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Social Media Usage: 2005-2015

65% of adults now use social networking sites – a nearly tenfold jump in the past decade

BY Andrew Perrin

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

Aaron Smith, Associate Director, Research
Dana Page, Senior Communications Manager

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

About This Report

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals. Find related reports online at www.pewresearch.org/internet

Andrew Perrin, *Research Assistant*

Maeve Duggan, *Research Associate*

Lee Rainie, *Director, Internet, Science, and Technology Research*

Aaron Smith, *Associate Director, Research*

Shannon Greenwood, *Assistant Digital Producer*

Margaret Porteus, *Information Graphics Designer*

Dana Page, *Senior Communications Manager*

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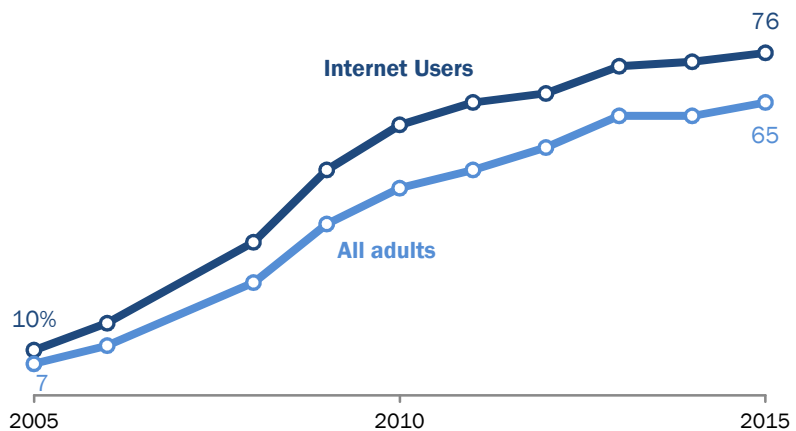
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Main Findings

Nearly two-thirds of American adults (65%) use social networking sites, up from 7% when Pew Research Center began systematically tracking social media usage in 2005. Pew Research reports have documented in great detail how the rise of social media has affected such things as [work](#), [politics](#) and [political deliberation](#), [communications patterns around the globe](#), as well as the way people [get and share information about health](#), [civic life](#), [news consumption](#), [communities](#), [teenage life](#), [parenting](#), [dating](#) and even people's [level of stress](#).

Social Networking Use Has Shot Up in Past Decade

% of all American adults and internet-using adults who use at least one social networking site



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

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A special analysis of 27 national surveys of Americans across the past decade documents this substantial spread of technology throughout the population, although the overall number of users of social networking sites has leveled off since 2013.¹ At the same time, there continues to be growth in social media usage among some groups that were not among the earliest adopters, including older Americans.

The figures reported here are for social media usage among all adults, not just among those Americans who are internet users. In many previous Pew Research reports, the share of social media users has been reported as the proportion of *internet users* who had adopted such sites, rather than the full adult population, which continues to include a relatively small share (currently 15%) who still remain offline. In this report, a broader picture of the American landscape is presented, and so the figures are based on the entire adult population.

¹ The data reported here result from a general question about whether people use social networking sites of any kind, rather than an aggregation of individual site usage. No data is available from 2007.

Across demographic groups, a number of trends emerge in this analysis of social media usage:

- **Age differences: Seniors make strides** – Young adults (ages 18 to 29) are the most likely to use social media – fully 90% do. Still, usage among those 65 and older has more than tripled since 2010 when 11% used social media. Today, 35% of all those 65 and older report using social media, compared with just 2% in 2005.
- **Gender differences: Women and men use social media at similar rates** – Women were more likely than men to use social networking sites for a number of years, although since 2014 these differences have been modest. Today, 68% of all women use social media, compared with 62% of all men.
- **Socio-economic differences: Those with higher education levels and household income lead the way** – Over the past decade, it has consistently been the case that those in higher-income households were more likely to use social media. More than half (56%) of those living in the lowest-income households now use social media, though growth has leveled off in the past few years. Turning to educational attainment, a similar pattern is observed. Those with at least some college experience have been consistently more likely than those with a high school degree or less to use social media over the past decade. 2013 was the first year that more than half of those with a high school diploma or less used social media.
- **Racial and ethnic similarities:** There are not notable differences by racial or ethnic group: 65% of whites, 65% of Hispanics and 56% of African-Americans use social media today.
- **Community differences: More than half of rural residents now use social media** – Those who live in rural areas are less likely than those in suburban and urban communities to use social media, a pattern consistent over the past decade. Today, 58% of rural residents, 68% of suburban residents, and 64% of urban residents use social media.

What follows is an overview of changes over time in social media by various demographic groups. A full archive of Pew Research Center reports on different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn as well as about social media usage on mobile devices in general can be found at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/topics/social-networking/>.

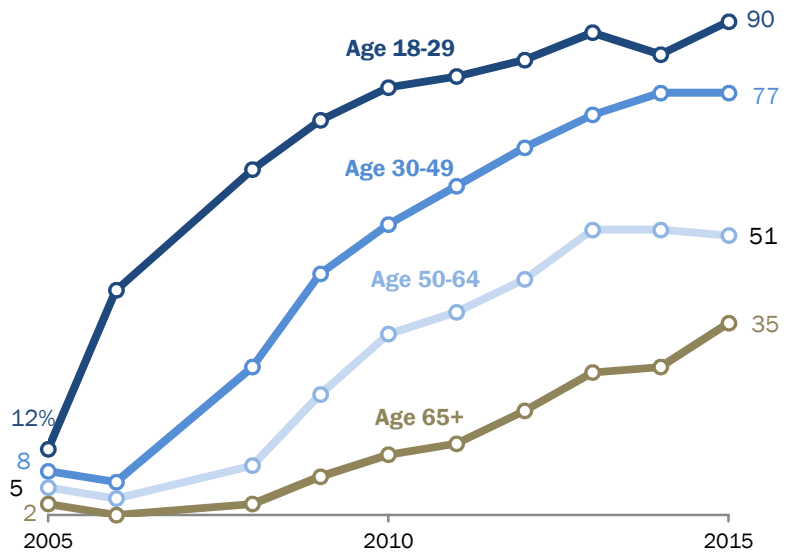
Social Media Usage by Age: Ubiquitous Among Youngest Adults, Notable Among Older Adults

Age is strongly correlated with social media usage: Those ages 18 to 29 have always been the most likely users of social media by a considerable margin. Today, 90% of young adults use social media, compared with 12% in 2005, a 78-percentage point increase. At the same time, there has been a 69-point bump among those ages 30-49, from 8% in 2005 to 77% today.

While usage among young adults started to leveled off as early as 2010, since then there has been a surge in usership among those 65 and older. In 2005, 2% of seniors used social media, compared with 35% today.

Young Adults Still Are the Most Likely to Use Social Media

Among all American adults, % who use social networking sites, by age



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

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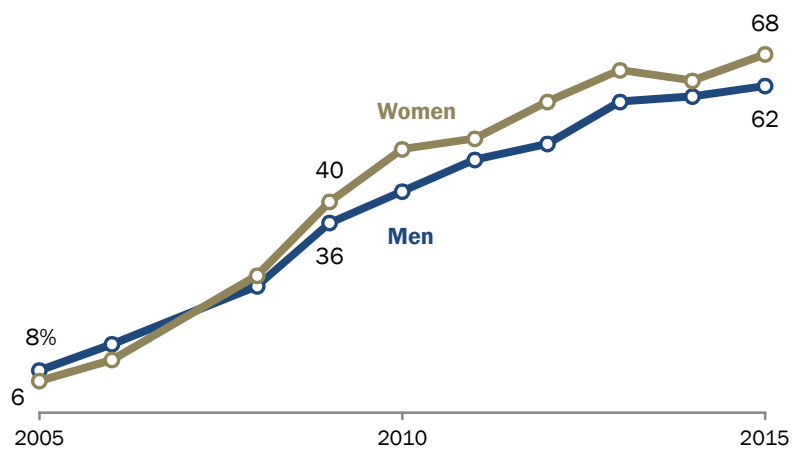
Social Media Usage by Gender: A Shifting Balance Over Time, With Parity Today

In 2005, 8% of men and 6% of women used social media.

Starting in 2009, women started using social media at slightly higher rates than men, although this balance has shrunk yet again in recent years. Today, 68% of women and 62% of men report social media usage, a difference that is not statistically significant.

Women and Men Use Social Networking Sites at Comparable Rates

Among all American adults, % who use social networking sites, by gender



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

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Social Media Usage by Educational Attainment: Those With Higher Education Levels More Likely to be Social Media Users

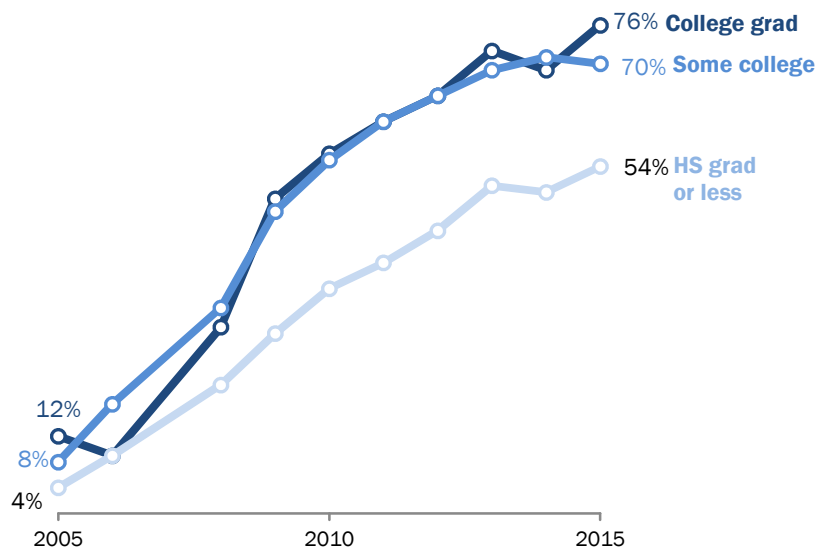
Those who have attended at least some college are more likely than those with a high school diploma or less to use social media, a trend that has been consistent since 2005. In that year, 4% of those with a high school diploma or less used social media, along with 8% of those who attended some college and 12% of college graduates.

Currently adoption rates for social media stand at 76% for those with college or graduate degrees, 70% of those with some college education and 54% for those who have a high school diploma or less.

At the same time, the share of those with a high school diploma or less who use social media has grown more than tenfold over the past decade.

Those With Lower Levels of Education Are Less Likely to Use Social Media

Among all American adults, % who use social networking sites, by education level



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

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Social Media Usage by Household Income: Those Living in Affluent Households More Likely to Be Social Media Users

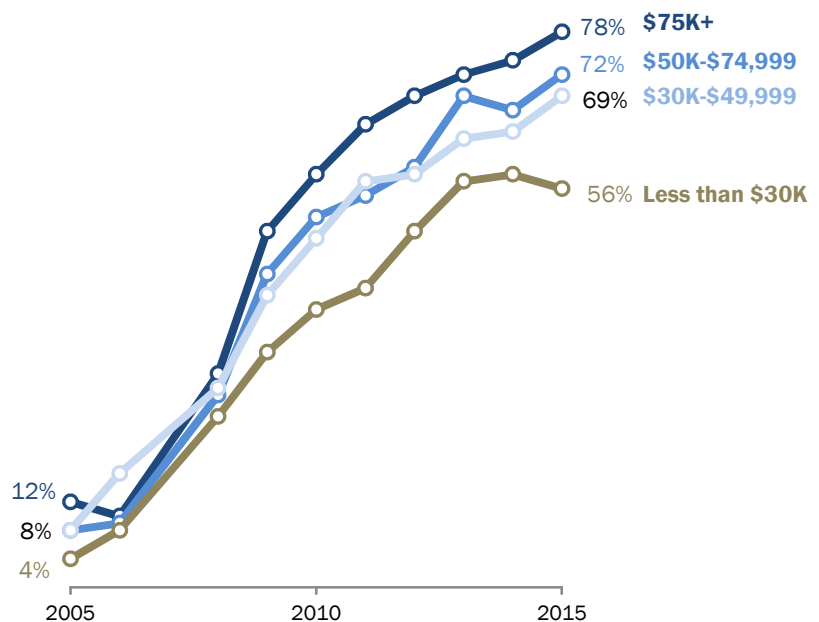
There were modest differences by household income when Pew Research first began measuring social media usage in 2005: 4% of those living in households earning less than \$30,000 used social media, compared with 12% of those living in household earning \$75,000 or more.

Those differences have persisted even as each group has seen dramatic growth in usage.

Today, 78% of those living in the highest-income households use social media, compared with 56% of those in the lowest-income households – a 22-point difference.

Those in Higher Income Households Lead the Way

Among all American adults, % who use social networking sites, by income



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

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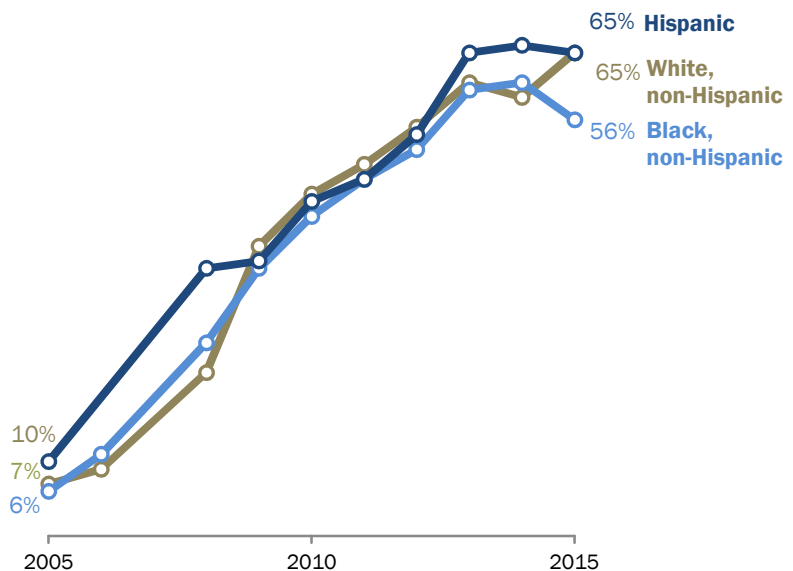
Social Media Usage by Race/Ethnicity: Consistent Similarities

When it comes to race and ethnicity, trends in social media adoption are defined by similarities, not differences. Whites, African-Americans and Hispanics have broadly adopted social media at the same brisk pace.

In 2005, 6% of African-Americans, 7% of whites and 10% of Hispanics used social networking sites. Today, those figures stand at 56% of African-Americans and 65% of both whites and Hispanics.

Racial Differences Not Very Evident as Social Media Usage Has Grown

Among all American adults, % who use social networking sites, by racial/ethnic group



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

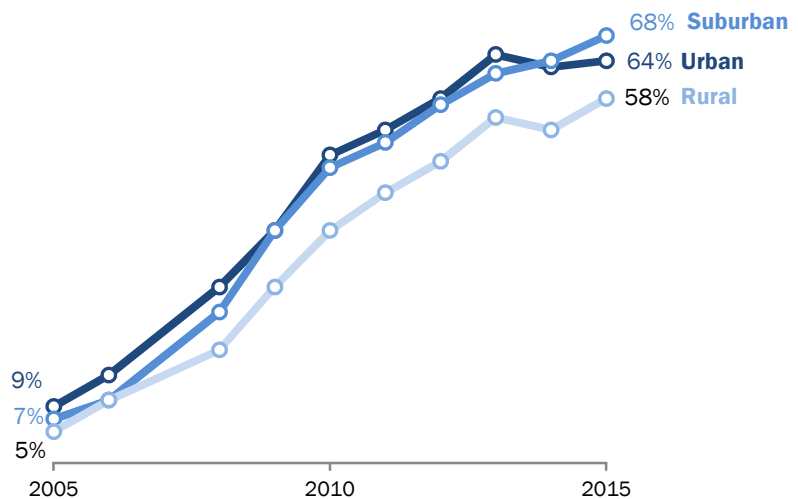
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Social Media Usage by Community Type: More Than Half of Rural Residents Now Use Social Media

Adults who live in rural communities have historically been the least likely to use social media. In 2005, 5% of rural residents, 7% of suburban residents and 9% of urban residents reported social media usage. Today, 58% of rural residents, 68% of suburban residents and 64% of urban residents use social media.

Rural Citizens Have Consistently Lagged Behind

Among all American adults, % who use social networking sites, by community type



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

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Methods

This analysis of social media usage is based on a compilation of 27 surveys and about 47,000 interviews among adult internet users and about 62,000 interviews among all adults conducted by Pew Research Center from March 2005 to July 2015. These surveys are combined, allowing for comparisons of trends among different demographic groups across years. Yearly totals are calculated by combining all surveys for the calendar year with appropriate weights applied. Weighting to adjust for disproportionate sampling and nonresponse reduces the precision of estimates beyond what would be achieved under simple random sampling. In this report, all measures of sampling error and statistical tests of significance take into account the design effect of weighting. The tables below show the number of surveys and interviews conducted each year for internet users and all adults respectively, as well as the margin of error for each yearly sample.

| Among Internet Users | | | | Among All Adults | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Year | Number of Surveys | Unweighted Sample Size | Margin of Error | Year | Number of Surveys | Unweighted Sample Size | Margin of Error |
| 2005 | 2 | 3,702 | +/-1.8% | 2005 | 2 | 5,416 | +/-1.5% |
| 2006 | 1 | 972 | +/-3.5% | 2006 | 1 | 1,464 | +/-2.9% |
| 2008 | 5 | 8,371 | +/-1.2% | 2008 | 5 | 11,521 | +/-1.0% |
| 2009 | 3 | 5,061 | +/-1.6% | 2009 | 3 | 6,764 | +/-1.4% |
| 2010 | 6 | 10,722 | +/-1.1% | 2010 | 6 | 14,327 | +/-1.0% |
| 2011 | 2 | 3,417 | +/-1.9% | 2011 | 2 | 4,537 | +/-1.7% |
| 2012 | 3 | 5,404 | +/-1.5% | 2012 | 3 | 6,767 | +/-1.3% |
| 2013 | 3 | 7,799 | +/-1.2% | 2013 | 3 | 9,264 | +/-1.1% |
| 2014 | 1 | 820 | +/-3.8% | 2014 | 1 | 1,002 | +/-3.5% |
| 2015 | 1 | 827 | +/-3.9% | 2015 | 1 | 971 | +/-3.6% |

Note: Data for 2007 is not available.

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Defining Social Media Users

The definition of a social media user in Pew Research Center surveys has changed when circumstances change. Our question about social networking use has varied over the course of these surveys, depending on the most common social networks at the time.

In 2005, social media users were defined as those who said “yes” to “Do you ever use online social or professional networking sites like Friendster or LinkedIn?”

In August 2006, social media users were defined as those who said “yes” to “Do you ever use an online social networking site like Myspace, Facebook or Friendster?”

From May 2008 to August 2011, social media users were defined as those who said “yes” to “Do you ever use the internet to use a social networking site like Myspace, Facebook² or LinkedIn?”

From February 2012 to January 2014, social media users were defined as those who said “yes” to “Do you ever use the internet to use a social networking site like Facebook, LinkedIn or Google Plus?”³

The most recent measure in July 2015 defined social media users as those who said “yes” to “Do you ever use a social networking site like Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn?”

² In August 2008, the question wording was “Do you ever...” and did not include the phrase “use the internet to...” In December 2008, only Myspace and Facebook were in the question, not LinkedIn.

³ In August 2012, the question wording was “Do you ever...” and did not include the phrase “use the internet to...”