

Data Memo

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**RE: Relief donations after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and use of the internet
to get disaster news
November 2005**

***9% of online users – or 13 million people – donated online for Katrina and Rita relief
The number of online donors is up 53% overall since January 2005***

The internet became an important outlet for relief donations in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, with 13 million Americans, or 9% of internet users, going online to give money in aid of victims of the Gulf Coast hurricanes.

In addition to serving as a conduit for donations, the internet was an important source of news, information, and dialogue about the disasters. Half (50%) of all online Americans turned to the internet for news and information about the Gulf Coast hurricanes and their aftermath. One quarter (24%) shared emails or instant messages about the storms; 9% used the internet to check on someone's safety.

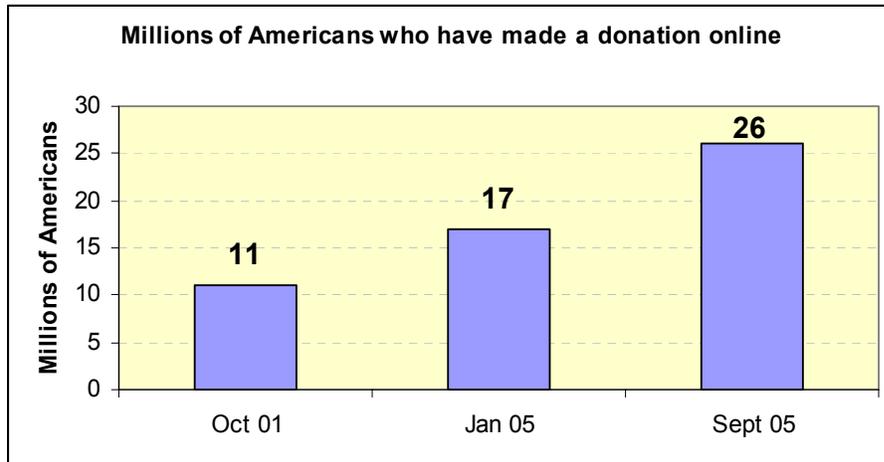
At the same time, a notable number of Americans used the internet to move beyond traditional institutions as they looked for news about the hurricanes and information about relief efforts. Some 17% of those who got news about the disasters read blogs to get details and insights into the impact of the hurricanes on affected communities. Some 5% of internet users – or 7 million people – went online to set up their own relief efforts. And 4% posted their own material such as comments, links, and pictures related to the hurricanes on online blogs, bulletin boards or chat rooms.

Key facts about Hurricanes Katrina & Rita and the internet
13 million Americans made donations online for hurricane relief.
50% of all internet users got news online about the hurricanes, mostly from Web sites of the mainstream media, but many from blogs.
5% of internet users created their own relief efforts and 4% posted their own material online.

Online donations increase with Katrina

The Pew Internet Project has in the past asked about online donations to charities following major events. After 9/11, 10% of internet users, or about 11 million Americans, said they had at one time made an online donation. These donors did not necessarily give because of the terror attacks, but a number obviously were inspired by the attacks to make contributions. Following the Asian tsunami at the end of 2004, 13% of internet users, or 17 million Americans, said they had made a donation to charity online. Again, these donations were not necessarily made on behalf of tsunami relief efforts, but it was probably true that the tragedy had moved at least some new entrants into the online donor population.

When queried after Katrina and Rita, 26 million Americans – 18% of internet users – said they had made a donation online, with half of them saying their donations were specifically for Gulf Coast hurricane relief. Since the beginning of 2005, the number of Americans who say they have ever made an online donation has increased by 53%.



Internet users were also active in using other online tools to keep track of developments and share their reactions with others. One-quarter (24%) of all internet users sent emails or instant messages pertaining to the storms and their aftermath. The same number (24%) used the internet to find out where to make contributions to relief efforts, with a smaller share (5%) saying they used the internet to organize their own assistance efforts.

For some online users, the internet helped in more urgent ways. About 9% of users said they used email or the internet to check on the safety of someone who might have been affected by the hurricanes. And 4% of internet users said they posted comments, links, pictures, or other materials to online bulletin boards, chats, or blogs.

Mainstream media sites dominate, but others play key supplementary role

Nearly three-quarters of online hurricane news consumers – or 73% – turned to the Web sites of major news organizations such as CNN.com or MSNBC.com for news about the hurricanes. Even though major media outlets were the most popular places to go, other kinds of news sites played important roles in filling out online users’ newsgathering habits. One in seven (14%) went to an international news source for news about a U.S. domestic crisis and nearly one-third sought out hurricane information from non-profit organizations.

All told, 54% of internet users who got Hurricane-related news online went to at least one out of five types of sites that aren’t associated with major U.S. news organizations (i.e., international news organizations, alternative news sources, blogs, non-profit organizations, or government Web sites). Here’s a breakdown by connection speed of news surfing habits connected to the hurricanes:

Getting news about Katrina and Rita

	All internet users	Home Broadband internet users	Home Dial-up internet users
Got news online about Hurricanes Katrina or Rita*	50%	59%	45%
In all, approximately 72 million Americans used the internet to get news and information about the hurricanes. These are the percentages of those who went to the following kinds of Web sites:			
Web site of a major news organization such as CNN.com	73	74	69
The Web site of non-profit organizations such as the Red Cross or the United Way*	32	37	27
A government Web site such as firstgov.gov or fema.gov	19	20	17
Internet blogs about the hurricanes	17	17	15
Web site of an international news organization such as the BBC*	14	16	11
The Web site of an alternative news organization such as AlterNet.org or NewsMax.com*	11	12	8
* denotes statistically significant differences between home broadband and dial-up users.			
Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project September 2005 Survey. N=2,251. The margin of error is $\pm 2\%$ for the entire sample. The margin of error is $\pm 3\%$ for the sample of 1,577 internet users, $\pm 4\%$ for 792 home broadband users and $\pm 5\%$ for 563 home dial-up internet users. The number of home dial-up, home broadband users, and non-internet users does not sum to the total number of internet users because 12% of internet users have access at places other than home or work.			

Getting news about Katrina and Rita: Broadband versus Dial-up

It has consistently been the case in Pew Internet Project surveys that home broadband users do more things online – and more often – than dial-up users. This pattern holds true when looking at online news consumption post-Katrina when the focus is on likelihood of getting news about Katrina online or not. However, when looking at specific types of news sites given that a respondent got Katrina news online, the differences often aren't great and, in a number of cases, not statistically significant.

This modest anomaly is probably attributable to the strong desire for lots of information in the face of such a large natural disaster. Established media organizations covered Katrina and Rita heavily and it is no surprise a large majority of internet users turned to them online. For blogs, international news sites, or online-only sites, connection speed matters in some cases, though not a great deal. It appears that the magnitude of the story mitigated somewhat the usual differences in internet behavior between broadband and dial-up users.

Pew Internet Project Survey Questions

September 2005 Daily Tracking Survey

Final Topline

11/10/05

Data for September 14 – October 13, 2005

Princeton Survey Research Associates International
for the Pew Internet & American Life Project

Sample: *n* = 2,251 adults 18 and older

Interviewing dates: 09.14.05 – 10.13.05

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on the full sample [n=2,251]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,577]

WEB1 Please tell me if you ever use the internet to do any of the following things. Do you ever use the internet to.../Did you happen to do this **yesterday**, or not?

Make a donation to a charity online	TOTAL HAVE EVER DONE THIS	----- DID YESTERDAY	HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED
Current	18	1	82	*
January 2005	13	*	86	*
Oct 2-7, 2001	10	*	90	0

MAJ1 In recent days, have you used the internet to get news or information about Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita hitting the Gulf Coast and their aftermath?¹

Based on internet users [N=1,577]

	CURRENT	
%	50	Yes
	49	No
	*	Don't know/Refused

¹ From Sept.14-28, questions MAJ1 through MAJ4 asked only about Hurricane Katrina.

MAJ2 Please tell me if you used any of the following kinds of online news sources to get information about the recent hurricanes in the Gulf Coast.

Based on those who got hurricane information online [N=772]

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
a The website of a major news organization, such as cnn.com or msnbc.com	73	26	1
b The website of an INTERNATIONAL news organization, such as the BBC	14	85	1
c The website of an ALTERNATIVE news organization, such as AlterNet.org or NewsMax.com	11	88	1
d Internet BLOGS about the hurricanes and their aftermath	17	81	2
e The website of a nonprofit organization such as the Red Cross or the United Way	32	67	1
f A government website, such as fema.gov or firstgov.gov	19	80	*

MAJ3 We'd like to know if you have used the internet or email to do any of the following things related to the hurricanes in the Gulf Coast.

Based on internet users [N=1,577]

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
a Sent or received emails or instant messages about the storms and their aftermath	24	76	*
b Posted any comments, links, pictures or other material related to the hurricanes on online blogs, bulletin boards or chat rooms	4	96	0
c Used the internet or email to check on the safety of someone you know who might have been affected by the hurricanes	9	91	0
d Used the internet or email to get information about how you could contribute to relief efforts for hurricane victims	24	76	*
e Used the internet or email to organize your own assistance or relief effort for hurricane victims	5	95	*

MAJ4 Earlier you said you have made a donation online...Did you happen to make an online donation to help the victims of the Gulf Coast hurricanes, or were your online donations for something else?

Based on internet users [N=1,577]

	CURRENT	
%	18	Total have ever made a donation online
	9	Made donation online to Gulf Coast hurricane victims
	9	Did not make a donation online to that cause
	82	Total have never made a donation online

Methodology for Pew Internet Project Survey

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 International between September 14 to October 13, 2005, among a sample of 2,251 adults, 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,577), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 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.

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.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled households. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each household received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone at home. In each contacted household, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest male currently at home. If no male was available, interviewers asked to speak with the oldest female at home. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

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 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (March 2004). 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.

The final response rate for the September sample was 30%.