

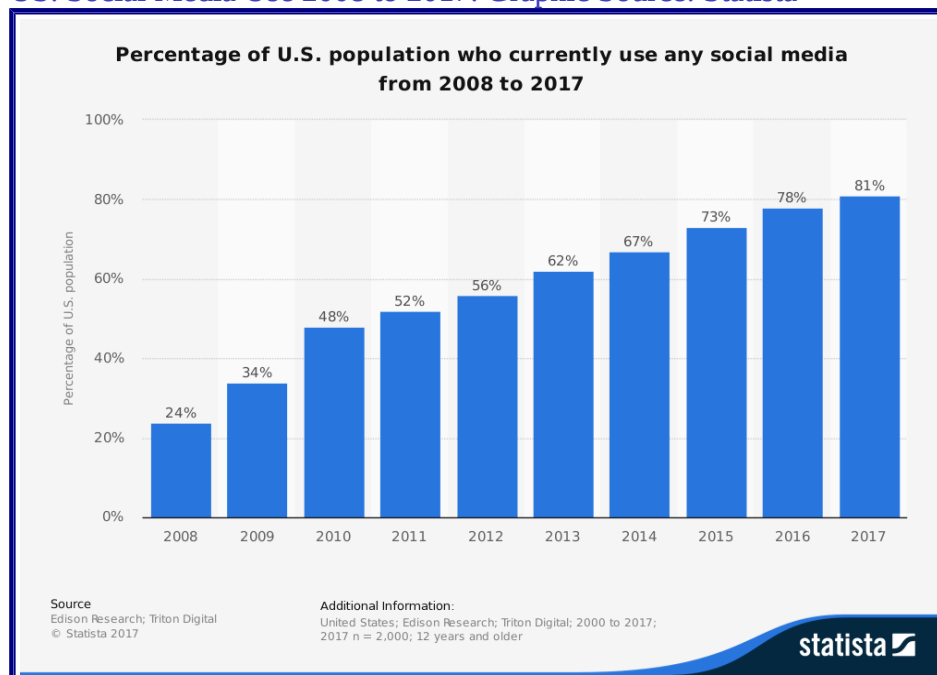
# Getting Smart About Social Media: Adoption and Engagement

*Getting Smart About Social Media: Adoption and Engagement* is the first in a series of three posts intended to help me get a basic familiarity with key facts, trends, and concepts related to social media (SM) adoption and engagement. In this post, I'll focus on the current state of, and recent trends in, SM adoption and engagement, demographic differences in SM usage, and SM usage across the world. My expectation isn't to create a complete literature review, but to develop a baseline understanding of the topic from which I can generate some useful and interesting questions.

In the second post, I will review factors related to SM adoption and engagement, with an emphasis on the most commonly used theories of engagement. In the final post, I will review some of the primary ways people use SM platforms and how these expected uses can impact adoption and engagement.

## Current State and Recent Trends in US Social Media Adoption and Engagement

US. Social Media Use 2008 to 2017. Graphic Source: Statista



As 2017, an estimated 81% of the online US population 12 years and older (about 209 million people) have a social media profile. From 2008 to 2017, SM use in the US increased 57 percentage points, from 24% of the online population ([Statista, 2017](#)). Of the total adult population (including those without Internet access), 69% used social media in 2016. From 2005 to 2016, SM use increased 64 pct points from 5% of the total adult population ([Pew Research Center, 2017](#)).

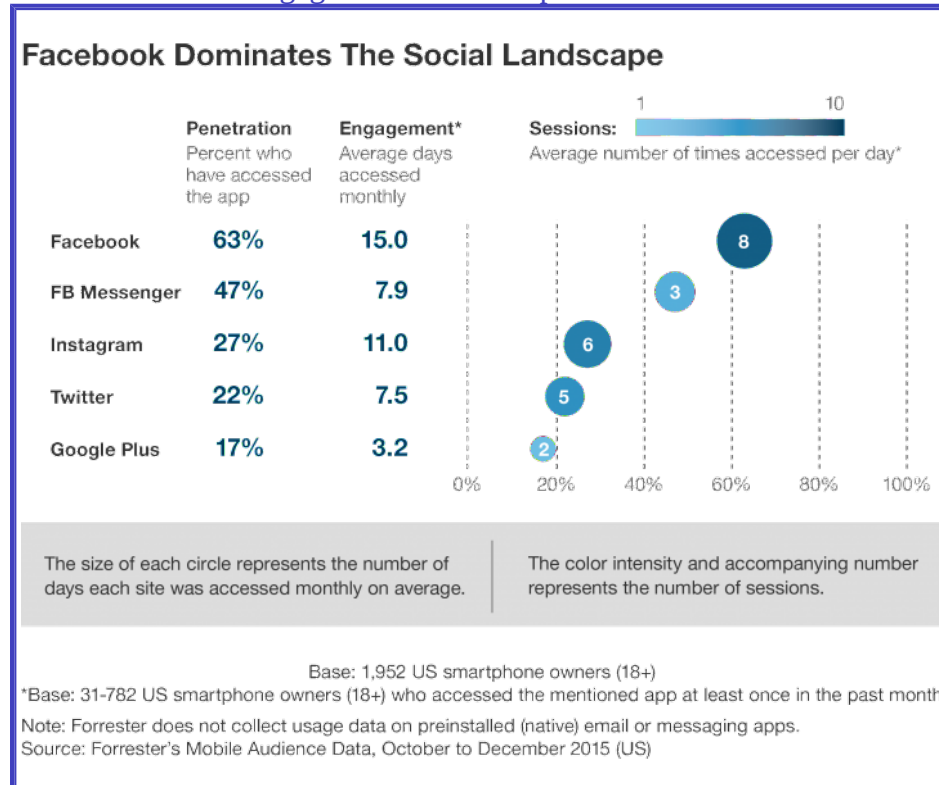
By far, the most popular SM platform is Facebook. In November, 2016, 42% of all visits to social media sites were to Facebook alone; more than 15 pct points higher than second place YouTube (25%)

## Getting Smart About Social Media: Adoption and Engagement

and about eight times as many as third place Twitter (5%). ([Statista, 2016](#)). In terms of users rather than visits, Facebook still dominates the social media landscape ([Greenwood et al, 2016](#)). In 2016, 79% of online adults used Facebook, about 2.5 times the percentage of online adults who use Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, or LinkedIn. Finally, the reciprocity of SM site usage illustrates another way in which Facebook has an out-sized influence on the social media landscape ([Greenwood et al, 2016](#)). Of online adults who use only one platform, 88% of them use Facebook. On the other hand, over 85% of adults who use Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, or Instagram also use Facebook. In some ways, Facebook acts as a gateway for introduction to other SM platforms.

The user base for all five of the major social media platforms grew considerably from 2012 to 2016 ([Duggan, 2015](#); [Greenwood et al, 2016](#)). The percent of adults with online access who use Facebook increased 12 percentage points from 67% to 79%, with a 7 pct point increase from 2015 to 2016 alone. Over the same time period, the percentage of online adults who use Twitter (16% to 24%), LinkedIn (20% to 29%), Pinterest (15% to 31%), and Instagram (13% to 32%) also experienced substantial growth. However, most of the growth for these four platforms occurred from 2012 to 2015.

### US. Social Media Engagement 2015. Graphic Source: Forrester Research



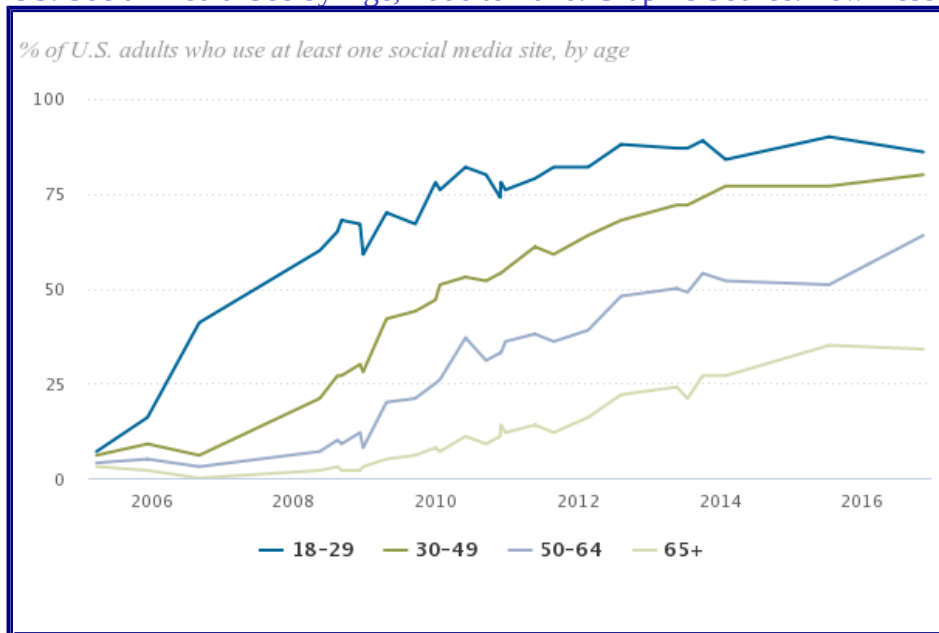
In terms of social media engagement, Americans spent an average of 2 hours and 6 minutes daily on general SM in 2016 ([WeAreSocial, 2017](#)). But this social media engagement was distributed unevenly across platforms. About 76% of Facebook users visit the site daily, with 55% of users visiting several times a day ([Greenwood et al, 2016](#)). Even among seniors, about 70% who use Facebook log in daily. ([Anderson and Perrin, 2017](#)). This is a much higher level of daily engagement than for Instagram (51%), Pinterest (25%), LinkedIn (18%), and

Twitter (42%). Similarly, in 2015, Facebook users accessed the site an average 8 times a day over an average of 15 days a month. In comparison, Instagram and Twitter users accessed those sites much less frequently (6 and 5 times a day; 11 and 7.5 days per month respectively) ([SmartInsights, 2017](#)).

## Demographic Differences in US Social Media Adoption and Engagement

The [Pew Research Center](#) has analyzed demographic differences in US social media use along multiple dimensions, including: age, education, income, gender, race and ethnicity, and community. Among adults who have used at least one SM platform over 2005 to 2016, there were not large differences in usage across gender or race and ethnicity (White, Black, and Hispanic). However, there have been considerable and consistent differences in SM use by education, income, and community during this time. In the case of community, the key demarcation is between rural and non-rural, with 60% of rural residents using SM in 2016 compared with about 70% of urban and suburban residents. For education and income, the key demarcation is the lowest education (HS diploma or less) and income (less than \$30,000). In both of these cases, social media usage is more than 10 pct points lower in 2016 than SM usage for the rest of the population.

US. Social Media Use by Age, 2006 to 2016. Graphic Source: Pew Research Center



Of course, age is the largest and most recognized demographic difference in SM use. From 2005 to 2016, there has been a clear, negative relationship ([Pew Research Center, 2017](#)) between age and social media usage. The key demarcation appears to be between people under and over 49 years. There is a 16 percentage point drop in SM usage between the 30-49 years and 50-64 years groups and an additional 30 pct point drop for the 65+ years group.

There are several possible reasons for the lower social media use among older people, including: comfort with technology and health problems or disabilities. Only 26% of older adults feel very confident using computers or other electronic devices for online activity and 34% feel only a little or not at all confident. In addition, 28% of older adults have health problems or disabilities that keep them from participating fully in work, school, housework, or other activities. Little more than half of disabled seniors (55%) use the Internet at all compared with 72% of non-disabled seniors ([Anderson and Perrin, 2017](#)). Moreover, there are similar gaps in SM usage among older adults by age, education, and income as for the larger population. Adults 80+ years, with a HS diploma or less, or annual incomes of less than \$30,000+ have lower rates of SM usage ([Anderson and Perrin, 2017](#)).

## Getting Smart About Social Media: Adoption and Engagement

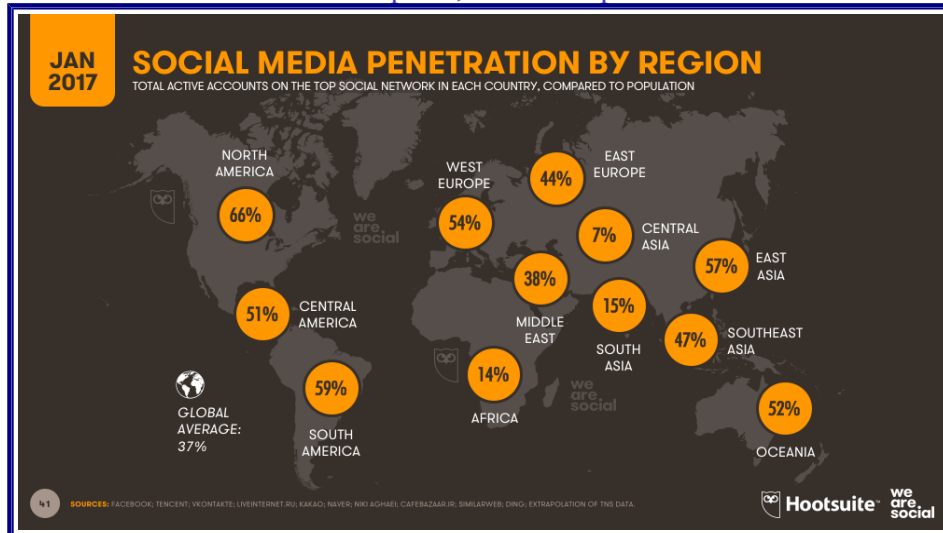
When we consider some of the top social media platforms separately, interesting demographic differences in usage emerge ([Greenwood et al., 2016](#)). In 2016, Facebook had the fewest demographic differences in usage; with at least 72% of online adults using the platform across income levels, education levels, community, gender, and age (except adults 65+). Even so, women were a bit more likely to use Facebook than men (83% vs. 75%). Instagram usage was considerably higher among women than men (38% vs. 26%) and among adults 18-29 years than 30-49 years (59% vs. 33%). Similarly, women were nearly three times more likely to use Pinterest in 2016 than men (45% vs. 17%). Twitter usage was higher for the college educated than people with a HS diploma or less (29% vs. 20%) and for people 18-29 years than 30-49 years (36% vs. 23%). Finally, reflecting the site's use as a business and career tool, there were large differences in LinkedIn usage. The college educated were more than four times as likely to use LinkedIn than people with a HS diploma or less (50% vs. 12%) and people with an annual income of \$75,000+ were more than twice as likely to use the site than those with <\$30,000 annual income (45% vs. 21%).

The most recent information on platform specific social media usage by race reflects fewer differences ([Duggan, 2015](#)). In 2015, Twitter and Instagram usage was higher among black and Hispanic online adults than white adults (28% and 28% vs. 20% for Twitter; 47% and 38% vs. 21% for Instagram). Pinterest usage was lower among black adults than Hispanic or white (23% vs. 32% and 32%). Finally, more Hispanic adults used Facebook than black adults (75% vs. 67%).

## Social Media Adoption and Engagement Across the World

As of January 2017, nearly 2.8 billion people were estimated to be active social media users; 37% of the total world population ([WeAreSocial, 2017](#)). The population of social media users grew by 21% or nearly half a billion people (482 million) over 2016. Based on estimates from eMarketer, the SM user base more than doubled between 2010 and 2017; increasing 153% over those years ([Statista, 2017](#)).

Worldwide Social Media Adoption, 2017. Graphic Source: WeAreSocial



Despite the substantial worldwide growth in social media, usage rates and growth differ dramatically across the world ([WeAreSocial, 2017](#)). In 2017, North and South America lead the world in social media use (66% and 59% respectively) and Africa and Central Asia have the lowest rates of SM use (14% and 7% respectively). These regional differences are

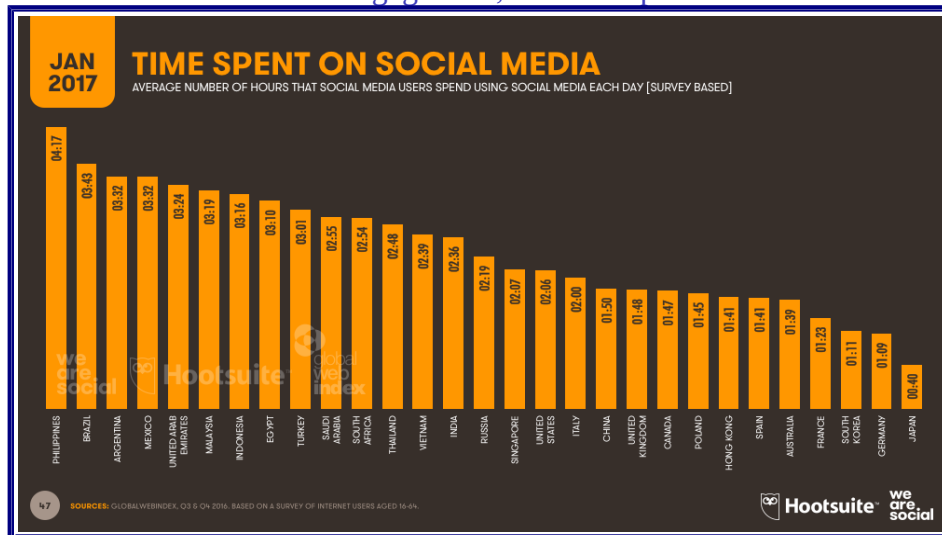
## Getting Smart About Social Media: Adoption and Engagement

reflected in country level differences in SM penetration, ranging from > 80% in a few Middle Eastern and Asian countries (e.g. United Arab Emirates, Brunei, South Korea, and Taiwan) to < 5% in several African and Central Asian countries (e.g. Chad, Niger, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). These country level differences are also evident in recent SM growth rates. In 2016, several countries experienced social media usage growth about twice as large as the overall world growth, including: Saudi Arabia (73%), United Arab Emirates (46%), and India (40%). On the other end of the spectrum are countries where social media usage grew by less than half the overall world amount, including South Korea (9%) and Poland (7%).

Of course, social media access is dependent on a country's Internet access. However, Internet connected countries differ widely in social media usage. In a survey of 40 countries, researchers found a key demarcation between advanced economy and developing economy countries ([Poushter, 2016](#)). All but two of the countries with 85% or more of online adults using social media were developing economies, such as the Philippines, Venezuela, Malaysia, and Nigeria. On the other hand, social media use was generally between 65% and 75% of online adults for advanced economy countries such as the US, UK, and Australia. Moreover, several advanced economy countries stand out for having high rates of Internet access, but relatively low rates of SM use. In Germany, only 50% of all online adults report using SM with Japan (51%) and France (57%) reporting similarly low rates of social media use among adults.

In terms of the most dominant sites, the world social media landscape looks similar to that of the US. ([WeAreSocial, 2017](#)). Of the twelve most popular SM sites in 2017, Facebook had the most monthly active users; almost 900 million more than the next most popular SM site, YouTube. Popular US. SM sites such as Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn round out the top 12 sites. However, this list does show the impact of region-specific social networking on the SM landscape, such as Vkontakte in Russia and Baidu Tieba and Sina Weibo in China.

### Worldwide Social Media Engagement, 2017. Graphic Source: WeAreSocial



Worldwide social media engagement matches the patterns of adoption. In 2017, Internet users with a social media account had an average of 8 SM accounts, more than double the average of 3 SM accounts in 2012 ([GWI Social Summary, 2017](#)). In 2016, social media comprised about one-third of all the time Internet users spent online. This share of online time translated into an

average of 2 hours and 19 minutes a day. Considering Facebook alone, about 85% of global members visited this SM site at least daily in 2015, with about 55% visiting more than once a day ([GWI Social](#)



## Getting Smart About Social Media: Adoption and Engagement

[Summary, 2016](#)). However, similar to general social media adoption, engagement levels differ substantially across countries ([WeAreSocial, 2017](#)). A number of developing economy countries show average SM engagement levels of more than 3 hours a day, including: the Philippines (4:17), Brazil (3:43), Argentina (3:32), and Mexico (3:32). On the other end of the spectrum, several advanced economy countries show average SM engagement levels of less than 1.5 hours a day, including: France (1:23), South Korea (1:11), Germany (1:09), and Japan (0:40).

Finally, the demographic differences in SM adoption observed in the US. were generally reflected across the world. Globally, there were not significant differences in social media adoption by gender ([GWI Social Summary, 2016](#); [GWI Social Summary, 2016](#)). These analyses also found little or no differences in global SM adoption across income levels. However, a 2016 [Pew Research Center](#) study found that better educated Internet users were more likely to use social media than less educated online adults. This study also found that although there's no gender or income difference in global SM usage, there are significant gender, income, and education differences in Internet access itself. Better educated and higher income adults in nearly all of the countries surveyed were more likely to have Internet access, by margins as low as 9 percentage points (for education in South Korea) to as high as 61 pct points (for education in Burkina Faso). There were also a number of countries where men were more likely to have Internet access than women by margins of at least 10 percentage points, including several in Africa, a couple of countries in South Asia, and Japan. Similar to the pattern in the US., age is a determining factor in SM usage. Globally, the turning point in social media adoption seems to be under and over 35 years, with SM usage decreasing consistently for Internet users 35 years and older ([GWI Social Summary, 2016](#); [GWI Social Summary, 2016](#)). Likewise, the [Pew Research Center \(2016\)](#) report found 19 of 40 surveyed countries with gaps in social media usage between online adults under 35 years and 35 years and older of at least 20 percentage points.

## Discussion

This initial foray into learning about social media raised several questions about adoption and engagement. First, we saw that income and education are strong factors in US social media usage and global Internet access, with less wealthy and educated adults being less likely to use SM. To what extent are these characteristics working as proxies for other personal differences that actually drive SM engagement (e.g. literacy, ESL, health and disability, general social engagement)? In addition, we saw that age is a major factor in global social media usage, with younger adults more likely to use social media. Are there life cycle effects for social media engagement? Will young adults continue high levels of SM engagement throughout adulthood or will engagement patterns change as young adults mature? What can we learn from the SM usage of older adults to anticipate changes in engagement as current young adults age? Interestingly, we saw that some countries such as Germany, France, and Japan have high Internet access but low SM use. Are there other differences between countries, particularly in social capital or age distribution, that may reflect these differences in SM use among advanced economy countries? Finally, social media adoption and engagement have been consistently higher and more widely distributed for general social media sites such as Facebook compared to more specific-use sites such as Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. Should our expectations of growth and engagement for social media be more specific to the primary uses and audiences of the platform?