

Boomers Are Least Likely to Want to Interact With Brands On Social Media

ARTICLE | OCTOBER 02, 2019

Mark Dolliver

Across US age groups, social media usage is common ground, but that commonality masks many differences in usage. New research sheds some light on the reasons US consumers in different generations use social media and how they feel about these platforms.

According to Adobe Advertising Cloud and Advanis' August 2019 "Voice of the Generations" report, just 33% of boomers surveyed in July agreed that "there is a place for companies interacting with individual people on social networks, forums and/or messaging sites." The figure rose to 49% among Gen Xers, 63% among millennials and 69% among Gen Zers.

The survey defines Gen Zers as those born between 1996–2001; millennials between 1977–1995; Gen Xers between 1965–1976; and boomers between 1946–1964.

Boomers' wariness about interacting with brands on social media likely reflects a general unease about digital privacy. The survey found that 43% of boomers endorsed the statement, "I worry about how my data is used all the time." Just 14% of Gen Zers and 20% of millennials said the same, as did 31% of Gen Xers.

Among all generational cohorts, the most-cited reason for using social media was “to share pictures and updates with friends and family.” But boomers were far more likely than Gen Zers to include that among their primary reasons for social usage (57% vs. 33%, respectively). Likewise, millennials were twice as likely as Gen Xers to say they use social to follow celebrities (18% vs. 9%, respectively).

Why Do US Internet Users Use Social Networks?				
<i>% of respondents, by generation, July 2019</i>				
1 Gen Z (18-23)	3 Gen X (43-54)			
2 Millennials (24-42)	4 Baby boomers (55-73)			
	1	2	3	4
Get news—it's convenient to follow news sources on social media	24%	26%	24%	22%
Get news—I don't trust or like mainstream media	14%	14%	16%	11%
Share pictures and updates with friends and family	33%	44%	50%	57%
It's where all my friends hang out, chat and have fun	30%	24%	23%	18%
Get inspired	26%	20%	14%	9%
Get advice, how-tos and to learn	23%	22%	19%	18%
Follow celebrities	23%	18%	9%	5%
Get involved in political debate about candidates or things that matter to me	18%	14%	9%	8%
Expand professional network	16%	18%	15%	9%
Influence and position myself as an idea maker and creative generator	16%	13%	7%	4%
Troll or comment	7%	9%	7%	7%
<i>Note: n=3,614; excludes "other"</i>				
<i>Source: Adobe, "Voice of the Generations Survey (US Results)" in partnership with Advanis, Sep 24, 2019</i>				
249883	www.eMarketer.com			

By contrast, “get news” stood out as a function that has a similar-sized constituency across generations, with millennials on the high end (26%) and boomers on the low end (22%).

More broadly (and unsurprisingly), social media simply looms larger in the lives of younger than older consumers. We estimate that 49.3% of US baby boomers will be social users this year. As one would expect, penetration is significantly higher among Gen Xers (77.5%) and millennials (90.4%).