

# Internet Use in the Elderly (65+)

## Findings from Switzerland

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### Current situation

While the age groups of up to 59 years have shown a strong increase in Internet usage since 1997, intensive Internet use among people aged 60 years and above lags strongly behind. Older people are particularly affected by this "digital divide", which can potentially lead to social exclusion (see Fig. 1).

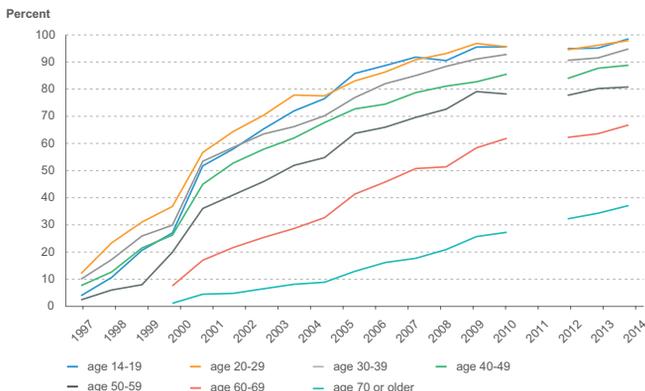


Fig. 1: Digital Gap Switzerland. Own diagram based on Federal Statistical Office (2015)

### Aim and research question

In connection with the network "Digital Integration Switzerland" the Center for Gerontology conducts a study that will provide information on the reasons for the relatively low Internet usage of the elderly, and it should identify starting points for the promotion of Internet use by this population.

### Methodology

In 2009, information about the current use of Internet services, as well as needs, expected utility, fears and competence in terms of technology was collected from a total of 1105 persons aged 65 years and above in all language regions of Switzerland by means of a telephone survey, supplemented by a postal survey. In 2014, a continuation study (N = 1037) was performed; in this case, the mobile Internet and the everyday importance of the Internet were also measured for the first time.

### Recommendations from the study

The findings show opportunities for and barriers of Internet use in the elderly, and provide guidance to overcoming the "digital gap" between generations. In addition to raising awareness and providing encouragement and direct support, a user-friendly design for Internet offerings is recommended on the supply side. Furthermore, support packages should be expanded and alternative access to information should be preserved.

### Results of the study from 2010

- In 2010, about 40% (aged 65 and above) used the Internet at least once over the past six months.
- Significant differences in usage exist between the age groups (see Fig. 2).
- The preferred and most attractive applications are similar in both Internet users and nonusers. General applications (email, searching for information, etc.) are preferred over specific applications (multimedia, social networks, etc.).
- The use is not in competition with traditional media.
- In general, the Internet is evaluated more positively by users than by nonusers, but a quarter of the latter tend towards a positive assessment as well.
- The fear that non-participation in the Internet leads to social exclusion is shared by a few respondents.
- The use of the Internet by the immediate social environment is strongly related to one's own use.
- The multivariate analysis states the number of interesting web applications, the technology affinity, and encouragement to Internet usage in the social environment, the general attitude to the Internet and – with a negative sign – age as the strongest predictors of use. Education and income also play a role.
- In an additional study (2013) based on focus group interviews (N = 36), views on the requirements for "age-appropriate" web design were collected. It was shown that the elderly have particular web design requirements and requests. However, an exclusive focus on "websites only for the elderly" should be avoided.

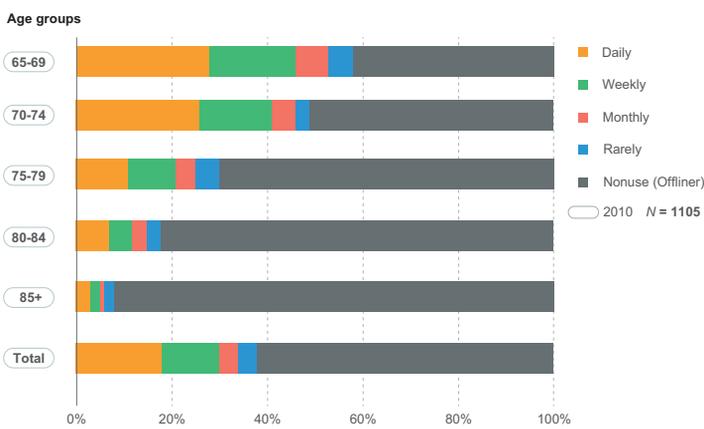


Fig. 2: Internet usage by age groups. Schelling & Seifert (2010)

### Continued study 2015

In mid-2014 a continuation of the study was conducted (see Methodology). Since the survey was unfortunately postponed no official data can be presented at the date of the poster presentation. However, it can already be noted that Internet use from 2009 to 2014 has increased significantly (by 47%), but still many (40%) older people aged 65 and up did not use the Internet. The mobile Internet is used by 32% of older Internet users (mostly younger men with a good education and a high affinity for technology).