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More Shop, Get News Online - Yet Digital Divide Widens As Californians Broaden Use of Web, Latino and Low-income Residents Left Behind

Published on Jun 26, 2008 - 10:02:03 AM

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By: Public Policy Institute of California

SAN FRANCISCO, California, June 25, 2008 - 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 Latino and low-income residents. These are among the key findings in a statewide survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) in collaboration with the California Emerging Technology Fund.

Californians value access to the web: Nearly all Internet users (92%) 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 Latinos, 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%) 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%) 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% vs. 62% in the 2008 Pew survey) and a broadband connection (55% 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% to 85%) and blacks (76% to 83%), as has Internet use (70% to 81% for whites, 60% to 82% for blacks). Among Latinos, computer use has declined (64% to 58%) and Internet use is unchanged (47% to 48%). Asians have seen declines in both their use of computers (91% to 81%) and the Internet (84% to 80%).

* Age and income: Internet use has grown sharply among those age 55 and older (42% to 58%), but not among adults with household incomes less than \$40,000 (47% to 49%). Adults under age 35 are more likely to use the Internet (78%) than older adults. Almost all adults with household incomes of \$80,000 or more use computers (94%) and the Internet (92%).

Fewer Latinos 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.

* Race/ethnicity: Less than half of Latinos (48%) have a home computer compared to about eight in 10 or more for whites (86%), Asians (84%), and blacks (79%). Just four in 10 Latinos (40%) have Internet access and a third (34%) broadband

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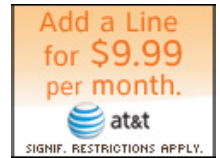
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connection at home. In contrast, majorities in other racial or ethnic groups have both Internet access and broadband.

* Income: Among households with incomes under \$40,000, half have home computers, but only four in 10 (40%) have home Internet access and just a third (33%) 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%) than residents in the San Francisco Bay Area (65%), Orange County/San Diego (58%), Inland Empire (56%), and Central Valley (53%). Rural residents are somewhat less likely than urban residents to have a computer (65% vs. 73%), Internet connection (58% vs. 63%), or broadband (51% vs. 56%).



What Are Californians Doing Online?

Californians are far more likely than they were in 1999 (PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Their Government, September 1999) to report that they go online to shop (52% vs. 30% in 1999) or get news about current events (55% vs. 43% in 1999), and slightly more likely to seek information about their work or jobs (49% vs. 45% in 1999). Half of Californians (50%) look for health information online or visit government websites. Less than half (47%) bank or manage finances online or look for community events and activities (47%). Fewer go online to use government resources, such as downloading forms (43%); get housing or real estate information (40%); engage in education activities, such as taking a class (27%); or use social networking sites (26%), such as Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn.

Stark differences emerge in the way demographic groups use the Internet. Latinos are more likely than they were in 1999 to go online for news (35% vs. 28%), but far less likely to do so than whites (67%), blacks (62%), and Asians (61%). Comparing age groups, most people under age 35 (62%) and between ages 35 and 54 (61%) get news online, compared to 41 percent of residents age 55 and older.

While more Latinos report shopping on the web today (29% vs. 16% in 1999), they are far less likely than whites (67%), blacks (63%), or Asians (58%) 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%) and Latinos (31%) 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%) 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%) and blacks (78%) are more likely than Asians (72%) and Latinos (63%) to have cell phones.

Nearly six in 10 use their cell phones to send or receive text messages, and younger residents (87%) are the most likely to do so. They are also most likely to use their cell phones for email or to access the Internet. Overall, one in four Californians uses cell phones for email (26%) or to go online (25%).

More Key Findings:

* More have DSL connections - Page 12

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 - Page 19

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 - Pages 20, 21

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 - Page 22

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

About the Survey

This is the first survey in a series on public opinion and information technology conducted with funding from the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) 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 between June 3 and June 17, 2008. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, and Korean. The sampling error for the 2,503 adults is $\pm 2\%$. The sampling error for subgroups is larger. For more information on methodology, see page 25.

Mark Baldassare is president and CEO of PPIC, where he holds the Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Public Policy. He is founder of the PPIC Statewide Survey which he has directed since 1998. This is the 87th PPIC Statewide Survey in a series that has generated a database that includes the responses of more than 185,000 Californians.

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