

CCI Digital Futures Study with 13 Partner Countries Release First World Internet Project Report

Pioneering Report Finds Remarkable Similarities and Significant Differences Globally

Online Purchasing Not Yet Part of the Global Internet Experience; A Majority of Users Believe Only Half of the Information they Find Online is Reliable

The World Internet Project (WIP), a comprehensive first-time global survey on the impact of the Internet, found remarkable similarities and significant differences in the way users utilize and rely on the Internet. Findings from work undertaken by the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Creative Industries and Innovation's (CCI) Digital Futures Study based at Swinburne University in Melbourne is included in the study along with 13 partner countries and regions in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Oceania.

“This first international collaboration has revealed a broad and diverse range of insights about online technology, Internet users, and non-users,” said Jeffrey I. Cole, director of the Center for the Digital Future at the USC Annenberg School for Communication. “We believe this annual survey will build a new level of understanding about the worldwide use of the Internet.”

The World Internet Project marks the first time that a worldwide partnership of research institutions has compiled data on the behavior and views of Internet users and non-users.

Among many findings by the World Internet Project:

The Internet: importance as an information source

The Internet is considered an important source of information by large majorities in all of the WIP countries and regions.

In all of the WIP countries and regions except for Sweden, two-thirds or more of users said that the Internet is an important or very important source of information.

In all of the WIP countries and regions except for Macao and Sweden, larger percentages ranked the Internet as an important or very important source of information compared to television, newspapers, and radio.

Looking for product information and buying online

The World Internet Project found wide-ranging views and behavior when looking at how online users go online for product information or for buying online. The project found that high percentages of users in most of the reporting countries and regions go online for product information; in eight of the WIP countries and regions, more than 35 percent of users said they go online at least weekly to look for information about a product.

However, in seven of the countries, more than half of those who go online have never made a purchase.

The percentage of users who never buy online ranges from 12 percent in the United States to 92 percent in Colombia.

Looking at users who do buy online, four countries and regions reported double-digit percentages of users who buy online at least weekly: the United Kingdom (18 percent), the United States (14 percent), and Australia and the Czech Republic (12 percent).

In nine countries and regions, more than 20 percent of users report buying online at least monthly, with the highest percentages in the United Kingdom (47 percent), the United States (46 percent), New Zealand (40 percent), and Australia (38 percent).

Internet use at school

Large percentages of users who are students go online for schoolwork, but significant numbers never do.

Very large percentages of Internet users who are students go online to find information for their school-related work. In 10 of the WIP countries and regions, more than 70 percent of students who are Internet users go online for school-related work at least weekly, and in nine of the WIP countries and regions, more than 30 percent of students go online daily or several times a day for schoolwork. Australia reported the highest daily use by far (62 percent).

Yet in spite of the high use reported for school work, surprisingly high percentages of students never go online for schoolwork, or do so less than monthly; nine of the WIP countries and regions reported double-digit percentages of these students. Two countries -- Columbia and Israel -- reported 30 percent or more of students who never go online for schoolwork, or do so less than monthly.

Internet non-users: reasons for not going online

Why are people around the world not online? In every WIP country other than the Czech Republic, Singapore, and the United States, “no interest/not useful” is the most-cited reason.

“No interest” or “not useful” was cited by more than half of all non-users in Hungary, 45 percent in New Zealand, almost 40 percent in Sweden, and about one-third in Australia, Canada, Urban China, and Israel.

Of particular note is that the expense of going online is no longer a significant factor in most WIP countries, with 10 percent or less of non-users in all of the countries except the Czech Republic saying that going online was too expensive or they cannot afford the fees.

Nine of the WIP countries reported 22 percent or less of non-users who said they don't go online because they don't know how to use the Internet or they are confused by technology. Notably, 44 percent of non-users in Singapore, a country with a broad commitment to a national technology infrastructure, said that they don't use the Internet because of lack of knowledge -- twice as high as the next highest country or region (urban China with 22 percent).

Going online for health information

The World Internet Project also found that very large percentages of users go online for information about health topics.

Twenty percent or more of users in six WIP countries and regions go online for health information at least weekly, and at least 30 percent of users in 10 of the reporting countries and regions seek health information on the Internet at least monthly.

Internet use to look for health information at least monthly is particularly high in Urban China and Israel (55 percent) and Canada (50 percent).

Conversely, more than a quarter of users in all of the World Internet Project countries and regions except the United States never go online for health information.

Downloading videos

Overall, relatively low percentages of users go online to download or watch videos. Only in urban China (37 percent) did more than 30 percent of users go online at least weekly to download or watch videos. By comparison, only 17 percent of users in the United States report going only at least weekly to download or watch videos.

Forty-nine percent of users in urban China go online at least monthly for videos, along with 43 percent of users in the Czech Republic, and 42 percent in Israel.

Downloading or listening to music

Compared to those who go online for video content, larger percentages of users go online to download or listen to music.

In five WIP countries and regions, more than 30 percent of users go online at least weekly to listen to music or download songs.

In urban China, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, and Macao, 47 percent or more of users download or listen to music online at least monthly.

Banking and financial services

Paying bills online is done by moderate percentages of users in most of the WIP countries and regions. Thirty percent or more of users in seven of the WIP countries and regions go online to pay bills at least monthly (a typical bill paying cycle).

However, compared to those who use the Internet to pay bills, higher percentages of users go online to use the online services provided by banks.

In eight of the responding countries and regions, 25 percent or more of users go online for online banking services at least weekly, and at least 35 percent in eight countries and regions go online for these services at least monthly. The highest percentages of use at least weekly were reported in New Zealand (56 percent), Australia (55 percent), Canada (48 percent), and the United States (43 percent).

Age and Internet use

In all of the World Internet Project countries and regions, Internet use relates directly to age.

A very high percentage of people under age 24 use the Internet. Even in the country with the lowest percentage of users ages 18-24, Singapore, three-quarters of respondents in that age range are users.

However, Internet use among those over 65 is extremely low in several countries and regions, with the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Macao reporting 10 percent or less of respondents as Internet users in that age range. By comparison, in Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States, at least 38 percent of respondents over 65 said they go online.

Newspapers: importance as an information source

Offline newspapers were ranked highly as information sources among Internet users. Forty-five percent or more of users in all of the WIP countries and regions ranked newspapers as an important or very important source of information.

Where are newspapers considered not important as information sources? The highest percentages were reported in Canada (26 percent), Israel (25 percent), Australia (23 percent), and New Zealand and the United States (20 percent).

Newspapers: importance as an information source -- users vs. non-users

Even though many users go online to obtain news, large percentages of users continue to consider newspapers as important or very important sources of information. In three WIP countries and regions -- Canada, Macao, and the United States -- larger percentages of users than non-users said that newspapers were important or very important as information sources.

CCI Digital Futures: The Internet in Australia

The Australian arm of the World Internet Project released its findings on national internet usage in June 2008. The research project, conducted by Julian Thomas and Scott Ewing from the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), surveyed 1,000 Australians on a range of internet-related issues.

Our partners in the World Internet Project include Canada, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Macao, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States.

As of 2009, also included in the project are Chile, Cyprus, Germany, Iran, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, and United Arab Emirates.

Any country that may be interested in joining the World Internet Project should contact digitalcenter@digitalcenter.org.

Our first report can be accessed here <http://www.cci.edu.au/publications/digital-futures>.

The international report can be purchased here <http://store.digitalcenter.org/world-internet-report.html>

If you have any questions about this work or would like more information please contact Scott Ewing at sewing@swin.edu.au or by telephone on +61 3 9214 5564

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