

Response to assertion “the intersection of mobile and social is where the future of advertising lies”

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements of

Introduction to Digital Advertising Landscape - University of Colorado Boulder/Coursera

Week 4 Assignment

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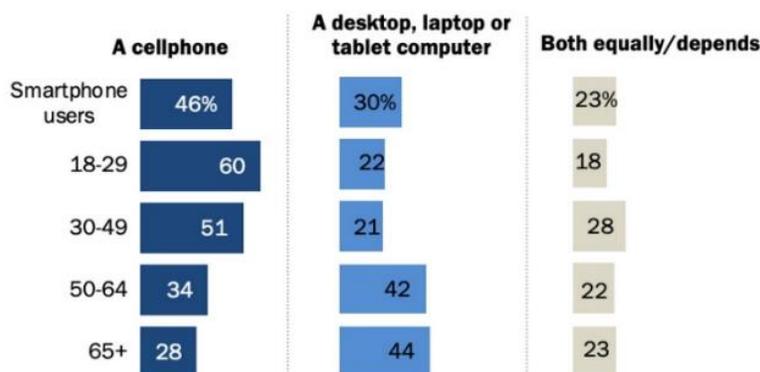
In this week’s reading, the 2019 article [“The Future of Digital Advertising: How ‘Mobile-first’ is turning into ‘Mobile-only’”](#) by Pocketmath CEO Joanne Joynson-Hewlett, the author asserts **“the intersection of mobile and social is where the future of advertising lies.”** I disagree with that assertion. That vision of the future fails to consider the following:

1. The [U.S. Census Bureau reports](#) that the “year 2030 marks a demographic turning point for the United States. Beginning that year, all baby boomers will be older than 65. This will expand the size of the older population so that one in every five Americans is projected to be retirement ageLater that decade, by 2034, we project that older adults [65+ years of age] will outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history.”
2. The Millennial generation, the largest generational group currently, is now entering their 40s (1981 having been the earliest birth year for that generation according to some definitions). 15 years from now, in 2036, that entire generation will be 40 years old or older (1996 having been the latest birth year for Millennials).
3. It is in your 40s when the [vision problem of presbyopia](#) begins, requiring the use of reading glasses.
4. Speaking from experience (I am 50+ years old), reading is still cumbersome with reading glasses. You need to either switch to reading glasses or tilt your head to use bifocals. You need to always hold the text a fixed distance from your face to maintain focus. You also have diminished peripheral vision. Therefore, once you need reading glasses, your days of reading your smartphone while walking are over. To see what I mean, observe older people like me in the supermarket trying to read packaging even while wearing our "cheaters."

We can see the impact of age-related vision problems on cellphone usage statistics in the United States. Shown below is 2019 data [from Pew Research Center](#) that reveals this:

Smartphone owners' preferred way of accessing the internet varies substantially by age

% of smartphone owners who say they mostly go online using...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019.
 "Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2019"

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In the data above, note that in the 30- to 49-year-old range (which includes many Millennials even in 2019) there is a transition from mostly-cellphone to "both equally/depends". In older groups, the preference for larger screens ("A desktop, laptop, or tablet computer") doubles from what it is for 30- to 49-year-olds. Many people will argue this is due to Baby Boomers being less tech-savvy, but the shift that begins in the 30- to 49-year-old group is the counter-argument.

I conclude that social media on mobile devices or smartphones may continue to grow (at least in the U.S.), but not tremendously and not for long. That growth would be driven by the immigration to the U.S. of people younger than 40 years old, [as reported by the Pew Research Center](#). Increased usage by recent immigrants has implications for the types of messaging, text, and positioning any advertising would have, complicating how increased social-by-mobile could benefit advertisers. Also, as the entire Millennial generation continues to enter their 40s and their vision deteriorates, we will see smartphone usage for social media drop as that generation switches to easier-to-read larger screens as shown by the chart above.

Speaking from experience as someone who needs reading glasses, this is why I don't spend much time reading on my smartphone. The activities where I spend most of my smartphone time are the non-reading activities of listening to music, podcasts, and audio books. In such activities, only audio advertisements would get my attention. To sell to people 40+ years old (which will be most of the U.S. population 15 years from now unless we experience another baby boom), audio ads will be best for smartphone users. This needs to be kept in mind for anyone whose primary market will be people in that growing, older demographic.

Besides reduced vision, dexterity for typing on a mobile device is also diminished with age. Stiff joints and arthritis make working with a cramped mobile keypad difficult. Fortunately, I have no

first-hand experience yet, but I know people older than me who do. Without first-hand experience or frequent observation of aging, it is easy to think it will never happen to you. This brings me to the large blind spot in this week’s article, “The Future of Digital Advertising: How ‘Mobile-first’ is turning into ‘Mobile-only,’” the 2019 article written by Pocketmath CEO Joanne Joynson-Hewlett. A comparison of what the author says in her article and what her biography reveals shows she has an age-related blind spot when it comes to mobile usage. We need to take her biography into consideration when assessing her conclusions in the article.

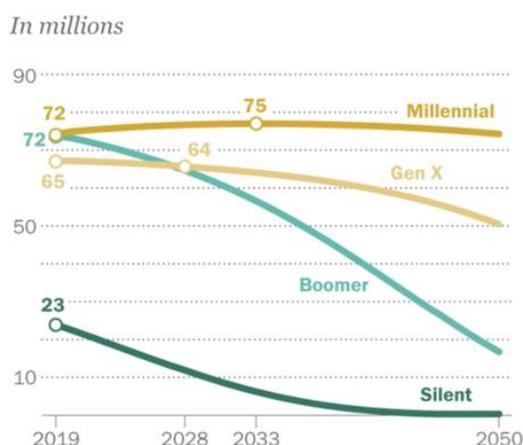
A check of [Joanne Joynson-Hewlett’s LinkedIn profile](#) shows the author earned her bachelor’s degree in 1997. If, as with most college graduates, she earned her degree at the age of 22, she would have been 44 years old when she wrote the 2019 article. I was a year older than that when I needed to get reading glasses. Since she does not mention the vision implications of aging in her article, Joynson-Hewlett’s apparently did not need reading glasses in 2019. Furthermore, her inability to empathize with older people --- a demographic she, I, and you are now or will be part of one day --- is borne out by her dismissive statement in this week’s reading that “[a] **Bingo app game might attract an older audience and be appealing to products targeting the 45+ age demographic...**” She therefore did not see herself becoming part of that Bingo-playing 45+ demographic even with her 45th birthday soon approaching.

Now that in 2021 Ms. Joynson-Hewlett would be 46 years old, I am confident she is having trouble seeing ads on her mobile phone even with reading glasses. I am also confident she has not acquired a sudden interest in Bingo. I suspect her perspective on the future of mobile will change as she realizes everyone becomes 45+ at some point (barring an early death). This includes the target young demographic that inspires current developments in technology and advertising. That demographic, now mostly younger than 40, is inevitably aging. Joanne Joynson-Hewlett’s blind spot is therefore a warning to all of us to remember that:

1. The current majority for whom technology is now being developed is getting older every day.
2. Due to a [declining birth rate in the U.S.](#), once the current majority passes 40 years old, there will not be a comparably large younger population to offset their elders’ economic significance. See chart, right.

When most of the U.S. population is older than 40, it means most of the population will need reading glasses. There will then be a general preference for larger, easier-to-read screens. Use of mobile devices for reading text (including social media) will therefore be considerably less than it is today. This will significantly decrease demand for digital advertising on mobile devices.

Projected population by generation

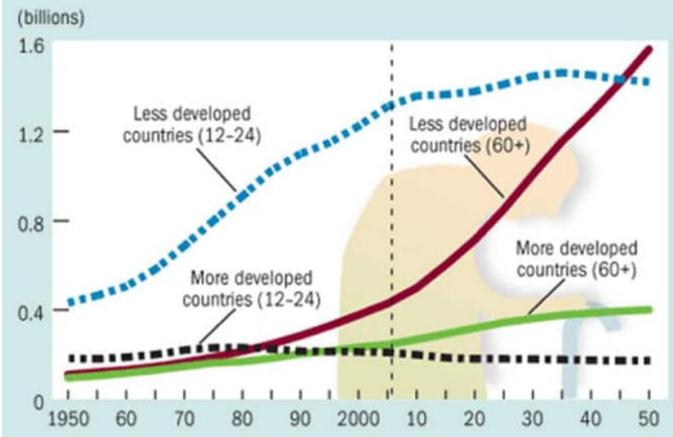


Note: Millennials refer to the population ages 23 to 38 as of 2019.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau population estimates released April 2020 and population projections released December 2017.

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The world's population is aging and, in developed countries, the size of the elderly population has already surpassed that of the 12-24 age group.



[Image: International Monetary Fund. Global Demographic Trends]

An increasing old population is also a trend in the rest of the developed world as shown by the chart, left (from [CEOWorld Magazine](#)). Therefore, in the rest of the developed world as in the U.S., “the intersection of mobile and social” is **not** “where the future of advertising lies.” The only way this could not prove true is if there is a sudden and very large baby boom or a cure is found for presbyopia (the vision problem of old age). The author of this week’s reading suffered from her own vision problem in not seeing the implications of an aging population on mobile phone usage.