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RESEARCH AREAS

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Millennials are the most likely generation of Americans to use public libraries

BY ABIGAIL GEIGER ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/AUTHOR/AGEIGER/](http://www.pewresearch.org/author/ageiger/))



(Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Millennials in America are more likely to have visited a public library in the past year than any other adult generation.

(http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/21/millennials-are-the-most-likely-generation-of-americans-to-use-public-libraries/ft_17-06-21_librariesabouthalf/) A new analysis of Pew Research Center survey data from fall 2016 finds that 53% of Millennials (those ages 18 to 35 at the time) say they used a library or bookmobile in the previous 12 months. That compares with 45% of Gen Xers, 43% of Baby Boomers and 36% of those in the Silent Generation. (It is worth noting that the question wording specifically focused on use of *public* libraries, not on-campus academic libraries.)

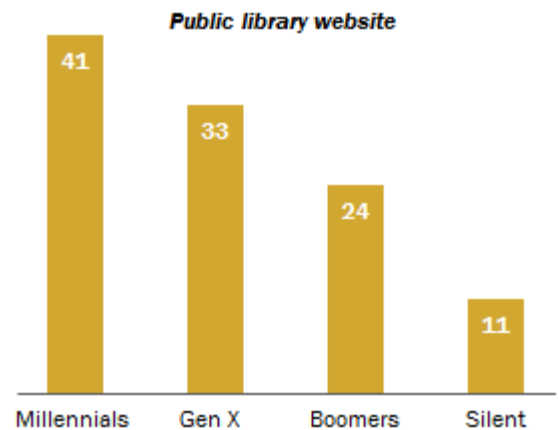
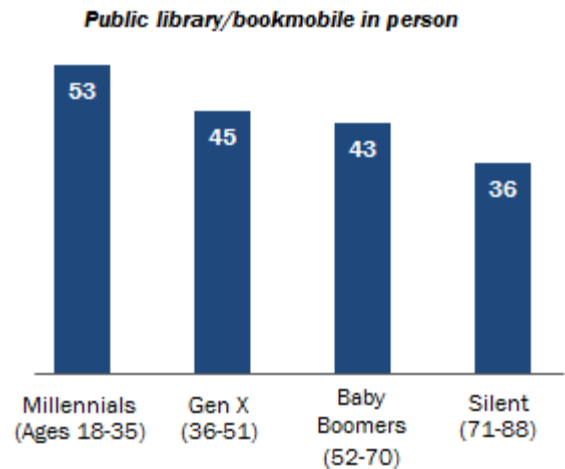
All told, 46% of adults ages 18 and older say they used a public library or bookmobile in the previous 12 months – a share that is broadly consistent with Pew Research Center findings in recent years.

Members of the youngest adult generation are also more likely than their elders to have used library websites. About four-in-ten Millennials (41%) used a library website in the past 12 months, compared with 24% of Boomers. In all, 31% of adults used a library website in the past 12 months, which is similar to the percentage that reported using library websites in late 2015.

Relatively high library use by Millennials might be related to changes (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/03/13/library-engagement-typology/>) that many public libraries have undergone in the past 20 years. Previous Pew Research Center surveys have documented how extensively people use computers and internet connections (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/09/library-usage-and-engagement/>) at libraries, as well as how interested they are in extra services (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/09/15/libraries-at-the-crossroads/>) such as literacy programs for young children, meeting spaces for community groups, and technology “petting zoos” (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/01/22/library-services-in-the-digital-age/>) that provide opportunities to explore 3-D printers and other tech gadgetry.

About half of U.S. Millennials have visited a public library or bookmobile in the past year

% in each generation who visited a _____ in the past 12 months (2016)

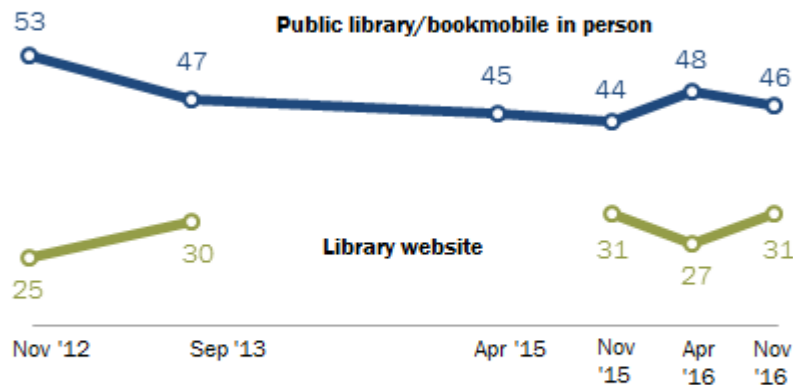


Source: Survey conducted Sept. 29-Nov. 6, 2016.

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In-person library use in the U.S. remains fairly stable

% of U.S. adults ages 18 and older who visited a _____ in the past 12 months



Note: No data specifically on website usage were gathered in April 2015.

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 29-Nov. 6, 2016.

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Across all generations, use of public library mobile apps is less common than use of libraries and their websites. The survey found that just 8% of Millennials used a library app in the past 12 months, as did 9% of Gen Xers and 9% of Boomers.

Beyond demonstrating generational differences in library use, the survey showed other demographic differences in library use. For instance:

- Women are more likely than men to say they visited a public library or bookmobile in the past 12 months (54% vs. 39%). And women are similarly more likely to use library websites (37% vs. 24%).
- College graduates are more likely than those whose education ended with a high school diploma to use libraries or bookmobiles in the past 12 months (56% vs. 40%). And a similar gap applies to use of library websites.
- Parents of minor children are more likely than non-parents to have used a library in the past 12 months (54% vs. 43%).

Read more about Americans' specific engagement with libraries and library resources in a 2016 Pew Research Center report (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/09/library-usage-and-engagement/>).

Note: This report was made possible by The Pew Charitable Trusts, which received support for the project through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



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11 Comments



Trey Mahaffey • 3 days ago (#comment-676378)

it is almost like the younger generation doesn't have the resources necessary to stay at home with books they have purchased. it's almost like they are... poor.

hmmm, perhaps there is a correlation to the age of this demographic and the wealth they have not been able to obtain in their short time here on this earth.

thank goodness we have "journalists" that make sure we have this type of information.

[Reply](#)



Anonymous • 3 days ago (#comment-676380)

Came here to say this. There's a correlation between income level and using the library, buying houses, having kids, eating out, etc.

Millennials take a lot of flak for these things. Perhaps they are simply responsible choices given the low incomes and high prices of the times.

[Reply](#)



James Linnane • 3 days ago (#comment-676377)

I love Pew and its surveys except for a few things. One thing I really hate is the dumb terms you use to describe different age groups. Please, just label the age groups as age groups.

[Reply](#)



Anonymous • 3 days ago (#comment-676374)

Public libraries which connect citizens to the wealth of human knowledge are among our greatest achievements as a society. It is nice to see that young people are appreciative of these traditional bastions of culture and learning.

[Reply](#)



Anonymous • 3 days ago (#comment-676373)

So yeah... isn't this obvious? "Hey did you know that the younger generations are at the library more often than others?"

Obviously! School, research, college, studies are very closely related to ANYONE age 14-26 going to school from ANY era lol! Not gonna lie this seems like a silly pointless study:

On a side-note, did you guys know that Dogs are 63% more likely to bark than Cats?

[Reply](#)



Anonymous • 3 days ago (#comment-676385)

Did you read the full text?

It doesn't include school libraries.

[Reply](#)



Anonymous • 3 days ago (#comment-676392)

I used the public library too when going to school.

[Reply](#)**Anonymous** • 3 days ago (#comment-676388)

...Except that the study was for public libraries, which are less useful for academic research than university libraries for the age group in question. In my experience, we use public libraries for leisure and if we really enjoy a book we'll consider purchasing it from a bookstore, instead of buying a book first and risking spending money on something we don't ultimately enjoy (books are expensive and take up a lot of space!). Also, as outlined in the article, public libraries have evolved to be great resources for fabrication (like with Maker-type spaces), accessing prohibitively expensive technologies, and building other skills. It's not pointless: it's demonstrating that we actively use these community resources and that they are worthwhile programs.

[Reply](#)**Anonymous** • 3 days ago (#comment-676389)

It is not so obvious that young people would choose to go to a library to study or do research. So much information is available through their computers and the internet, why leave the house? Why leave their bedrooms? Why not hang out at a coffee shop
(many do...I wonder what the percentage is?) It is interesting that so many prefer the calm and quiet of a library.

[Reply](#)**Anonymous** • 5 hours ago (#comment-676407)

It's interesting that now we criticize people for using the library....

[Reply](#)**Anonymous** • 4 days ago (#comment-676372)

I've been an avid library user and as a result an avid book reader since I was in elementary school over 50 years ago, so I guess I'm not the typical member of the Silent Generation. Besides anyone who knows me knows "silent" wouldn't describe me.

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