# Anonymity, Privacy, and Security Online

*86% of adult internet users have taken steps from time to time to avoid surveillance by other people or organizations when they were using the internet. Despite their precautions, 21% of online adults have had an email or social media account hijacked and 11% have had vital information like Social Security numbers, bank account data, or credit cards stolen—and growing numbers worry about the amount of personal information about them that is available online.*

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# Summary of Findings

Most internet users would like to be anonymous online at least occasionally, but many think it is not possible to be completely anonymous online. New findings in a national survey show:

- 86% of internet users have taken steps online to remove or mask their digital footprints – ranging from clearing cookies to encrypting their email, from avoiding using their name to using virtual networks that mask their internet protocol (IP) address.
- 55% of internet users have taken steps to avoid observation by specific people, organizations, or the government

Still, 59% of internet users do not believe it is possible to be completely anonymous online, while 37% of them believe it is possible.

A section of the survey looking at various security-related issues finds that notable numbers of internet users say they have experienced problems because others stole their personal information or otherwise took advantage of their visibility online – including hijacked email and social media accounts, stolen information such as Social Security numbers or credit card information, stalking or harassment, loss of reputation, or victimization by scammers.

- 21% of internet users have had an email or social networking account compromised or taken over by someone else without permission.
- 13% of internet users have experienced trouble in a relationship between them and a family member or a friend because of something the user posted online.
- 12% of internet users have been stalked or harassed online.
- 11% of internet users have had important personal information stolen such as their Social Security Number, credit card, or bank account information.
- 6% of internet users have been the victim of an online scam and lost money.
- 6% of internet users have had their reputation damaged because of something that happened online.
- 4% of internet users have been led into physical danger because of something that happened online.
- 1% of internet users have lost a job opportunity or educational opportunity because of something they posted online or someone posted about them.

Some 68% of internet users believe current laws are not good enough in protecting people's privacy online and 24% believe current laws provide reasonable protections.

Most internet users know that key pieces of personal information about them are available online – such as photos and videos of them, their email addresses, birth dates, phone numbers, home addresses, and the groups to which they belong. And growing numbers of internet users (50%) say they are worried about the amount of personal information about them that is online – a figure that has jumped from 33% who expressed such worry in 2009.

People would like control over their information, saying in many cases it is very important to them that only they or the people they authorize should be given access to such things as the content of their emails, the people to whom they are sending emails, the place where they are when they are online, and the content of the files they download.

## About this survey

This survey by the Pew Research Center's Internet Project was underwritten by Carnegie Mellon University. The findings in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from July 11-14, among a sample of 1,002 adults ages 18 and older.  Telephone interviews were conducted in English by landline and cell phone. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.4 percentage points and for the results from 792 internet and smartphone users in the sample, the margin of error is 3.8 percentage points.  More information is available in the Methods section at the end of this report.
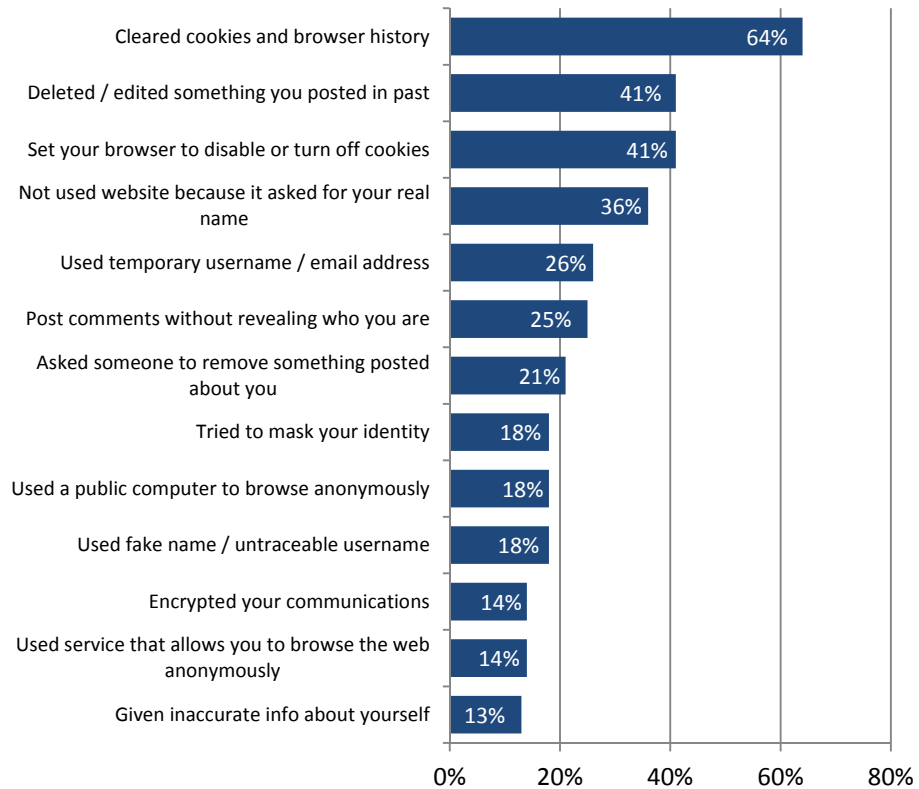
# A closer look at key findings

## 86% of internet users have tried to use the internet in ways to minimize the visibility of their digital footprints

The chart below shows the variety of ways that internet users have tried to avoid being observed online.

### The strategies people use to be less visible online
*% of adult internet users who say they have done these things online*

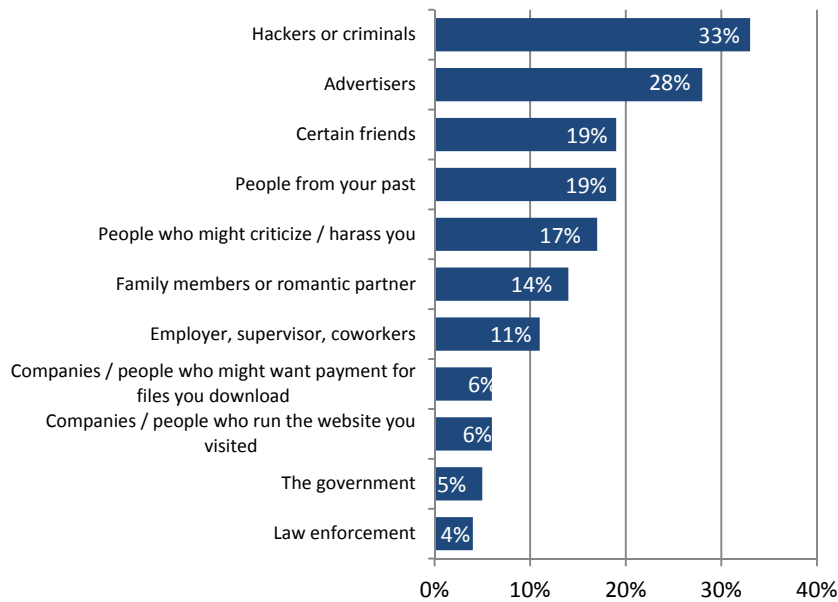| Strategy | % |
|---|---|
| Cleared cookies and browser history | 64% |
| Deleted / edited something you posted in past | 41% |
| Set your browser to disable or turn off cookies | 41% |
| Not used website because it asked for your real name | 36% |
| Used temporary username / email address | 26% |
| Post comments without revealing who you are | 25% |
| Asked someone to remove something posted about you | 21% |
| Tried to mask your identity | 18% |
| Used a public computer to browse anonymously | 18% |
| Used fake name / untraceable username | 18% |
| Encrypted your communications | 14% |
| Used service that allows you to browse the web anonymously | 14% |
| Given inaccurate info about yourself | 13% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

## 55% of internet users have taken steps to hide from specific people or organizations

Beyond their general hope that they can go online anonymously, the majority of internet users have tried to avoid observation by other people, groups, companies, and government agencies. Hackers, criminals and advertisers are at the top of the list of groups people wish to avoid.

### Who users try to avoid

*% of adult internet users who say they have used the internet in ways to avoid being observed or seen by …*

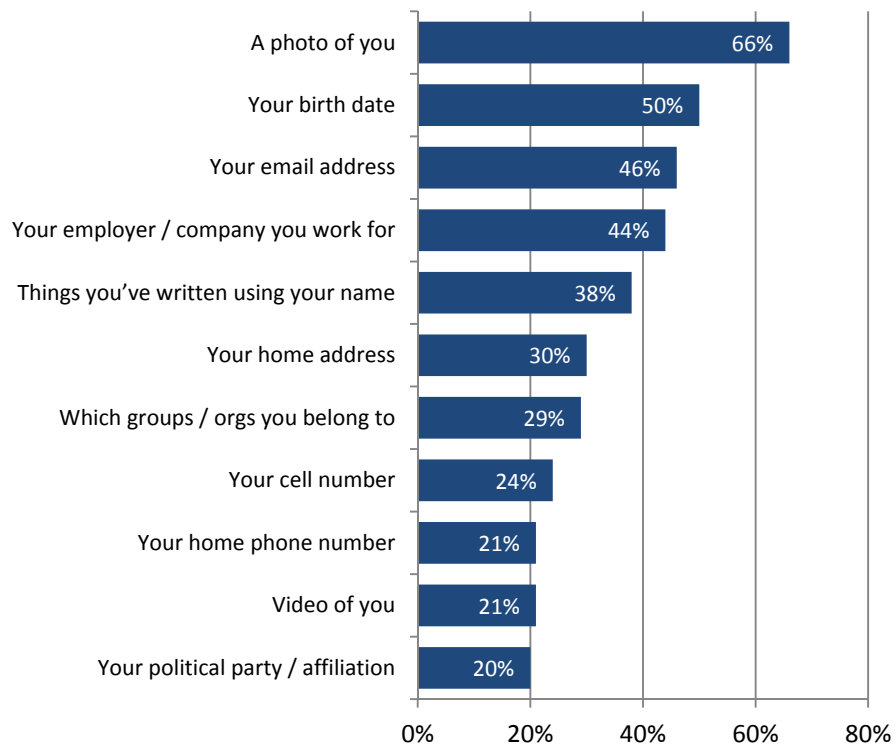| Group | % |
|---|---|
| Hackers or criminals | 33% |
| Advertisers | 28% |
| Certain friends | 19% |
| People from your past | 19% |
| People who might criticize / harass you | 17% |
| Family members or romantic partner | 14% |
| Employer, supervisor, coworkers | 11% |
| Companies / people who might want payment for files you download | 6% |
| Companies / people who run the website you visited | 6% |
| The government | 5% |
| Law enforcement | 4% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

**Users report that a wide range of their personal information is available online, but feel strongly about controlling who has access to certain kinds of behavioral data and communications content.**

Users know that there is a considerable amount of personal information about them available online. Among the list of items queried, photos were the most commonly reported content posted online; 66% of internet users reported that an image of them was available online. And half (50%) say that their birth date is available.

## Personal information online
*% of adult internet users who say this information about them is available online*

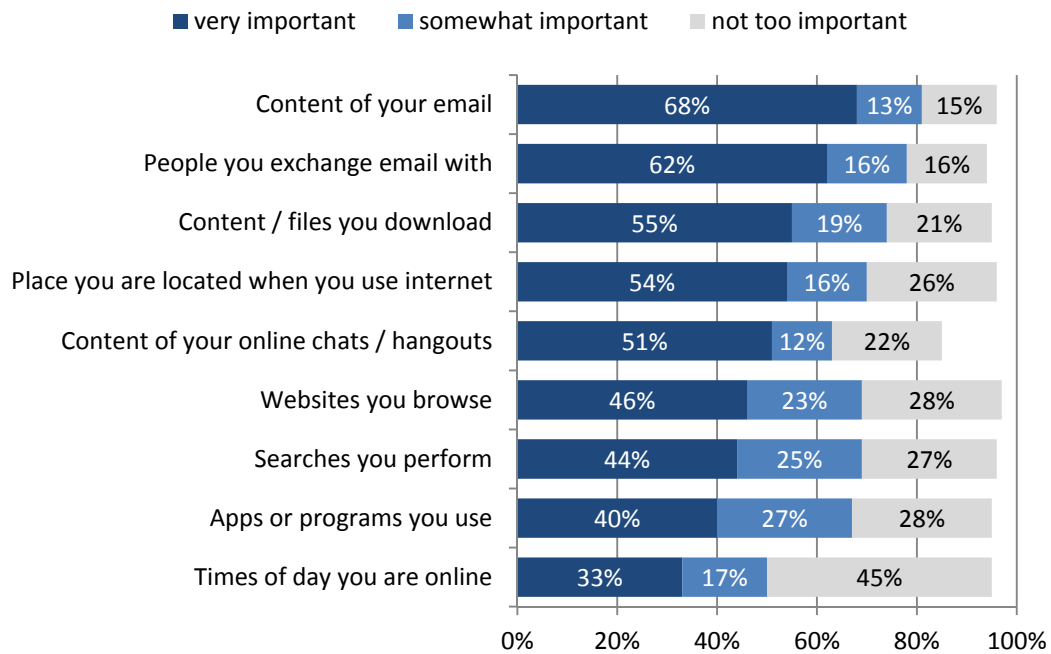| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| A photo of you | 66% |
| Your birth date | 50% |
| Your email address | 46% |
| Your employer / company you work for | 44% |
| Things you've written using your name | 38% |
| Your home address | 30% |
| Which groups / orgs you belong to | 29% |
| Your cell number | 24% |
| Your home phone number | 21% |
| Video of you | 21% |
| Your political party / affiliation | 20% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

Another set of questions focused on the kinds of "data exhaust" that is generated as a result of everyday forms of online communications, web surfing and application use. Respondents were asked how much they cared "that only you and those you authorize should have access" to certain kinds of behavioral data and communications content and there was notable variance in the answers. The content of email messages and the people with whom one communicates via email are considerably more sensitive pieces of information when compared with other online activities and associated data trails.

## How much do you care that only you and those you authorize should have access to this information?

*% of adult internet users who say it is important—or not—to them to control these types of information*

Legend: ■ very important  ■ somewhat important  ▢ not too important

| Information type | very important | somewhat important | not too important |
|---|---|---|---|
| Content of your email | 68% | 13% | 15% |
| People you exchange email with | 62% | 16% | 16% |
| Content / files you download | 55% | 19% | 21% |
| Place you are located when you use internet | 54% | 16% | 26% |
| Content of your online chats / hangouts | 51% | 12% | 22% |
| Websites you browse | 46% | 23% | 28% |
| Searches you perform | 44% | 25% | 27% |
| Apps or programs you use | 40% | 27% | 28% |
| Times of day you are online | 33% | 17% | 45% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

# Part 1: The Quest for Anonymity Online

In word and deed, most Americans would like the ability to be anonymous and untracked online at least every once in a while.
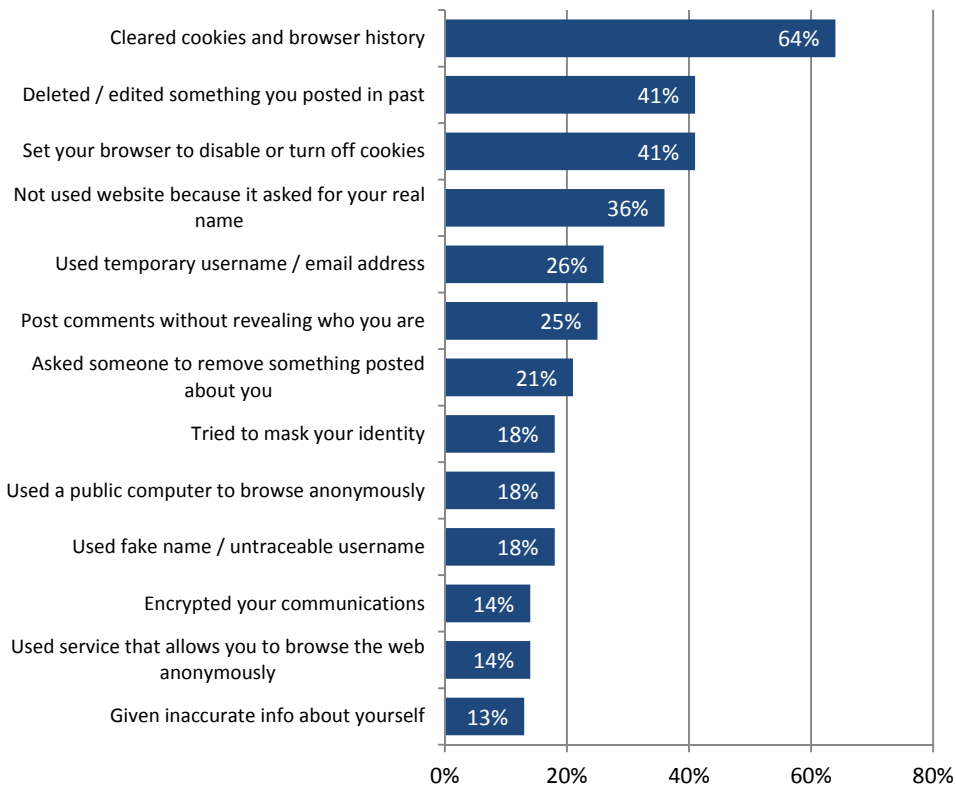
A clear majority – 59% -- say that people should have the ability to use the internet completely anonymously. When internet users are directly asked, 18% say they use the internet in a way that hides or masks their identity. Yet when a broader battery of activities about masking behavior or content is asked of respondents, 81% say they do at least one of these obscuring activities.

All told, 86% of internet users have tried to be anonymous online and taken at least one step to try to mask their behavior or avoid being tracked. The most common strategy was to clear cookies and browser history. Yet, notable numbers have taken even more sophisticated steps, such as encrypting their email (done by 14% of internet users) or used virtual personal network or proxy server, like Tor software[1], that does not allow firms to track their online movements (also done by 14% of internet users).

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[1] See https://www.torproject.org/

## Strategies to be less visible online
*% of adult internet users who say they have done these things online*

| Strategy | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Cleared cookies and browser history | 64% |
| Deleted / edited something you posted in past | 41% |
| Set your browser to disable or turn off cookies | 41% |
| Not used website because it asked for your real name | 36% |
| Used temporary username / email address | 26% |
| Post comments without revealing who you are | 25% |
| Asked someone to remove something posted about you | 21% |
| Tried to mask your identity | 18% |
| Used a public computer to browse anonymously | 18% |
| Used fake name / untraceable username | 18% |
| Encrypted your communications | 14% |
| Used service that allows you to browse the web anonymously | 14% |
| Given inaccurate info about yourself | 13% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project  Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

The question of whether people should be allowed to use the internet anonymously was asked of all adults (not just internet users) and 34% of the general public (including 33% of internet users) said they did not believe people should be allowed to use the internet anonymously.

There are noteworthy demographic and political differences in the answers to this question. Those most likely to say that people should have the ability to go online anonymously include: men, those under the age of 65, those who live in urban areas, and liberal Democrats. In addition, those who are employed are more likely than non-workers to believe internet use should be allowed to be anonymous. Across the board, technology users were more likely than non-users to say this: that includes internet users v. non-users, cell users v. non-users, and social media users v. non-users.

# Who has taken steps to mask their identity or avoid being observed online
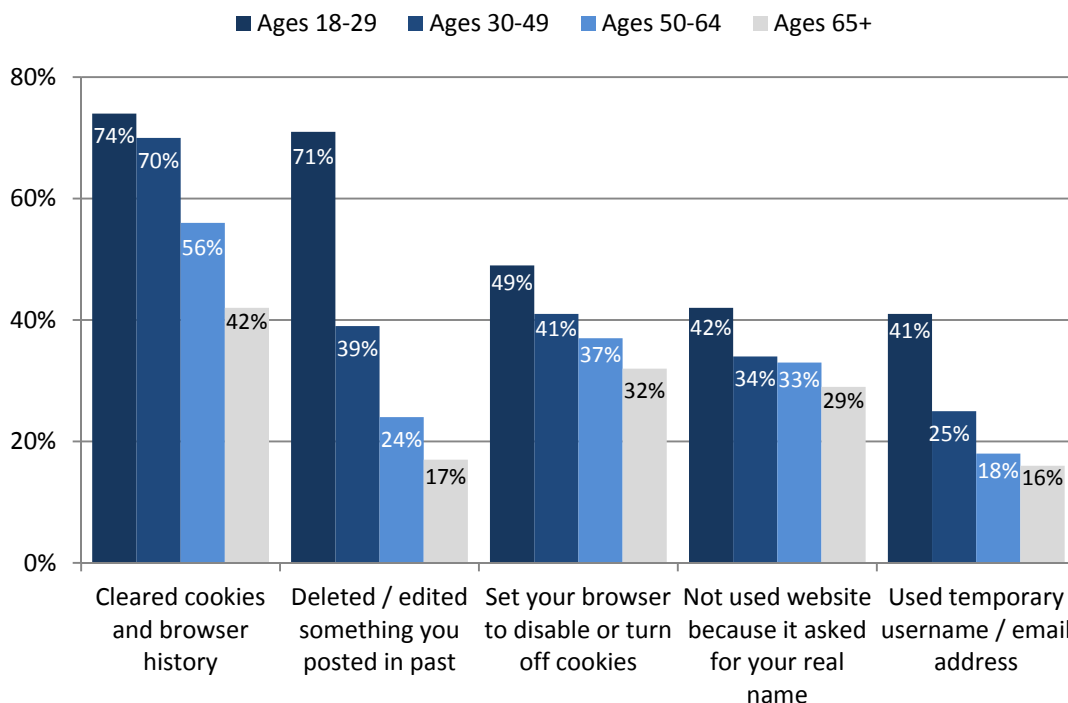
In this survey, 81% of adults are internet users; 90% of adults are cell phone owners; and 53% of adults are smartphone owners. The internet users and smartphone owners were asked a battery of questions about the strategies online Americans might use to hide their identity or otherwise mask them from others who might want to observe their online behavior.

In all, 81% of internet users or smartphone owners said they had employed at least one of the eleven strategies we queried. Many had employed multiple strategies. The average anonymity seeker had used between 3 and 4 of these strategies at one time or another.

The most consistent differences in masking strategies are tied to age. The youngest adults (those ages 18-29) are more likely than their elders to take steps to be hidden online, as the chart below shows. The one activity where the differences did not show up in a stark way involved encrypting email. Internet users of all ages under 65 were equally likely to have done that.

## Young adults are the most likely to use most strategies to be less visible online

*% of adult internet users in each age cohort who say they have done these things online*

Ages 18-29 ◼ Ages 30-49 ◼ Ages 50-64 ◼ Ages 65+

| | Cleared cookies and browser history | Deleted / edited something you posted in past | Set your browser to disable or turn off cookies | Not used website because it asked for your real name | Used temporary username / email address |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ages 18-29 | 74% | 71% | 49% | 42% | 41% |
| Ages 30-49 | 70% | 39% | 41% | 34% | 25% |
| Ages 50-64 | 56% | 24% | 37% | 33% | 18% |
| Ages 65+ | 42% | 17% | 32% | 29% | 16% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

Other notable differences relate to educational attainment. Those who have a college or graduate education are more likely than those who have not gone to college to have cleared their cookie and browser history, disabled cookies, decided not to use a website because it had asked for their name, encrypted their email, and used a proxy server or VPN.
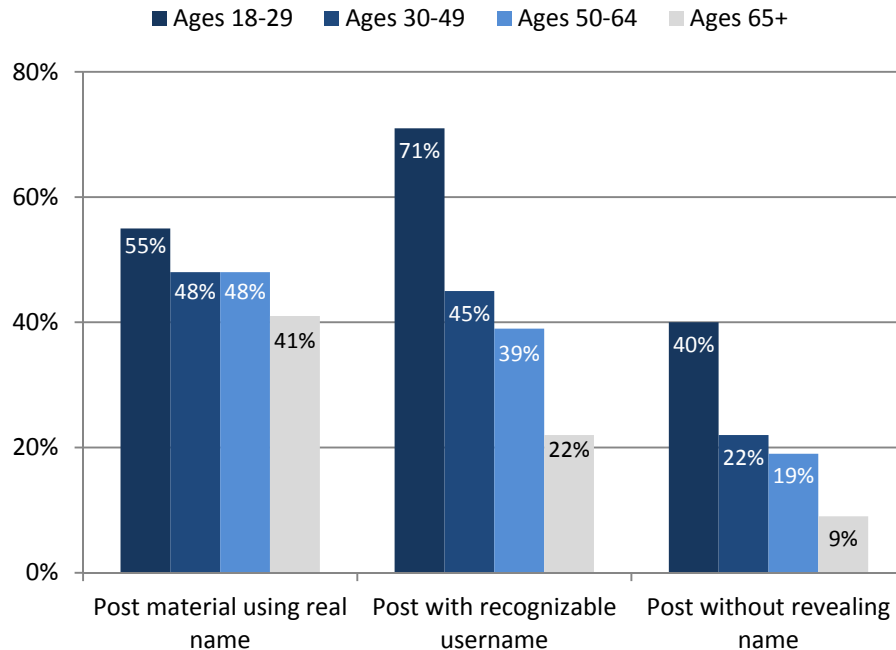
## Users bounce back and forth between disclosing who they are and remaining anonymous

When users post material online, they are more likely than not to attach their name or a recognizable screenname to their material: 49% of internet users say they have used their real name and 47% use a screenname or username that people associate with them. At the same time, 25% of internet users say that they have posted material without revealing who they are.

The most consistent pattern in these findings is that younger adults who use the internet tend to do all three things at greater rates than those who are 30 or older – use their real names; use a recognizable screenname, and post without disclosing who they are. This undoubtedly relates to the fact that younger users tend to be more frequent users of the internet and share more content than older users.

### Young adults are most likely to use all three strategies when they post material

*% of adult internet users in each age cohort who do these things when the create content online*

Legend: ■ Ages 18-29  ■ Ages 30-49  ■ Ages 50-64  ▢ Ages 65+

| Strategy | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-49 | Ages 50-64 | Ages 65+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Post material using real name | 55% | 48% | 48% | 41% |
| Post with recognizable username | 71% | 45% | 39% | 22% |
| Post without revealing name | 40% | 22% | 19% | 9% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

Beyond the differences tied to age, online women are more likely than online men to say they have used their real name when they post material (55% vs. 43%).

## Most do not think it is possible to be completely anonymous online, though a healthy minority believe they can be totally hidden

Even though many wish to be anonymous and have taken steps to obscure their online activities at least occasionally, they do not necessarily think it is possible to be completely anonymous online.

All of the adults in our sample were asked: Considering everything you know and have heard about the internet, do you think it is possible for someone to use the internet completely anonymously – so that none of their online activities can be easily traced back to them? Just 37% of them said they thought it was possible to be completely anonymous and 59% said it was not possible. And internet users held exactly the same views.

The most striking differences on this question were between men and women. While majorities in both genders do not think it is possible to be completely anonymous online, women were more likely than men to say it is not possible to be completely anonymous online (64% vs. 54%).

We also asked a specific question about anonymous posting online. Internet users were asked: Suppose you said something critical about a product online, and you didn't use your real name. How easy do you think it would be for the company to find out who you are anyway? Most thought it would not be terribly hard for the company to track them down.

- 42% said would be "very easy" for the company to find out who they were.
- 37% said it would be "somewhat easy" for the company to find who they were.
- 13% said it would be "not too easy" for the company to find who they were.
- 3% said it would be "almost impossible" for the company to find who they were. (And 5% said they did not know.)

Those who had not taken any steps to obscure their online activities were much more likely to say it would be "very easy" for a company to trace them (56% said so).

# Part 2: Concerns About Personal Information Online

Internet users are more worried than they were in the past about the amount of information that is available about them online. Half (50%) of internet users say they are worried, up from 33% who said that in September 2009. In late 2006, the figure stood at 40%.

There is consistent evidence that the level of concern is growing. It has increased among all groups, and is especially pronounced among internet users ages 65 and older and those living in households earning less than $30,000.

## The personal information that users know is available

We asked internet users about 11 kinds of personal information and whether that information was available online "for others to see". We made clear that it did not matter if they posted or revealed the information or if someone else did. The average user reported that they knew at least four of these details about them was available on the internet. Here is a breakdown of their answers:

We asked internet users about 11 kinds of personal information and whether that information was available online. We made clear that it did not matter if they posted or revealed the information or if someone else did. The average user reported that they knew at least four of these details about them was available on the internet. Here is a breakdown of their answers:

- 66% of internet users said a photo of them was available online.
- 50% said their birth date was available online.
- 46% said their email address was available online.
- 44% said their employer or the company they worked for was available online.
- 38% said things they'd written that have their name on it was available online.
- 30% said their home address was available online.
- 29% said the groups and organizations they belong to was available online.
- 24% said their cell phone number was available online.
- 21% said a video of them was available online.
- 21% said their home phone number was available online.
- 20% said their political party or affiliation was available online.

In several of the categories of personal information, young adults are more likely to have those details online, as the chart below shows. Still, there several items on the list where this cohort did not stand out. When it comes to whether users' email addresses are available online, there were no major noteworthy differences among those below the age of 65.
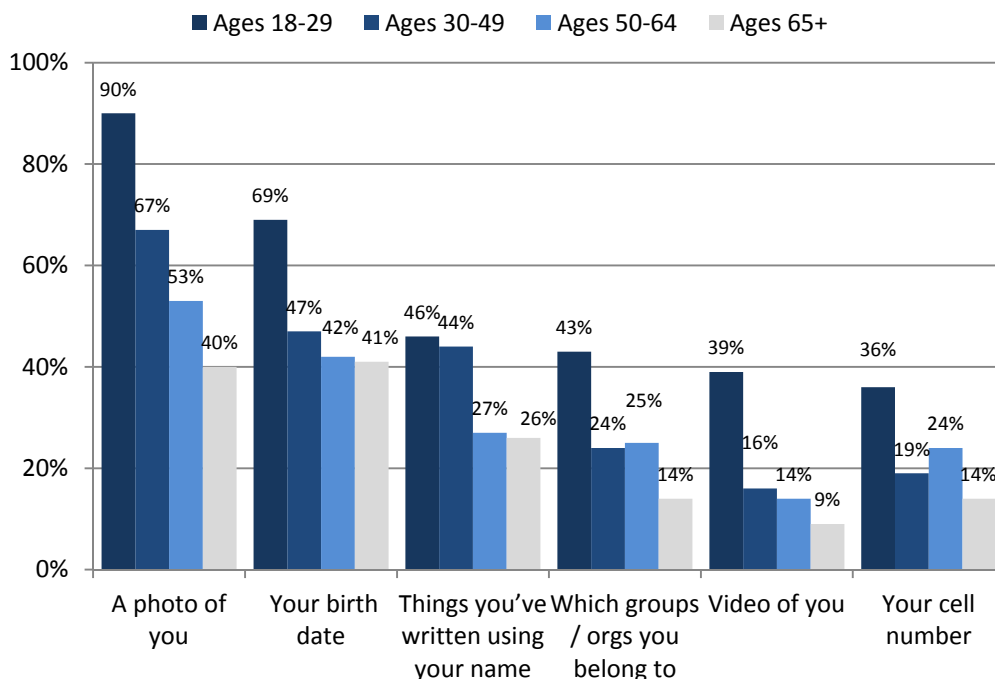
Moreover, young adults were the least likely online adults to say that their home address was available online: More than a third of the internet users ages 30 and older said their home address was online,

but only 15% of those ages 18-29 said that. Similarly, these young adults were the least likely to say their home phone number was on the internet – perhaps because this age group is among the least likely to have a landline telephone number.

Finally, younger adults were no more or less likely than their elders to say that their political affiliations were available online.

## Young adults are the most likely to have some key personal information about them available online

*% of adult internet users in each age cohort who say these details about them are available online*

Legend: ■ Ages 18-29 ■ Ages 30-49 ■ Ages 50-64 ■ Ages 65+

| | A photo of you | Your birth date | Things you've written using your name | Which groups / orgs you belong to | Video of you | Your cell number |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ages 18-29 | 90% | 69% | 46% | 43% | 39% | 36% |
| Ages 30-49 | 67% | 47% | 44% | 24% | 16% | 19% |
| Ages 50-64 | 53% | 42% | 27% | 25% | 14% | 24% |
| Ages 65+ | 40% | 41% | 26% | 14% | 9% | 14% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

It is important to note that significant numbers of respondents said they did not know if some personal information about them was available online. For instance: 30% of internet users said they did not know if their email address was posted online; 22% said they didn't know if their home address was posted; 17% said they didn't know if their cell phone was posted; and 13% said they didn't know if their political party, their writing, and their birth date were posted online.

# Users do not think current laws provide enough protections

Asked whether they think current privacy laws provide reasonable protections for people's privacy on their online activities, 66% of all adults said the laws are "not good enough." Some 24% said they provide reasonable protection.

Interestingly, there are not noteworthy differences in answers to this question associated with political or partisan points of view. Tea Party supporters, conservative Republicans, self-described moderates, and liberal Democrats are not statistically significantly different in their answers.

Not surprisingly those who say they are worried about the amount of information about them online are more likely to say that current laws are not good enough.

# Part 3: Who Internet Users are Trying to Avoid; the Information They Want to Protect

Sometimes, internet users are not trying to be completely anonymous. They say they want to stay unobserved or tracked by certain people or organizations. Thus, we asked the internet users: Have you ever tried to use the internet in ways that keep different kinds of people or organizations from being able to see what you have read, watched or posted online? The answers:
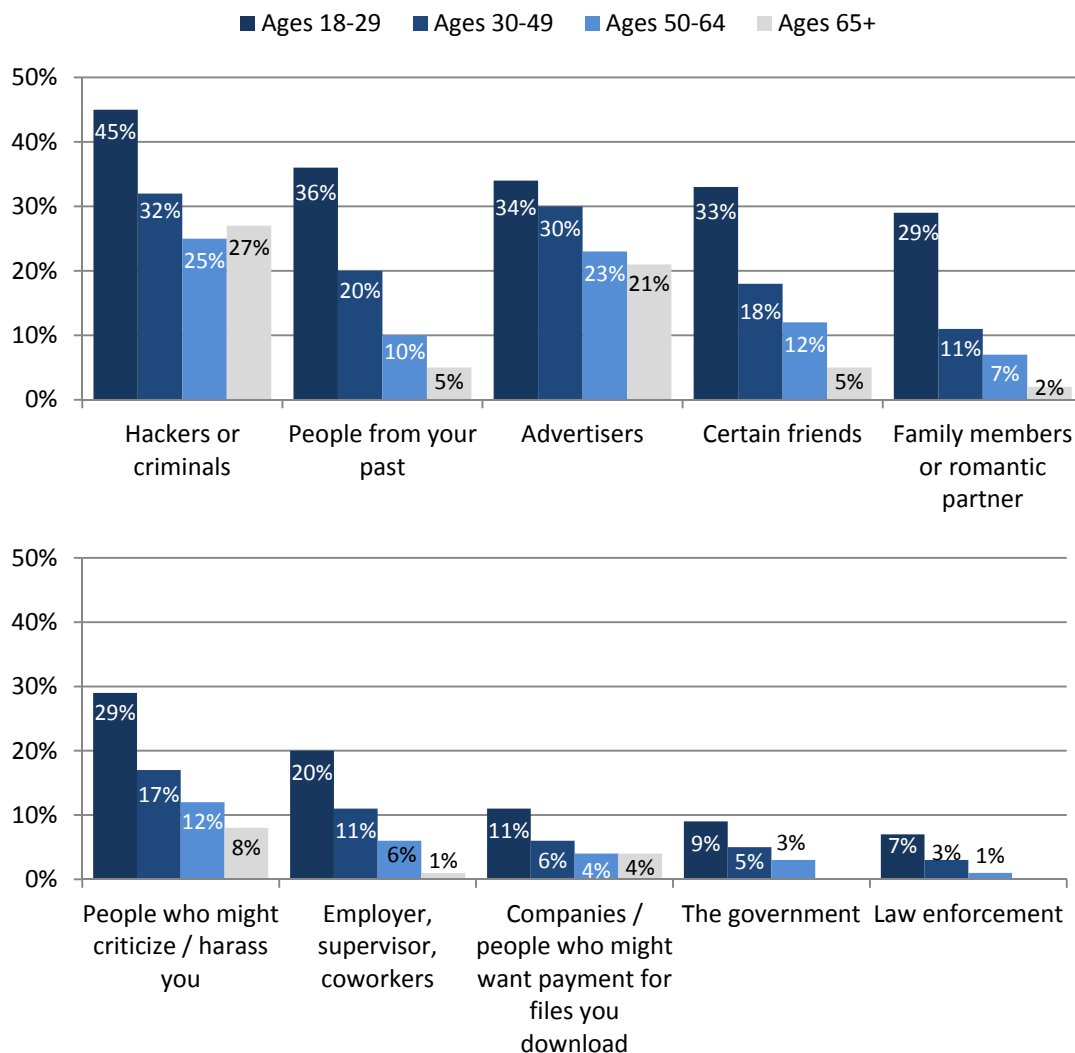
- 33% of internet users said they had tried to hide their activities from hackers or criminals
- 28% said they had tried to hide their activities from advertisers
- 19% said they had tried to hide their activities from people in their past
- 19% said they had tried to hide their activities from certain friends
- 17% said they had tried to hide their activities from people who might criticize, harass, or target them
- 14% said they had tried to hide their activities from family members or a romantic partner
- 11% said they had tried to hide their activities from an employer, supervisor, or coworkers
- 6% said they had tried to hide their activities from companies or people who run the websites they visit
- 6% said they had tried to hide their activities from companies or people that might want payment for the files they downloaded such as songs, movies, or games
- 5% said they had tried to hide their activities from the government
- 4% said they had tried to hide their activities from law enforcement

Overall, 55% of internet users said they had taken steps to avoid being observed by at least one of these types of people or organizations. It is worth noting that considerably more people take steps to avoid advertisers and unpleasant social observations than take steps to avoid detection by their employers or by government or law enforcement.

Again, the most important, consistent differences in avoidance behaviors online are tied to age. Young adults (those ages 18-29) are more likely to have tried to keep from being seen online by most of these potential observers than older users of the internet.

## Young adults are the most likely to take steps to hide from others online

*% of adult internet users in each age cohort who say they have tried to avoid being observed by these people or organizations*

Ages 18-29 ■ Ages 30-49 ■ Ages 50-64 □ Ages 65+

**Chart 1**

| Category | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-49 | Ages 50-64 | Ages 65+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hackers or criminals | 45% | 32% | 25% | 27% |
| People from your past | 36% | 20% | 10% | 5% |
| Advertisers | 34% | 30% | 23% | 21% |
| Certain friends | 33% | 18% | 12% | 5% |
| Family members or romantic partner | 29% | 11% | 7% | 2% |

**Chart 2**

| Category | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-49 | Ages 50-64 | Ages 65+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| People who might criticize / harass you | 29% | 17% | 12% | 8% |
| Employer, supervisor, coworkers | 20% | 11% | 6% | 1% |
| Companies / people who might want payment for files you download | 11% | 6% | 4% | 4% |
| The government | 9% | 5% | 3% | |
| Law enforcement | 7% | 3% | 1% | |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

The survey also showed there are times when online men and women have varied as they take steps to avoid being seen by others. Online men are more likely than online women to try to avoid detection by advertisers (33% vs. 24%), to try to avoid observation by those who run the websites they visit (9% vs. 4%), and avoid being observed by law enforcement (6% vs. 1%). On the other hand, online women are more likely to say they have used the internet to keep from being observed by people from their past (23% vs. 16%) and by certain friends (23% vs. 14%).

# Those who try to shield themselves are also the most likely to be visible in other ways
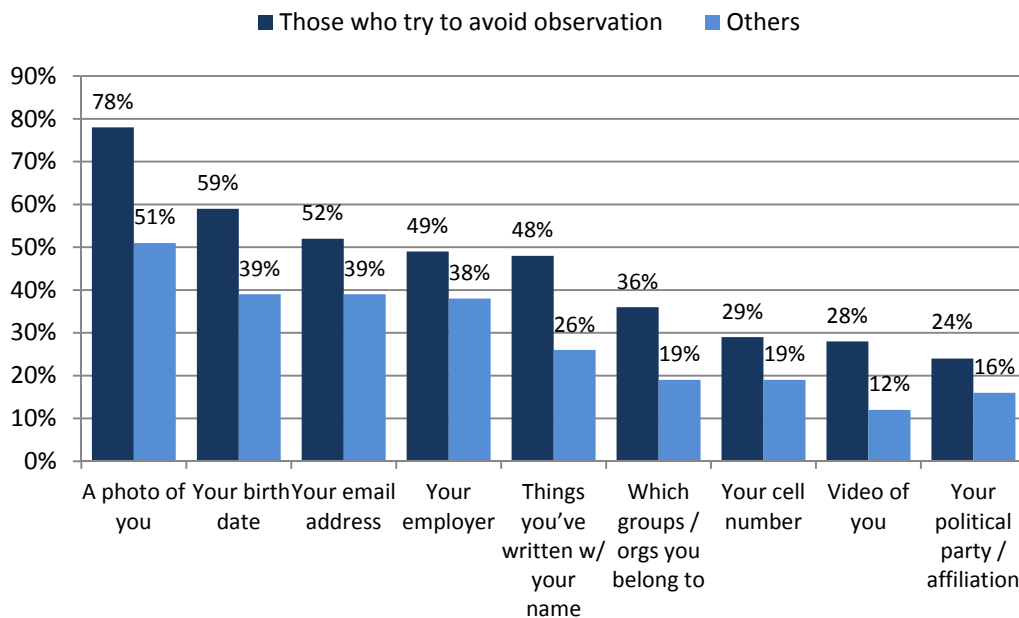
One of the most revealing contradictions in the results of this survey is that those who have taken steps to try to avoid observation by others (e.g. tried to avoid hackers or advertisers or people from their past) *and* those who have taken more general steps to be anonymous (e.g. cleared cookies, used fake names, used encryption or VPNs) are *more likely than others to have each of these items of personal information posted online.*

This reinforces the notion that privacy is not an all-or-nothing proposition for internet users. People choose different strategies for different activities, for different content, to mask themselves from different people, at different times in their lives.

The chart below shows how the 55% of internet users who have taken steps to hide from someone or an organization compare with those who have not tried any avoidance strategies when it comes to key pieces of personal information that are available online:

## The internet users who try to avoid others also often have the most personal information available online

*% of adult internet users who have taken steps to avoid observation by others compared with non-avoiders on the kinds of personal information that is available about them online*

Legend: ■ Those who try to avoid observation  ■ Others

| Category | Those who try to avoid observation | Others |
|---|---|---|
| A photo of you | 78% | 51% |
| Your birth date | 59% | 39% |
| Your email address | 52% | 39% |
| Your employer | 49% | 38% |
| Things you've written w/ your name | 48% | 26% |
| Which groups / orgs you belong to | 36% | 19% |
| Your cell number | 29% | 19% |
| Video of you | 28% | 12% |
| Your political party / affiliation | 24% | 16% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone users. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

# Part 4: How Users Feel About the Sensitivity of Certain Kinds of Data

Online Americans believe that different kinds of data trails have different value and they want control over some of the more personal material.
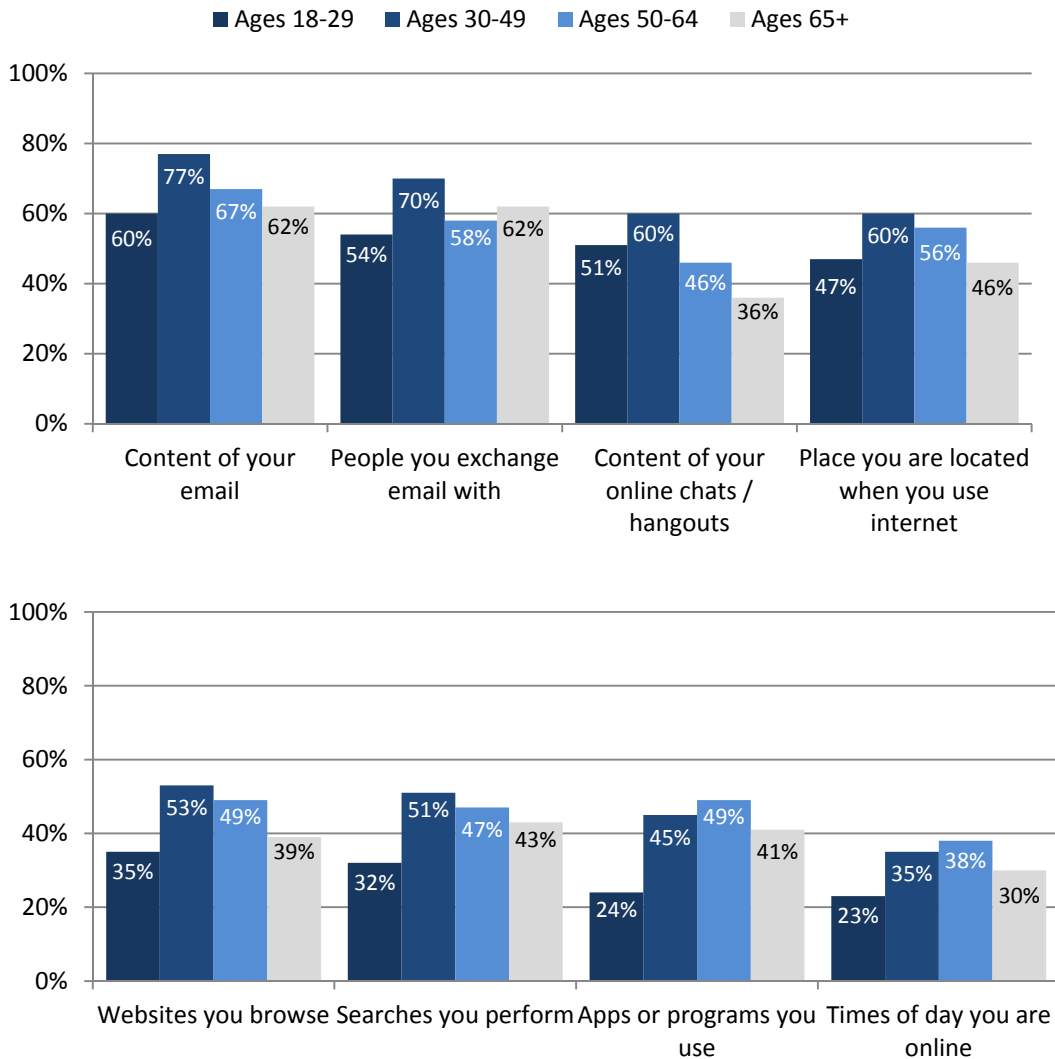
To test the varying views on the importance of different types of personal information, we asked respondents how important it was to them "that only you and those you authorize have access to" particular pieces of information. Here are the responses that said their control was "very important":

- 68% of internet users say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the content of their emails.
- 62% say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the people they exchange emails with.
- 55% say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the content of the files they download.
- 54% say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the place where they are located when they use the internet.
- 51% say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the content of their online chats or hangouts with others.
- 46% say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the websites they browse
- 44% say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the content of the searches they perform.
- 40% say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the applications and programs they use.
- 33% say it is very important that only they or those they authorize have access to the times of day they are online.

Clearly, key communications and content are relatively precious to internet users and information about the time of day when they are online is not nearly as important for users to control. Some of the strongest sentiments about controlling personal information are exhibited by those ages 30-49.

## Those ages 30-49 are often most eager to control access to their personal information

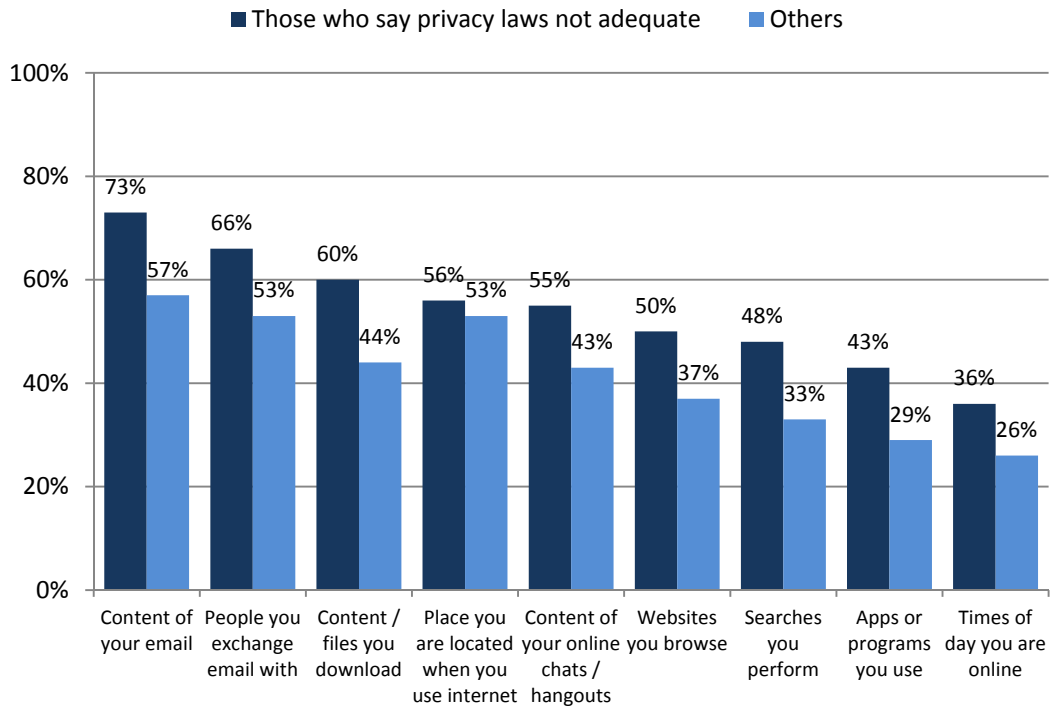*% of adult internet users who say it is <u>very important</u> to them to control these pieces of information*

■ Ages 18-29   ■ Ages 30-49   ■ Ages 50-64   ■ Ages 65+

**Chart 1**

| | Content of your email | People you exchange email with | Content of your online chats / hangouts | Place you are located when you use internet |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ages 18-29 | 60% | 54% | 51% | 47% |
| Ages 30-49 | 77% | 70% | 60% | 60% |
| Ages 50-64 | 67% | 58% | 46% | 56% |
| Ages 65+ | 62% | 62% | 36% | 46% |

**Chart 2**

| | Websites you browse | Searches you perform | Apps or programs you use | Times of day you are online |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ages 18-29 | 35% | 32% | 24% | 23% |
| Ages 30-49 | 53% | 51% | 45% | 35% |
| Ages 50-64 | 49% | 47% | 49% | 38% |
| Ages 65+ | 39% | 43% | 41% | 30% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

Those who are worried about the amount of information available about them online are consistently more likely than others to say it is very important to them that they or those they authorize have access to pieces of personal information. And those who think current laws do not offer enough privacy protection are more likely than others to say it is very important they have this kind of control.

**Those who say current privacy laws are not adequate are more likely to hold strong views about controlling personal data**

*% of adult internet users who say it is very important to them to control these pieces of information*

■ Those who say privacy laws not adequate    ■ Others

| Category | Not adequate | Others |
|---|---|---|
| Content of your email | 73% | 57% |
| People you exchange email with | 66% | 53% |
| Content / files you download | 60% | 44% |
| Place you are located when you use internet | 56% | 53% |
| Content of your online chats / hangouts | 55% | 43% |
| Websites you browse | 50% | 37% |
| Searches you perform | 48% | 33% |
| Apps or programs you use | 43% | 29% |
| Times of day you are online | 36% | 26% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

There are also some differences on these questions between online women and men. Women who use the internet are more likely than men to say it is very important that only they or those they authorize  know who they are emailing (67% vs. 57%). Online women are more likely to say it is very important for them to control access to information about the place where they are located when they go online (60% vs. 49%).

# Part 5: Online Identity Theft, Security Issues and Reputational Damage

An array of woes has struck some internet users when personal information of theirs was compromised or some of their online activities put them in conflict with others:

- 21% of internet users have had an <u>email or social networking account compromised or taken over without their permission</u>.
- 12% have been <u>stalked or harassed online.</u>
- 11% have had important <u>personal information stolen such as their Social Security Number, credit card, or bank account information.</u>
- 6% have had their <u>reputation damaged</u> because of something that happened online.
- 6% have been the victim of an <u>online scam and lost money.</u>
- 4% have had something happen online that led them into <u>physical danger.</u>
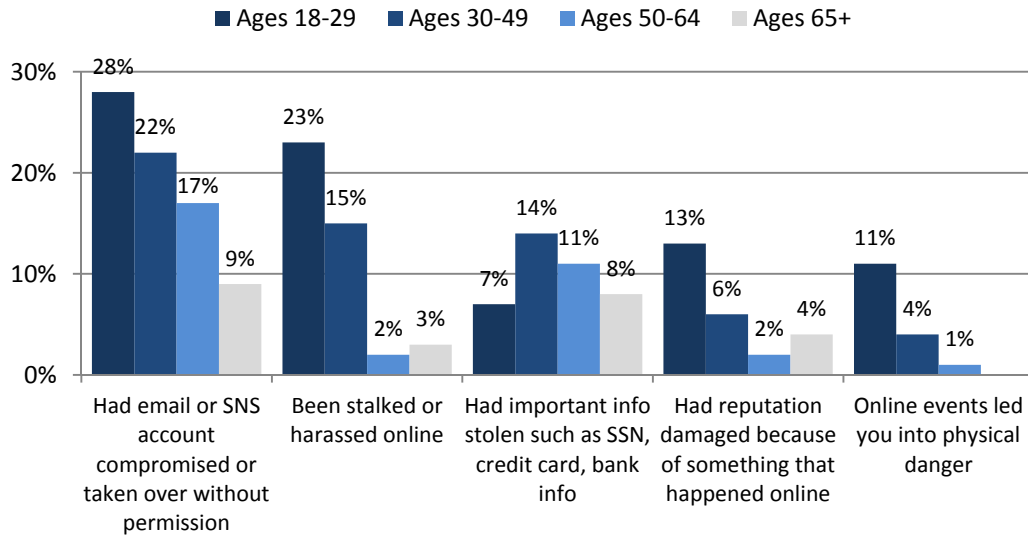
In addition to those instances when personal information and personal identity have been at the center of a problem, 13% of internet users report they have experienced <u>trouble in a relationship</u> between them and a family member or a friend because of something they posted. And 1% say they have <u>lost a job opportunity or educational opportunity</u> because of something they posted online or someone posted about them online.

Online younger adults – those ages 18-29 – are the most likely to have experienced some of these troubles, including have an email or social media account taken over, being stalked or harassed online, suffering reputational damage, or being in physical danger based on online events.

Overall, 55% of the internet users ages 18-29 have experienced at least one of this array of problems, compared with 42% of those ages 30-49, 30% of those ages 50-64 and 24% of those ages 65 and older.

**Young adults are the most likely to have had several—but not all—major problems with personal information and identity**

*% of adult internet users in each age cohort who say these things have happened to them because of their online activities*

■ Ages 18-29　■ Ages 30-49　■ Ages 50-64　□ Ages 65+

| | Had email or SNS account compromised or taken over without permission | Been stalked or harassed online | Had important info stolen such as SSN, credit card, bank info | Had reputation damaged because of something that happened online | Online events led you into physical danger |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ages 18-29 | 28% | 23% | 7% | 13% | 11% |
| Ages 30-49 | 22% | 15% | 14% | 6% | 4% |
| Ages 50-64 | 17% | 2% | 11% | 2% | 1% |
| Ages 65+ | 9% | 3% | 8% | 4% | |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.
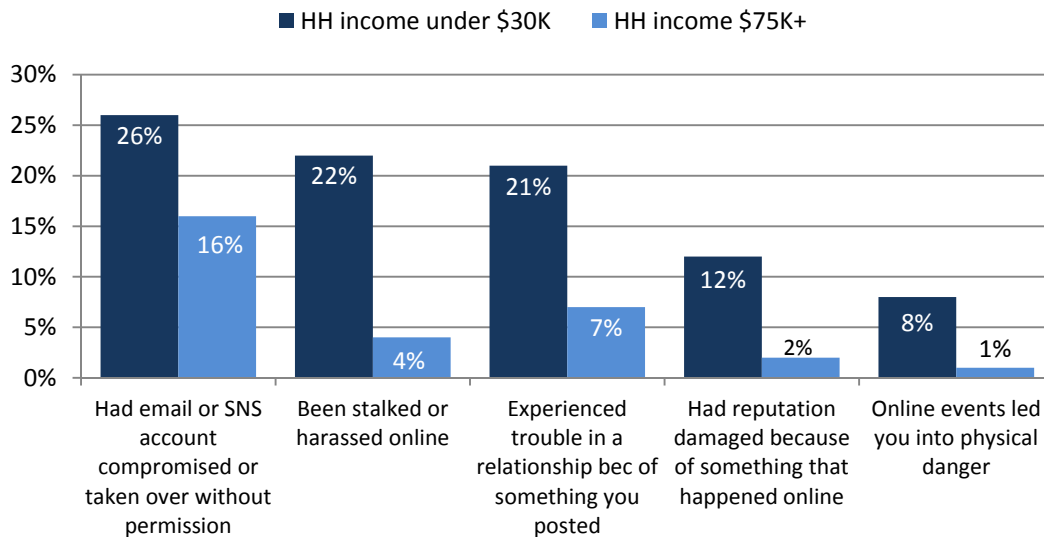
# Low-income internet users are more likely to report negative experiences

In addition to the age differences when it comes to these problems, there are also times when poorer internet users are among the most likely to be victimized. For instance, the internet users who live in households earning less than $30,000 are particularly likely to have suffered a problem from their online activities:

- Had an email or social media account compromised
- Experienced trouble in a relationship between themselves and others
- Been stalked or harassed online
- Had their reputation damaged by online activity
- Been put in physical danger after online activity

## Poorer internet users are more likely to report negative outcomes

*% of internets owners in different income brackets who have had problems online with personal information*

■ HH income under $30K ■ HH income $75K+

| Outcome | HH income under $30K | HH income $75K+ |
|---|---|---|
| Had email or SNS account compromised or taken over without permission | 26% | 16% |
| Been stalked or harassed online | 22% | 4% |
| Experienced trouble in a relationship bec of something you posted | 21% | 7% |
| Had reputation damaged because of something that happened online | 12% | 2% |
| Online events led you into physical danger | 8% | 1% |

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, conducted July 11-14, 2013, on landline and cell phones. N=792 for internet users and smartphone owners. Interviews were conducted in English on landline and cell phones. The margin of error on the sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

# Survey Questions

**INTUSE** Do you use the Internet, at least occasionally?[2]

|  | USES INTERNET | DOES NOT USE INTERNET |
|---|---|---|
| Current | 81 | 19 |
| December 13-16, 2012[i] | 85 | 15 |
| October 12-14, 2012[ii] | 83 | 17 |
| August 2-5, 2012[iii] | 81 | 19 |
| January 5-8, 2012[iv] | 83 | 17 |
| Oct. 28-Nov. 1, 2010[v] | 80 | 20 |
| October 7-10, 2010[vi] | 75 | 25 |
| June 17-20, 2010[vii] | 81 | 19 |
| June 18-21, 2009[viii] | 76 | 24 |

**PIALQL1** Do you have a cell phone?[3]

|  | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW[4] | REFUSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Current | 90 | 10 | 0 | * |

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[2] The definition of an internet user varies from survey to survey. For trends August 2012 thru December 2012, an internet user is someone who uses the internet, sends/receives email, or accesses the internet a mobile device (three-part definition with question wording "Do you use the internet, at least occasionally?" OR "Do you send or receive email, at least occasionally?" OR "Do you access the internet on a cell phone, tablet or other mobile handheld device, at least occasionally?"). For trends January 2012 and earlier, an internet user is someone who uses the internet or sends/receives email (two-part definition with question wording "Do you use the internet, at least occasionally?" OR "Do you send or receive email, at least occasionally?").

[3] Question was asked of landline sample only. Results shown here have been recalculated to include cell phone sample in the "Yes" percentage. Trend questions were sometimes asked as an independent question and sometimes as an item in a series. Trend wording may vary from survey to survey. Wording variations include: "Do you have a cell phone (or not)?"; "Do you have a cell phone or a Blackberry or iPhone or other device that is also a cell phone?"; "Do you have a working cell phone?"

[4] For this question and others in the topline, results for "Don't know" often reflect combined "Don't know" and "Refused" percentages. DK and REF are reported separately where available.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| January 3-6, 2013[ix] | 89 | 11 | 0 | 0 |
| December 13-16, 2012 | 88 | 12 | * | -- |
| November 1-4, 2012[x] | 89 | 11 | * | -- |
| October 12-14, 2012 | 88 | 12 | * | -- |
| September 27-30, 2012[xi] | 89 | 11 | 0 | -- |
| September 20-23, 2012[xii] | 88 | 12 | 0 | * |
| August 2-5, 2012 | 87 | 13 | * | * |
| January 12-15, 2012[xiii] | 87 | 13 | 0 | * |
| January 5-8, 2012 | 88 | 11 | * | * |
| March 31-April 3, 2011[xiv] | 84 | 15 | * | -- |
| December 2-5, 2010[xv] | 83 | 15 | 2 | -- |
| Oct. 28-Nov. 1, 2010 | 86 | 14 | 0 | 0 |
| October 7-10, 2010 | 82 | 17 | * | -- |
| June 17-20, 2010 | 85 | 14 | 0 | * |

SMART3 Some cell phones are called "smartphones" and can access the internet. Is your cell phone a smartphone or not, or are you not sure?[5]

Based on cell phone owners

| | YES, SMARTPHONE | NO, NOT A SMARTPHONE | NOT SURE/ DON'T KNOW | REFUSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Current [N=912] | 59 | 37 | 5 | * |
| January 3-6, 2013 [N=908] | 57 | 39 | 4 | 0 |
| September 20-23, 2012 [N=872] | 49 | 43 | 8 | * |
| August 2-5, 2012 [N=886] | 51 | 44 | 5 | * |
| January 12-15, 2012 [N=894] | 45 | 47 | 8 | 0 |
| March 31-April 3, 2011 [N=863] | 37 | 51 | 12 | * |

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[5] Trend wording may vary from survey to survey. Wording variations include: "Some phones are called 'smartphones' because of certain features they have. Is your cell phone a smartphone or not, or are you not sure?"; "Some cell phones are called 'smartphones' because of certain features they have. Is your cell phone a smartphone, such as an iPhone, Android, Blackberry or Windows phone, or are you not sure?"

**PIAL1** We'd like to know if any of the following information about you is available on the internet for others to see. It doesn't matter if you put it there yourself or someone else did so. As I read each item, you can just tell me yes or no -- if you're not sure if something is on the internet, just say so. (First,/Next,) How about...[INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER]? [READ AS NECESSARY: Is this available on the internet, or not -- or are you not sure?]

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

| | YES | NO | (VOL.) DOESN'T APPLY | NOT SURE/ DON'T KNOW | REFUSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Your email address | 46 | 22 | 1 | 30 | * |
| b. Your home address | 30 | 48 | * | 22 | 1 |
| c. Your home phone number | 21 | 60 | 6 | 13 | 1 |
| d. Your cell phone number | 24 | 57 | 2 | 17 | * |
| e. Your employer or a company you work for | 44 | 42 | 9 | 5 | 0 |
| f. Your political party or political affiliation | 20 | 65 | 2 | 13 | * |
| g. Things you've written that have your name on it | 38 | 48 | 1 | 13 | * |
| h. A photo of you | 66 | 28 | * | 6 | * |
| i. Video of you | 21 | 69 | * | 9 | * |
| j. Which groups or organizations you belong to | 29 | 57 | 3 | 11 | 1 |
| k. Your birth date | 50 | 36 | * | 13 | * |

**PIAL2** Do you ever worry about how much information is available about you on the internet, or is that not something you worry about?

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

| | CURRENT | | September 2009 | December 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| % | 50 | Yes, worry about it | 33% | 40% |
| | 50 | No, don't worry about it | 67% | 60% |
| | * | Don't know | * | * |
| | 0 | Refused | * | * |

**PIAL3** Now, here is a list of some things that you might do online. For each activity, how much do you care that only you and those you authorize should have access to the following kinds of information? First, is it very important to you, somewhat important, or not too important to you that only you and those you authorize have access to [INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE]?

How about [INSERT NEXT ITEM]? [READ AS NECESSARY: Is it very, somewhat, or not too important to you that only you and those you authorize have access to this information?]

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

| | | VERY IMPT. | SOME-WHAT IMPT. | NOT TOO IMPT. | (VOL.) NOT AT ALL IMPT. | (VOL.) DOESN'T APPLY | DON'T KNOW | REFUSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | The websites you browse | 46 | 23 | 28 | 2 | 1 | * | * |
| b. | The place where you are located when you use the internet | 54 | 16 | 26 | 2 | 1 | 1 | * |
| c. | The content and files that you download | 55 | 19 | 21 | 1 | 3 | 1 | * |
| d. | The times of day you are online | 33 | 17 | 45 | 3 | 1 | 1 | * |
| e. | The applications or programs you use | 40 | 27 | 28 | 2 | 1 | 1 | * |
| f. | The searches you perform | 44 | 25 | 27 | 2 | 2 | * | * |
| g. | The content of your email | 68 | 13 | 15 | 1 | 2 | * | * |
| h. | The people you exchange email with | 62 | 16 | 16 | 2 | 3 | * | * |
| i. | The content of your online chats or hangouts with others | 51 | 12 | 22 | 3 | 11 | * | * |

**PIAL4** Considering everything you know and have heard about the internet, do you think it is possible for someone to use the internet completely anonymously – so that none of their online activities can be easily traced back to them?

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

| | CURRENT | |
|---|---|---|
| % | 37 | Yes |
| | 59 | No |
| | 4 | Don't know |
| | 1 | Refused |

**PIAL5** Have you ever tried to use the internet in a way that hides or masks your identity from certain people or organizations?

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

|     | CURRENT |           |
| --- | ------- | --------- |
| %   | 18      | Yes       |
|     | 81      | No        |
|     | 1       | Don't know |
|     | *       | Refused   |

**PIAL6** Do you ever post comments, questions, or information on the internet [INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER]? And, then, do you ever post comments on the internet [INSERT NEXT ITEM]?

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

|     |                                                          | YES | NO | (VOL.) DOESN'T APPLY | DON'T KNOW | REFUSED |
| --- | -------------------------------------------------------- | --- | -- | -------------------- | ---------- | ------- |
| a.  | Using your real name                                     | 49  | 47 | 3                    | 1          | *       |
| b.  | Using a username or screen name that people associate with you | 47  | 51 | 2                    | *          | *       |
| c.  | Without revealing who you are                            | 25  | 72 | 2                    | 1          | 0       |

**PIAL7** While using the internet, have you ever done any of the following things? First, have you ever [INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE] while you used the internet? How about [INSERT NEXT ITEM]? [READ AS NECESSARY: Have you ever done that while you used the internet?]

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

|  |  | YES | NO | (VOL.) DOESN'T APPLY | DON'T KNOW | REFUSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Used a temporary username or email address | 26 | 72 | * | 1 | 0 |
| b. | Used a fake name or untraceable username | 18 | 81 | 1 | * | 0 |
| c. | Given inaccurate or misleading information about yourself | 13 | 85 | * | 1 | * |
| d. | Set your browser to disable or turn off cookies | 41 | 53 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| e. | Cleared cookies and browser history | 64 | 32 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| f. | Used a service that allows you to browse the web anonymously, such as a proxy server, Tor software, or a virtual personal network | 14 | 82 | 1 | 3 | * |

|  |  | YES | NO | (VOL.) DOESN'T APPLY | DON'T KNOW | REFUSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| g. | Encrypted your communications | 14 | 79 | 1 | 5 | * |
| h. | Decided not to use a website because they asked for your real name | 36 | 63 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| i. | Deleted or edited something you posted in the past | 41 | 56 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| j. | Asked someone to remove something that was posted about you online | 21 | 78 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| k. | Used a public computer to browse anonymously | 18 | 81 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

**PIAL8** Have you ever tried to use the internet in ways that keep [INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE] from being able to see what you have read, watched or posted online? How about [INSERT NEXT ITEM]? [READ AS NECESSARY: Have you ever tried to keep (ITEM) from being able to see your online activities?]

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

| | | YES, DID THIS | NO, DID NOT | (VOL.) DOESN'T APPLY | DON'T KNOW | REFUSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Family members or a romantic partner | 14 | 85 | * | * | 0 |
| b. | Certain friends | 19 | 80 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| c. | An employer, supervisor, or coworkers | 11 | 86 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| d. | The companies or people who run the website you visited | 6 | 91 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| e. | Hackers or criminals | 33 | 62 | 1 | 3 | * |
| f. | Law enforcement | 4 | 94 | 1 | 1 | * |
| g. | People who might criticize, harass, or target you | 17 | 78 | 3 | 1 | * |
| h. | Companies or people that might want payment for the files you download such as songs, movies, or games | 6 | 89 | 4 | * | * |
| i. | People from your past | 19 | 79 | 1 | 1 | * |
| j. | Advertisers | 28 | 69 | 1 | 1 | * |
| k. | The government | 5 | 92 | 1 | 2 | * |

**PIAL10** Suppose you said something critical about a product online, and you didn't use your real name. How easy do you think it would be for the company to find out who you are anyway? Would it be very easy, somewhat easy, not too easy, or almost impossible for the company to find out?

Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]

| | CURRENT | |
|---|---|---|
| % | 42 | Very easy |
| | 37 | Somewhat easy |
| | 13 | Not too easy |
| | 3 | Almost impossible |
| | 5 | Don't know |
| | 1 | Refused |

**PIAL11** As far as you know, have you ever had any of these experiences as a result of your online activities? [INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE]? Have you ever had this experience as a result of your online activities? How about [INSERT NEXT ITEM]? [READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN AS NECESSARY: Have you ever had this experience as a result of your online activities?]

|  | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW | REFUSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Item A : Based on Total* | | | | |
| a. Had important personal information stolen such as your Social Security Number, your credit card, or bank account information | 10 | 88 | 2 | * |
| *Items B-H: Based on all internet users or smartphone users [N=792]* | | | | |
| b. Had an email or social networking account of yours compromised or taken over without your permission by someone else | 21 | 78 | 1 | 0 |
| c. Been the victim of an online scam and lost money | 6 | 93 | * | * |
| d. Been stalked or harassed online | 12 | 88 | * | 0 |
| e. Lost a job opportunity or educational opportunity because of something you posted online or someone posted about you online | 1 | 98 | 1 | 0 |
| f. Experienced trouble in a relationship between you and a family member or a friend because of something you posted online | 13 | 87 | * | 0 |
| g. Had your reputation damaged because of something that happened online | 6 | 93 | * | * |
| h. Something happened online that led you into physical danger | 4 | 96 | * | 0 |

**PIAL12** Thinking about current laws, do you think the laws provide reasonable protections of people's privacy about their online activities, or do you think the laws are not good enough in protecting people's privacy online?

|  | CURRENT |  |
|---|---|---|
| % | 24 | Reasonable protection |
|  | 66 | Not good enough |
|  | 9 | Don't know |
|  | 1 | Refused |

**PIAL13** Do you think that people should have the ability to use the internet completely anonymously for certain kinds of online activities?

|   | CURRENT |   |
|---|---------|---|
| % | 59 | Yes |
|   | 34 | No |
|   | 6 | Don't know |
|   | 1 | Refused |

*The remaining demographic questions are not reported in this topline.*

## Methods

## July 2013 Omnibus Week 2

Prepared by Princeton Survey Research Associates International

July 2013

The PSRAI July 2013 Omnibus Week 2 obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,002 adults living in the continental United States. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (502) and cell phone (500, including 268 without a landline phone). The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Interviews were done in English by Princeton Data Source from July 11 to 14, 2013. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.6 percentage points.

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[i] December 13-16, 2012 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,006 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[ii] October 12-14, 2012 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,006 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[iii] August 2-5, 2012 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[iv] January 5-8, 2012 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[v] October 28-November 1, 2010 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[vi] October 7-10, 2010 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[vii] June 17-20, 2010 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,009 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[viii] June 18-21, 2009 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[ix] January 3-6, 2013 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[x] November 1-4, 2012 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,011 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[xi] September 27-30, 2012 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[xii] September 20-23, 2012 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[xiii] January 12-15, 2012 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,008 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[xiv] March 31-April 3, 2011 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,008 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.

[xv] December 2-5, 2010 trends based on an omnibus survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults 18+ living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted in English on both landlines and cell phones.