

By Community

The 2005 study was our first view into how the use of information resources, technology and libraries varied by age. Five years later, we wanted to understand more about how different user communities use and perceive online resources and their libraries—what was different, what activities and beliefs were shared, and if the lines between the generations and online activities were blurring, or becoming more defined, as technologies evolved.

As in 2005, teens (ages 14–17), young adults (ages 18–24) and college students adopt new technologies quickly. Today, teens lead in the use of ask-an-expert sites. Young adults and college students are the most active social networking and media users. Gen Xers (ages 25–45), Boomers (ages 46–64) and Seniors (age 65+) are closing the gap with triple-digit growth over the last three years in social site use.

Americans, no matter their life stage, are relying more heavily on libraries during tough economic times. The economic downturn had the most negative job impact on Gen Xers and Boomers, who are most likely to have reduced spending on entertainment, books, CDs, DVDs and dining out—and to have increased their library use.

Perceptions and online resource use varied fairly widely across age groups and between students and nonstudents, but the gaps from 2005 are closing. The beliefs and attitudes about libraries and librarians were strikingly similar across age groups, but library use varied widely.

We wanted to capture their views and advice to libraries in information consumers' own words. A summary of their advice and sample quotes are provided for each community. Teens, young adults, Gen Xers and college students advise the library to update and add to their collections, while Boomers and Seniors advise the library to extend hours.

The library offers valued service across all generations. The following is what we learned.

COLLEGE STUDENTS

52–63

TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

64–71

GENERATION X

72–77

BOOMERS

78–83

SENIORS

84–89

GENERATIONS AT THE LIBRARY AND ONLINE

90–93

