



## Background Paper

### ***Social Media***

### ***2. Who Uses Them?***

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**Social Media: 2. Who Uses Them?  
(Background Paper)**

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## SOCIAL MEDIA: 2. WHO USES THEM?\*

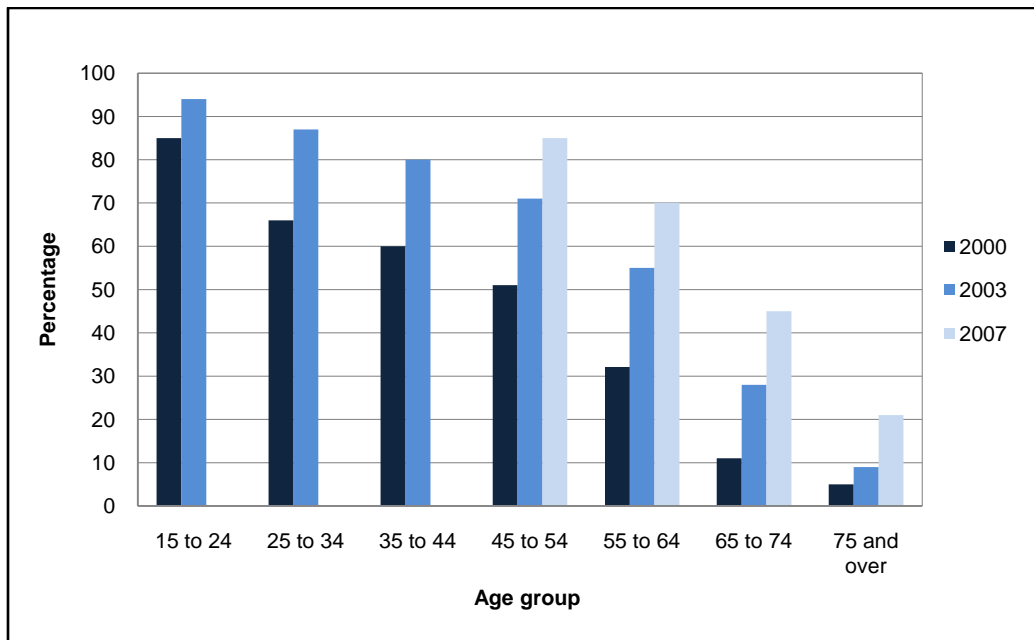
Although the adoption of social media<sup>1</sup> has been rapid and widespread in Canada, rates of use vary considerably between demographic groups. This paper reviews recent statistics that demonstrate differences between older and younger Canadians, men and women, Anglophones and Francophones, immigrants and native-born Canadians, and urban and rural dwellers in their rates of Internet and social media use.

### 1 AGE

According to Statistics Canada, age is a significant predictor of Internet use, even when factors such as level of education and household income are taken into account. In 2007, 94% of those aged 15 to 24 used the Internet. In addition, the vast majority of baby boomers (those aged 45 to 64) used the Internet. Among those aged 45 to 54, 85% were users, as were 70% of those aged 55 to 64. On the other hand, those over 65 were significantly less likely to use the Internet: rates of use were 45% for those aged 65 to 74 and only 21% for those 75 and over.<sup>2</sup>

Internet use has increased in all age categories since 2000, seniors being the fastest growing group of users (Figure 1). Furthermore, since younger and middle-aged people are likely to continue using the Internet as they get older, age-related differences in usage are expected to decline over time.<sup>3</sup>

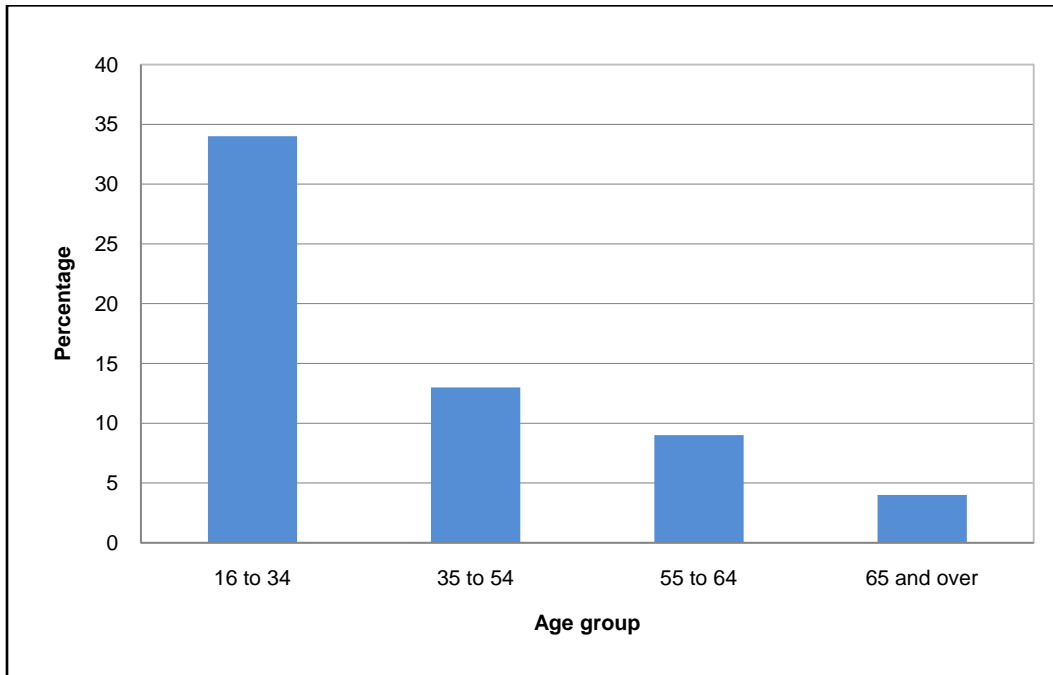
Figure 1 - Rates of Internet Use, by Age Group, Selected Years



Source: Ben Veenhof and Peter Timusk, "Online activities of Canadian boomers and seniors," *Canadian Social Trends*, Statistics Canada, Cat. no. 11-008, Winter 2009, No. 88, p. 26.

These differences in Internet usage are reflected in the statistics on social media, which show that younger groups use these modes of communication to a far greater extent than older groups. In 2007, 34% of Canadians aged 16 to 34 contributed content on the Internet by blogging, participating in discussion groups, or uploading photos. In comparison, only 13% of users aged 35 to 54 contributed content, while 9% of those aged 55 to 64 and a mere 4% of those aged 65 and over did so.<sup>4</sup> In June 2009, Ipsos Reid reported that 86% of Canadians aged 18 to 34 who used the Internet had a social network profile, as compared with only 44% of those aged 55 and over.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 2 – Home Internet Users Who Contributed Content, by Age Group, 2007



Source: B. Veenhof et al., “How Canadians’ Use of the Internet Affects Social Life and Civic Participation,” *Connectedness Series*, Statistics Canada, Cat. no. 56F0004M, No. 16, December 2008, p. 21.

Data from the United States show similar trends. A survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that, in December 2008, 75% of adults aged 18 to 24 who used the Internet had a profile on a social network site. This rate was less than 20% among those 45 years of age and older and just 7% among those 65 and older.<sup>6</sup>

It would appear that some social network sites are more popular with certain age groups than with others. Another survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, conducted in the fall of 2009 in the United States, found that Facebook users tended to be older than MySpace users: the median age for Facebook users was 33, while the median age for MySpace was 26. The median age of users of the business-oriented LinkedIn social network site was 39. The survey also found that younger Internet users (those aged between 18 and 44) were more likely than older users to use Twitter or similar status-update services.<sup>7</sup>

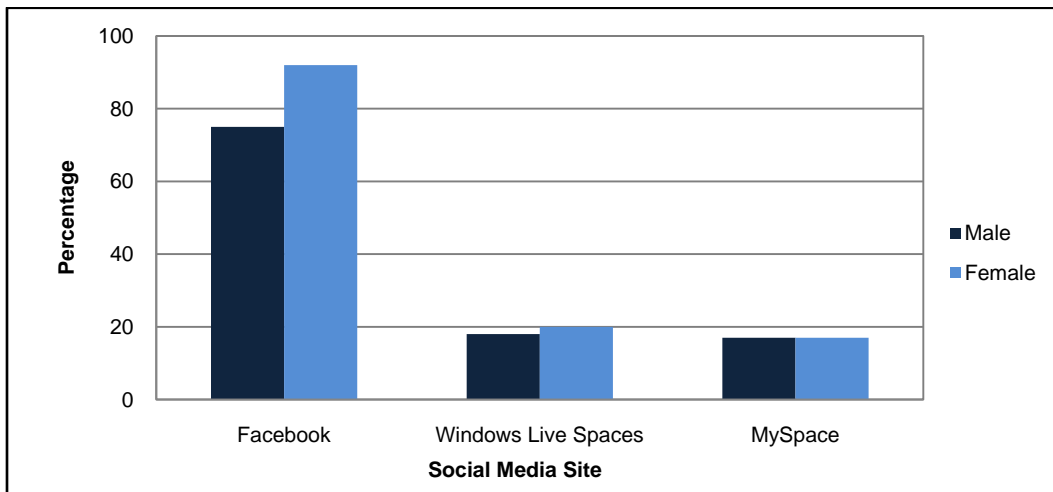
## 2 GENDER

According to Statistics Canada survey results for 2007, an equal proportion of Canadian men and women – just under 75% – had used the Internet in the previous year.<sup>8</sup> However, their patterns of use were different: men used the Internet at home more often and for longer periods than women,<sup>9</sup> and earlier data showed that women were more likely than men to use the Internet to communicate with family and friends.<sup>10</sup> Data from the United States indicate similar patterns: survey findings reported in 2005 showed that men were more likely to go online than women, and that women were more likely than men to use the Internet for personal communication.<sup>11</sup>

Gender differences are also apparent in the use of social media specifically. A 2009 Ipsos Reid survey of Canadians aged 18 and over who go online showed that women (59%) were slightly more likely to have a social network profile than men (52%) and that Facebook was the dominant social networking site among Canadian adults. Of the women with online personal social network profiles, almost all (92%) had a Facebook profile. The next most popular social networking sites for the women surveyed were Windows Live Spaces (20%) and MySpace (17%). Men with an online social network personal profile were less likely than women to use Facebook (75%) but, similarly to women, 18% of men used Windows Live Spaces and 17% used MySpace (see Figure 3).<sup>12</sup>

Another 2009 survey by Ipsos Reid revealed that women (36%) were more likely than men (23%) to access a social networking site through their mobile device.<sup>13</sup> A 2009 study by the communications firm People From Cossette showed that the topic most discussed by men online (20%) was leisure activities, while expressing feelings was the most frequent subject for women (19%).<sup>14</sup> The study also indicated that, although men (25.9%) spent more time online than women (22.5%), women spent a greater proportion of this time on social networking sites.

**Figure 3 – Percentage of Canadian Adults with an Online Social Media Personal Profile, by Site and Gender, 2009**



Source: Ipsos Reid, *What? You Don't Have a Social Network Profile? You Are Now in the Minority*, 19 June 2009.

### 3 LINGUISTIC GROUPS

On the whole, Internet use in Canada is higher among Anglophones than Francophones, but this difference is less pronounced among younger people. Among 12,000 Canadians surveyed in 2008, 83% of Anglophones and 75% of Francophones reported that they had used the Internet during the past month (Table 1). Differences in the rate of use were most pronounced in older populations. Use among Anglophones aged 35 to 49 years was 91%, as compared with 86% for Francophones, while the corresponding rates among those over 50 years of age were 70% and 56%. On the other hand, among younger people, there was very little difference between Anglophones and Francophones in their rates of Internet use. In 2008, Internet use among those aged 18 to 34 years stood at 95% for Anglophones and 93% for Francophones.<sup>15</sup> Survey results for earlier years show that usage has increased in all age groups, but has been consistently higher among Anglophones compared with their Francophone counterparts.

In 2008, about 46% of Anglophone Internet users used social networking sites, as compared with just over 30% of Francophone users.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1 – Percentage of Canadians Who Used the Internet, by Age and Linguistic Group**

	2003		2005		2007		2008	
	Anglo- phone	Franco- phone	Anglo- phone	Franco- phone	Anglo- phone	Franco- phone	Anglo- phone	Franco- phone
Overall	68	58	77	65	81	71	83	75
18-34	84	79	91	86	95	91	95	93
35-49	78	66	84	76	89	84	91	86
50+	48	34	60	43	66	51	70	56

Data source: Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, "CRTC Communications Monitoring Report," August 2009, p. 173.

### 4 NEW CANADIANS

New Canadians tend to use the Internet differently from those who are Canadian-born. They are more likely to use it to communicate with friends and family, particularly those back home. Indeed, in 2007 new Canadians were much more likely to make telephone calls over the Internet or to use instant messaging than were the Canadian-born. As far as contributing content on the Internet was concerned, however, new Canadians were slightly less likely than the Canadian born to do so – 17%, as compared with 21%.<sup>17</sup>

### 5 URBAN AND RURAL DWELLERS

Canadians living in rural areas are generally less likely to use the Internet than their urban counterparts. In 2007, 76% of urban Canadians used the Internet for personal reasons, while only 65% of rural Canadians did so. Canadians living in urban areas also participate in a greater variety of online activities than do those living in rural areas. This is partly due to the lack of high-speed service in many rural areas. As for contributing content on the Internet, in 2007, 21% of urban Canadians but only 16% of rural Canadians did so.<sup>18</sup>

**NOTES**

- \* This paper is one in a series on social media prepared by the Parliamentary Information and Research Service of the Library of Parliament. The other papers in the series are these: Michael Dewing, *Social Media: 1. An Introduction*, Publication no. 2010-03, 3 February 2010; Alysia Davies, *Social Media: 3. Privacy and the Facebook Example*, Publication no. 2010-06, 8 February 2010; Amanda Clarke, *Social Media: 4. Political Uses and Implications for Representative Democracy*, Publication no. 2010-10, 22 March 2010; and Havi Echenberg, *Social Media: 5. Parliamentary Use in the United Kingdom*, Publication no. 2010-11, 25 March 2010.
- 1. For a definition of social media, an overview of their evolution and development, and a discussion of their effects and implications, see Dewing (2010).
- 2. Ben Veenhof and Peter Timusk, "[Online activities of Canadian boomers and seniors](#)," *Canadian Social Trends*, Statistics Canada, Cat. no. 11-008, Winter 2009, No. 88, p. 26.
- 3. Ibid.
- 4. B. Veenhof et al., "[How Canadians' Use of the Internet Affects Social Life and Civic Participation](#)," *Connectedness Series*, Statistics Canada, Cat. no. 56F0004M, No. 16, December 2008, p. 21.
- 5. "[More than half of online Canadians are social networking: Ipsos Reid](#)," *Marketing Magazine*, 22 June 2009.
- 6. Amanda Lenhart, "[Adults and Social Network Websites](#)," Pew Internet and American Life Project, Washington, DC, January 2009.
- 7. Susannah Fox, Kathryn Zickuhr and Aaron Smith, "[Twitter and Status Updating, Fall 2009](#)," Pew Internet and American Life Project, Washington, DC, 21 October 2009.
- 8. Statistics Canada, "[Canadian Internet User Survey](#)," *The Daily*, 12 June 2008.
- 9. Ibid.
- 10. Veenhof et al. (2008), Table 3.
- 11. Deborah Fallows, [How Women and Men Use the Internet](#), Pew Internet and American Life Project, Washington, DC, 28 December 2005.
- 12. Ipsos Reid, *What? You Don't Have a Social Network Profile? You Are Now in the Minority*, 19 June 2009.
- 13. Ipsos Reid, *Two in Ten (17%) Cellphone and Smartphone Users Typically Access the Internet on a Daily Basis from their Phone*, 19 May 2009.
- 14. People From Cossette, [Social Media Study Report](#), 2009.
- 15. Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, "[CRTC Communications Monitoring Report](#)," August 2009, p. 173.
- 16. Ibid., p. 174.
- 17. Veenhof et al. (2008), pp. 17–18.
- 18. Ibid., pp. 19–20.