

# Study Finds Men More Than Women Share Creative Work Online

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A Northwestern University study finds that men are more likely to share their creative work online than women despite the fact that women and men engage in creative activities at essentially equal rates.

“Because sharing information on the Internet today is a form of participating in public culture and contributing to public discourse, that tells us men’s voices are being disproportionately heard,” says Eszter Hargittai, assistant professor of communication studies at Northwestern University. Hargittai co-authored the study with Northwestern researcher Gina Walejko.

Overall, almost two-thirds of men reported posting their work online while only half of women reported doing so. When Hargittai and Northwestern's Walejko controlled for self-reported digital literacy and Web know-how, however, they found that men and women actually posted their material about equally.

“This suggests that the Internet is not an equal playing field for men and women since those with more online abilities -- whether perceived or actual -- are more likely to contribute online content,” says Hargittai.

The study titled “The Participation Divide: Content Creation and Sharing in the Digital Age” recently appeared in the journal *Information, Communication and Society*.

“It appears that lack of perceived skill is holding women back from

putting their creative content out there,” says Hargittai. She says that other factors that may be responsible for the observed difference, although not measured in the study, may relate to lack of confidence in the quality of one’s work or privacy concerns.

Hargittai and Walejko found men were more than twice as likely to share music on the Web that they had created or re-mixed than were women; and that men were also considerably more likely to post film or video they made when compared to women who engaged in film- or video-making.

“Much of the early research about the Web dwelled on accessibility and on digital technology’s ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots,’” says Hargittai. And early conversations about the Web revolved around its potential as a social leveler once access issues were resolved.

Today, researchers like Hargittai -- who directs Northwestern’s Web Use Project -- and Walejko study how people use the Internet, who creates content for the Web and whether or not the Internet contributes to social equality.

In their survey of creative content -- whether online or offline -- the Northwestern researchers found that on average two out of three men and two out of three women engage in creative writing, art photography, music or film/video generally (and this does not relate in any way to the Web).

“So while creative output, on the aggregate, is equally distributed among men and women, the sharing of such content is not,” Hargittai says.

Of the 61 percent of the full sample who reported engaging in at least one type of creative activity, 56 percent said they posted at least some of their creative work online.

Not surprisingly -- since it is the easiest content to post -- the most popular type of creative content shared online was creative writing. Just over half of the students who report engaging in creative writing also reported posting their work online.

Video was the second most popular creative work to be posted, at just under 50 percent. Again, Hargittai points to the ease of posting such material. "Video-sharing sites like YouTube make it relatively simple for people to share their own or remixed videos," she says.

The Northwestern researchers' study was based on a survey of 1,060 freshmen from the University of Illinois, Chicago, which, according to U.S. News & World Report, is one of the nation's most ethnically diverse universities. The researchers observed little-to-no difference in the posting habits of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Source: Northwestern University

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