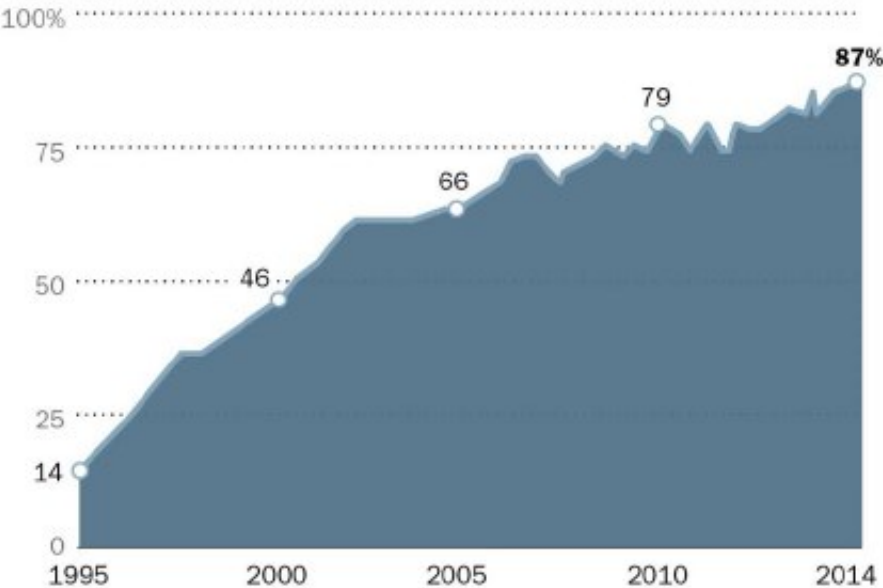# Pew studies American view of Internet impact

February 27 2014, by Nancy Owano

Internet use, 1995-2014

% of American adults who use the internet, over time

Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 1995-2014.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Credit: Pew Research

The Pew Research Center released this week its Pew Research Internet Project findings on how Americans view the Internet's impact on their

lives and relationships. The findings are Part 2 of the think tanks's overall look at the "The Web at 25 in the U.S." The verdict? Well, here is the Pew group's statement: "There is considerable debate about whether people's use of the internet has enriched their relationships or not and whether the online environment is friendly or menacing. We asked questions about that and found that for the American public, the balance sheet is considerably more positive than negative." To be exact, 76% of internet users said the internet has been a good thing for society, and 15% said it has been a bad thing society and 8% said it has been equally good and bad; 90% of Internet users said the Internet has been a good thing for them personally and 6 % of users said it was bad for them personally, and 3 % said it was some of both good and bad.

Pew's attempt to study the viewpoints of those who use the Internet of course will attract interest in not only the positive outcome but also the numbers of negative reactions among American users.

Issues over the past few years have surfaced that pose questions about the role of the Internet in American life. Some critics point to social networking's digital gated communities where people only chat and swap comments with people who think like them; headline news has included instances of cyber-bullying taken to tragic extremes; self-styled experts have taken to controlling [web](#) sites that give out false information; mental health practitioners have warned against social development consequences over children's hours spent interacting with a screen instead of offline with real human beings.

Interestingly, 67% of Internet users said their online communication with family and friends generally strengthened those relationships, and 18% said it generally weakened the relationships. Also, asked for a broad perspective about the civility or incivility they have either witnessed or encountered during their online tenure, 76% of Internet users said the people they witnessed or encountered online were mostly

kind, and 13% said people were mostly unkind.

What about how they themselves were treated, kindly or unkindly or attacked? 70% of Internet users say they had been treated kindly or generously by others online. That compared with 25% who said they have been treated unkindly or been attacked.

The numbers are based on data from telephone interviews during January with a sample of 1,006 adults age 18 and older.

The Web turns 25 this year, conceived by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989. While the Web and the Internet are not the same thing, with the Web service using Internet architecture, Pew researchers used broadly the term Internet in its survey questions. Pew said "it is a common practice for us in this report and earlier work to use the words "internet" and "Web" interchangeably, even though they are different things."

  More information: www.pewinternet.org/2014/02/27 … mmary-of-findings-3/

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