

## Study says digital divide widens in California

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- **Hispanics, low-income are left behind**
- **'There are tremendous differences in access to critical information'**

At least half of Californians go online to get news, make purchases, look for health information, or visit government websites. But as the state's residents integrate the Internet into their daily lives, there are signs that the digital divide is widening for some groups, particularly Hispanic and low-income residents, according to a new survey by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California.

Californians value access to the web: Nearly all Internet users (92 percent) say it is at least somewhat important in everyday life, and even 56 percent of those who don't go online agree.

But disparities in Californians' use of technology reveal a digital divide: Residents who are white, black, or over age 55 have significantly increased their use of computers and the Internet since 2000, while Hispanics, Asians, and low-income residents have not.

"Many Californians go online to research the decisions they make as voters, taxpayers, and consumers," says Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. "Yet there are tremendous differences in access to critical information that put many at a disadvantage in their everyday lives. At a time when technology's role is growing and in a state that has led the way, this poses a major policy challenge."

### *Computer use similar in California and nation*

Three in four Californians (75 percent) use a computer at home, school, or work, a statistic that has held steady since 2000. A 2008 survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found similar results (74 percent) nationwide. The percentage of Californians who use the Internet has increased since 2000, from 65 percent to 70 percent.

Today, Californians and adults across the nation are equally likely to have Internet access at home (63 percent vs. 62 percent in the 2008 Pew survey) and a broadband connection (55 percent each).

### *White, black, older Californians increase use*

Differences emerge in the way demographic groups use technology.

- **Race/ethnicity:** Since 2000, computer use has grown among whites (79 percent to 85 percent) and blacks (76 percent to 83 percent), as has Internet use (70 percent to 81 percent for whites, 60 percent to 82 percent for blacks).

Among Hispanics, computer use has declined (64 percent to 58 percent) and Internet use is unchanged (47 percent to 48 percent). Asians have seen declines in both their use of computers (91 percent to 81 percent) and the Internet (84 percent to 80 percent).

- **Age and income:** Internet use has grown sharply among those age 55 and older (42 percent to 58 percent), but not among adults with household incomes less than \$40,000 (47 percent to 49 percent).

Adults under age 35 are more likely to use the Internet (78 percent) than older adults. Almost all adults with household incomes of \$80,000 or more use computers (94 percent) and the Internet (92 percent).

### *Fewer Hispanics have computers, Web access at home*

A digital divide is also apparent among ethnic/racial groups, income levels, and regions when comparing rates of computer ownership, Internet access, and broadband connections at home, according to the PPIC study.

- **Race/ethnicity:** Less than half of Hispanics (48 percent) have home computers compared to about eight in 10 or more for whites (86 percent), Asians (84 percent), and blacks (79 percent).

Just four in 10 Hispanics (40 percent) have Internet access and a third (34 percent) broadband connection at home. In contrast, majorities in other racial or ethnic groups have both Internet access and broadband.

- **Income:** Among households with incomes under \$40,000, half have home computers, but only four in 10 (40 percent) have home Internet access and just a third (33 percent) have broadband.

At higher income levels, overwhelming majorities of Californians have home computers, Internet access, and broadband.

- **Region:** Majorities in each region of the state say they have home computers and Internet access, but Los Angeles residents report lower rates of broadband connection (48 percent) than residents in the San Francisco Bay Area (65 percent), Orange County/San Diego (58 percent), Inland Empire (56 percent), and Central Valley (53 percent).

Rural residents are somewhat less likely than urban residents to have a computer (65 percent vs. 73 percent), Internet connection (58 percent vs. 63 percent), or broadband (51 percent vs. 56 percent).

### ***What are Californians doing online?***

Californians are far more likely than they were in 1999 to report that they go online to shop (52 percent vs. 30 percent in 1999) or get news about current events (55 percent vs. 43 percent in 1999), and slightly more likely to seek information about their work or jobs (49 percent vs. 45 percent in 1999).

Half of Californians (50 percent) look for health information online or visit government websites. Less than half (47 percent) bank or manage finances online or look for community events and activities (47 percent).

Fewer go online to use government resources, such as downloading forms (43 percent); get housing or real estate information (40 percent); engage in education activities, such as taking a class (27 percent); or use social networking sites (26 percent), such as Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn.

Stark differences emerge in the way demographic groups use the Internet, the PPIC study says.

Hispanics are more likely than they were in 1999 to go online for news (35 percent vs. 28 percent), but far less likely to do so than whites (67 percent), blacks (62 percent), and Asians (61 percent).

Comparing age groups, most people under age 35 (62 percent) and between ages 35 and 54 (61 percent) get news online, compared to 41 percent of residents age 55 and older.

While more Hispanics report shopping on the Web today (29 percent vs. 16 percent in 1999), they are far less likely than whites (67 percent), blacks (63 percent), or Asians (58 percent) to research or make purchases online.

Among other differences:

- **Health information:** While half of Californians say they get health information online, lower income adults (30 percent) and Hispanics (31 percent) are the least likely to do so.
- **Social networking:** Half of residents under age 35 use social networking sites, compared to 20 percent in the 35-54 age group and 8 percent of adults over age 55.
- **School websites:** More than half of parents (56 percent) visit their children's school websites. However, only 30 percent of those with household incomes under \$40,000 do so, compared to 84 percent of those with incomes of \$80,000 or more.

### ***Who's texting?***

Some experts have suggested that mobile devices may be the platform to bridge the digital divide because a phone and service plan costs less than a computer and Internet connection.

In California, 75 percent of all adults and solid majorities in all demographic categories have cell phones. Whites (83 percent) and blacks (78 percent) are more likely than Asians (72 percent) and Hispanics (63 percent) to have cell phones.

Nearly six in 10 use their cell phones to send or receive text messages, and younger residents (87 percent) are the most likely to do so.

They are also the most likely to use their cell phones for e-mail or to access the Internet. Overall, one in four Californians uses cell phones for e-mail (26 percent) or to go online (25 percent).

### ***More key findings***

- *More have DSL connections*

To access the Internet, 29 percent have DSL, 19 percent have cable modems, 5 percent have wireless, and 2 percent have fiber optic or T-1 connections. Just 7 percent have dial-up connections.

- *Most say cities should provide free wireless*

As local governments consider the benefits and difficulties of providing free wireless Internet access, 67 percent of Californians say it is a good idea and 26 percent say it is a bad one.

- *Comfort with technology, worries about security*

Internet users are comfortable using technology but less confident that they can keep viruses and spyware out of their computers. They're even less confident about the security and privacy of financial transactions online.

- *Californians concerned about digital divide*

Two-thirds (65 percent) think Californians in lower-income areas are less likely to have broadband Internet access, and nearly as many (62 percent) are at least somewhat concerned about the disparities.

The PPIC survey was conducted with funding from the California Emerging Technology Fund and ZeroDivide. The report is based on a telephone survey of 2,503 California adult residents, including 2,253 interviewed on landline telephones and 250 on cell phones, conducted June 3-17. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, and Korean.

The sampling error for the 2,503 adults is +/- 2 percent. The sampling error for subgroups is larger.

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