

World's biggest online population: 538M Chinese

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(AP) — China's population of Internet users, already the world's biggest, has risen to 538 million, driven by rapid growth in wireless Web surfing, an industry group said Thursday.

The latest figure represents an 11 percent increase from a year earlier, according to the report by the China Internet Network Information Center. The government-sanctioned group said that raised the share of China's population that uses the Internet to 39.9 percent.

The number of people who go online from mobile phones and other wireless devices rose to 388 million, the group said. That was up 22 percent from a year earlier.

China's communist government encourages Internet use for business and education but tries to block access to material considered subversive or obscene. Authorities tightened controls after social networking and other websites played a key role in protests that brought down governments in Egypt and Tunisia.

The rise of Internet use and the explosive popularity of wireless access have driven the growth of a series of new Chinese industries from microblogs to online video.

This month, regulators tightened control over online video, telling providers they must prescreen all material before making it available. The government complained that some online video was vulgar,

pornographic or too violent.

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