www.pewinternet.org

Pew Internet & American Life

PROJECT

a project of the Tides Center

THE INTERNET AND THE IRAQ WAR
HOW ONLINE AMERICANS HAVE USED THE INTERNET TO LEARN WAR NEWS, UNDERSTAND EVENTS, AND PROMOTE THEIR VIEWS

AUTHORS
LEE RAINIE, DIRECTOR
SUSANNAH FOX, RESEARCH DIRECTOR
DEBORAH FALLOWS, SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW

In the first six days after hostilities began in Iraq, the Pew Internet & American Life Project joined with the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press to survey Americans about their views about the conflict, how they were getting news about it, and the impact of developments on them. This report discusses how the Internet has grown as a news source for millions, how supporters and opponents of the war are using the Internet differently and how Americans are using email to debate, express concerns and show their patriotism.

77% of online Americans have used the Internet in connection with the war
More than three-quarters of online Americans (77%) have used the Internet in connection with the war in Iraq. They are going online to get information about the war, to learn and share differing opinions about the conflict, to send and receive emails where they ponder events, express their views and offer prayers. In addition, a smaller portion of Internet users are using email to mobilize others and gain support for their views about the conflict.

In all, 55% of the nation's 116 million adult Internet users have used email in one way or another to communicate or learn about the war and 56% have used the Web to get news, general information, and commentary on countless Web sites that have war related material and argument.

About one in seven Internet users (14%) say they are going online more because of the news. War opponents are slightly more likely than supporters to report intensified Internet use. For instance, they stayed online somewhat longer during a typical day in the early period of the war.

TV still rules the news world, but the online news audience jumps to record levels. Reliance on the Internet is many times greater than after the 9/11 attacks
The overwhelming majority of Internet users are using TV to get most of their war news. In fact, of all the major forms of media, the Internet is last on the list of ways that online Americans are getting most of their news. Still, 17% of online Americans say their principal source of information about the war is the Internet and that number is considerably higher than when we asked questions about how Americans were getting their news immediately after the 9/11 terror attacks. At that time, only 3% of online Americans said the Internet was their primary source of information about the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon and the aftermath of the attack.

How are you getting most of your news about the war? *		
	All Americans	*Internet users*
Television	89%	87%
Newspapers	24%	21%
Radio	19%	22%
Internet	N/A	17%

* Respondents were allowed to give two answers.

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Iraq war survey, March 20-25, 2003. N for the entire sample is =1600. Margin of error is ±3%. N for Internet users=999. Margin of error is ±3%.

In the immediate pre-war period, Internet users were even more likely to say they were relying on the Internet for news about the situation in Iraq. Some 26% of online Americans said the Internet was their primary source of news and information about the possibility of war with Iraq. Further, more people in our pre-war

sample said their use of the Internet was keeping them abreast of breaking news developments, was helping them form their views about the war, and helping them promote their views about the impending conflict.

In addition, the size of the online news audience has jumped dramatically beginning in the period just before the war began on March 19 and in the immediate days after hostilities were started. On each of the five days after the war began on March 19, more than 33% of U.S. Internet users went online to get news. And online news interest was even higher in the days immediately before the war broke out: 37% of online Americans were getting news on a typical day. This is a substantial increase from the usual online news audience; we have previously found that 24%-26% of Internet users got news on a typical day. It is also the first time in the three years of polling done by the Pew Internet & American Life Project that more than 30% of Internet users were gathering news online during a typical day.

Men with Internet access are much more likely than online women to be getting news from the Web both before and after the war broke out. In addition, Internet veterans (those with more than six years of online experience) and broadband users are the most likely to be getting news online. Nearly half of broadband users are getting news online each day.

At the same time, we do not see a diminishing of other online activity at the outset of the war. Typical Internet use has not changed – roughly the same number of U.S. Internet users are going online during a typical day, they are spending about the same amount of time online and they are doing other online activities at approximately the same rates. This is different from the period right after 9/11, when there were generally fewer people online on any given day and they were not nearly as likely to be doing online browsing for fun or shopping.

The general sentiments of Internet users
In the days the war started, U.S. Internet users support the U.S. war effort by a 3-1 margin. Some 74% of Internet users back the U.S. war effort and 22% oppose it. Internet users are *more likely* than non-users to support the war and to support the way President Bush is conducting the war. Internet users are also *more likely* than non-users to think that launching the war was the right decision and to think the war is going well. Further, online Americans are also *more likely* to believe that the press is doing a good job covering the war and to say they think the U.S. military is giving the public an accurate picture of how the war is going. At the same time, Internet users are a bit *less apprehensive* than non-users about several possible outcomes of the war, including the possibility of Iraq using weapons of mass destruction against U.S. troops, that there might be a lot of U.S. casualties, and that the general situation in the Middle East might deteriorate into all-out war.

Email and the war
Fully 55% of online Americans have used email in connection with the war. (A full table of the activities we measured is below.) As a rule, the most fervent veteran Internet users

(those who have high levels of education and income and several years of online experience) have been the ones most likely to send email of all kinds. Whites are somewhat more likely than minorities to use email for matters related to the war after the fighting broke out, but there were not notable differences between racial and ethnic groups in the pre-war period. Online men were more likely than women to use email to get news alerts. Online women were more likely than men to use email for prayer requests, to discuss the war with family members.

Email and the war	
Type of email	Percent who sent/received this kind of email
Patriotic sentiments and material	29%
Prayer requests	25%
Discuss the war with friends	18%
Email news alerts from news organizations	17%
Discuss the war with family members	14%
Received email from organization against the war	10%
Received email from organization in favor of the war	7%
Communicate with elected official about the war	5%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Iraq war survey, March 20-25, 2003. N for the entire sample is =1600. Margin of error is ±3%. N for Internet users=999. Margin of error is ±3%.

Use of the Web and the war

In all, 56% of American Internet users have gone online for some kind of information and news about the war or to become involved in a more direct way. Many are using their Internet connections to keep abreast of war developments, perhaps because this is the most convenient way for them to catch up on headlines during the day or because they are not immediately able to turn on a TV or radio.

Some 45% of Internet users got news about the war in the initial days of the conflict. Reflecting our longstanding observation, online men were more likely than women to be news-seekers. Further, Internet users from upscale groups with high levels of education and income were more likely to seek news online than those with less income and lower levels of educational attainment. Broadband users were also much more likely than dial-up users to go online for information and news about the war. Some 70% of those with broadband connections used the Web for war-related searches, compared to 58% of dial-up users who used the Web for those purposes.

Use of the Web and the war	Percent of Internet users who used the Net for this purpose
Look for news	44%
Get info about the reaction of the financial markets	23%
Get info about the country and people of Iraq	15%
Look for info about how to prepare for a terrorist attack	9%
Sign a petition for/against the war	6%
Read/posted comments on a bulletin board or chat room	6%
Get info about how to become involved politically	5%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Iraq war survey, March 20-25, 2003. N for the entire sample is =1600. Margin of error is ±3%. N for Internet users=999. Margin of error is ±3%.

The sites they use

Just as most Americans are getting their news from television, more Internet users are going to American television networks' Web sites than any other news source online. Men, college graduates, and Internet users under the age of 65 are more likely to have looked at any of these news sources online. Internet users with six or more years of experience are significantly more likely to have done so, as are home broadband users.

The Web sites Americans have used	Percent of Internet users
American TV network sites	32%
American newspaper sites	29%
U.S. government sites	15%
Foreign news organizations	10%
Alternative news sites	8%
Sites of groups that oppose the war	6%
Sites of groups that support the war	5%
Web log/blog sites	4%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Iraq war survey, March 20-25, 2003. N for the entire sample is =1600. Margin of error is ±3%. N for Internet users=999. Margin of error is ±3%.

Blogs gain a small foothold

There has been much early discussion about the role of blogs or Web diaries in shaping opinion about the war and allowing Internet users to gain new perspectives and sources of information about the war. Our first soundings on the subject show that blogs are gaining a following among a small number of Internet users, but they are not yet a source of news and commentary for the majority of Internet users. Some 4% of online Americans report going to blogs for information and opinions. The overall number of blog users is so small that it is not possible to draw statistically meaningful conclusions about who uses blogs. The early data suggest that the most active Internet users, especially those with broadband connections are the most likely to have found blogs they like. In addition,

blogs seem to be catching on with younger Internet users – those under age 30 – at a greater pace than with older Internet users.

Why Americans go online for news

Variety and timeliness are the top two most important aspects of online news for U.S. Internet users. In general, younger Internet users are more likely than others to have favorable opinions about online news. Internet users with six or more years of experience are also significantly more likely than others to get news online, as are home broadband users.

What's important to users about news on the Net *The percent of Internet users who cite these reasons as important to them*	
	Internet users
Get news from a variety of sources	66%
Get up-to-the-minute news	63%
Get points of view different from those in traditional news	52%
Get points of view different from official government sources	52%
Exchange emails/instant messages about the war	31%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Iraq war survey, March 20-25, 2003. N for the entire sample is =1600. Margin of error is ±3%. N for Internet users=999. Margin of error is ±3%.

How the Internet helps

Online Americans appreciate their ability to use the Internet to keep up to date on events. More than two of every five U.S. Internet users (41%) say their use of the Internet helps them stay abreast of the news. The heaviest users of the Internet, especially those with broadband connections, are the most likely to appreciate the Internet for this reason. Younger Internet users – those under age 30 – are the most likely age group to cite that benefit. College graduates are also very likely to say the Internet helps them stay current with war developments.

One in five Internet users (19%) say their use of the Internet has helped them shape their views on the war. War opponents are more likely than war supporters to say this. And longtime users of the Internet are more likely than relative newcomers to express this appreciation for the role of the Internet.

Some 20% of online Americans say the Internet has helped them make their views about the war known to others. Again, war opponents are more likely than supporters to cite this benefit from going online. And the most fervent Internet users are more likely to say this than those who are less active online.

A small number say Internet information changed their mind about the war
Finally, 6% of all Internet users say something they learned online has changed their opinion about the war. The number is so small that there is no way to draw statistically significant conclusions from a closer examination of the group that said it had changed its mind based on information available on the Internet. It appears that more war opponents than supporters said that Internet information helped change their mind. Users who did not complete high school were more likely to be swayed than those with higher levels of education and younger Internet users were more likely than older users to say "yes" to this question.

The online world vs. the traditional world
Towards the end of our survey, we asked respondents to compare the online news environment to that of newspapers and TV. Did they think that using the Internet gave them points of view that are not available in newspapers and TV? Even though a clear majority of Internet users say they value the online environment because they get a *variety* of points of view, just 17% of Internet users said going online gave them *different* points of view. Some 64% said the points of view online were pretty much the same as those in newspapers and TV. Fully 19% of the respondents did not express an opinion – a rate of non-response that is unusually high.

This modest level of sentiment that the online world is different applied to even the most obvious Internet partisans. These are the same people, though, who frequently say the value of the Web is that they can find a variety of points of view. Just 21% of the most active Internet users – those who are online every day, those who have more than six years of online experience, and those with broadband connections – said the online environment exposed them to more points of view that other media. About a third (34%) of those who said they are relying most on the Internet for news said the Internet is different from traditional media. War opponents were somewhat more likely than supporters to believe the Internet gave them alternative points of view from those in traditional media.

PART 2: THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WAR SUPPORTERS AND WAR OPPONENTS ONLINE

War opponents and supporters are going online for different purposes and with different results during the early days of the conflict. They also have diverging views about the role the Internet is playing in their lives. As a rule, war opponents use email and the Web for a variety of purposes and they are more appreciative of the benefits of the Internet use than those who support the war. War opponents are more politically active online, more anxious to discuss the war, and more likely to seek out a variety of sources of information about the war. The results are in the table below:

War supporters and war opponents		
	War supporters	*War opponents*
Where war opponents are more active online		
Look at the Web sites of American newspapers	27%	39%
Receive email from organizations opposing war	6%	24%
Get information online about the country/people of Iraq	13%	23%
Use email to discuss the war with friends	17%	22%
Use email to discuss war with family	13%	18%
Look at Web sites of groups that oppose the war	3%	17%
Get information online about how to get involved politically	3%	17%
Look at Web sites known as alternative media sources	6%	15%
Look at the Web sites of foreign news organizations	10%	14%
Sign online petitions for/against the war	4%	14%
Use email to communicate with elected officials	3%	12%
Read/post comments to bulletin boards and other online forums about the war	5%	9%
Where war supporters are more active online		
Receive/send patriotic material by email	30%	19%
Receive/send email prayer request	27%	20%
Where supporters and opponents are similarly active		
Look for news online about the war	45%	46%
Look at the Web sites of American TV networks	33%	34%
Receive email alerts from news organizations	17%	17%
Look at U.S. government Web sites	15%	16%
Use instant messaging to discuss war	11%	13%
Get information online about preparing for terrorist attack	9%	10%
Receive email from organization supporting the war	7%	5%
Look at Web sites of groups that support the war	6%	4%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Iraq war survey, March 20-25, 2003. N for the entire sample is =1600. Margin of error is ±3%. N for Internet users=999. Margin of error is ±3%.

Not surprisingly, online war opponents are more likely than war supporters to be skeptical of the way war information is being disseminated by the U.S. military and less confident that the mainstream press has done a good job covering the war. Asked about several possible reasons people might get information online, war opponents were more likely than supporters to say they prized the benefits of being online.

The role of the Internet is more important to war opponents		
The percent of each group who say the Internet is very important to them for this activity		
	War supporters	*War opponents*
Get news and information from a variety of sources	35%	46%
Get points of view that are different from official government sources	20%	38%
Get points of view that are different from traditional news sources	18%	36%
Exchange emails and instant messages about the war	13%	18%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Iraq war survey, March 20-25, 2003. N for the entire sample is =1600. Margin of error is ±3%. N for Internet users=999. Margin of error is ±3%.

Asked about activity in online discussion groups and email lists, online war opponents were more likely than war supporters to report discussion about the conflict. Overall, 14% of Internet users said their online groups had devoted some time to discussing the war. Almost a quarter of the wired war opponents (23%) said their online groups were discussing the war, compared to 12% of wired war supporters.

Different impacts of Internet use
War opponents are more likely than war supporters to say that their use of the Internet has helped to shape their views about the war, has helped them stay abreast of events, and has helped them share their views with others.

How the Internet helps		
The percent of each group who say their use of the Internet has helped…		
	War supporters	*War opponents*
Keep up to date with war developments	39%	48%
Shape their views about the war	17%	27%
Make their views about the war known to others	19%	24%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Iraq war survey, March 20-25, 2003. N for the entire sample is =1600. Margin of error is ±3%. N for Internet users=999. Margin of error is ±3%.

General Internet use
Despite these differences, there is striking similarity between war supporters and opponents in their general Internet use. Both go online at roughly the same rates and there is no difference between them in how they are relying on the Internet to get basic news

about the war. The one modest difference between them is that war opponents are a bit more likely to spend several hours online during a typical day that war supporters are.

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 March 20 and March 25, 2003, among a sample of 1,600 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 3 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=999), 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.

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. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. Additionally, the sample was released in replicates to make sure that the telephone numbers called are distributed appropriately across regions of the country. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at every household in the sample. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Interview refusals were recontacted at least once in order to try again to complete an interview. 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 Current Population Survey (March 2002). 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.

PSRA calculates a response rate as the product of three individual rates: the contact rate, the cooperation rate, and the completion rate. Of the residential numbers in the sample,

60.8 percent were contacted by an interviewer and 55.5 percent agreed to participate in the survey. Ninety percent were found eligible for the interview. Furthermore, 92.2 percent of eligible respondents completed the interview. Therefore, the final response rate is 31.1 percent.