

# The Web: Women vs. men online

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Men and women use the Internet rather differently, with women employing e-mail more often than men to communicate with family and friends, but with men logging online more frequently to obtain news or sports updates, experts tell United Press International's The Web.

A report released last week by the Pew Internet & American Life Project indicates that men pursue many Internet activities more intensively than women and that men are still "first out of the blocks" in trying the latest technologies.

Other experts said that there are different "motivations" that drive men and women online.

"It may be the motivation behind the use," Nancy P. Hemenway, executive director of the International Council on Infertility Information Dissemination Inc., based in suburban Washington, told The Web.

Commercial researchers like James Chung, president of Boston-based Reach Advisors, said that companies study these gender differences to develop more precise marketing programs online. The differences may be even more pronounced by generation. "We're getting close to releasing information from a study including gender differences in Generation X Internet usage," Chung said.

The Pew study, "How Women and Men Use the Internet," may be the most comprehensive work on this topic to date, however. The report, developed by Deborah Fallows, indicates that women are "catching up"

in overall use of the Internet but are "framing their online experience" with a greater emphasis on deepening connections with people.

Some highlights from the new report show how men's and women's use of the Internet has changed over time. According to the Pew study:

-- The percentage of women using the Internet still lags slightly behind that of men. But, women under 30 and black women outpace their male peers online. However, older women trail dramatically behind older men.

-- Men are slightly more intense Internet users than women. Men log on more often, spend more time online and are more likely to be broadband users.

-- More men than women perform online transactions. Men and women are equally likely to use the Internet to buy products and take part in online banking, but men are more likely to use the Internet to pay bills, participate in auctions, trade stocks and bonds and pay for digital content.

"More than men, women are enthusiastic online communicators, and they use e-mail in a more robust way," wrote Fallows. "Women are more likely than men to use e-mail to write to friends and family about a variety of topics: sharing news and worries, planning events, forwarding jokes and funny stories. Women are more likely to feel satisfied with the role e-mail plays in their lives, especially when it comes to nurturing their relationships. And women include a wider range of topics and activities in their personal e-mails."

Men use e-mail more than women to communicate with various kinds of organizations, the report said.

Most interestingly, the Pew study said, the data show that men and

women are more similar than different in their online lives, starting with their common appreciation of the Internet's strongest suit: efficiency.

"Men and women also value the Internet for a second strength, as a gateway to limitless vaults of information. Men reach farther and wider for topics, from getting financial information to political news. Along the way, they work search engines more aggressively, using engines more often and with more confidence than women," Fallows wrote.

Still, women are more likely to see the vast array of online information as a "glut" and to penetrate deeper into areas where they have the most interest, including religion and health. "Women tend to treat information gathering online as a more textured and interactive process -- one that includes gathering and exchanging information through support groups and personal e-mail exchanges," said Fallows.

Buttressing this finding, the INCIID reports that 95 percent of its 40,000 registered users are women. But this small group of users requests "more than 10 million page views per month," Hemenway told the Web.

Still, some experts are skeptical about the findings of the Pew study. "From my perspective as the author of the humor book, and a frequent speaker on the lighter side of gender differences, there really weren't any surprises in the study," said Sandra Beckwith, author of "Why Can't a Man Be More Than a Woman?" (Kensington, 1995).

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