



POINT OF VIEW

Debunking the Digital Divide

Older Americans & the Adoption of Digital



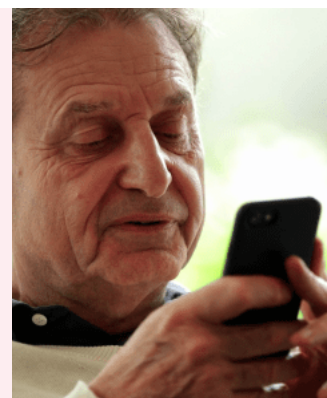
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I hear lines like these all the time:

- “ Why are we building a website? Seniors don't use digital.
- “ We need a paper option. Our patients will never find this.
- “ Remember, we're talking to seniors. Will they even use mobile?

These are artifacts of the still prevailing myth that older Americans can't, don't, and won't use digital.

While it may be true that “seniors” do make up the bulk of remaining Americans who lag in tech adoption, that does not mean they as a whole are tech resisters. So, let's unpack the myths to better understand tech adoption and consumption patterns of aging Americans.



By the numbers

According to Pew Research Center, the total US population aged 65+ topped 51 million people in 2017. That's more than 15% of our total population. And by 2022, that number is expected to grow to 58 million (22% of total) as more Baby Boomers age into the seniors cohort.

Who is a “Senior Citizen” anyway?

With more than one-fifth of Americans soon falling into this age group, it's important that we understand its nuances and diversity.



Multiple life stages: An important consideration is that Americans over the age of 65 fall into a range of life stages. With consequential impact on trends in employment, marital status, child-rearing, health, financial independence, and more, this diversity can significantly impact the overall mindset of this group as a target audience.



Generational shift: Just as Baby Boomers refused to follow the worn paths of those before them earlier in life, they are once again redefining what it means to age. Americans on the younger side of 65+ are more active, vibrant, and independent—increasingly rejecting the label of “Senior Citizen” entirely. This also means they tend to play a stronger role in their own health, and they have more time available to do that.

Let's talk digital

Aging Americans are increasingly digital, are active on social media, and use mobile devices for a range of activities.



More than half of all Internet users aged 65+ (57%) actively use social media



1 in 5 use their mobile device simultaneously (dual screen) while watching TV



Over 80% use text messaging regularly



An important digital divide remains

Although digital adoption is now ubiquitous, we continue to observe a major difference in technology adoption when factoring in skew by age and household income. This is especially evident with the adoption of mobile.



Age: Americans between the ages of 65 and 69 are **twice as likely** to use the Internet as those over the age of 80. And within this same group, smartphone ownership is **nearly four times higher** (59% vs 17%).



Household income: Since 2013, smartphone adoption **has increased 39%** among Americans aged 65+ with household incomes over \$75,000 per year. That's **15% higher** than the 65+ age cohort overall. Tablets follow a similar adoption curve but generally see less active and extensive use than smartphones because they are sometimes treated as entertainment devices for reading, games, and videos.



Attitude: A primary motivator for Americans aged 65+ to use technology is social interaction: **9 in 10** Americans aged 65+ say they use technology to remain connected with family and friends. While adoption has occurred, we generally see lower levels of “attachment” to devices and digital media than we do in younger generations. **Only 8%** of those aged 65+ are rated as going on the Internet “constantly” (compared to 41% for those aged 18-29). **17%** say they go online “about once per day.”



Video and media preferences: While it is growing, digital video viewership remains vastly lower for those aged 65+ compared to younger cohorts. Americans aged 65+ spend over 50 hours per week watching TV but remain laggards in adopting streaming services. However, as aging Americans increasingly rely on the use of smartphones and tablets for a greater share of media consumption time, we expect this to change. Currently, email is a top mobile activity, with **9 in 10** aging Americans who own smartphones reaching for their mobile devices to check and send emails.

What does this mean for marketers?

Ignoring digital media for your brands targeting aging Americans is no longer an option. Digital is ubiquitous, and marketers who fail to let go of the biases will miss important opportunities to reach, engage, and sustain relationships with their audiences.

1

Email and website content must be optimized for mobile devices

2

Look to Facebook for quick-win and efficient media opportunities

3

Consider SMS programs to nurture patient engagement and drive adherence

To discover more about the evolving behaviors of your customers and how you can engage them with digital, speak with your Evoke Client Services lead or contact business@evokegroup.com.