Internet use at home soars to more than 17 hours per week

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Credit: AI-generated image (disclaimer)

Since the internet became mainstream less than 20 years ago, faith in traditional institutions and consumption of traditional media has also been displaced by faith in newer, digital institutions and consumption of newer, digital media, according to the 15th annual Digital Future Report recently produced by the USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future.

In the years since the USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future published its first Digital Future Report in 2000, the [internet](#) has evolved from a secondary medium to an essential component of daily life.

Over the course of that time:

- Overall internet penetration has increased from 67 to 92 percent.
- Total hours per week online has steadily increased from 9.4 to 23.6.
- Internet usage at home has risen from 3.3 to 17.6 hours per week.

The effect on our relationships, to media and each other

Perhaps the largest change affecting our online behavior over the life of the report was the introduction of the iPhone and other smartphone technologies in 2007, which increased the internet's always on—and always with us—technology capabilities.

Since 2010 alone:

- People who use their phone to access the internet has skyrocketed from 23 to 84 percent.
- Use of smartphone email has nearly quadrupled from 21 to 79 percent.
- The use of mobile apps increased from 49 to 74 percent.
- GPS location service use has gone from 12 to 71 percent.
- The percentage of people who stream music on their phone has increased from 13 to 67 percent.

Since 2001, the internet has also had an indelible impact on our relationship to physical media, and not just evidenced by the shuttering

of Borders, Blockbuster Video stores and so many newspapers. In one of the most dramatic changes to occur over the life of the report, the ratio of print-to-online news consumption for all ages has gone from 85-15 in 2001 to near-parity at 51-49 in 2016.

The center also found that social networking impacted offline relationships—62 percent said the internet was important or very important for maintaining social relationships.

The shift to digital and online may also be having a significant impact on political attitudes and involvement. For many years, the consensus among the survey's respondents was that online technology served a much more limited role in creating political power and involvement, but that is now shifting to a belief by 40 percent or more of all respondents, users and nonusers alike that the internet is an integral part of all aspects of American politics.

Future of post-net neutrality

With the specter this winter of net neutrality being rolled back, the pervasiveness of "unlimited, everywhere" internet that the American public has assumed over the last couple of decades may no longer be a given, possibly affecting both use and attitudes related to the technology. Researchers at the USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future believe preventing a rollback to net neutrality is essential to maintaining equal access to what has become a de facto necessity of modern life.

"From the beginning of our research in 1999, it quickly became clear that the internet was becoming a central part of everyday life—even more vital than the telephone and telegraph were in their day," said Jeffrey Cole, director of the USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future. "And just as those earlier technologies were regulated to support the public good, so too should the internet be regulated, which is a

compelling reason why we should have net neutrality—so everyone has equal access to this invaluable resource."

The Digital Future Report is the longest-running continuous study of its kind and was the first to develop a longitudinal panel study of the views and behavior of internet users and nonusers in the United States.

The project surveys more than 2,000 individuals across the United States, each year contacting the same households to explore how online technology affects the lives of both internet users and nonusers. It also examines how changing technology, such as the shift from desktop personal computer to laptop to smartphone, affects behavior.

The USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future is a think tank that explores the most pressing questions about how technology changes media and communications. It has become an internationally regarded research center that is committed to studying, through a variety of prisms, the important digital issues that are transforming our lives.

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