

## The Internet as a Diversion

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**Three-quarters of online economic users go online to relax and take their minds off of the recession. Fully 88% of 18-29 year old online economic users look to the internet to relax.**

**September 2009**

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**View Report Online:**

<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/16-The-Internet-as-a-Diversion.aspx>

**Pew Internet & American Life Project**

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# The Internet as a Diversion

## Introduction

In the Pew Internet & American Life Project’s report “The Internet and the Recession”, we identified a group of individuals we call “online economic users”. This group—which comprises 69% of all American adults and 88% of all internet users—includes anyone who has turned to online sources for one or more of the following reasons:

- To keep up with the news about the nation’s economy
- To deal with their own financial situation
- To share their thoughts about what is happening with the economy

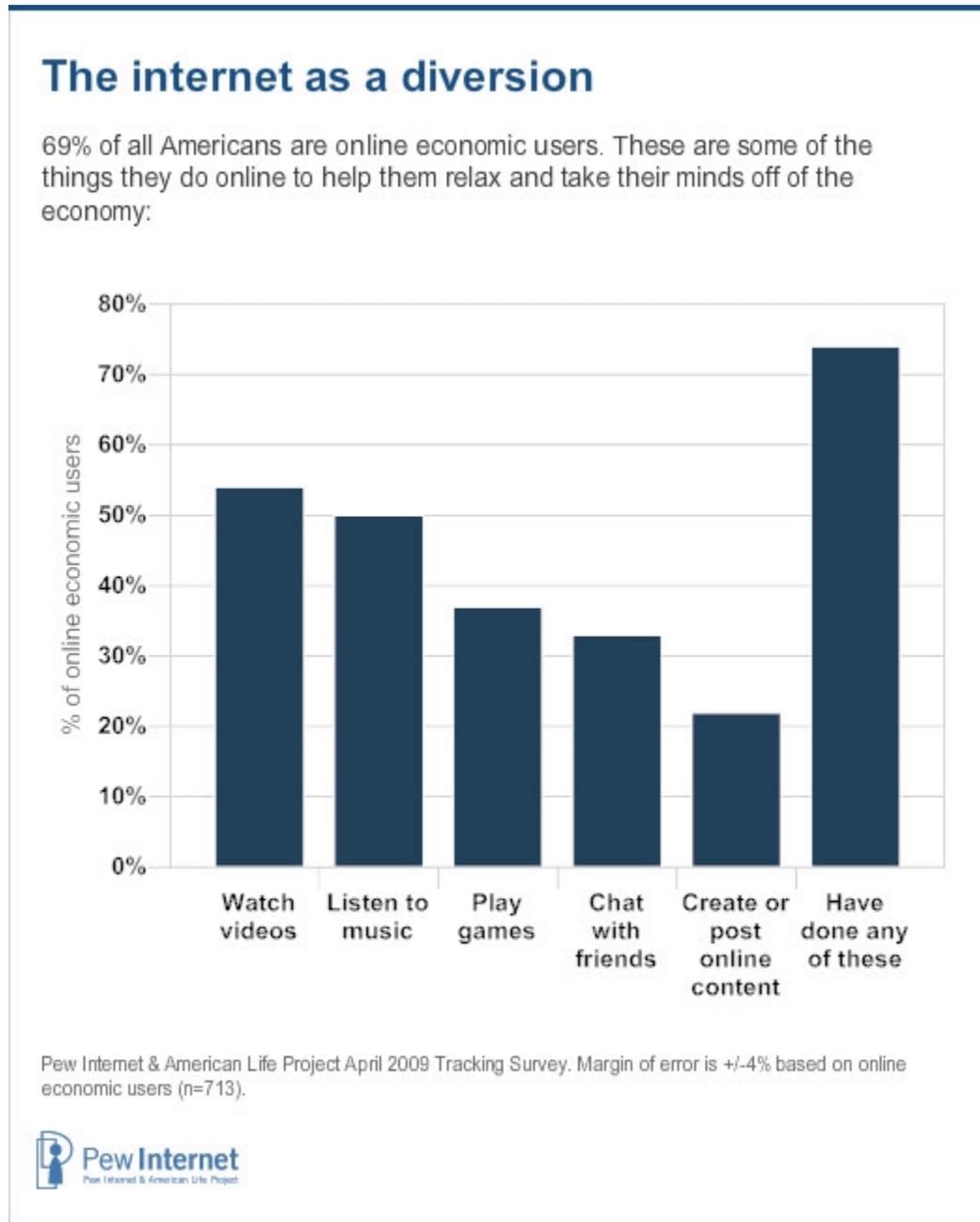
In that same report, we found that online economic users relied heavily on online sources to make sense of the economic crisis, to adjust their own personal finances, and to share their experiences during the recession with others. This data memo, based on a national telephone survey conducted March 26 to April 19, 2009 among 2,253 Americans (including 561 reached via cell phone), evaluates the flip side of that phenomenon: the degree to which people are using the internet as a diversion and way to relax and take their minds off of their economic troubles.

## **Three-quarters of online economic users go online to relax and take their minds off of the recession**

When asked whether they used the internet to relax and help get their minds off of the recent economic or financial problems, three-quarters (74%) of online economic users said they had done so.

Listening to music and watching online videos are among the most common of the

activities we evaluated; roughly half of all online economic users have done each of these activities to relax. Approximately one-third of online economic users have played online games or chatted with friends (on a social networking site, listserv or other online group), while an additional 22% have taken their minds off of their economic or financial circumstances by creating or posting content online.



## **Online economic users under the age of 30 are especially likely to turn to the internet as a diversion, although a range of age groups take part in these activities**

The youngest online economic users (those ages 18-29) are significantly more likely than other age groups to engage in a wide range of online relaxation activities. Among these young online economic users, three-quarters say that they go online to relax by watching online videos (74%) or listening to music online (73%); roughly half play online games (52%) or go online to chat with friends (55%); and two in five post their own original creations online.

Although the youngest online economic users turn to the internet in the largest numbers to relax and take their minds off of the economy, those in other age groups tend to do so as well. For instance, among online economic users ages 30-49, more than half say they relax by watching online videos (58%) or listening to music online (52%); additionally, one-third play online games (34%) or chat with friends online (33%).

## Online economic users of many ages go online to relax

69% of Americans are online economic users; these are some of the ways that online economic users of different ages go online to relax

	All online economic users	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%
Watch videos online	54	74 <sup>^</sup>	58 <sup>*</sup>	37	26
Listen to music online	50	73 <sup>^</sup>	52 <sup>*</sup>	31	25
Play online games	37	52 <sup>^</sup>	34	31	30
Chat with friends	33	55 <sup>^</sup>	33 <sup>*</sup>	16	11
Create or post online content	22	40 <sup>^</sup>	21 <sup>*</sup>	11	8
<b>Have done any of these</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>88<sup>^</sup></b>	<b>78<sup>*</sup></b>	<b>59</b>	<b>56</b>

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project April 2009 Tracking Survey. Margin of error is +/-4% based on online economic users (margin of error within subgroups is higher). <sup>^</sup>Indicates statistically significant difference compared with all other age groups. <sup>\*</sup>Indicates statistically significant difference compared with 50-64 and 65+ age groups.



There are few statistically significant differences between male and female online economic users. The exception is chatting with friends online: women (38%) are more likely to do this than men (27%). There are also few significant differences between online economic users based on race, education or household income.

**Going online to relax is a near-universal activity among online economic users, regardless of whether they have been personally impacted by the recession or not.**

Interestingly, online economic users go online for relaxation or as a diversion at the same rate regardless of their own financial situation, or whether or not they have been

personally impacted by the economic downturn. For these online economic users, going online as a diversion or relaxation tool is simply a standard feature of their lives, and not one that is necessarily tied to their personal economic circumstances.

## Online economic users go online to relax and take their minds off of the economy, regardless of their personal financial situation

69% of all Americans are online economic users; the following are some of the activities that online economic users with different financial situations take part in.

	Financial status excellent/good	Financial status fair/poor	Personally hurt by downturn	Not personally hurt by downturn
Proportion of online economic user population	48%	51%	55%	45%
Watch videos online	58	52	52	58
Listen to music online	50	50	45	56 <sup>^</sup>
Play online games	39	37	34	41
Chat with friends on a social networking site, listserv or online group	32	33	32	34
Create or post content online, such as a picture, video or blog post	24	21	21	24
<b>Have done any of these</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>79<sup>^</sup></b>

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project April 2009 Tracking Survey. Margin of error is +/-4% based on online economic users. Margin of error within subgroups is higher. <sup>^</sup>Indicates statistically significant difference compared to opposite column.



**Those who use the internet as a diversion also are highly**

## engaged in other online activities related to the economic recession

As noted above, many online economic users turn to the internet as a diversion; however, these individuals engage in a wide range of more serious online pursuits as well. For example, fully 76% of those who have gone online to relax or take their minds off of the economy have also gone online to find the lowest price on something they need to buy. Additionally:

- 46% of online economic users who go online as a diversion have also gone online to find or use online coupons.
- 26% have sold personal items on an online auction site.
- 15% have signed up online for automatic updates about economic or financial issues, and an additional 15% have tagged or categorized online content related to economic or financial issues.
- 13% have shared photos, videos or audio files about economic or financial issues.

These individuals are also active in posting their own original online content: 10% of those who go online as a diversion have posted their comments about the recession in an online discussion group or other online forum, and 9% have done so on a blog (their own or someone else's).

# Methodology

## About the Pew Internet & American Life Project

The Pew Internet Project is an initiative of the Pew Research Center, a nonprofit “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. The Pew Internet Project explores the impact of the internet on children, families, communities, the work place, schools, health care and civic/political life. The Project is nonpartisan and takes no position on policy issues. Support for the project is provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

## Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research International between March 26 to April 19, 2009, among a sample of 2,253 adults, 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,687), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points. For results based on Form A online economic users (n=713) the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households

from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 5 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest male currently at home. If no male was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest female at home. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau's March 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an

iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

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**Spring Tracking Survey 2009**

Final Revised Topline 7/16/09

Data for March 26 – April 19, 2009

Princeton Survey Research Associates International  
for the Pew Internet & American Life ProjectSample: n= 2,253 national adults, age 18 and older, including 561 cell phone interviews  
Interviewing dates: 03.26.09 – 04.19.09

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,253]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,687]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on online economic users [n=1,475]

**Q37** Now, I'd like to ask if you've used the internet to relax and to help get your mind off all the economic and financial problems. Specifically, in the last 12 months, have you gone online to do any of these things to help you relax? Have you... [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] to help you relax?

Based on Form A online economic users [N=713]

	YES, HAVE DONE THIS	NO, HAVE NOT	(VOL) DOESN'T APPLY	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Played an online game	37	62	*	0	*
b. Watched videos online, which includes short video clips or a entire movie	54	45	*	0	*
c. Chatted with friends on a social networking site, a listserv or online group	33	67	*	*	*
d. Listened to music online	50	50	*	0	*
e. Created or posted content online, such as a picture, video or blog post	22	77	*	*	*