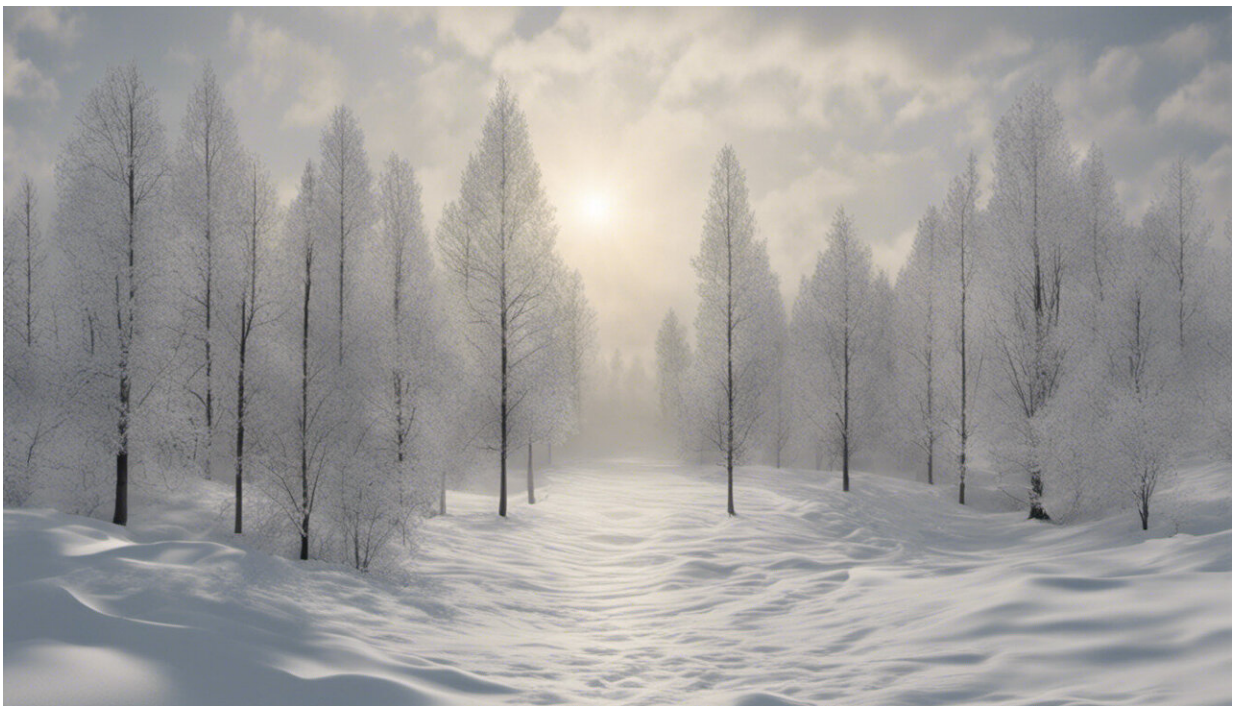# Survey: Internet users usually have a positive experience online, but potential for digital divide to widen

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Credit: AI-generated image (disclaimer)

Research from the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), part of the University of Oxford, has revealed a rapid increase in use of the internet for commercial, banking and entertainment purposes.

The number of people paying bills online, watching films and TV series' and streaming music via the internet has increased significantly since 2013.

However, there is a growing divide in experience and perception between those who use the internet and those who do not, which could lead to non-users potentially missing out on access to key services, widening the "digital divide."

The findings of the 2019 Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) show that while harmful experiences on the internet like viruses or theft of credit card details have not increased, 72 percent of non-internet users believe the internet threatens privacy, compared to 52 percent of those who actually use the internet.

Internet users are also far more likely to believe "technology makes things better"—79 percent of users agree with that sentiment, compared to just 29 percent of non-users.

Dr. Grant Blank, Survey Research Fellow, Oxford Internet Institute, and author of the survey, said:

"The majority of people are having positive experiences of internet use, regularly going online to watch their favourite shows or pay their utility bills.

"However there is a widening perception gap between internet users and non-users, with non-users resolutely avoiding the internet. Often these non-users are from low income groups, where being online could potentially improve their quality of life.

"There's an interesting paradox here with internet users being less likely to take action to protect their privacy while non-users tend to be put off

by [privacy concerns](). These concerns could perpetuate the digital divide, with many people missing out on the benefits of the internet, such as access to health information, employment opportunities and reduced prices online.

"There is a real opportunity to engage with non-users to address their concerns and help them understand the opportunities the internet can bring. We hope this survey contributes to the [public debate]() about what further steps can be taken to narrow the digital divide."

The Oxford Internet Survey 2019 is sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), BT and Google.

Minister for Digital Matt Warman MP said:

"It is great to see an increasing number of people are reaping the huge benefits of being online. From paying bills, streaming their favourite songs to connecting with friends and family across the globe.

"To help more people get online we launched our £400,000 Digital Inclusion Fund to help older and disabled people get online and acquire new digital skills. Through our Digital Skills Partnership we are continuing to work with our partners across the public, private and charity sectors to boost people's capability and confidence in a collaborative way so everyone can benefit from our world-leading digital economy."

Andy Wales, Chief Digital Impact and Sustainability Officer, BT said:

"Helping motivate people who lack confidence to get online is essential to bridge the [digital divide](). BT is passionate about building people's digital skills and helping them to navigate new technologies to improve their lives and drive better productivity for the UK economy."

Commercial and leisure use of the internet

- Almost all forms of online commercial activity have increased sharply in the last six years, with a significant rise in the number of people using the internet to pay bills. 83 percent of internet users now pay their bills online, up from 59 percent in 2013.
- 72 percent of internet users watch films and series on platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, up from just 49 percent in 2013.
- People are increasingly going online to follow their favourite celebrities, with 66 percent of users in 2019 using platforms such as Instagram and Twitter to do so, up from 44 percent in 2013.
- Listening to music online has increased, with 76 percent of users now using channels such as Spotify and YouTube to stream their favourite songs, compared to 64 percent in 2013.

Reasons for not being online

- Among non-internet users 69 percent cite "lack of interest" as the main reason for not being online, down from 82 percent in 2013.
- 18 percent of non-users cite a lack of knowledge as a reason not to go online, with 10 percent expressing privacy concerns.
- Financial barriers are another reason for not accessing the internet; 40 percent of non-users report annual incomes below £12,500.

Internet risks declining

- Internet users believe the risks of internet use are stable or declining, with 52 percent of users reporting concerns about computer malware and viruses in 2019, compared to 69 percent in 2013.

- The number of people receiving malware or viruses has decreased since 2013, down from 30 percent in 2013 to 12 percent in 2019. Alongside this, the proportion of respondents take steps to protect themselves against malware or a virus has fallen dramatically, down from 76 percent in 2013 to just 33 percent in 2019.

User-created content online

- The use of the internet for various forms of content production has been much more stable in the last six years. Posting on social media remains the most popular form of content production, up 8 percentage points to 79 percent of internet users in 2019.
- Other activities such as selling products online remain stable at just over 40 percent of internet users
- Maintaining a personal website is up 5 percentage points at 23 percent and posting your own pictures is up 6 percentage points at 69 percent respectively.
- Writing a blog has declined by 6 percentage points at 14 percent of internet users in 2019, perhaps reflecting the emergence of "threads" and the option to write longer posts and notes on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Attitudes to online advertising

- New for 2019, the survey also examined whether people were comfortable with targeted online advertisements. Some 68 percent of all people surveyed, including users and non-users, dislike the use of targeted advertising and the use of tracking data for commercial purposes.

More information: Perceived Threats to Privacy Online: The Internet

in Britain. oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/u … nal-digital-PDFA.pdf

Provided by University of Oxford