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PROJECT

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# **How Americans Used the Internet** **After the Terror Attack**

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***The Internet was not a primary resource for news or outreach for most Americans after the terror attacks, but it was a helpful supplement to TV and the telephone and many found it useful for expressing their sorrow and anger at the assault***

Americans, including Internet users, relied mostly on TV for their news and the phone primarily for their communication needs in the days following the terror attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon. But for many online Americans, the Internet played a useful supplemental role as a communications tool – through their use of email and instant messaging – and as a news source.

The general picture of many Internet users that emerges in the aftermath of the attack is that they were aggressively using all the means at their disposal to get information about the unfolding crisis and make contact with their networks of loved ones and friends. That meant they were anxious consumers of TV news and restless users of the telephone even more than they used online tools.

In addition, many Internet users were highly active in their communities in responding to the attacks.

There were increases in some online activities in the wake of the tragedy, perhaps the most notable of which was the greater proportion of Internet users posting and reading comments from other Americans about their emotional response to the attacks and the ways America might retaliate.

Some 81% of all Americans say they got most of their information from TV and there was no statistical difference between Internet users and nonusers in their reliance on TV news. About 11% of Americans say they got most of their information from radio and again there is no difference between the responses of Internet users and nonusers. Only 3% of Internet users say they got most of their information about the attacks and the aftermath from the Internet.

***Americans are eager for contact and reassurance***

In the two days after the terror attack, three quarters of all Americans (74%) reached out to loved ones and friends by the phone or by the Internet. Some 82% of Internet users used the phone or email to make contact with people they care about in the first 48 hours after the attacks.

On the day of the attack, 51% of American adults phoned family members and 40% phoned friends about the crisis. About a quarter of Americans (23%) tried to reach someone to try to find out if she or he was safe. Internet users were more likely than non-Internet users to be using the phone to reach out to potential victims.

On that same day, more than a seventh of Internet users (15%) sent email about the crisis to family members and 12% sent email to friends. More women did this than men. In addition, 6% of Internet users sent instant messages to someone on Tuesday, which is about the same level of use of instant messaging that takes place on any given day online.

***There has been a large-scale outpouring by tens of millions of Americans who have personally responded to the crisis***

Even before Friday's National Day of Mourning, many Americans had an instantaneous urge to respond personally to the crisis. In the two days after the attack, a third of all American adults (32%) hung a flag outside their homes. That amounts to approximately 60 million adults who flew the flag. A fifth of Americans (19%) attended a religious service and that amounts to about 35 million people. Some 16% of Americans, or about 30 million people gave a donation. More than a tenth of the public (11%) tried to give

blood, which comes more than 18 million people. And a similar proportion (11%) went to a meeting to discuss the attacks. Of course, this does not include the extraordinary events that took place on Friday, which saw many millions of Americans attend memorial services, perform candlelight vigils, and mount other displays of patriotism.

Internet users were more likely than nonusers to display some kinds of emotional and civic engagement with their country. Online Americans were among the most fervent to attend meetings and attempt to donate blood.

### ***Millions cancel their travel plans***

About 9% of Americans say that in the first two days after the terror attacks they cancelled some travel plans. That suggests more than 15 million have already changed significant parts of their schedules in the wake of the attacks.

### ***There was much heavier use of news sites online in the days after the attack, but the overall size of the online population was slightly smaller than usual***

In the months we have followed the online population, we usually find that between 55% and 58% of Internet users are online on any given day. On this past Tuesday and Wednesday, 51% of Internet users were online. It is probably the case that many Internet users like other Americans decided to follow the events on television. At the same time, those using the Internet spent a bit more time online than is usual.

Compared to an average day, a far greater number of Internet users than normal tried to go to online news sites. Overall, 36% of Internet users went online looking for news in the first two days after the attacks. On Tuesday alone, 29% of Internet users – or more than 30 million people – sought news online. That is one-third greater than the normal news-seeking population on a typical day online. (About 22% of Internet users get news online on a typical day.)

Still, it is important to stress that Internet users were just like everyone else in the population in their devotion to getting most of their news from television.

### ***The virtual town square***

In the 48 hours after the crisis, 13% of Internet users “attended” virtual meetings or participated in virtual communities by reading or posting comments in chat rooms, online bulletin boards, or email listservs. That is substantially greater than normal. On a typical day only 4% of online Americans visit chat rooms. After the terror attacks, Internet users were doing everything online from grieving, to comforting each other, to having reasoned discussions about policy options, to having flame wars where emotions ran high and insults were exchanged. Online communities were an emotional, spiritual, cerebral, primal, and sorrowful place for Americans to sort out their feelings and hash out their views.

### ***The Internet was a backup for some whose phones didn't work well***

More than 70 million Internet users tried to make phone calls to family members and friends on the day of the attacks. More than a third of those Internet users who tried to place calls on Tuesday (35%) had trouble getting through to people they tried to contact by phone and a fifth of them turned to the Internet to make contact with loved ones and friends. That comes to between 4-5 million people who turned to the Internet because the phones weren't working well enough for them.

***Many Internet users had problems in the early hours trying to reach the Web sites they tried to access***

Some 29% of Internet users tried to get news of the crisis online on the day of the attacks – that constitutes about 30 million American adults. About 43% of them said they had problems getting to the sites they wanted to access. Of those who had trouble, 41% kept trying to get to the same site until they finally reached it; 38% went to other sites, 19% gave up their search. Many news sites recognized this problem quickly and redesigned their pages to strip out graphics, ads, and other features that would make their pages time-consuming to download.

A high proportion of Internet users were actively surfing to get all the information they could about the crisis; 58% of those seeking news online were going to multiple Web sites in their hunt for information.

***Many Internet users were multitasking their way through the crisis***

A quarter of Internet users were multitasking on Tuesday by having the TV or radio on while they were surfing or sending email.

***The final assessment: For some, the Internet was a help***

Some 30% of Internet users say the Internet helped them learn about what was going on in the first days after the attacks occurred and 29% say the Internet helped them connect with people they needed to reach.

***More analysis from the Pew Research Center For The People & The Press***

This report is part of a larger effort done in coordination with the Pew Research Center For The People & The Press that will examine Americans' attitudes about how news organizations have been covering the terror attacks. A report by the Pew Research Center about those attitudes and about the psychological impact on Americans of the massive coverage will be released next week.

**The questionnaire**

Since you first heard about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, where would you say you have gotten MOST of your information about this story? From talking with others, listening to the radio, watching television, reading a newspaper, or going online over the Internet?

		SEPT 2001
%	2	Talking with others
	11	Radio
	81	Television
	1	Newspaper
	2	Internet
	1	Other
	1	Don't know/Refused

Thinking again about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, have you (INSERT)?  
(IF YES, And did you happen to do this on Tuesday – the day of the attacks?)

**Items c, d, e, f, and g based on Internet users (N=663)**

		HAVE DONE THIS				
		TOTAL HAVE DONE THIS	DID THIS ON TUESDAY	DID THIS OTHER DAY	HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
a	Called a family member to talk about the attacks Sept 2001	60	51	10	40	*
b	Called a friend to talk about the attacks Sept 2001	48	40	8	52	*
c	Gone online looking for news about the attacks Sept 2001	36	29	8	64	0
d	Gone online to send e-mail to family members because of the news Sept 2001	19	15	4	81	0
e	Gone online to send e-mail to friends because of the news Sept 2001	16	12	4	84	0
f	Posted or read comments about the attack on a web site bulletin board, in a chat room or on an e-mail list-serv Sept 2001	13	8	5	87	0
g	Used instant messaging to communicate with someone about the attacks Sept 2001	9	6	2	91	0
h	Called to try to find out whether someone you know was safe Sept 2001	28	23	5	72	*

TERO2/12 When you tried to make phone calls on Tuesday did you have any trouble placing the calls?

TERO2a When you had trouble making the call, did you try to reach them through the Internet via email or instant messaging?

**Based on those who tried to make phone call on Tuesday [N = 740]**

		SEPT 2001	
%	32	4	Yes, had trouble Tried to reach via e-mail/IM
	28		No, not tried to reach
	68		No, did not have trouble
	*		Don't know/Refused

TER02b/12b How many phone calls would you say you made to family members and friends on **Tuesday** because of the attacks?

**Based on those who tried to make phone call on Tuesday [N = 740]**

	SEPT 2001	
%	31	1 or 2 calls
	38	3 to 5
	17	6 to 10
	6	11 to 20
	4	20 or more
	4	Don't know/Refused

TER03 When you went online Tuesday to get news and information about the attacks, were you trying to reach one particular site or did you try various Web sites?

**Based on those who went to web site on Tuesday [N = 193]**

	SEPT 2001	
%	37	One particular site
	58	Various sites
	4	Don't know/Refused

TER04 When you went online Tuesday to get news and information about the attacks, did you have any problems accessing the web sites? (IF YES) Would you say you had a lot of problems or just some problems?

**Based on those who went to web site on Tuesday [N = 193]**

	SEPT 2001	
%	15	Yes, a lot of problems
	28	Yes, some problems
	56	No, did not have problems
	1	Don't know/Refused

TER04a When you had problems accessing a web site, did you eventually get to the site you wanted, did you go to other sites, or did you just give up?

**Based on those who had trouble with web site on Tuesday [N = 82]**

	SEPT 2001	
%	41	Got to desired site
	38	Went to other sites
	19	Gave up
	1	Don't know/Refused

TER05 How many emails would you say you sent to family members and friends on **Tuesday** because of the attacks?

**Based on those who sent e-mail Tuesday about attacks [N = 127]**

	SEPT 2001	
%	39	1 or 2 e-mails
	34	3 to 5
	11	6 to 10
	5	11 to 20
	4	20 or more
	8	Don't know/Refused

TER06 On Tuesday, were there times that you were watching television or listening to the radio and going online at the same time to try to get information related to the attacks?

**Based on Internet users [N = 663]**

	SEPT 2001	
%	24	Yes
	75	No
	*	Don't know/Refused

TER07 Thinking about your use of the Internet in reaction to the attacks, how much would you say using the Internet... (INSERT) ... a lot, some, a little, not at all?

**Based on Internet users [N = 663]**

a. Helped you learn more about what is going on

	SEPT 2001	
%	30	Helped
	13	A lot
	17	Some
	69	Didn't Help
	15	A little
	53	Not at all
	2	Don't know/Refused

b. Helped you connect with people you needed to reach

	SEPT 2001	
%	29	Helped
	16	A lot
	13	Some
	69	Didn't Help
	12	A little
	57	Not at all
	2	Don't know/Refused

**TER13** Thinking about other things that you personally have done in response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, have you (INSERT)? IF YES, Did you happen to learn about this online?

		HAVE DONE THIS			NO, HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
		TOTAL HAVE DONE THIS	HAVE DONE IT	LEARNED ABOUT THIS ONLINE		
a	Attended a religious service					
	Sept 2001	19	18	1	80	*
b	Tried to donate blood					
	Sept 2001	11	11	1	88	1
c	Attended a meeting to discuss the attacks and their aftermath					
	Sept 2001	11	10	1	89	*
d	Flown an American flag outside your house					
	Sept 2001	32	31	1	68	*
e	Gave money to relief efforts <sup>1</sup>					
	Sept 2001	16	15	1	84	1

**TER14** Also ... after the terrorist attacks, did you happen to cancel or postpone travel plans?

		SEPT 2001	
%	9	Yes, have done this	
	91	No, did not do this	
	1	Don't know/Refused	

### **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 Associates between September 12, 2001 and September 13, 2001, among a sample of 1,226 adults, 18 and older. Some 663 of them are Internet users. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on Internet users, the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4 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.

<sup>1</sup> Item e based on those interviewed on 9/13/01 only (N=474).

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid “listing” bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

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 Current Population Survey (March 2000). This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. 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.