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Digital Life in 2025

Americans Feel Better Informed Thanks to the Internet

87% say the Web helps them learn new things; 72% say it improves their ability to share ideas. Most enjoy having access to more information, rather than feeling overloaded.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

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About this Report

This report is the latest in a sustained effort throughout 2014 by the Pew Research Center to mark the 25th anniversary of the creation of the World Wide Web by Sir Tim Berners-Lee ([The Web at 25](#)).

There are two parts to this sustained effort. One group of findings relates to the current state of the internet in American society. A [previous report](#) noted the growth in adoption of digital technologies since the mid-1990s. It also noted the overall positive views online Americans have about the role of the internet in their lives and in the broader society.

The other part of the research is a series of reports exploring the future of the internet and its potential social, political, and economic consequences. Those other reports can be found at <http://www.pewinternet.org/the-web-at-25/>.

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

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About the Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take policy positions. It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, media content analysis and other empirical social science research. The center studies U.S. politics and policy views; media and journalism; internet and technology; religion and public life; Hispanic trends; global attitudes and U.S. social and demographic trends. All of the center's reports are available at www.pewresearch.org. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts.

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Summary of Findings

Rather than crushing them with too much information and making it hard to find useful material, most Americans say the internet and cell phones have brought benefits in learning, sharing and diversifying the flow of information into their lives. A new survey by the Pew Research Center finds that the vast majority of Americans believe their use of the web helps them learn new things, stay better informed on topics that matter to them, and increases their capacity to share ideas and creations with others.

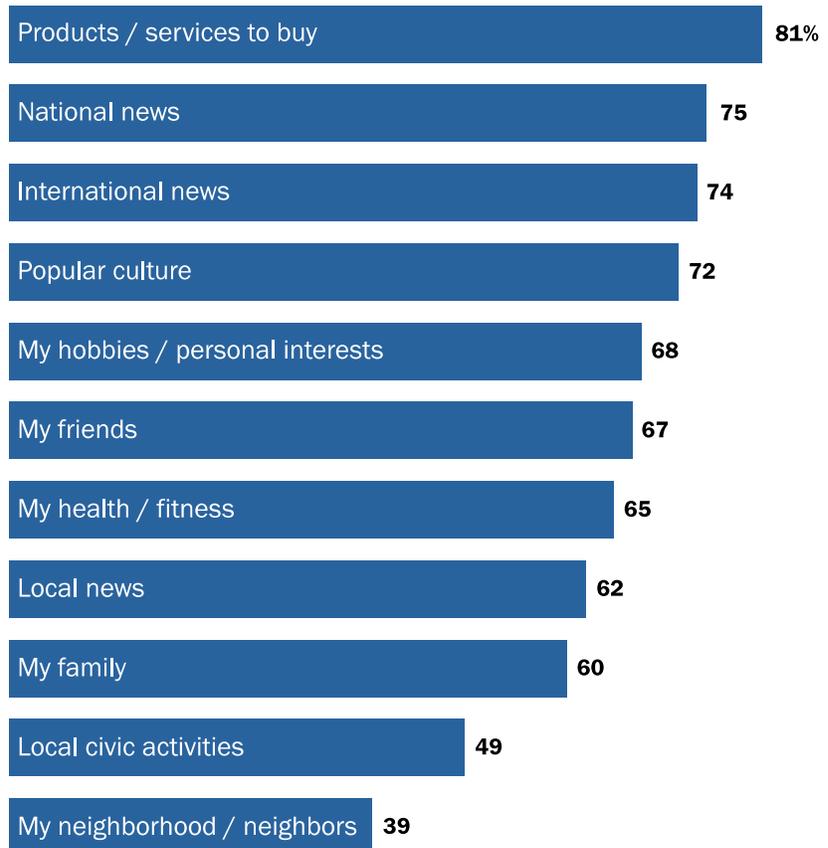
These generally positive attitudes are buttressed by the view that people like having so much information at their fingertips, rather than feeling information overload. Moreover, this positive judgment extends to the broader culture. Most believe that average Americans and U.S. students are better informed than in the past.

The survey of 1,066 internet users shows that **87% of**

online adults say the internet and cell phones have improved their ability to learn new things, including 53% who say it has improved this “a lot.”¹ Internet users under age 50,

Internet users say digital tech makes them better informed than 5 years ago

% of internet users who say the internet and cell phones helps them be better informed about ...



Source: August 2014 Panel Survey.

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¹ The most current findings of the Pew Research Center are that 89% of American adults use the internet.

those in higher income households, and those with higher educational attainment are especially likely to say the internet and cell phones help them “a lot” when it comes to learning new things.

Asked if they enjoy having so much information at their fingertips or if they feel overloaded, **72% of internet users report they like having so much information**, while just 26% say they feel overloaded.

Online Americans especially highlight how the internet and cell phones have made them better informed about products and services available for sale, national and international news, and popular culture. Asked if their internet use affected their being better informed on these issues compared with five years ago:

Products and services: 81% of online Americans report their internet and cell phone use has made them better informed about products and services today than they were five years ago.

News: Substantial majorities also feel better informed about national news (75%), international news (74%), and pop culture (72%) because of these tools.

Friends: 67% of online adults say they are better informed about friends than they were five years ago, and 60% feel they know more about family.

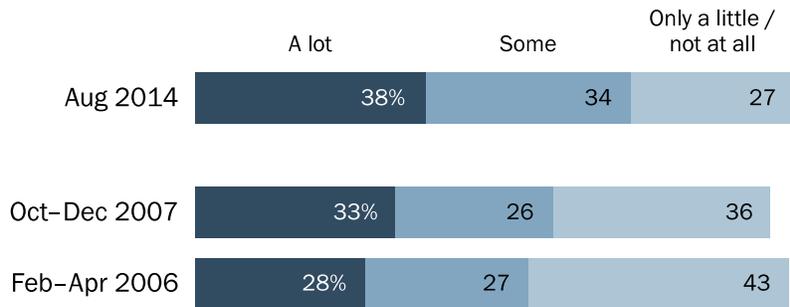
Civic and community life: Fewer internet users say these tools have made them better informed about ...

- Civic and government activities in their community—49% say they feel better informed thanks to digital technology
- Their neighborhood and neighbors—39% say they feel better informed because of their use of digital tools

Sharing ideas: In addition, 72% of internet users say digital technologies have improved their ability to share their ideas and creations with others. These figures have risen since 2006, when we found that 55% of online adults felt the internet improved their ability to share their ideas and creations. It is likely that a major contributor to the increase in this measurement is the rise of social networking sites, which were not heavily in use in 2006. Social networking sites are used by more than two-thirds of those who go online now.

Rising share feel digital technology helps their ability to share their ideas and creations

% of internet users who say digital technology helps ...



August 2014 Panel Survey. Previous surveys were telephone polls. .

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Average Americans and students are better informed: Overall, internet users believe that both the average American and the average student today are better informed thanks to the internet.

- 76% of online adults say access to the internet has made *average Americans* better informed, while just 8% saying it has made them less well-informed
- 77% of adult internet users say the internet has made *today's students* better informed, with just 8% saying it has made them less well-informed

Perhaps surprisingly in both cases, internet users under age 30 are less likely to believe the internet is making average Americans or today's students better informed. Instead, they are more likely than their older counterparts to say the internet has had no real impact—19% of young adults say so, compared with 9% percent of those ages 30 and older.

About This Survey

The analysis in this report is based on an online probability survey conducted September 12-18, 2014 among a sample of 1,066 adult internet users, 18 years of age or older. The survey was conducted in English by the GfK Group using KnowledgePanel, its nationally representative online research panel. Sampling error for the total sample of 1,066 respondents is plus or minus 3.3 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. For more information on the GfK Privacy Panel, please see the Methods section at the end of this report.

More information Yields More Learning and Sharing

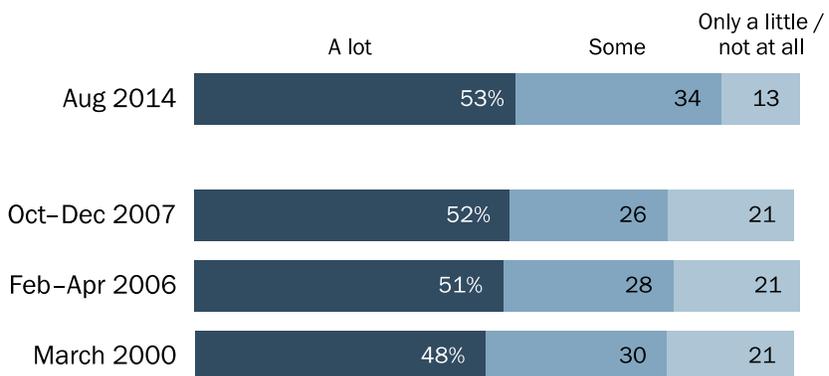
Information is exploding and most digitally-connected Americans think that has brought benefits to them personally and to the broader culture, despite the ceaseless flow of [commentary about information overload](#).

It is not easy to figure out exactly how much material flows into and out of people's lives, but there is no doubt that there is much more than the not-so-distant past. [One elaborate study](#) projected that by 2015, Americans will consume 1.7 trillion hours of traditional and digital media. That is an average of 15.5 hours of media per person per day of 30 different kinds of media in video, print, audio, and gaming formats and allows for lots of multi-tasking. That projection came after watching 5% growth per year in the amount of information and media in people's lives between 2008 and 2013. That work built on previous scholarship showing that the average American in 2008 was processing over [100,500 words per day in various formats—a 140% increase from 1980](#).

Over the years, the Pew Research Center has asked internet users a variety of questions about the role of the internet in their lives and the impact their internet use has had on key aspects of their lives. This report focuses on the issue: Do the internet and cell phones help people learn new things and feel better informed? And does this outweigh any possible feelings of information overload?

How much, if at all, have the internet and cell phones improved your ability to learn new things?

% of internet users who say the internet and cell phones help ...



Source: August 2014 Panel Survey. Previous surveys were national phone surveys.

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A large majority (87%) of American adult internet users say the internet has improved their ability to learn new things. This figure includes just over half (53%) who say it has improved their ability to learn new things “a lot” and 34% who say it has improved this “somewhat.” Just 13% see the internet and cell phones having little or no impact in this area.

Americans' appreciation for digital technology's impact on their learning capacity has been relatively steady since Pew Research Center began measuring it in 2000. Even in those earlier

days of internet adoption, before smartphones became the norm, 78% of adult internet users felt the internet had an impact on their ability to learn new things, including about half (48%) who said it improved this “a lot.”

Among today’s web users, those under age 50 are more likely than internet users age 50 and older (61% v. 44%) to feel the internet and cell phones have improved their ability to learn new things “a lot.” The oldest internet users (ages 65 or older) are the least likely to perceive an impact in this area, with 19% saying the internet and cell phones have improved their ability to learn new things “only a little” or “not at all.”

Along with younger adult internet users, those living in higher income households are also more likely to see these technologies having an impact on their ability to learn new things. Six in ten (59%) web users living in households with incomes of \$75,000 or more say the internet and cell phones have improved their ability to learn “a lot,” a figure that drops to 44% among those in households with incomes below \$30,000.

An internet user’s education level is also related to their perceptions of the internet’s impact in this area, with adults at the higher end of the educational spectrum reporting

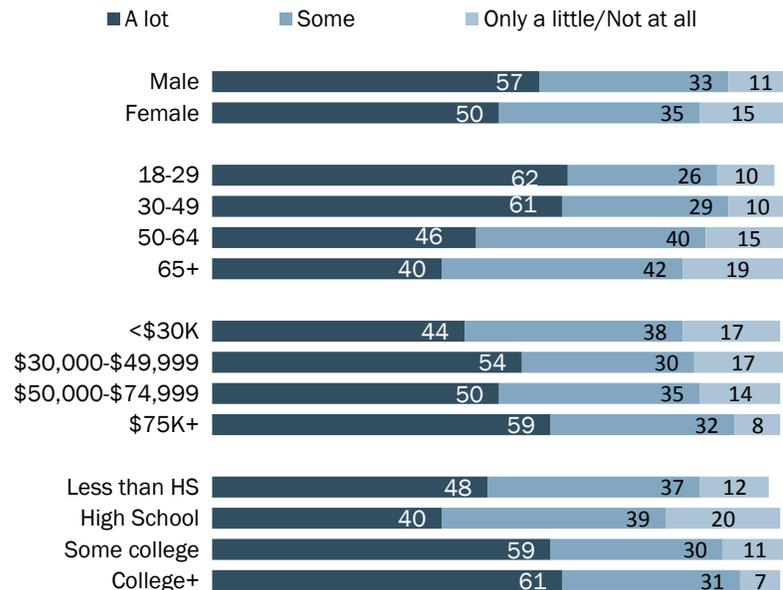
more of an impact than those in the lower end. Online Americans who have attended or graduated from college are more likely than those who have not (60% v. 43%) to say the internet and cell phones improve “a lot” their ability to learn new things.

Most say average Americans and students are better informed because of their internet use

In addition to seeing an impact on their own ability to learn, large majorities of adult internet users believe both the “average American” and “today’s students” are better informed because of

Better off and better educated Americans are more likely to say the internet helps their ability to learn new things

% of internet users who say the internet helps them learn ...



Source: August 2014 Panel Survey

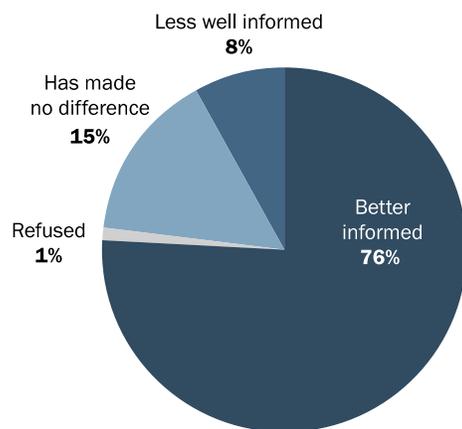
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the internet. Three-quarters of online adults (76%) say access to the internet has made average Americans better informed, while just 8% say it has made average citizens less well-informed. The remainder say the internet has made no difference.

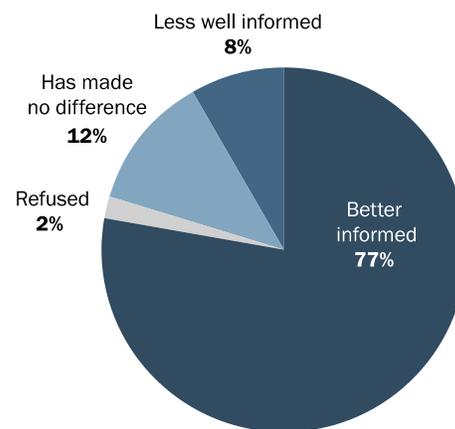
Likewise, when asked if the internet has made today's students better informed or less well-informed, 77% of web users say they are better informed. Again, just 8% say the internet has made today's students less well-informed and the remainder see no impact.

Internet users think average Americans and students are better informed now

% of internet users who think access to the internet has made average Americans ...



% of internet users who think access to the internet has made today's students ...



Source: August 2014 Panel Survey

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Interestingly enough, some of the heaviest users of the internet are *less likely* to believe that other Americans are benefiting from internet use. Younger adult internet users (those ages 18-29) are the *least* likely to believe the internet is making average Americans (66%) or today's students (67%) better informed, and instead are more likely than their older counterparts to say the internet has no real impact. About one in five young online adults say the internet has had no real impact on how well-informed average Americans (23%) or today's students (19%) are.

Asked about the internet's impact on how well-informed average Americans are, those at the two ends of the educational spectrum differ slightly from those in the middle. On this question, those who have graduated from high school are more likely than both those who have not graduated from high school and those who have graduated from college to say the internet has made average

Americans better informed (81% v. 66% and 72% respectively). These differences disappear when asking about the internet's impact on today's students.

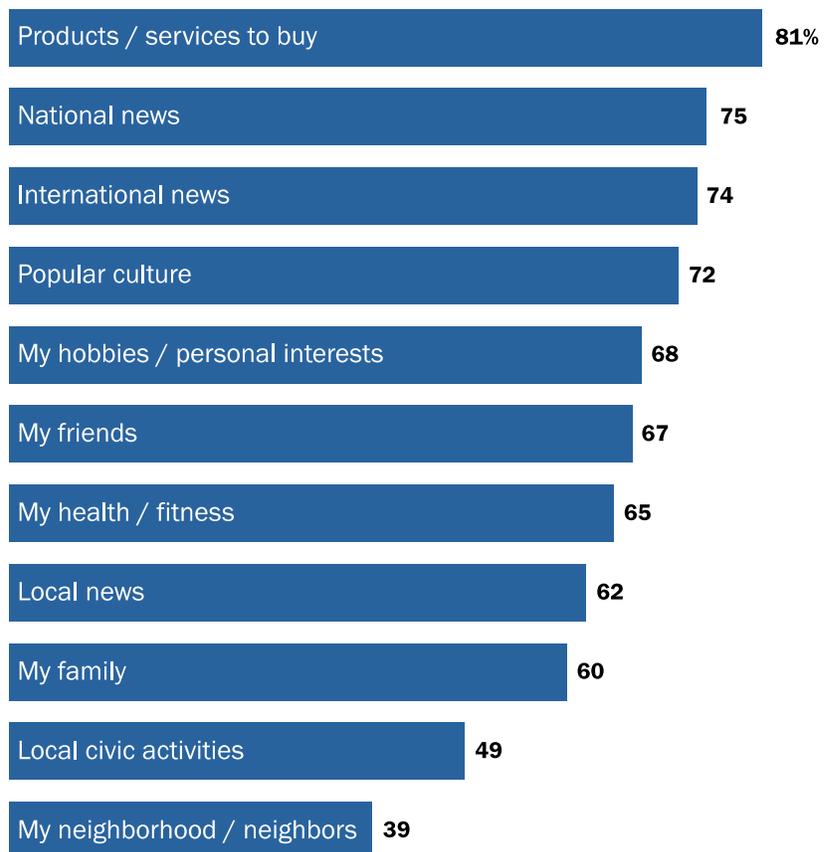
The internet helps people feel better informed about some faraway topics such as global news, but it has less impact on people feeling better informed on things closer to home

To gauge the perceived impact of the internet in different topic areas, internet users were asked to think about being informed now on key issues, compared with five years ago: Did their use of the internet and cell phones make them better informed about each of 12 specific topics? Results reveal widely varying perceptions of how much impact the internet is having on respondents' knowledge levels in different areas.

Generally, respondents report digital technologies have made them better informed about topics further away or more removed from them personally, such as national news, international news, pop culture, and products and services to purchase. Topics that are more local, micro-local or personal in nature, including family, friends, local news, their health, local civic and government activities, and one's own neighbors or neighborhood, tend to reveal less perceived impact.

Internet users say digital tech makes them better informed than 5 years ago

% of internet users who say the internet and cell phones helps them be better informed about ...



Source: August 2014 Panel Survey.

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Of the 12 topics in our survey, the highest percentage of respondents say the internet has made them better informed about products and services to purchase, with 81% of internet users saying they know more than they did in this area five years ago. This is followed by national news (75%), international news (74%) and pop culture (72%). By comparison, about half as many internet users say the internet has made them better informed about their neighborhood and neighbors (39%).

Each of the 12 topics is examined in detail below.

Products and services to buy

Overall, 81% of adult internet users say their use of the internet and cell phones has made them better informed about products and services to buy than was the case five years ago. Internet users ages 65 and older are the least likely to report this is the case when compared with all other age groups. In addition, internet users who have not graduated from high school are less likely than those with higher educational attainment to feel better informed about products and services as a result of using the internet and cell phones.

National news

Overall, 75% of internet users say their use of the internet and cell phones has made them better informed about national news today than they were five years ago. This figure is slightly higher among internet users under age 50 when compared with those ages 50 and older (78% v. 70%). Internet users in the highest income households—those with annual household incomes of \$75,000 or greater—are also slightly more likely than other adults (80% v. 71%) to say using digital technology has made them better informed about national news.

International news

International news elicits responses and demographic patterns similar to those found for national news. Overall, 74% of internet users say their use of the internet and cell phones has made them better informed in this area compared with five years ago. This figure is slightly higher among internet users under age 50 when compared with those ages 50 and older (78% v. 70%). Higher income internet users (\$75,000 or higher annual household income) are slightly more likely than other adults (81% v. 70%) to perceive their internet and cell phone use making them better informed about international news.

In the case of international news, educational differences also emerge, with web users who have been to college slightly more likely than those who have not been to college to say digital technology has made them better informed about what is happening in the world than they were five years ago (79% v. 68%).

Pop culture

Asked if the internet and cell phones have made them better informed about pop culture than they were five years ago, 72% of adult internet users say yes. Age is a key factor on this front, with 18-29 year-old internet users the most likely to say digital technology has made them better informed about pop culture.

Personal hobbies and interests

Age is again a factor in whether respondents feel their use of the internet and cell phones has made them better informed about their personal hobbies and interests. Overall, 68% of internet users say this is the case, but that figure is lower among those ages 65 and older (56%) than it is among internet users ages 18-29 (78%), 30-49 (69%) and 50-64 (65%).

Friends

When it comes to the impact of digital technology on their knowledge about people close to them, more internet users say they are better informed today about friends (67%) than say they are better informed about family (60%). More female than male internet users (70% v. 63%) say the internet and cell phones have made them better informed about their friends. Internet users under age 50 are also more likely than those ages 50 and older to say they feel better informed about their friends (71% v. 62%). These age differences disappear when asking about their knowledge of family.

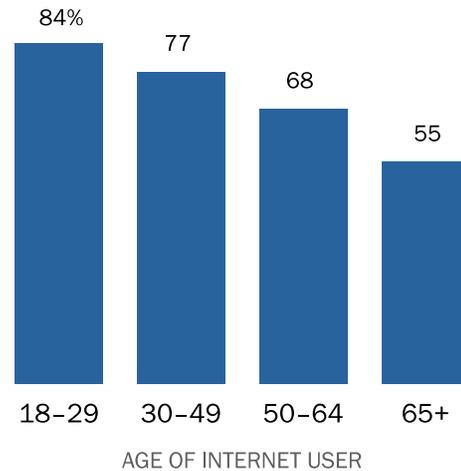
Health and fitness

Overall, two-thirds of internet users (65%) say they are better informed about health and fitness today than they were five years because of their internet and cell phone use.

The survey included a second question about health information which indicates similar impact in this area. Asked how much, if at all, digital technologies have improved their ability to get information about health and healthcare, 44% say these technologies have helped “a lot” and another 35% say they have helped “somewhat.” Just 20% say the internet and cell phones have had little or no impact on their ability to get health information.

Younger adults say the internet has made them more aware of pop culture

% who say their use of the internet and cell phones has made them better informed about pop culture



August 2014 Panel Survey

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These figures are relatively consistent across all demographic subgroups, with the exception of the lowest income internet users. Among web users living in households with an annual income below \$30,000, almost one-third (31%) say digital technologies have helped “only a little” or “not at all” in this area, the highest percentage of any demographic subgroup to report little to no impact.

A March 2000 survey posed a similar question to internet users—“How much, if at all, has the internet improved the way you get information about healthcare?” At that time, far fewer internet users saw this relatively new technology having a significant impact on the way they got their health information. In 2000, just 13% of internet users saw the internet improving this “a lot” and just 12% saw the internet improving it “somewhat.” Fully half (49%) of internet users at the time said the internet had no impact at all on how they gathered information about healthcare.

Local news

About six in ten internet users (62%) say their internet and cell phone use has made them better informed about local news than they were five years ago.

Family

As noted above, more internet users say the internet and cell phones have made them better informed about friends today (67%) than say they are better informed about family (60%). As was the case when asking about friends, more female than male internet users say the internet and cell phones have made them better informed about their family (65% v. 56%).

Civic life and government activities in your community

Results for this item are similar to those found when asking about local news. About half of internet users (49%) say their internet and cell phone use has made them better informed about civic life and government activities in their community.

Neighborhood and neighbors

This micro-local level elicits the least perceived impact among respondents. Just 39% overall say their internet and cell phone use makes them better informed today about their neighbors and neighborhood than was the case five years ago. Responses to this item vary across several demographics, including gender, race/ethnicity and age. Women and internet users under age 50 are all slightly more likely than their counterparts to report feeling better informed about their neighborhood and neighbors thanks to their cell phone and internet use.

Most do not feel the explosion of information is overwhelming

With the vast amount of information available online about all of these different topics, a common question is whether internet users like having so much information or feel overwhelmed by it. Responses show that a majority of internet users (72%) enjoy having so much information at their fingertips, while just 26% find it overwhelming. Women are slightly more likely than men to

report feeling overwhelmed (30% v. 21%), as are internet users ages 50 and older when compared with those ages 18-49 (30% v. 22%). Still, across all demographic subgroups, large majorities report that they like having so much information available.

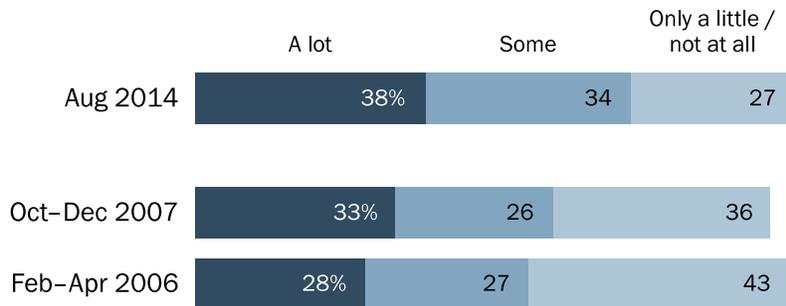
These figures have remained relatively constant since the Pew Research Center began asking this question in 2000.

It's not just about learning—it's also about sharing. Most people say the internet helps.

The internet and cell phones have not just impacted individuals' abilities to learn new things, they have also had an effect on their ability to share ideas. Asked how much digital technology has improved their ability to share ideas and creations with others, 38% of online Americans say these technologies have improved this "a lot" and another 34% say they have improved it "somewhat."

Rising share feel digital technology helps their ability to share their ideas and creations

% of internet users who say digital technology helps ...



August 2014 Panel Survey. Previous surveys were telephone polls. .

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Among internet users, those under age 50 are more likely to say this when compared with those ages 50 and older (47% v. 28%).

The same question was asked of internet users in 2006 and 2007 in telephone surveys, and responses show the perceived impact of the internet on sharing ideas and creations growing steadily over time.

Survey questions

Q28 How much, if at all, have the internet and cell phones improved your ability to learn new things?

A lot	53%
Some	34%
Only a little	8%
Not at all	5%

Q29 How much, if at all, have the internet and cell phones improved your ability to share your ideas and creations with others?

	Current	Oct. '07	April '06
A lot	38%	33%	28%
Some	34%	26%	27%
Only a little	15%	15%	16%
Not at all	12%	21%	27%
Refused/DK *		6%	1%

Q32 How much, if at all, have the internet and cell phones improved your ability to find ways to get information about health and health care?

A lot	44%
Some	35%
Only a little	12%
Not at all	7%

Q33 Some people say they feel overloaded with too much information these days. Others say they like having so much information available. Which best describes you?

	<u>Aug '14</u>	Aug '13	Dec '07	April '06
I feel overloaded	26%	18	24	27
I like having so much information	72%	79	69	67
Refused/DK	2%	3	7	7

Q34 We'd now like you to think about all the ways that the internet connects you to information. Compared with five years ago, would you say that you are better informed on the following topics because of your use of the internet and cell phones, or not?

	Better informed because of tech, compared w/ 5 yrs. ago	Not better informed	Ref/DK
a. local news	62%	36%	2%
b. national news	75	23	2
c. international news	74	23	3
d. your neighborhood and your neighbors	39	58	3
e. your family	60	37	2
f. your friends	67	31	3
g. the hobbies and personal interests you have	68	30	2
h. your health and fitness	65	32	3
i. civic life and government activities in your community	49	49	2
j. popular culture such as movies, music, and books	72	26	2
k. products and services to buy	81	17	2

Q35 Do you think access to the internet has made average Americans ...

Better informed	76%
Less well-informed	8%
Has not made much of a difference	15%
Refused/DK	1%

Q36 Thinking specifically about America's students: Has access to the internet made today's students:

Better informed	77%
Less well-informed	8%
Has not made much of a difference	12%
Refused/DK	2%

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on an online probability survey conducted September 12-18, 2014 among a sample of 1,066 adult internet users, 18 years of age or older. The survey was conducted by the GfK Group using KnowledgePanel, its nationally representative online research panel. To qualify for the main survey, a panel member must be at least 18 years of age and meet one of the following two criteria:

- Use the internet or email at least occasionally; or
- Access the internet on a cell phone, tablet or other mobile handheld device at least occasionally

The survey was conducted in English.

KnowledgePanel members are recruited through probability sampling methods and include both those with internet access and those without. KnowledgePanel provides internet access for those who do not have it and, if needed, a device to access the internet when they join the panel. A combination of random digit dialing (RDD) and address-based sampling (ABS) methodologies have been used to recruit panel members (in 2009 KnowledgePanel switched its sampling methodology for recruiting panel members from RDD to ABS). The panel comprises households with landlines and cellular phones, including those only with cell phones, and those without a phone. Both the RDD and ABS samples were provided by Marketing Systems Group (MSG). KnowledgePanel continually recruits new panel members throughout the year to offset panel attrition as people leave the panel. The survey was conducted in English. Respondents were selected randomly from eligible adult household members of the panel. All sampled members received an initial email September 12-13, 2014 to notify them of the survey and included a link to the survey questionnaire. One follow-up reminder was sent three days later to those who had not yet responded.

The final sample for this survey was weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, household income, metropolitan area or not, and region to parameters from the July 2013 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). In addition, the sample is weighted to match current patterns of internet access from the July 2011 CPS survey. This weight is multiplied by an initial base or sampling weight that corrects for differences in the probability of selection of various segments of the sample and by a panel weight that adjusts for any biases due to nonresponse and noncoverage at the panel recruitment stage (using all of the parameters mentioned above as well home ownership status).

Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting at each of these stages. Sampling error for the total sample of 1,066 respondents is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.