



Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009 Report Released: Attitudes Towards the Internet in Britain

One of the main challenges in creating a Digital Britain will be to change the perceptions of the third of the British population who choose not to use the internet, according to the latest in a series of Oxford University Surveys.

The Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009, published on 22 June 2009, shows that while most British internet users (84%) are extremely confident about using new technology and see the Internet as central to many activities, over half of non-users of the internet (57%) now distrust new technology more than they did before.

The survey, conducted by the Oxford Internet Institute, questioned 2000 people in 2009 and found that cost, a lack of access and a lack of interest were the main reasons that led to people deciding to stop using the Internet. OxIS 2009 provides a detailed breakdown of where the digital divide lies: twice as many people from higher than lower socio-economic groups use the Internet. Age too has a dramatic impact on digital choices with the proportion of Internet users between 25-54 increasing considerably since 2003, but not changing significantly for other age groups. The proportion of retired people going online has inched forward from 30% in 2005 to 34% in 2009. However, the gap between male and female users has nearly closed with 71% of men and 68% women now using the Internet; gaps in self-confidence between men and women, however, remain. 100% of students and 88% of households with children said they had access to the Internet.

OxIS 2009 concludes that the Internet is a valuable resource for people to find information, communicate with others, and find entertainment 'in ways that could well give advantages to them over those who choose not to use the Internet'. The 'Digital Britain Report' (published by the UK Government on 16 June 2009) contains pledges to provide universal access to a broadband connection, but according to OxIS Principal Investigator, Professor William Dutton, the heart of the matter is about persuading those who choose to exclude themselves.

Professor Dutton, Director of the Oxford Internet Institute, said: "Digital Britain is heavily focused on government investment in infrastructures and pilot projects, supported in part by a tax on fixed copper lines and a governmental 'Digital Delivery Agency'. The OxIS 2009 survey indicates that the major issues are neither infrastructures nor innovation. The key concerns are the attitudes and beliefs of individuals uninterested in the Internet. It will be far less expensive and more effective to focus on informing those who think the Internet is irrelevant to their lives than on building information super-highway projects in the 21st Century."

While users opt for the Internet as their most trusted medium, non-users or people who have stopped said they trusted television and radio the most. Non-users were most concerned about the negative aspects of online communication, with 86% agreeing that people can find personal information too easily online, as compared with only half of users. Over two-thirds (68%) of non-users said that there was too much immoral material online and nearly three quarters (71%) of non-users wanted greater government regulation of the Internet, as compared with 57% of users.

Both users (77%) and non-users (71%) agreed that the Internet can be addictive. People who had stopped using the Internet (41%) were twice as likely as users (23%) to say that dealing with the amount of information was exhausting.

There was little difference between unemployed, retired and unemployed ex-users in finding someone who could help them on the Internet (88-93%). The most popular person for ex-users to ask for help was a friend (69%), while non-users were most likely to ask a child or grandchild (68%).

OII Research Fellow, Dr Ellen Helsper, said: "While we have known about a digital divide in Britain for some time, this survey gives insight into how we might tackle the problem more efficiently. It is the only comprehensive survey of this type, providing detailed information about attitudes that different groups in society have towards the Internet and why. Given the Internet's increasing centrality to everyday life, if Britain is to fulfil government aspirations to become the digital capital of the world, policy makers need to explore how they can engage the considerable section of the population that has negative attitudes towards the Internet. It is not just an issue of access to the technology."

The OxIS 2009 Report

Dutton, W.H., Helsper, E.J. and Gerber, M.M. (2009) Oxford Internet Survey 2009 Report: The Internet in Britain. Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford.

Download [PDF, 1.9MB]: http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/oxis/oxis2009_report.pdf

Contact

Jennifer Darnley, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, 1 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3JS
Tel: +44 (0) 1865 287210 / Fax: +44 (0) 1865 287211 / Email: press@oii.ox.ac.uk

Notes for Editors

OxIS surveys were undertaken in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009 of nationally representative random samples of 2000 people in the UK. By comparing different datasets over time, careful predictions about the future of the Internet are made in relation to how the Internet is affecting our society. <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis/>

The Oxford Internet Institute is a department within the Social Sciences Division of the University of Oxford. It is a leading world centre for the multidisciplinary study of the Internet and society, focusing on Internet-related research and teaching, and on informing policy-making and practice. <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/>

Professor William Dutton is Director of the OII, Professor of Internet Studies, University of Oxford, and Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford. He was previously a Professor in the Annenberg School for Communication (USC), which he joined in 1980, where he was elected President of the Faculty. He was National Director of the UK's PICT Programme from 1993 to 1996. He has been Chair of Ofcom's Advisory Committee for England since February of 2009. <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/people/faculty.cfm?id=1>

Ellen Helsper is a Research Fellow at the OII responsible for the design, analysis and coordination of the Oxford Internet Surveys (OxIS) and World Internet Project (WIP) Surveys. She sits on the International Advisory Board of the EU Kids Online project (2006-2009) which examines European research on cultural, contextual and risk issues in children's safe use of the Internet and new media across 21 countries. She is the UK Government Special Advisor on digital inclusion for Wales and author of the Digital Inclusion report (2008) for the Department of Communities and Local Government. <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/people/faculty.cfm?id=106>