

# Over half of British internet users go online 'without enthusiasm'

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(Phys.org) —The number of people in Britain who are using the internet has risen, reaching 78% of the population aged 14 years and over as compared with 59% in 2003. Yet according to the latest survey of British internet use and attitudes, conducted by the University's Oxford Internet Institute (OII), more than half of those who go online do it without enthusiasm.

Nearly one in six (14%) users felt the [internet](#) was taking over their lives and invading their privacy. An additional one-third (37%) of British users had no strong feelings either for or against the internet and were described as 'moderate' in their view. Some 17% said it made them more efficient; 12% said they were happy going online; and 19% had mixed

views, feeling efficient and happier but also frustrated, according to the report.

The report, published today by the OII, is based on face-to-face interviews earlier this year with a representative sample of 2,000 internet users in Britain. One noteworthy trend highlighted in the report is a levelling off in the popularity of social networking sites, with nearly two-thirds (61%) of internet users surveyed saying they used them – an increase of only one percentage point from 2011 after explosive growth between 2007 and 2011.

While most users of social network sites are under 35, there has been a substantial rise in the proportion of users aged 45-54 years old using such sites – from 10% in 2007 to 51% in 2013. People who are retired are much less likely to use them than employed people or students. Privacy has been a frequent concern on these sites, with 90% of student users saying they checked their settings, contrary to the commonly expressed view that young people no longer care about privacy.

The digital divide in Britain continues to narrow, suggests the report, with the number of people who have never gone online falling from 23% in 2011 to 18% in 2013. Trends in household use parallel individual use, with 81% of households in Britain now online as compared with 74% in 2011. The rise in the number of individuals having access to the internet is due to households acquiring it for the first time, rather than more people going online in households that already have access, suggests the research.

However, television sets remain the focal point of households in Britain. Virtually all households have a TV set in 2013 whereas one-quarter (24%) of them still do not have a computer.

The survey suggests that internet use increased modestly across all age

groups. The gender divide is now almost non-existent as compared with 2003 when 64% of men and 55% of women said they used the internet. Among lower income groups, during the last two years internet use has increased from 43% to 58% for households earning less than £12,500 a year, and from 65% to 88% for households paid £12,500-£20,000 a year.

People in higher status jobs are more likely to use the internet, with 83% of managers and professionals using it for work as compared with just 23% of blue collar workers, says the report. Only those with no educational qualifications at all tend to be left out – only 40% of this group use the internet. Nearly half (45%) of the retired people surveyed said they used the internet, which compares with 36% in 2011.

Meanwhile, 51% of people with a disability are now using the internet, a rise of 11 percentage points since 2011. Nearly all those surveyed (98%) said parents should bear the main responsibility for their children's experience of the internet, much the same as two years ago. However, there was a rise in the number of people who believe the government is responsible for how children experience the internet. Three-quarters of those surveyed agreed that the government should play a role in protecting children who go online as compared with 66% in 2011 and just 56% in 2007.

Lead researcher Professor William Dutton said: 'In the past, academics studying the internet tended to focus on the digital divide, examining why certain people did not go online: whether it was to do with choice or lack of access. This study shows that a small percentage of the population (18%) still have not used the internet and it suggests that most non-users have made the choice that it is not for them. Our surveys started 10 years ago, and in that time we have been able to track just how mainstream the internet has become – it is an integral part of most people's lives in Britain today. This latest study examines in detail the

variety of ways in which it is being used and the wide range of attitudes held about it.'

Researcher Dr Grant Blank from the OII said: 'This year's survey shows that while most of us in Britain are now using the internet, half do it without enthusiasm. These are people who use the internet because they have to, not because they want to. They don't go online to enjoy themselves and they don't feel more productive online. They also perceive problems, particularly with regard to privacy, frustration and wasted time. The apparent weak growth in the proportion of people using social network sites is a remarkable change from prior years. We can speculate that this is because of media coverage about privacy issues on social media sites. Or, maybe it shows that we are approaching a natural limit in the number of people interested in such sites.'

**More information:** Study: [oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/sites/oxis.o...  
ations/OxIS\\_2013.pdf](https://www.oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/sites/oxis.org/files/oxis_2013.pdf)

Provided by Oxford University

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