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**Tenth Study by the Digital Future Project Finds High Levels of Concern  
about Corporate Intrusion in Personal Lives**

Forget Big Brother -- it's Big Business that's watching you.

The annual study of the impact of the Internet on Americans conducted by the Center for the Digital Future found that almost half of Internet users age 16 and older -- 48 percent -- are worried about companies checking their actions on the Internet.

By comparison, the new question for the Digital Future Study found that only 38 percent of Internet users age 16 and older are concerned about the government checking what they do online.

"Many of us are worried that the Big Brother in our lives is actually Big Business," said Jeffrey I. Cole, director of the Center for the Digital Future at USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism.

"Internet users have major concerns about corporate intrusion -- and who can blame them?" said Cole. "Considering the recent revelations about covert surveillance of personal behavior through GPS tracking and other related issues, we believe that user concerns about the involvement -- some would say encroachment -- of companies into the lives of Internet users represent a significant issue."

The responses are among more than 180 issues explored by the Digital Future Project, which has now completed its 10th study of the digital realm -- the longest continuing study of its kind and the first to develop a longitudinal survey of the views and behavior of Internet users and non-users.

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## **The Internet and free speech about politics and government**

Other new questions for the 2011 study explored users' views about personal expression online on matters concerning politics and government:

\* Among Internet users age 16 and older, 33 percent said that it is safe to voice their views about politics while online. However, 36 percent of users do not think it is safe to say whatever one thinks about politics while online.

\* A much larger percentage – 70 percent -- believe that people should be free on the Internet to criticize their government while online.

\* And more than half of users -- 55 percent -- agreed with the concept that people should be able to express their ideas on the Internet, even if those ideas are extreme.

The Center for the Digital Future telephone and web-based survey of 1,926 Americans age 12 and older was conducted between April and August 2010, and has a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

## **The Center for the Digital Future: 10 studies that explore the impact of the Internet on America**

The Center for the Digital Future at the USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism created and organizes the World Internet Project, which includes the Digital Future Project and similar studies in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Australasia.

The Digital Future Project provides a broad year-to-year exploration of the influence of the Internet and online technology on Americans. Since 2000, the project has examined the behavior and views of a national sample of Internet users and non-users, as well as comparisons between light users (5 hours or less per week using the Internet) and heavy users (more than 24 hours per week on the Internet).

“Through our 10 studies, we have observed one particularly fascinating constant: that online behavior changes relentlessly, and users and non-users develop attitudes and actions that are constantly in flux as technology emerges, and then thrives or withers,” said Cole. “This report, the nine studies that preceded it, and those that will follow, are our ongoing attempt to chronicle this extraordinary interplay between technology and behavior.”

For highlights of the 2011 Digital Future Project or to order a copy of the complete report, visit [www.digitalcenter.org](http://www.digitalcenter.org).

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(Highlights of the 2011 Digital Future Project )

## Highlights: The 2011 Digital Future Project – Year Ten

The Digital Future Project, conducted by the Center for the Digital Future USC Annenberg’s School for Communication & Journalism, explores the behavior and attitudes about Internet use and non-use in five major subject areas: who is online and who is not, media use and trust, consumer behavior, communication patterns, and social effects.

Each study explores more than 100 major issues in broad categories involving the impact of online technology in the United States. Here are highlights of the 2011 study:

(“Light users” = 5 hours or less per week using the Internet; “Heavy users” = more than 24 hours per week on the Internet)

### Internet Users and Non-Users

#### 1. Internet Use in the United States

In 2009, Internet use surpassed 80 percent among Americans – reaching 82 percent. In the current study, Internet use remained flat at 82 percent of Americans. *(page 30)*

#### 4. Internet Use and Income

The expense of using the Internet continues to be cited as a reason for not going online by only a small percentage of non-users -- only seven percent in the current study *(see page 55)*. Nevertheless, the tenth Digital Future Project continues to find that Internet use has a strong relationship with income. *(page 33)*

#### 5. Hours per Week Online

Internet use dipped slightly to an average of 18.3 hours per week -- the first time the weekly use has declined in the studies. *(page 34)*

#### 6. Using the Internet at Home: Hours per Week

For the first time in the Digital Future studies, home use of the Internet has passed 12 hours per week (12.3 hours average). *(page 34)*

#### 11. Activities on the Internet: General Use

Looking at responses to questions about a range of online activities, the largest percentages of users reported going on the Internet at least weekly (several times a day, daily, or weekly) to browse the Web (79 percent), use online banking (47 percent), get product information (46 percent), visit social networking and video-sharing sites (46 percent), play games (39 percent), download or watch videos (39 percent), download or listen to music (38 percent), listen to online radio (22 percent), and pay bills (22 percent). *(page 39)*

#### 13. Internet Use: How Many Years?

Internet users now report an average of more than 11 years of online use. *(page 41)*

#### 14. Working Computers in the Home

A large majority of respondents report more than one computer in their home; the households with three or more computers (17 percent) and four or more computers (15 percent) reached an all-time high for the Digital Future Project. *(page 42)*

## **15. Laptop Ownership**

In seven years, the percentage of computer owners who have a laptop has increased from 18 percent to nearly three-quarters of computer owners. *(page 43)*

## **16. Laptop Ownership: Non-Users Vs. Users**

Laptop ownership is not limited to Internet users. More than one-third of non-users with a computer in their household (34 percent) report ownership of a laptop. *(page 43)*

## **17. The Internet at Work**

The number of hours that Internet users report they are online at work remained unchanged from the previous study -- at the peak of 12.9 hours per week reported last year. *(page 44)*

## **18. The Internet at Work: Active Use**

Internet users continue to report increasing active use of the Internet at work. For the third year in a row, the hours that users said they are actively using the Internet at work has increased -- this year to 9.2 hours per week -- a new high for the Digital Future Project. *(page 44)*

## **20. Using the Internet at Home for Work**

A large and stable percentage of users who use the Internet at work said they go online at home for their jobs; 56 percent said sometimes or often. *(page 46)*

## **21. Productivity and the Internet at Work**

The percentage of users who said that access to the Internet at work makes them more productive remains high, and is stable at 64 percent of users. *(page 47)*

## **22. Internet Connection at Home: Modem and Broadband**

Access to the Internet at home through a broadband connection continues to increase, and has reached a new peak of 84 percent of Internet users. In 10 years, Internet access through a broadband connection has grown more than 800 percent. *(page 48)*

# **Internet Non-Users: Exploring the Views of 18 Percent of Americans**

## **27. Internet Non-Users: Were They Ever Online?**

Of the 18 percent of Americans who are not currently using the Internet, 39 percent in the current Digital Future Study had previously gone online. *(page 54)*

## **28. Internet Non-Users: Reasons for Not Being Online**

The study reported a large increase in the percentage of non-users who don't go online because they lack a computer or an Internet connection. Thirty-seven percent of non-users cited this reason for not going online, up from 27 percent in the previous study. Twenty-five percent of non-users said their reason for not going online was that the Internet is of "no interest" or "not useful," and seven percent are non-users because of the expense. *(page 55)*

## **29. "Internet Dropouts": Why Do Users Stop Going Online?**

"Internet dropouts" -- those who previously used the Internet but no longer go online -- continue to report a variety of reasons for being non-users. The largest response in the current study -- no interest -- increased to 17 percent of dropouts. *(page 56)*

## **31. Internet Non-Users: Views about Not Being Online**

The percentage of non-users who said that others had trouble contacting them because they were not online increased for the second year in a row. The percentage who said they feel excluded from communicating with friends because they are not online increased to 21 percent of non-users. *(page 57)*

### **32. Internet Non-Users: Will They Go Online?**

The percentage of Internet non-users who say they will not go online has grown to its highest level in the Digital Future Project. Two-thirds of non-users said they are not likely at all to go online within the next year – up from 62 percent in the previous year. *(page 58)*

## **Views about Sources of Information and Entertainment**

### **34. Access to News through the Media**

Internet users report spending more time each week going online for non-sports news than any other type of media, online or offline. *(page 61)*

### **35. Views about Sources of Information**

Three-quarters of Internet users age 17 and older said that the Internet was an important or very important source of information to them (75 percent) -- higher than the percentage reported for television, newspapers, or radio. *(page 62)*

## **The Internet, Television, and Print Newspapers: Quality and Integrity of Coverage**

The Digital Future Project asked a series of new questions that explored the quality and integrity of non-sports media coverage on the Internet, television, and in print newspapers. *(page 66)*

### **39. Media Coverage on the Internet, Television, and in Print Newspapers: Users**

According to users age 18 and older, how well do the Internet, television, and print newspapers accomplish certain key goals? In eight out of twelve categories, larger percentages of respondents said the Internet was "good" or "excellent" at accomplishing the goal, compared to television and print newspapers. *(page 66)*

### **40. Media Coverage on the Internet, Television, and in Print Newspapers: Non-Users**

Surprisingly large percentages of non-users said the Internet is good or excellent for non-sports news coverage. The Internet received good or excellent ratings from half or more of non-users in all categories, even though these respondents do not go online for their news coverage. *(page 68)*

### **42. Information Online: Is it Reliable?**

A slightly higher percentage of users (40 percent) compared to non-users (38 percent) in the current Digital Future study said that most or all of the information on the Internet is reliable. *(page 70)*

### **47. Information Posted by Media, Government, and Individuals: Which are Reliable and Accurate, and Which are Not?**

The percentage of users who said that most or all of the information posted by the media is generally reliable and accurate rose marginally, while the percentage who said that most or all of the information posted by the government or individuals is generally reliable and accurate declined slightly. *(page 75)*

### **49. Government Websites: Reliability and Accuracy**

A smaller percentage of Internet users said that most or all of the information on government websites is reliable and accurate -- now 79 percent, a decrease from 82 percent in 2009. *(page 76)*

### **50. Media Web Pages: Reliability and Accuracy**

Seventy-five percent of Internet users said that most or all of the information posted on established media websites such as nytimes.com is generally reliable and accurate, up slightly from 74 percent in 2009. *(page 77)*

## **52. Information Posted by Individuals: Reliability and Accuracy**

Internet users continue to report extremely negative views about the reliability of Web pages posted by individuals. Only 15 percent of users said that most or all of the information on Web pages posted by individuals is reliable and accurate – down marginally from 16 percent in 2009. *(page 78)*

## **54. Information on Social Networking Sites: Reliability and Accuracy**

A majority of Internet users have almost no faith that the information they find on social networking sites is reliable and accurate. Fifty-one percent of users said that only a small portion or none of the information on social networking sites is reliable and accurate. *(page 80)*

## **56. Information Provided by Search Engines: Reliability and Accuracy**

The percentage of Internet users who said that most or all of the information provided by search engines such as Google is reliable and accurate has declined for the second year in a row. *(page 82)*

## **58. Trust in the Internet**

Trust in the Internet overall has increased slightly in the current Digital Future study. Forty-five percent of all respondents said they have some trust or a lot of trust in the Internet. However, 15 percent of respondents said they trust only a small portion or none of the Internet. *(page 84)*

## **Views about Regulation of the Internet**

### **60. The Internet and Government Regulation**

Only a small percentage of respondents (19 percent) said that the government should regulate the Internet more than it does now. Sixty-one of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that there should be more government regulation of the Internet. *(page 85)*

### **62. The Internet and Personal Privacy: Government and Companies**

A significant percentage of Internet users are concerned about the government checking what they do online. Users are even more concerned about companies checking what they do online. *(page 86)*

## **Media Use**

### **69. Would You Miss the Print Edition of Your Newspaper?**

The percentage of users who said that they would miss the print edition of their newspaper if it ceased to exist continued to grow -- but slightly -- for the second year in a row -- now 63 percent. *(page 91)*

### **70. Does Online Content Lead to Cancelled Print Subscriptions?**

Even though a large percentage of users who read newspapers said they would miss the print edition of the publication if it was no longer available (see the previous question), the percentage of readers who stopped reading a print publication because of online content increased in the current study. *(page 92)*

### **71. Alternatives to Print Newspapers**

A growing percentage of newspaper readers said they would switch to the online edition of the publication if the print edition ceased to exist. *(page 93)*

### **72. Surfing the Web**

The percentage of users who surf the Web rose again marginally in the current Digital Future Study, increasing to 82 percent of users who say they sometimes or often go online without a specific destination in mind -- a new high response for the study. *(page 94)*

### **78. Cell Phones and Text Messages**

The number of text messages sent by cell phone users has increased more than 300 percent in only four years, and has now reached an average of 48 per day -- increasing from 38 per day last year. *(page 98)*

## **79. Cell Phones and Text Messages (by age)**

Texting remains the domain of young cell phone users -- and their texting is increasing dramatically. Cell phone users under 18 who send text messages report the largest number of text messages by far - now an average of 104 per day, up sharply from an average of 81 in the previous study and an increase of more than 300 percent from only four years ago. *(page 99)*

## **80. Posting Information Online: Blogs and Photos**

Posting content online -- either on a blog or in a display of photos -- continued to increase for the sixth year in a row, and reached new highs for the Digital Future Project. *(page 100)*

## **Buying on the Internet**

### **83. Who Is Buying Online?**

Sixty-eight percent of adult Internet users said they buy online, a slight increase over the 65 percent reported in 2009 and the highest figure reported thus far in the Digital Future Project. *(page 104)*

### **84. Who Is Buying Online: Light Users Vs. Heavy Users**

While large percentage of adult Internet users overall buy online, large disparities exist between the purchasing behavior of light users and heavy users. *(page 104)*

### **85. How Much are Online Purchasers Spending?**

The percentage of users who report spending \$1 to \$100 per month increased to 58 percent of adult Internet users, up from 54 percent in the previous study. *(page 105)*

### **86. Types of Online Purchases**

The percentages of users who bought in almost every category of online purchases increased or at least remained stable in the current Digital Future study. *(page 106)*

### **87. Online Purchasing Frequency**

Adult Internet users buy online an average of 31 times per year, down from 35 times per year in the previous study, and moderately below the peak average of 36 purchases in 2007. *(page 108)*

### **88. Privacy Concerns When Buying Online**

Americans have reported high levels of concern about privacy and security when or if they buy online since the Digital Future Project first asked about this issue in 2001. However, those reporting the highest level of concern has declined for the third year in a row. *(page 109)*

### **93. Credit Card Information: Concerns about Security**

Adult respondents continue to report high levels of concern about credit card security when or if buying online, a finding that has continued in all of the Digital Future studies. However, the percentage of respondents with the highest level of concern has been generally declining since 2001, and has now dropped for three years in a row. *(page 113)*

### **98. Buying Online: Effects on Traditional Retail Purchasing**

The percentage of online purchasers who said their purchasing online has reduced their buying in retail stores increased in the current study after declining last year. *(page 118)*

### **99. Buying Online: Effects on Traditional Retail Purchasing**

#### **Light Users Vs. Heavy Users**

Large percentages of both light users and heavy users said that their online buying has affected purchasing in traditional retail stores. *(page 118)*

### **100. Browsing for Products: Retail Stores Vs. the Internet**

Although large percentages of Internet users buy online (see page 175), even larger percentages continue to use the Web as a reference service before purchasing locally. *(page 119)*

#### **101. Views about Risking Privacy by Going Online**

The percentage of Internet users who agree that people who go online put their privacy at risk declined to the lowest level in the Digital Future studies. *(page 120)*

### **Americans and Email**

#### **104. How Many Americans Are Using Email?**

Nearly all respondents who go online continue to use email (97 percent), with the percentage increasing marginally in the current study over the previous year. *(page 123)*

#### **105. Email Users: By Age**

Even though the use of text messaging is growing dramatically among primarily younger Internet users *(see page 99)*, very large percentages of Internet users in every age range use email, and use is near-universal (94 percent or more) in all age ranges. *(page 123)*

#### **106. Regular Contact by Email**

Email users maintain weekly personal email contact with a growing number of people -- now an average of 7.5, up from 6.7 in the previous study and the highest level in four years. More than half (52 percent) of email users maintain personal contact by email on a weekly basis with five or more people, up from 47 percent in the previous study. *(page 124)*

#### **108. How Quickly Should Users Reply to Personal Email?**

An increasing percentage of email users want fast responses to messages. Sixty-four percent of email users said they expect a response to a personal email message as soon as possible or in one day -- up from 61 percent in the previous study. *(page 126)*

#### **110. Email Communication with Teachers, Government Officials, and Health Care Professionals**

A majority of email users have contacted a government official by email, and growing percentages used email to contact teachers or health care providers. *(page 128)*

#### **111. Email Contacts and In-Person Contacts**

Users also report that of those with whom they maintain regular email contact, they meet an average of 3.7 people face-to-face on a weekly basis, an increase from 3.3 in 2009 and a return to the peak level of 2006. *(page 129)*

#### **113. The Internet and Social Relationships**

Given explosive increases in social networking, it is not surprising that the percentage of Internet users who said that going online is important in maintaining social relationships has reached a new high for the Digital Future Project. *(page 131)*

#### **114. The Internet and Social Relationships: By Age**

Looking at the question of the Internet and social relationships by age shows that the percentage of those who consider the Internet important or very important for social relationships is highest among users ages 19 to 24 (69 percent) and users ages 25 to 35 (67 percent). One half or more of users in all age groups said that the Internet is important or very important for social relationships. *(page 131)*

#### **115. Cell Phones and Social Relationships**

Seventy-one percent of cell phone users said their phone helped them to maintain their social relationships. The percentage of cell phone users who said their phone is not important for maintaining social relationships declined to 12 percent, down for the third year in a row. *(page 132)*

#### **116. Instant Messaging and Social Relationships**

Instant messaging remains one of the most frequently-used communication tools for some age groups. However, looking at all respondents show that overall, relatively small percentages of Internet users said that instant messaging is important in maintaining social relationships. *(page 133)*

### **117. The Internet and Online Friends**

Internet users continue to report an increase in the number of online friends, the average of which has reached a new peak for the Digital Future Project. *(page 134)*

### **118. Friends Met Online, Then Met in Person**

Although Internet users continue to report an increasing number of online friends (see the previous question), the number of online friends that users meet in person has declined slightly. *(page 135)*

### **119. Time Spent Socializing with Friends and Family**

The percentage of Internet users who said that they spend about the same amount of face-to-face time with friends since being connected to the Internet declined slightly in the current study, while the percentage who spent more face-to-face time with friends rose marginally. *(page 136)*

### **121. Are You Ignored Because of Television or the Internet?**

Fifty percent of Internet users said they were sometimes or often ignored because another member of the household spends too much time online, and 48 percent said they were ignored because others spend too much time watching television -- the first time in the Digital Future studies that a higher percentage felt they were neglected because of online use. *(page 138)*

### **122. Internet Use and Contact with Others**

Very large percentages of users (91-94 percent) report that Internet use has no effect or a positive effect on contact with the key groups in the lives of users, including family, friends, and people who share hobbies, political beliefs, religious beliefs, and professional interests. *(page 138)*

## **Online Communities**

For the Digital Future Project, an “online community” is defined as a group that shares thoughts or ideas, or works on common projects, through electronic communication only. For views and behavior on social networking and video sharing sites, see the next section. *(page 140)*

### **126. Online Community Members: How Often Do They Log In?**

More than half (56 percent) of online community members are actively involved in their communities on a daily basis. *(page 142)*

### **131. Online Communities: Connection to Offline Actions**

Thirty-two percent of online community members said they take actions offline at least monthly that are related to their online community, such as attending a meeting or seeing a doctor. *(page 146)*

### **134. Online Community Members: Do They Meet Members of Their Community in Person?**

Fifty percent of online community members said they meet in person with members of their online communities. *(page 147)*

## **Social Networking and Video Sharing Sites**

### **135. Websites for Video Sharing or Social Networking: How Often Do You Visit?**

Visiting websites for video sharing or social networking such as YouTube or Facebook continues to increase; 44 percent of Internet users said they use these sites at least once a day or more, up from 36 percent in the previous study. *(page 148)*

### **136. Creating Content for Video Sharing or Social Networking Sites**

The percentage of users who create content for websites such as YouTube continues to grow modestly -- now 32 percent of users. *(page 149)*

### **137. Why Do Online Community Members Visit Websites for Video Sharing and Social Networking?**

The most frequently-cited reason for visiting video sharing sites such as YouTube and social networking websites such as Facebook is to relax or fill time -- reported by 64 percent of Internet users in the current Digital Future Project, up from 61 percent in 2009. *(page 150)*

## **Online Communities and Social Causes**

### **138. Participation in Online Communities Related to Social Causes**

After increasing for three years, the percentage of members of online communities who participate in communities related to social causes declined in the current Digital Future study. *(page 151)*

### **139. The Internet as an Information Source about Social Causes**

Ninety-three percent of online community members said the Internet helps them stay informed about social causes, up from 91 percent in 2009 and 2008. *(page 152)*

### **140. Does Participation in Online Communities Encourage Members to Participate in Social Causes?**

Seventy-nine percent of online community members said they participate in social causes new to them since they became involved in online communities -- an increase from 71 percent in 2009. *(page 153)*

### **143. Online Communities: Participation in Non-Profit Organizations**

Thirty-six percent of online community members said that their participation in non-profit organizations has increased since their Internet use began -- up from 25 percent in the previous study. *(page 155)*

## **Children and the Internet**

### **146. Internet Use: the Right Amount of Time For Children?**

A modest but growing percentage of adults said the children in their households spend too much time online; the number who said the amount of time is "just right" declined in the current study. *(page 158)*

### **147. Television Viewing: The Right Amount of Time for Children?**

The percentage of adults who said that the amount of time that household children are spending watching television is just right has increased for the second year in a row. *(page 159)*

### **148. The Internet and Schoolwork: Children's Views**

Ninety-six percent of Internet users age 18 and under said that going online has some level of importance for their schoolwork, while only four percent said the Internet was not at all important. *(page 160)*

### **149. Internet Use and School Grades: the Adults' View**

When compared to children, adults have different ideas about the value of the Internet for their children's schoolwork. A large and growing percentage of adults (84 percent) said that since the children in their households began using the Internet, their grades have either stayed the same or declined. *(page 161)*

### **151. Children and Time Spent with Friends**

The percentage of adults who said that the children in their household spend the same amount of time or more time with friends since using the Internet increased slightly in the current study -- now 89 percent of adults. *(page 163)*

## **Political Power and Influence**

### **152-167. At a Glance: Views about the Internet and Politics**

Overall, large percentages of Internet users believe that the Internet plays an important role in political campaigns and leads to an increased understanding of politics. However, much smaller percentages of users think that the Internet serves as a tool to build political power, or to encourage public officials to care more about constituents' views, or to create more say for citizens in their government. *(page 176)*

### **168. Voting Online**

Although election campaigns now involve elaborate outreach by candidates over the Internet, respondents age 16 and older express only limited enthusiasm for voting online. *(page 177)*

## **The Internet and Free Speech about Politics and Government**

New questions for the Digital Future Project asked respondents for their views regarding personal expression online about politics and government.

### **169-170. Personal Political Expression on the Internet**

Thirty-three percent of Internet users agree or strongly agree that it is safe to say online whatever one thinks about politics, while 36 percent of non-users agree with this statement. *(page 179)*

### **171. Criticizing the Government While Online**

Sixty-six percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that people should be free to criticize the government while online -- twice the number from the previous question who said they feel comfortable saying whatever they like about politics while online. *(page 180)*

### **173. Free Speech and Extreme Ideas while Online**

More than a majority of respondents -- 52 percent -- agreed with the concept that people should be able to express their ideas on the Internet, even if those ideas are extreme. Twenty-two percent of respondents disagreed with full expression of ideas, even if extreme. *(page 181)*

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