

Older folks flocking to online social networks: US study

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This picture taken in 2009 in Paris, shows the front page of the Facebook website. While online social networks remain havens for the young, they are also becoming increasingly popular with the over 50 crowd in the United States, a study released Friday showed.

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"Young adults continue to be the heaviest users of social media, but their growth pales in comparison with recent gains made by older users," said Mary Madden, from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project.

"Email is still the primary way that older users maintain contact with friends, families and colleagues, but many older users now rely on social network platforms to help manage their daily communications."

Nearly half of US Internet users ranging in age from 50 to 64 engaged in online communities such as Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn during the year that ended May 30, according to the study.

That marked an 88 percent increase from the prior year.

The ranks of online seniors 65 years of age or older using social networks doubled to 26 percent, the research indicated.

One in five "online adults" ages 50 to 64 claimed to use [social networking](#) websites daily, while 13 percent of "wired seniors" said they did so.

"Social media has the potential to bridge generational gaps," Madden said.

"There are few other spaces -- online or offline -- where tweens, teens, sandwich generation members, grandparents, friends and neighbors regularly intersect and communicate across the same network."

Pew research showed that older social network users were inclined to reconnect with people from the past, potentially creating support networks for retiring or changing careers.

Older people were more likely than the young to be living with chronic illnesses and using the Internet for blogging or online health discussions.

They also appear to be developing a taste for firing off terse text message "updates" at microblogging service Twitter, according to the study.

One-in-ten Internet users in ages 50 to 64 said they used Twitter or another status update service, and six percent said it was part of their

daily routine.

A lack of broadband Internet service was seen as a main impediment to older people embracing life online.

"Even though older adults may be among the most resistant to broadband, there is evidence that once these users get a taste of high-speed access, they often come to rely on the Internet as an everyday utility in their lives," the study said.

The findings came from a US telephone survey conducted in May of this year.

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