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Which Boomers Are Using Social Media the Most?

Study Finds Striking Trends in How Growing Subset Stays Connected

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We know that boomers are big consumers of social media. Pew Internet's most recent study showed that use of networking sites in the 50-plus demographic grew 88% between 2009 and 2010 to 47%. Use among those 65-plus doubled to 26%, making them the fastest growing segment.

But here's an interesting cross-tabulation. Boomers who are caring for their aging parents are even more heavily reliant on sites like Facebook than boomers in general.

We love unusual segmentation like this. While promoting her book about boomer caregivers, "The Daughter Trap," Laurel Kennedy and her social-media consultant noticed an unusually high level of engagement. Instead of saying, "huh," and moving on, Ms. Kennedy, president of Chicago-based multi-generational consulting firm Age Lessons, partnered with ComScore to study the phenomenon. Their study examined the online habits of 3.8 million boomer caregivers.

Top 10 Sites for Boomer Caregivers by Reach

	Site	Reach
1	Facebook	91%
2	Amazon	76%
3	Walmart	41%
	Federated Media Publishing	41%
4	Linked In	37%

What they found was a great niche for marketers. According to Ms. Kennedy, estimates of the boomer caregiver population run around 15.5 million out of the 78 million boomers. They are split about 60/40 female to male. The level of care ranges from phone check-ins to live-in help. Seventy percent of the caregivers doing day-to-day care tasks are women. "Think of these women as Chief Wellness Officers for their families," she said, adding that they might also be subsidizing adult children as well as their pre-boomer parents.

They use social media for 150 minutes per month and view 70% more pages than the average internet user. They're driven to these sites by several primary reasons, according to the study.

5	Target	33%
6	Technorati	32%
7	Yelp	30%
8	WordPress	29%
9	My Life	21%
	Twitter	21%
10	Shopzilla	20%

Source: comScore for Age Lessons

1) Validate and reinforce their feelings: "No one plans for this, you just get a call in the middle of the night saying something happened." Being a caregiver, especially for the parents that always cared for you, causes all kinds of relationship stresses. Finding people and communities in similar situations is key for this group.

2) Simplify and customize their lives: Taking care of yourself is hard enough work. Taking care of your parents, especially when it happens out of the blue, is a major logistical problem. Using social media to keep up with friends and family can help keep things streamlined.

3) Information and advice: The study found that they are more likely to research than buy online, but that they do buy, too. They're three times as likely as the average boomer to use sites like Yelp and Citysearch before making a purchase.

Ms. Kennedy sees great potential for brands trying to reach this demographic in social-media channels. When taking care of multiple generations of family, "what falls by the wayside is self-care," she said. "That's an opportunity for brands that represent a break or an affordable luxury like skin care, spa treatments and other home and personal care items."

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