

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Well-heeled boomers narrowing tech-use gap

Demographic's members have time and money to spend on new media

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Date: Monday, December 16, 2013

Canadian boomers have lagged behind younger tech-obsessed consumers when it comes to buying gadgets and getting hooked on the Web, but a new report suggests that might be changing.

The results of telephone surveys with more than 6,000 Canadians conducted on behalf of the Media Technology Monitor were used to compare technology trends among members of Gen Y (defined as 24-to 33-year-old consumers), Gen Z (aged 18 to 23) and the 47-to-67 boomer demographic.

Younger consumers were earlier adopters of smartphones and streaming web video but some of the gaps may be narrowing as wellheeled boomers are eagerly discovering new technologies. "While (boomers) have not grown up with publicly available Internet and wireless technologies, they have become avid users of these offerings," the report states.

"Younger boomers are reaching their earning prime, giving them money to spend on media technology."

When it comes to spending time online, the members of Gen Z told pollsters they were typically using the Internet for about 28 hours a week. That was a couple of hours more than Gen Y respondents, and nearly double the time boomers estimated they were on the Internet.

Almost half of all boomers said they were smartphone owners, a considerable number, although it paled in comparison to younger consumers. About 82 per cent of Gen Z and 78 per cent of Gen Y poll respondents said they had an iPhone, Google Android phone, a BlackBerry or another hightech phone. Younger boomers between 47 and 57 were most likely to embrace tablets. About 36 per cent of the consumers in that cohort said they owned a tablet, which was more than Gen Y (34 per cent) and Gen Z (28 per cent) respondents.

But that was the only example of boomers leading the way in tech adoption.

Twice as many Gen Y and Z members were using the Internet on their phone compared to boomers, and four times as many were using social media on a smartphone.

Boomers said they watched 20 minutes of online video a day and were not yet big users of Netflix, averaging less than an hour on the streaming service a week.

Meanwhile, Gen Y consumers said they watched almost an hour of online video a day and a couple of hours of Netflix a week. The members of Gen Z said they watched almost 10 hours of web video and two-and-a-half hours of Netflix each week.

The second-screen trend - using a computer, phone or tablet while channel surfing - registered with all three groups of consumers.

Just over half of the boomers and about 85 per cent of the Gen Y and Z poll respondents said they sometimes multi-task on the couch while watching TV.

About 21 per cent of the boomers, 44 per cent of Gen Yers and 55 per cent of the Gen Z members called themselves heavy multitaskers, saying they often or almost always use a device while in front of the TV.

The margin of error for the boomers' poll results are considered accurate within 1.9 percentage points 19 times out of 20, while it's 2.2 percentage points for the younger Gen Y and Gen Z consumers.