxiety of daily activities and interactions.

Deaf Users:

99% of Deaf respondents cited feelings of anxiety or frustration when relying on others for help with phone communication.

99% of users felt frustration when trying to communicate with family and friends on the phone, underscoring the emotional toll of relying on external help for basic communication.

Hard of Hearing Users:

83% of Hard of Hearing users experienced similar frustrations when trying to communicate with family or friends and reported feelings of isolation and emotional distress as a result.

Assistive technology can reduce this emotional toll and improve autonomy in social settings by providing users with more control over their communications. The result is stronger personal relationships, greater personal satisfaction, and improved mental well-being.

59% of Deaf users found basic phone communication frustrating

Empowering Independence with Assistive Technology

The ability to communicate independently can enhance users' confidence, giving them control over their personal and professional interactions. Fortunately, assistive technology solutions are increasingly available to Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, offering solutions that help alleviate many of the limitations outlined above.

Deaf Users:

Prior to assistive technology, **37%** of Deaf users were able to communicate somewhat independently, relying on an intermediary only once or less per week. After adopting assistive technology, the number who were able to communicate independently increased to nearly **55%**, allowing users to engage more fully in work, social life, and daily activities without constant reliance on others.

Hard of Hearing Users:

32.9% of Hard of Hearing users were able to communicate independently before using assistive technology, a figure that increased to over 55% after the technology was introduced.

Enabling Deaf and Hard of Hearing users to lead autonomous, independent lives reduces the need for go-betweens in communication, bolstering users' self-sufficiency and overall satisfaction in daily activities.

Assistive technology significantly improved users' ability to live independently

Deaf users: **+62.16%**

Hard of Hearing users: **+91.49%**

Social and Professional Opportunities Expanded

By facilitating more accessible communication, assistive technology enables users to expand their social circles and access a wider range of professional opportunities, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Deaf Users:

49% of Deaf respondents indicated that assistive technology expanded both their social and professional opportunities, providing access to new relationships, job roles, and career paths that were previously unavailable or out of reach.

Hard of Hearing Users:

32.9% of Hard of Hearing users reported similar improvements in their social lives, demonstrating how assistive technology has made overall communication more accessible and inclusive.

Assistive technology improved social networks and professional opportunities

Deaf users: **+46%**

Hard of Hearing users: **+32.9%**

Conclusion

As with any community facing physical or sensory challenges, Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals have to live a life empowered lives, where the challenges posed by their circumstances never come at the expense of independence, opportunity, and dignity.

These survey results illustrate that communication barriers significantly impact the quality of life for both Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, with major implications in the areas of employment, healthcare, social relationships, and emotional well-being. However, the adoption of assistive technologies have proven to meaningfully reduce these challenges, increasing access and opportunities, improving daily activities, and enabling greater independence for users.

The call to action is clear: Widespread integration of assistive technologies across healthcare, education, daily communication, the workplace and beyond will ensure that these vulnerable communities have equal access to opportunities and support.

We hope that future studies will complement our research and further increase awareness by exploring the long-term effects of assistive technology on career advancement, healthcare outcomes, healthcare outcomes, and overall life satisfaction among members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

Assistive technology in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community

Increases career opportunities and workplace autonomy

Improves healthcare outcomes and alleviates fears around emergency situations

Bolsters social and professional networks

Increases a sense of independence and self-sufficiency in daily life

Reduces feelings of frustration, isolation, and social anxiety

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Thank You

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