

China's online population rises to 450 million

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File photo of a man playing online games at an internet cafe in Beijing. China said Thursday the number of Internet users in what is already the world's largest online market had jumped to 450 million -- more than a third of the country's 1.3-billion-strong population.

China said Thursday the number of Internet users in what is already the world's largest online market had jumped to 450 million -- more than a third of the country's 1.3-billion-strong population.

"By the end of November, the number of netizens had reached 450 million, a rise of 20.3 percent compared to the same period last year," Wang Chen, minister for the press office of the State Council, China's cabinet, said.

The figure marks an increase of 30 million -- more than the population of Peru -- since the number of [web users](#) was last given in July.

"The coverage rate of the Internet in [China](#) is 33.9 percent -- above the world average of 30 percent," Wang told a press conference.

"These figures show the environment for the development of the Internet in China is sound," he said.

China's spiralling online population has turned the Internet into a forum for citizens to express their opinions in a way rarely seen in a country where the traditional media is under strict government control.

The Internet has also become a lucrative marketplace. The value of online payments is expected to hit one trillion yuan (151 billion dollars) for the year, Beijing-based research company Analysys International said in a note.

The growing strength and influence of the [web population](#) has prompted concern in [Beijing](#) about the Internet's potential as a tool for generating social unrest, and authorities have stepped up surveillance in recent years.

The government blocks web content that it deems politically sensitive in a vast system dubbed the "Great Firewall of China".

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