

What's the big deal with Facebook?

A study of the social media use of 1,362 Canadians

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Abacus Data and Millennials

Generations are created by history and defined by era, and each has its own uniqueness. Whether Lost, Silent, Boomer, or X, each generation gone by has been distinct and required business to understand and adapt accordingly.

We are now at the height of the millennial generation; those born between 1980 and 1995 have grown into one of the most powerful consumer groups in the world. We are confident, upbeat, self expressive and receptive to new ideas and ways of living. More importantly, we have grown up through the evolution of the internet and mobile communication, and in many cases, have seamlessly integrated those technological advances into our daily lives.

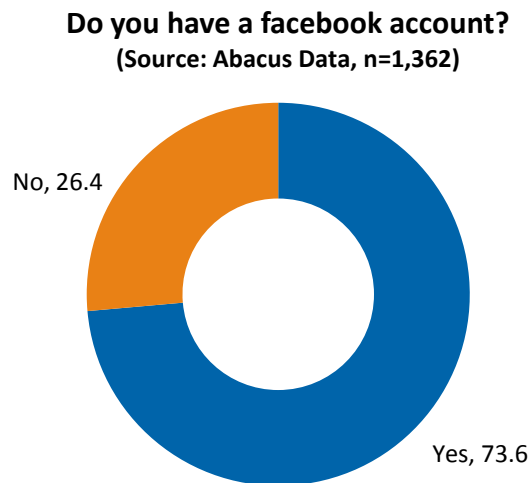
Understanding the uniqueness of millennials is a critical step in developing products, services, and business strategies to capitalize on this new, and very savvy, group of potential customers. Developing this understanding, however, is not always a simple task. Millennials are highly mobile, and less likely to participate in traditional research studies.

Abacus Data has developed a specialized practice to act as a bridge between businesses and millennials. We are experts in research methodology and strategic development, but more importantly, we are a team of millennials. We bring our expertise in both areas together to bridge generational gaps and help your business reach this critical consumer group.

This brief report explores the ways in which millennials use social media, and how that differs from other generations. The scope is narrow, specifically dealing with Facebook use, but the message and the differences are clear.

1.0 Who has it?

In December, 2010, Abacus Data conducted a representative national survey of 1,362 Canadians on their use of Facebook. On the whole, as illustrated in Figure 1.0, a majority of Canadians said they had a Facebook account.



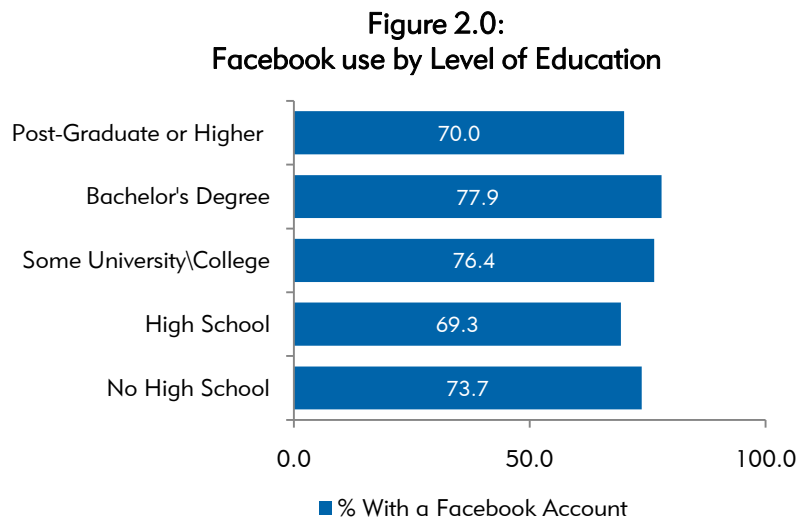
While nearly three quarters of respondents self-identified as Facebook users, it is important to note that this survey was conducted online. As a result, respondents will have a slightly higher propensity to be internet users than if the survey had been conducted over the phone. However, despite this difference, it is clear that Facebook has been effective at reaching a large number of Canadians, and the vast majority are engaging, at least somewhat, on the social media site.

Edging on 75% of market penetration in Canada, Facebook has enormous potential as a medium of social interaction, but what effect, if any, does this penetration have on the way Canadians communicate and interact with each other?

2.0 Who uses it?

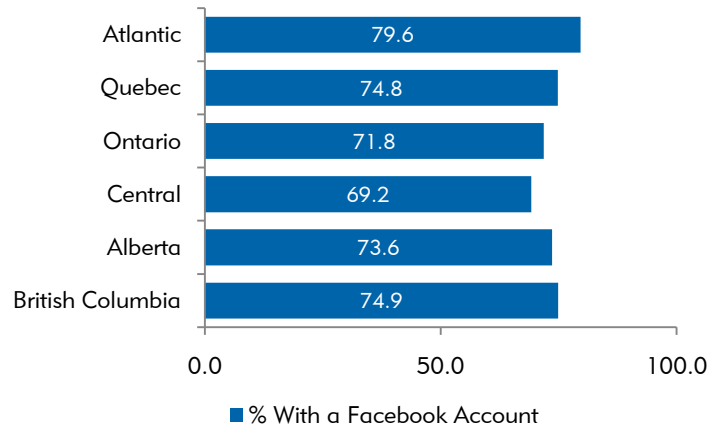
With an understanding of just how many Canadians self-identify as Facebook users, it's important to determine who these users are. Without background knowledge, one may hypothesize that Facebook is used nearly exclusively by young people and students, as its origins can be traced to university and college campuses. However, the idea of student-exclusive use quickly evaporates when membership is broken down by level of education.

Figure 2.0 displays the percentage of Facebook users by their level of education, and reveals very little variance. While respondents with bachelor's degrees were most likely to use Facebook, and those with only high school educations were least likely, the differences were marginal.



Expanding the demographic analysis to region, living environment (urban or rural), and immigration status yielded similar results. Figure 2.1 (region) reveals that Atlantic Canadians are most likely to be Facebook users, while central Canadians (residents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba) are least likely. However, these differences are again marginal, in this case less than 10 percentage points in total.

**Figure 2.1:
Facebook use by Region**



Examining living environment and immigration status yields even greater similarity. Only half a percentage point separates those born in Canada from those born outside Canada, and less than three percentage points separating those in rural environments from urbanites.

**Figure 2.2:
Facebook use by Environment and Immigration Status**

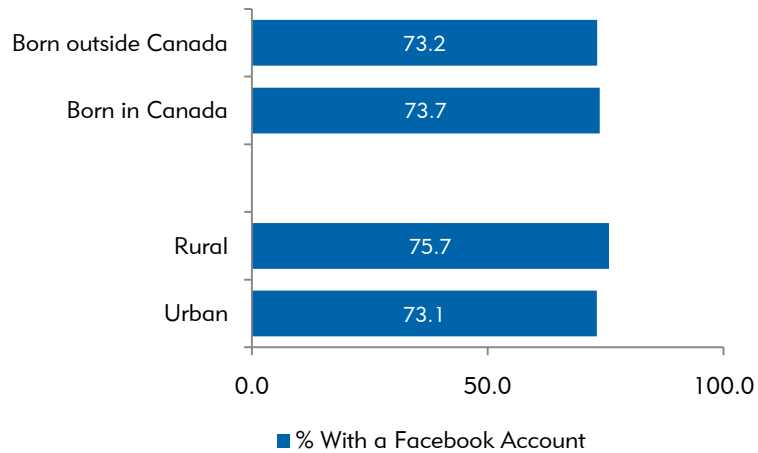
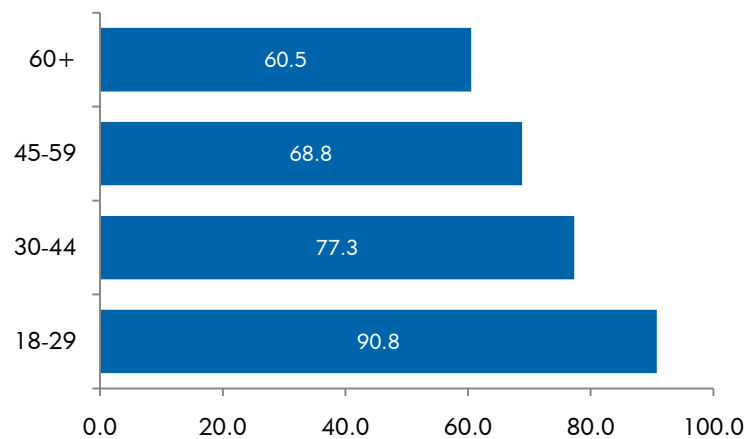


Figure 2.3: Facebook account by Age

Only a breakdown of the age demographic yields significant differences in Facebook membership rates. However, the generational 'gap' is not as pronounced as one may have expected. While over 90% of millennials (those in the 18-29 age group) have a Facebook account, well over half of adults 60 and up do as well. These results suggest that the often cited 'generational gap' may in fact be more of a generational gradient.

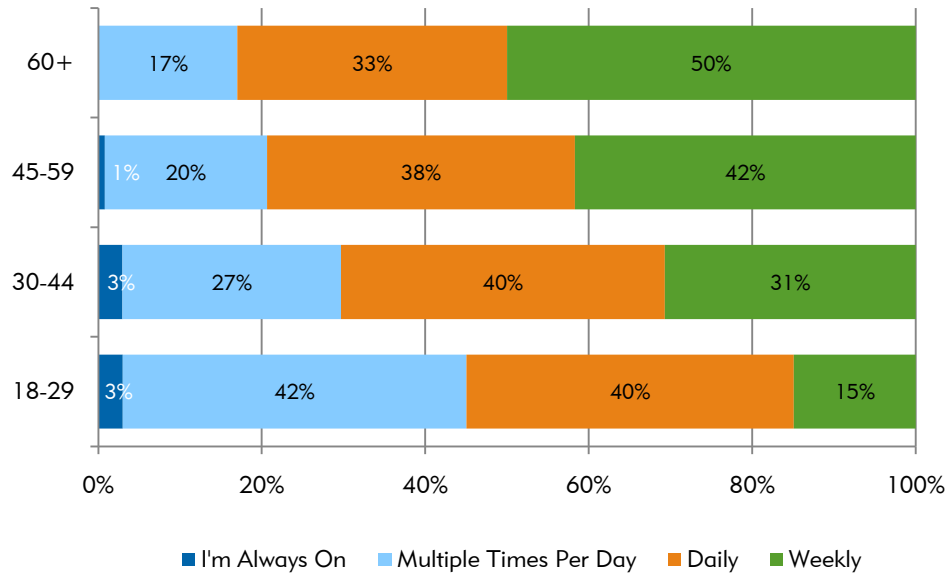
3.0 Age and Social Media Adoption

If social media and the internet are not strictly the domain of millennials, does that mean the older generations aren't as different as some have suggested? In a word, no; the key differences are not in the membership incidence, but rather in the usage patterns.

It's one thing to have a Facebook account, but another to use it. Figure 3.0 represents the regularity with which four sampled generations check their Facebook accounts. At a basic level, millennials are clearly much more involved, with 50% of us checking our Facebook accounts at least multiple times per day, and over 80% checking at least once per day.

Rates of regular usage for the older generations were considerably lower, with 67% of 30-44 year olds, 58% of 45-59 year olds, and 50% of those 60 and over checking at least daily.

Figure 3.0: How often do you check you Facebook account? by Age Group
 (Source: Abacus Data, n=1,362)

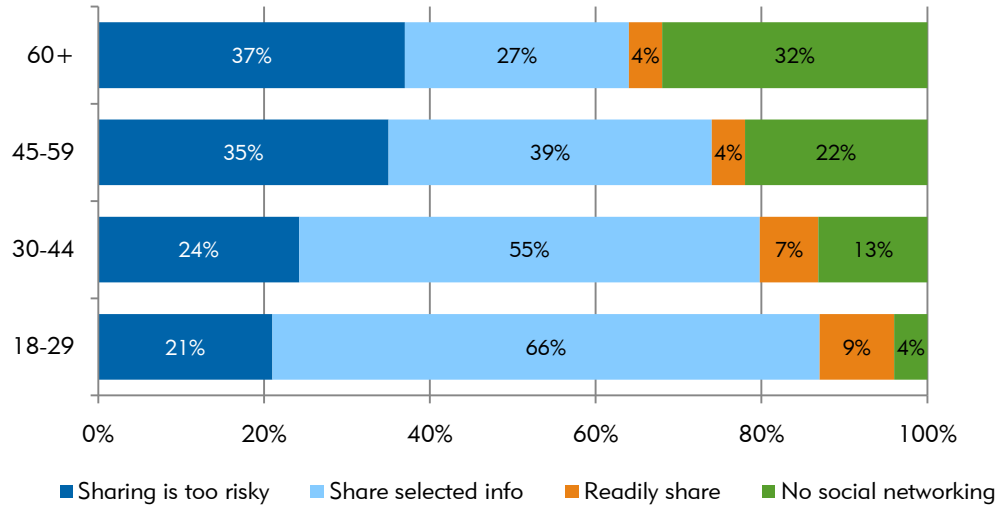


Delving further into usage patterns, Figure 3.1 displays the results of a statement test. We presented respondents with four statements: “Sharing any kind of personal information online is too much of a risk for me”; “I share selected personal information with my family and friends via Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, or a personal website”; “I readily share information. I am not concerned with privacy risks, as only my friends want to see what I share online”; and “I don’t use the internet for personal networking or social reasons”.

Continuing the trend, millennials were most likely to share information, and least likely to not be involved in social media. As age increased, respondents were more likely to say that they do not use social media, but they were also more likely to feel that sharing information online is too risky. This could be indicative of a fundamental, generational attitudinal difference.

Among other things, sharing information online can be a sign of comfort with the internet as a social medium, or as an acceptance of social networking as a means of keeping in touch with friends on a regular basis. Figure 3.1 indicates that 75% of millennials share some degree of information online. It is this sort of comfort with a new technology that can lead to natural adoption – using Facebook simply as another, natural, means of communication.

Figure 3.1: How much information do you share online? by Age Group
 (Source: Abacus Data, n= 1,362)

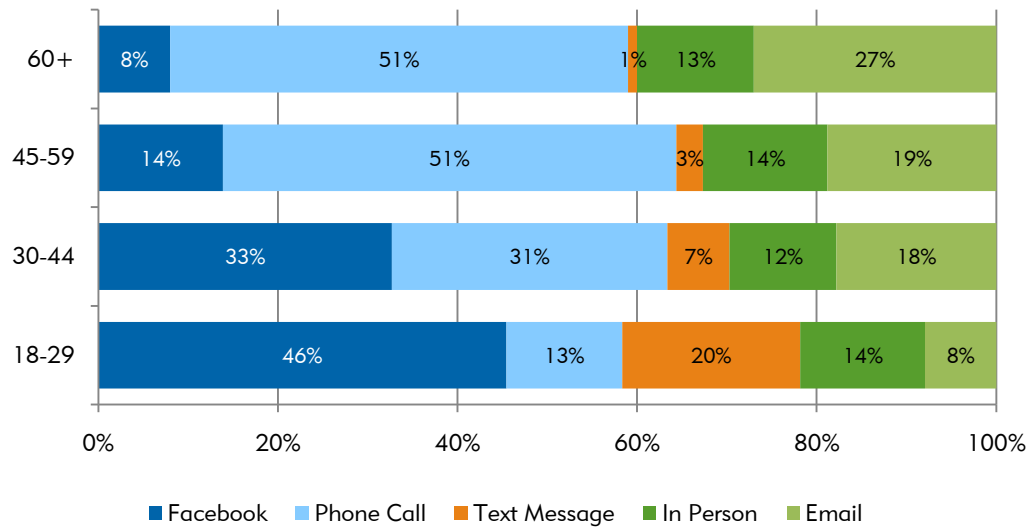


Perhaps the most important measure for determining the reach of social media, and Facebook in particular, is a test of communication. We asked each respondent how they were most likely to hear about a noteworthy event within their circle of friends. Figure 3.2 illustrates the results.

Nearly half of millennials indicated that Facebook was the most likely way to hear of noteworthy events, with text messages second at 20%. Only 13% of millennials indicated they would most likely hear by phone. In contrast, over 50% of 45-59 year olds and those over 60 were most likely to hear by phone.

Results also indicate that older generations are not cut off from technology as a means of communication. Nearly 30% of those over 60 said they were most likely to hear of noteworthy events via email.

Figure 3.2: If a noteworthy event happend within your circle of friends, how are you most likely to hear about it? by Age Group
 (Source: Abacus Data, n=1,362)



4.0 So what is the big deal?

A gap does exist between millennials and other generations, but not in the simple use of the internet or other modern technologies. The use of Facebook as a natural extension for social communication is where a generational gap becomes evident. The prevalence of email use and Facebook membership among older generations suggests that they are active on the internet; they communicate and share information via email. Real penetration of Facebook as a means of relaying meaningful information within a social circle, however, still seems to rest with millennials.

As millennials, we are most likely to have Facebook accounts, most likely to be active on them, and most likely to use Facebook as a medium for regular and meaningful communication. We may not even think of it as a novelty, but rather in the same way that older generations consider the phone – as a simple, natural, and efficient means of interacting with others. That’s the ‘big deal’ with Facebook in generational terms: it has become an integrated and often seamless communication tool for a generation.

How Can Abacus Help?

Obviously, such a dramatic shift in the way generations interact demands marketers target each generation differently. What is less obvious, however, is the way in which millennials should be targeted, and how these nuanced generational differences can be used to the advantage of your business.

As, first and foremost, a data-based research company, Abacus has the expertise and technical skill to tailor the right kind of research solution for your business and carry it out quickly and efficiently. More

importantly, at Abacus, we are all millennials. As the leading edge of our generation, we are able to provide insight and information that goes beyond trend models and linear graphs.

Whether you are looking to expand an existing area of your business, boost sales, design new products, or test the efficacy of your advertising campaigns, we can help give you the edge you need.

Visit our website at www.abacusdata.ca, or give us a call to find out how we can help.

5.0 Methodology

Survey Administration

The survey was conducted online with 1,362 respondents in English and French using an internet survey platform licensed by Abacus Data. A random sample of panelists was invited to participate in the survey from a larger internet panel of over 100,000 Canadians. The survey was completed between December 3 and 6, 2010.

Steps were taken to ensure that the survey respondents were representative of the Canadian population over 18 years of age. Balances were set to match the distribution of actual census data for age, gender, education, language, urban/rural, and province. Moreover, statistical weighting was applied to the data after the completion of the survey for age, gender, and region.

Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research, that their participation in the study was voluntary, and that all information provided would remain confidential. Furthermore, the survey was registered with the National Survey Registration System.

Sample Distribution

A sample of 1,362 drawn from the Canadian population would be expected to provide results accurate to within plus or minus 2.7 percent in 95 out of 100 samples. Since a random sample was not generated for this project, there is technically no margin of error. However, a margin of error for this project is comparable to plus or minus 2.7percent. Readers should be aware that margins of error are higher for subgroups and the smaller the subgroup the higher the margin of error.

More interviews in Atlantic Canada were conducted than are normally done in a representative national survey to get more robust findings in the region. Statistical weights were used to balance the regional numbers according the actual population figures.

Subgroups	Sample (Unweighted)	Sample (Weighted)
Province		
Atlantic Provinces	253	98
Quebec	257	318
Ontario	474	511
Manitoba and Saskatchewan	79	92
Alberta	132	147
British Columbia	166	182
Gender		
Male	708	654
Female	654	694
Age Group		
18 to 29	182	273
30 to 44	385	379
45 to 59	509	364
60 and over	286	332
Type of Community		
Urban	1008	1044
Rural	354	304
Total	1,362	1,348