



Pew Internet
Pew Internet & American Life Project

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The social side of the internet

Technology use has become deeply embedded in group life and is affecting the way civic and social groups behave and the way they impact their communities

Lee Rainie, Director
Kristen Purcell, Associate Director, Research
Aaron Smith, Senior Research Specialist

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Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project
1615 L St., NW – Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-419-4500 | pewinternet.org

Summary

The internet is now deeply embedded in group and organizational life in America. A new national survey by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project has found that 75% of all American adults are active in some kind of voluntary group or organization and internet users are more likely than others to be active: 80% of internet users participate in groups, compared with 56% of non-internet users. And social media users are even more likely to be active: 82% of social network users and 85% of Twitter users are group participants.

The overall impact of the internet on group activities and accomplishments

In this survey, Pew Internet asked about 27 different kinds of groups and found great diversity in group membership and participation using traditional and new technologies. It becomes clear as people are asked about their activities that their use of the internet is having a wide-ranging impact on their engagement with civic, social, and religious groups. Asked to assess the overall impact of the internet on group activities:

- 68% of all Americans (internet users and non-users alike) said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **communicate with members**. Some 75% of internet users said that.
- 62% of all Americans said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **draw attention to an issue**. Some 68% of internet users said that.
- 60% of all Americans said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **connect with other groups**. Some 67% of internet users said that.
- 59% of all Americans said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **impact society at large**. Some 64% of internet users said that.
- 59% of all Americans said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **organize activities**. Some 65% of internet users said that.
- 52% of all Americans said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **raise money**. Some 55% of internet users said that.
- 51% of all Americans said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **recruit new members**. Some 55% of internet users said that.
- 49% of all Americans said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **impact local communities**. Some 52% of internet users said that.
- 35% of all Americans said the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to **find people to take leadership roles**. Some 35% of internet users said that.

At a personal level, those who are active in groups say the internet has had varying influence over their connection to groups:

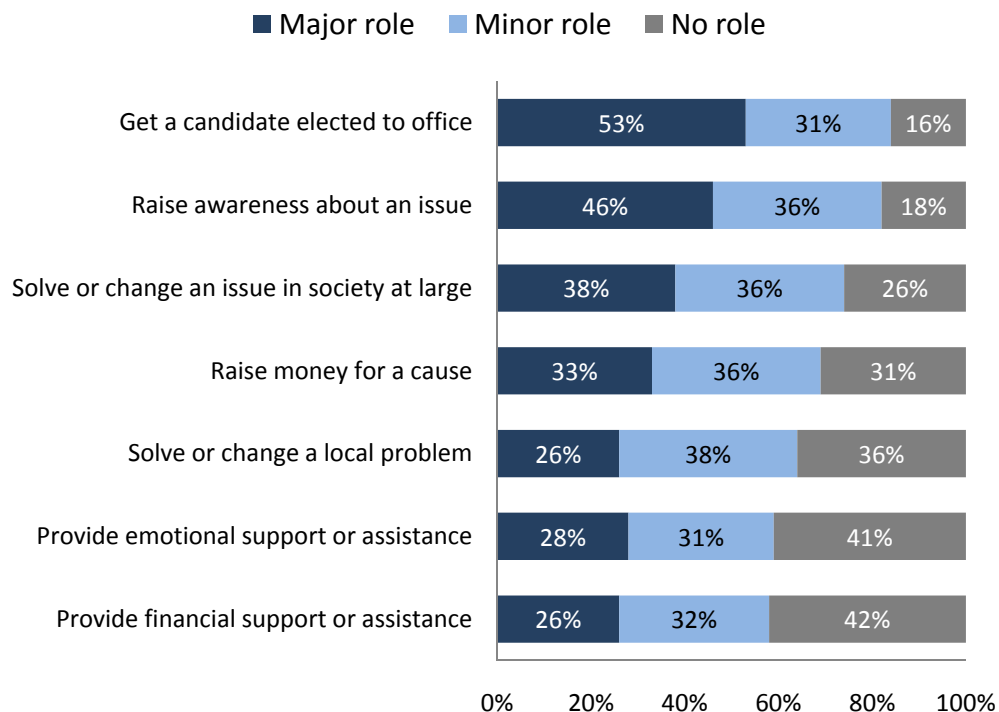
- 53% of the online Americans who are active in groups say the internet has had a major impact on their ability to **keep up with news and information about their groups**; 30% say the internet has had a minor impact on that.
- 41% of these internet-using active group members say the internet has had a major impact on their ability to **organize activities for their groups**; 33% say the internet has had a minor impact on that.
- 35% of these internet-using active group members say the internet has had a major impact on their ability to **invite friends to join their groups**; 36% say the internet has had a minor impact on that.

- 33% of these internet-using active group members say the internet has had a major impact on their ability to **find groups that match their interests**; 28% say the internet has had a minor impact on that.
- 28% of these internet-using active group members say the internet has had a major impact on their ability to **create their own groups**; 28% say the internet has had a minor impact on that.
- 24% of these internet-using active group members say the internet has had a major impact on their ability to **volunteer their time to groups**; 40% say the internet has had a minor impact on that.
- 24% of these internet-using active group members say the internet has had a major impact on their ability to **contribute money to groups**; 34% say the internet has had a minor impact on that.

Many groups work hard to accomplish their goals but do not necessarily succeed in a modest amount of time. In the Pew Internet survey, respondents were asked about several kinds of outcomes and whether groups had achieved them in the previous 12 months. In some cases majorities or significant pluralities had accomplished their goals. For those that had achieved those outcomes, we then asked what role the internet played (if any) in achieving those goals. For those that did succeed, the internet's role ranged from significant to modest:

The role of the internet in achieving group goals *among groups whose goals were achieved*

% among those who are members of a group that achieved each goal in the preceding 12 months



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

On other internet impacts:

- 46% of the internet users who are active in groups say the internet has helped them be active in more groups than would otherwise be the case.
- 24% of those active in groups say they discovered at least some of their groups on the internet. However, three times that number of active group members (75%) did not discover any of the groups they belong to online.
- 23% of internet users say the technology allows them to spend more time with their groups; 70% of internet users report no impact of the internet on their time spent with groups.

Social media activities are taking hold in group activities

Groups and their members are using all kinds of digital tools to bind themselves together and some of the most innovative involve social networking sites like Facebook (used by 62% of the internet users in our survey), Twitter (used by 12% of internet users), blogs, and texting (used by 74% of the cell phone owners in our survey) :

- 48% of those who are active in groups say that those groups have a page on a social networking site like Facebook
- 42% of those who are active in groups say those groups use text messaging
- 30% of those who are active in groups say those groups have their own blog
- 16% of those who are active in groups say the groups communicate with members through Twitter

Group members themselves are often active in using social media to connect with the group and evangelize for the group with others: Some 65% of those who are social network site users say they read updates and messages on these sites about the groups in which they are active and 30% say they have posted news about their groups on their SNS page. The numbers are similar when it comes to Twitter users: 63% of the Twitter users who are active in groups say they read updates and posts on Twitter about their groups, and 21% say they post news on Twitter about their groups. Some 45% of the texters who are active in groups say they send and receive texts with other group members and leaders.

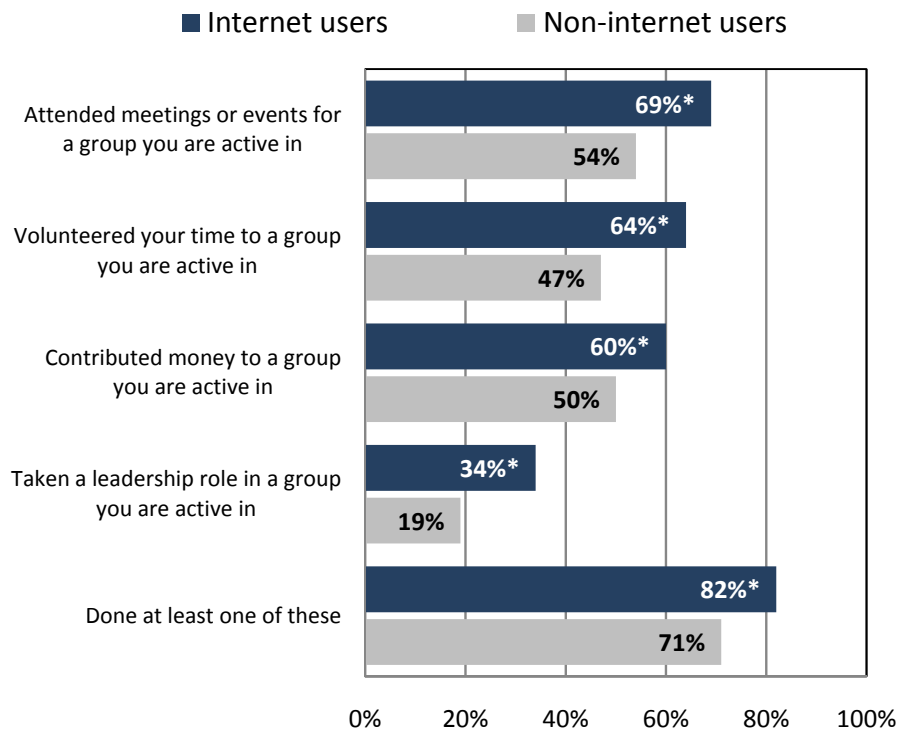
Social network and Twitter users are also more active in some parts of group activity: They post about group activities on their Facebook pages and Tweets; they are more likely than others to invite newbies into a group; more likely than others to be targeted for invitation to groups; more likely to use the internet to discover groups; more likely to say the internet enables them to participate in more groups and more likely to say they spend more time on group activities because of the internet. Social media users are significantly more likely than other group participants who go online for group activities, to say that the internet has a “major impact” on their ability to engage with their groups.

Internet users are more active participants in their groups than other adults, and are more likely to feel pride and a sense of accomplishment

The survey asked group members whether they had done several core activities with their group in the past 30 days and internet users were significantly more likely to have done all of these activities.

Internet users are more active in their groups than non-users

In the past 30 days, have you...



* Indicates a difference that is statistically significant at the 95% level

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 29-May 30, 2010 Tracking Survey (N=2,252 adults 18 and older), including 748 reached via cell phone.

Perhaps reflecting their higher levels of participation, internet users are also more likely than non-users to say that, in the past 12 months, they have felt really proud of a group they are active in because of something it accomplished or a positive difference it made (62% v. 47%) and that they have accomplished something as part of a group that they could not have accomplished themselves (48% v. 35%). Internet users and non-users are statistically equally likely to say that in the past 12 months they felt disappointed in a group they are active in because it failed to accomplish its goals or lacked purpose. Internet users are, however, slightly more likely to report leaving a group in the past 12 months.

Acknowledgements

The survey covered here was inspired by conversations with Jerry Berman and David Johnson of the Center for Democracy and Technology and Tim Lordan of the Internet Education Foundation. They were enormously helpful in suggesting the appropriate framing for this research and in pondering the particular questions that would yield insights into how Americans use technology to act in groups.

Section 1: The state of groups and voluntary organizations in America

The status of Americans' social ties and the vigor of their communities have drawn considerable attention in recent years, much of it focused on the degree to which the internet, cell phones, and other information and communication devices are affecting Americans' social lives.

To assess the state of the play in these social arenas, the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project did a national phone survey of 2,303 adults between November 23 and December 21, 2010. All told, 75% of Americans are active in one kind of group or another. Internet and cell phone owners are more likely than non-technology users to be active in groups. Fully 80% of internet users are active in one kind of group or another, compared with 56% of non-internet users; and 86% of cell owners are active in a group, compared with 62% of non-cell owners.

Furthermore, those who are active in social media are among the most heavily involved group participants: 82% of those who use social networking sites such as Facebook say they are active in groups vs. 77% of the internet users who are not users of such sites; and 85% of Twitter users are active in groups vs. 79% of the online Americans who are not Twitter users.

These figures about group participants come from those who said they belonged to at least one of 27 different kinds of groups that we queried in the survey. If a person said "yes" to being active in at least one group, then she was counted among the 75% of Americans who are active in groups. In fact, the average American adult is active in 3.51 groups of the various types we queried. Some 14% of adults belong to at least 8 types of groups. In addition, the average person spends 6.54 hours per week in group activities.

Church organizations and spiritual groups are by far the most popular groups among Americans: 40% of adults say they are active in such groups. The next most popular groups are those related to sports and recreation leagues (in which 24% of adults are active), consumer groups such as the Automobile Association of America (AAA) or coupon-sharing groups (24%), charitable or volunteer organizations (22%), and professional or trade associations of people in similar occupations (20%). Here is the full picture of group participation that was captured in this survey:

- 40% of adults say they are active in church groups or other religious or spiritual organizations
- 24% are active in sports or recreation leagues for themselves or for their children
- 24% are active in consumer groups such as AAA or coupon-sharing groups
- 22% are active in charitable or volunteer organizations such as Habitat for Humanity or the Humane Society
- 20% are active in professional or trade associations for people in their occupations
- 19% are active in community groups or neighborhood associations
- 18% are active in support groups for people with a particular illness or personal situation
- 17% are active in hobby groups or clubs
- 15% are active in national or local organizations for older adults such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
- 15% are active in political parties or organizations
- 14% are active in alumni associations
- 13% are active in parent groups or organizations such as the PTA or local parent support groups
- 11% are active in literary, discussion, or study groups such as book clubs
- 10% are active in performance or arts groups, such as a choir, dance group, or craft guild

- 9% are active in fan groups for a particular sports team or athlete
- 9% are active in youth groups such as the Scouts, YMCA, or 4-H club
- 8% are active in labor unions
- 8% are active in social or fraternal clubs, sororities or fraternities
- 7% are active in environmental groups
- 7% are active in sports fantasy leagues
- 7% are active in veterans organizations such as the American Legion or VFW
- 6% are active in gaming communities
- 6% are active in fan groups for a particular TV show, movie, celebrity, or musical performer
- 5% are active in ethnic or cultural groups
- 5% are active in travel clubs
- 4% are active in farm organizations
- 3% are active in fan groups for a particular brand, company, or product
- 3% say they are active in another kind of group that was not mentioned in the Pew Internet list

The traits of group members

In a notable number of cases, demography is destiny when it comes to group participation in America. There is considerable variance in group membership depending on gender, age, racial and ethnic groups, and socio-economic status. For instance, women are more likely than men to be active in church groups, consumer groups, support groups, parent groups, literacy groups and performance groups among other things. At the same time, men are more likely than women to be connected to groups involving sports or sports fan activities, veterans, and gaming groups.

Group participation and gender

Percentage of American adults in each sex who are active in various organizations

Type of group	Men	Women
Groups where women are more involved than men		
Church, religious, spiritual groups	37%	43%*
Consumer groups	21%	26%*
Support groups for people with illness, personal situation	16%	21%*
Organizations for older adults such as AARP	13%	17%*
Parent groups such as PTA	9%	16%*
Literary groups such as book clubs	7%	15%*
Performance or arts groups	7%	12%*
Groups where men are more involved than women		
Sports or recreation leagues for themselves/their children	27%*	22%
Fan groups for team or athlete	12%*	7%
Sports fantasy leagues	12%*	3%
Veterans organizations	9%*	5%
Gaming communities	7%*	4%
Groups where men and women are equally active		
Charitable or volunteer organizations such as Habitat for Humanity	21%	24%
Professional or trade associations	21%	19%
Community groups, neighborhood associations	18%	20%
Hobby groups or clubs	19%	15%
Political parties or organizations	15%	15%
Alumni associations	14%	14%
Youth groups such as Scouts	9%	10%
Social/fraternal clubs	9%	7%
Labor unions	9%	6%
Environmental groups	7%	8%
Fan groups for shows/celebrities	5%	6%
Ethnic or cultural groups	5%	6%
Travel clubs	5%	5%
Farm organizations	5%	4%
Fan groups for products/brands	4%	3%

* Denotes statistically significant difference

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

When it comes to age cohorts, there are similarly striking differences. Older Americans are the most likely to be active in church groups, organizations for older adults like AARP, consumer groups, and charitable or volunteer organizations. The youngest adults are the most likely to be part of gaming communities and fan groups of various kinds, and the least likely to participate in neighborhood groups, support groups, political organizations, and labor unions. Those ages 30-49 are the most likely to be active in sports and recreation leagues, sports fantasy leagues, and youth-related groups.

Group participation and age

Percentage of American adults in each age grouping who are active in various organizations

Type of group	Total pop.	Ages 18-29	Ages 30-49	Ages 50-64	Ages 65+
Groups where those over age 50 are most active					
Church, religious, spiritual groups	40%	29%	39%	42%	53%*
Organizations for older adults such as AARP	15%	2%	3%	27%*	37%*
Consumer groups	24%	18%	22%	30%*	24%
Charitable or volunteer organizations such as Habitat for Humanity	22%	17%	23%	26%*	22%
Professional or trade associations	20%	13%	24%*	26%*	12%
Veterans organizations	7%	2%	5%	9%*	13%*
Groups where the youngest adults are most active					
Gaming communities	6%	10%*	5%	4%	3%
Fan groups for shows/celebrities	6%	8%*	6%	4%	4%
Fan groups for products/brands	3%	6%*	4%	2%	1%
Groups where the youngest adults are least active					
Community groups, neighborhood associations	19%	9%^	20%	23%	23%
Support groups for those w/ illness, personal situation	18%	14%^	19%	21%	20%
Political parties or organizations	15%	8%^	15%	20%	16%
Parent groups such as PTA	13%	7%^	21%	11%	6%
Labor unions	8%	4%^	9%	12%	5%
Travel clubs	5%	2%^	5%	6%	7%
Groups where GenX /younger Boomers are most active					
Sports or recreation leagues for themselves/their children	24%	17%	36%*	21%	14%
Youth groups such as Scouts	9%	7%	13%*	8%	5%
Sports fantasy leagues	7%	7%	11%*	4%	5%
Group where oldest adults are least active					
Fan groups for team or athlete	9%	10%	12%	8%	6%^
Groups where all ages are equally active					
Hobby groups or clubs	17%	14%	18%	18%	17%
Alumni associations	14%	13%	14%	16%	15%
Literary groups such as book clubs	11%	10%	10%	12%	12%
Performance or arts groups	10%	8%	11%	12%	11%
Social/fraternal clubs	8%	8%	7%	8%	10%
Environmental groups	7%	5%	8%	8%	8%
Farm organizations	4%	3%	5%	4%	5%

* Denotes statistically significant difference greater than other groups at the 95% level

^ Denotes statistically significant difference less than other groups

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

There are also some differences tied to racial and ethnic groups. African-Americans are the most likely to be active in church groups, support groups, and parent groups. Whites are most likely to be involved in consumer groups, charitable organizations, professional or trade associations, hobby groups, and veterans organizations – and least likely to be active in fan groups or ethnic clubs. Hispanics are least likely to be involved in community groups, organizations for older adults, political parties, book clubs, or performance groups.

Group participation by race and ethnicity

Percentage of American adults in each group who are active in various organizations

Type of group	Total pop.	White	Black	Hispanic
Groups where blacks are the most active				
Church, religious, spiritual groups	40%	40%	49%*	28%
Support groups for people with illness, personal situation	18%	18%	24%*	15%
Parent groups such as PTA	13%	11%	20%*	11%
Groups where whites are the most active				
Consumer groups	24%	26%*	21%	17%
Charitable or volunteer organizations such as Habitat for Humanity	22%	24%*	19%	13%
Professional or trade associations	20%	21%*	17%	14%
Hobby groups or clubs	17%	19%*	14%	11%
Veterans organizations	7%	8%*	5%	2%
Groups where whites are the least active				
Fan groups for shows/celebrities	6%	5%^	8%	10%
Ethnic or cultural groups	5%	3%^	8%	8%
Groups where Hispanics are the least active				
Community groups, neighborhood associations	19%	20%	21%	11%^
Organizations for older adults such as AARP	15%	17%	16%	4%^
Political parties or organizations	15%	16%	13%	8%^
Literary groups such as book clubs	11%	10%	14%	8%^
Performance or arts groups	10%	10%	15%	7%^
Groups where all are equally active				
Sports or rec leagues for themselves/their children	24%	25%	21%	22%
Alumni associations	14%	15%	11%	13%
Fan groups for team or athlete	9%	10%	10%	9%
Youth groups such as Scouts	9%	10%	10%	7%
Social/fraternal clubs	8%	8%	10%	5%
Labor unions	8%	9%	6%	5%
Sports fantasy leagues	7%	8%	7%	6%
Environmental groups	7%	8%	6%	6%
Gaming communities	6%	6%	6%	5%
Travel clubs	5%	5%	7%	3%
Farm organizations	4%	5%	3%	3%
Fan groups for products/brands	3%	3%	4%	3%

* Denotes statistically significant difference greater than other groups at the 95% level

^ Denotes statistically significant difference less than other groups at the 95% level

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

In addition to those factors, socio-economic status is strongly tied to group participation. Those with college degrees are substantially more likely than others to be participants in all the groups that were queried in this survey, except support groups, organizations for older adults, fan groups of athletes or teams, labor unions, sports fantasy leagues, gaming communities, and veterans groups. The same pattern held for household income. The higher the income the more likely someone was to be involved with most groups, except the groups cited above.

Another attribute associated with being active in many organizations was the length of time a person had lived in his or her community. In a number of cases, the longer someone had lived in a community the more likely that person was to be active in certain groups, especially those that had a geographic component to them. For instance, those who had lived in a community for 20 or more years were more likely than those who had lived in a community five years or less to be active in these kinds of groups: church and spiritual groups, organizations for older Americans, veterans organizations, labor unions, and farm organizations.

In some instances, the type of community in which respondents lived was tied to the likelihood of their involvement with certain kinds of groups. For example, suburban dwellers were more likely than others to be active in sports leagues for themselves or their children, consumer groups, professional or trade associations, community associations, hobby groups, political organizations, alumni associations, parent groups, sports fantasy leagues. Those who live in large cities were more likely than others to be in consumer groups, literary discussion groups, gaming communities, fan groups, and ethnic/cultural groups. Those who live in rural areas were most likely to be involved with church and spiritual groups, organizations for older adults like AARP, veterans groups, and farm organizations.

The special role of personal efficacy and social trust

Two of the main drivers of activism in groups appear to be people's sense of their own ability to make a difference and their sense of trust in others. We did not probe either issue in great depth in this survey, but we did take simple readings. On the issue of personal efficacy, we asked respondents, "Overall, how much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live — a big impact, a moderate impact, a small impact, or no impact at all?" Some 30% said they felt they can have a big impact; 39% said they can have a moderate impact; 22% said they have a small impact; and 10% said they felt they have no impact.

To get a glimpse into people's sense of trust, we asked, "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" Some 44% said most people can be trusted and 50% said "you can't be too careful."

In both the case of personal efficacy and the case of trust, those who felt they could have a big impact and those who thought most others could be trusted were more likely to be active in groups, more likely to be connected to multiple groups, more likely to spend more time in volunteer and group activities, and more likely to report positive personal and societal outcomes from their group experiences.

Technology users were more likely to say they trusted others: 49% of internet users said that, compared with 27% of non-internet users; 49% of those who connect to the internet wirelessly said others could be trusted, compared with 28% of those who do not connect wirelessly. And technology users were more likely to say they felt they could have a big impact on their communities: 33% of internet users said that, compared with 21% of non-users; 36% of wireless internet users said they could have big impact, compared with 23% of those who do not connect to the internet that way.

Clearly, a personal sense that one can have impact will likely propel some people into group activities aimed at personal fulfillment and civic engagement. In addition, the degree to which people are interested in others, can work with others, and can find benefits in social connection could also influence their willingness to become active in groups.

Why people do not participate in groups

A quarter of Americans do not belong to any of the kinds of groups that Pew Internet probed in this survey. We asked those respondents some questions about the reasons they might not be active and the most frequently cited reasons were time pressures (cited by 43% of non-group members as a major reason for not being active) and lack of interest in these kinds of organizations (cited by 25% as a major reason for not being activity). Others said health issues, lack of access to the internet, and their view that they cannot find groups or organizations that share their interests.

Reasons people do not participate in social and civic groups

The 25% of adults who are not active in groups were asked: Please tell me if each of the following is a reason for you, personally, or not [for not being able to be active in groups]

	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	DK/Ref
You don't have the time to participate in these kinds of groups or organizations	43%	13%	42%	2%
You have no interest in participating in these kinds of groups or organizations	25%	15%	56%	5%
You have health or medical issues that prevent you from participating	17%	7%	75%	*
You don't have access to the internet	10%	11%	78%	1%
You can't find groups or organizations with people who share your interests and beliefs	9%	10%	78%	3%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for non-group participants=470.

Time pressures were most likely to be cited by those under age 50 as a major reason why they were not active in groups, while health issues were most likely to be cited by those over age 50. Women were more likely than men to say that they had health issues and had difficulty finding groups that shared their interests (15% of non-group participant women cited this as a major reason vs. 4% of non-participant men).

Some 20% of internet users are not active in any groups – compared with 44% of non-internet users. These internet users tend to stay away from groups because they are time stressed. Some 48% cite that as a major reason they are not active in groups. Interestingly, 17% of the non-internet users who also do not participate in groups say that lack of internet access is a major factor in their inactivity.

Section 2: Joining, participating in and leaving groups

Why people participate

Those who are active members in groups – 75% of Americans – were asked about three potential reasons for being active in social or civic groups. Some 59% of adults cite this as the major reason: accomplishing things as part of a group that they could not accomplish on their own. An almost equal number (57%) say that keeping up with news and information about subjects that matter to them is a major reason. Fewer adults cite meeting new people as a major reason to participate in social and civic groups.

Reasons people participate in social and civic groups

Please tell me if, for you personally, each of the following is a MAJOR reason to participate, a MINOR reason, or not a reason at all... (as % of all those who are active in groups)

	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	DK/Ref
Accomplishing things as part of a group that you can't accomplish on your own	59%	26%	14%	1%
Keeping up with news and information about subjects that matter to you	57%	30%	12%	1%
Meeting new people who share your interests	48%	37%	14%	1%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for active members of groups=1,833.

Reasons for participating in groups vary across age groups. The youngest adults, age 18-29, are much more likely than older adults to say that meeting new people is a major reason they participate in these kinds of groups. Six in ten young adults (59%) say meeting new people is a major reason for them, making it equally important as keeping up with information (58%) and almost as important as accomplishing things as part of a group that they cannot accomplish on their own (65%). In contrast, about one in five adults age 65 and older (18%) say meeting people who share their interests is not a reason at all for them to participate in groups.

Low income adults and African-Americans are also slightly more likely than others to cite meeting new people who share their interests as a major reason to participate in social and civic groups. More than half of adults (56%) in households earning less than \$30,000 say this is a major reason for them, and among African-American adults, 58% cite this as a major reason.

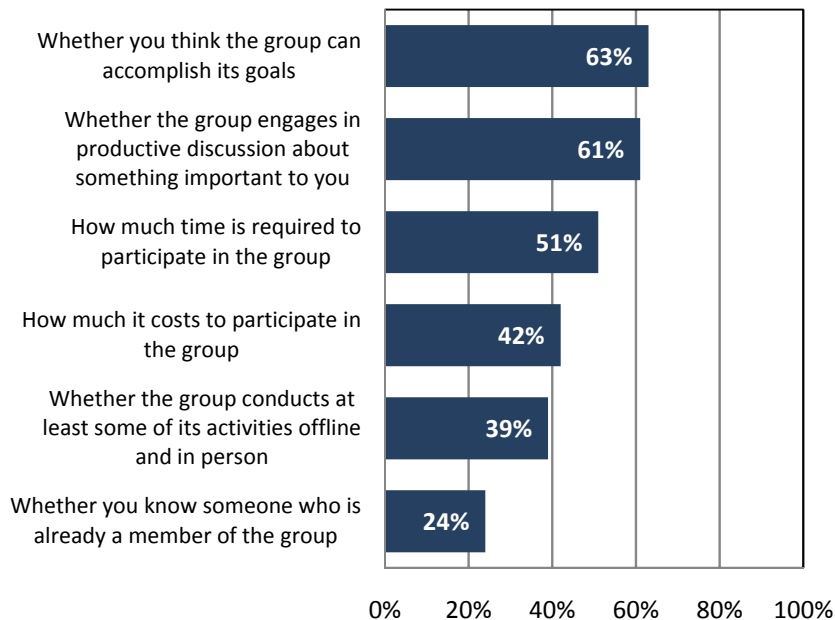
Both African-American adults (70%) and Hispanic adults (67%) are significantly more likely than white adults (54%) to say that keeping with news and information that matters to them is a major reason to participate. In fact, for minority adults, this reason ranks higher than accomplishing things as part of a group or meeting new people.

What makes people join particular groups

In deciding whether to join a social or civic group, the top two considerations are about group productivity—whether the individual thinks the group can accomplish its goals (63% say this is very important in their decision) and whether the group engages in productive discussions about something that is important to that individual (61% say this is very important).

What factors affect the decision to join a group

% of active social or civic group members who say each is very important in their decision to join...



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for active members of groups=1,833.

An individual's reasons for joining a social or civic group vary somewhat by both race and gender. African-American adults, for instance, are more likely than white adults to say that the group's ability to accomplish its goals (72% v. 60%), whether the group engages in productive discussions (71% v. 59%) and the costs of participation (50% v. 40%) are very important factors in their decision to join a group. In addition, more women than men say that productive discussions (64% v. 58%), the costs of participation (47% v. 37%) and the time required to participate (56% v. 44%) are very important in their decision.

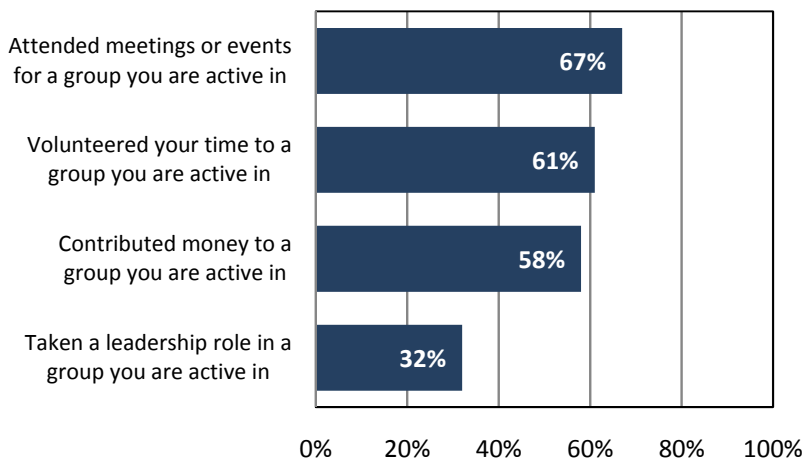
The roles people play in groups

Asked how they have been active in their groups in the 30 days prior to the survey, two-thirds of group members say they had attended a meeting or event for a group they are active in. Another six in ten reported volunteering their time to a group in the past month. Only half as many group members (32%) reported taking a leadership role in a group they are active in during that same time period. It should be

noted that the survey took place in late November and December, a time of year in which many people are particularly active in social and civic groups.

How people have participated in the past 30 days

% of active social or civic group members who, in the past 30 days, have...



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for active members of groups=1,833.

Participation of all types within social and civic groups is highest among adults with a college education and those with the highest incomes. As the table below indicates, taking a leadership role is more than twice as common among college graduates (41%) as it is among those with less than a high school education (17%).

Active participation is highest among the more educated and affluent

% of active group members in each group who have done the following in the past 30 days...

	Attended meeting or events	Volunteered their time	Contributed money	Taken a leadership role
Education				
Less than high school	56%	49%	39%	17%
High school graduate	61%	54%	56%	26%
Some college	66%	61%	55%	29%
College grad or higher	75%	69%	68%	41%
Household income				
Less than \$30,000	61%	54%	48%	25%
\$30,000-\$49,999	64%	57%	51%	26%

\$50,000-\$74,999	65%	68%	67%	41%
\$75,000 or higher	75%	71%	69%	38%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for active members of groups=1,833.

How group members feel about their group's activities

Adults currently active in social or civic groups were asked about their groups' accomplishments and achievements over the past 12 months. Overall, six in ten (60%) reported feeling really proud of a group they are active in because of something it achieved or a positive difference it had made over that time period. Fewer (45%) felt they had accomplished something in a group they belonged to that they would not have been able to achieve on their own. And fully one in five active group members (19%) said that at some point in the past 12 months they had felt really disappointed in a group they belonged to because it failed to achieve its goals or lacked purpose.

As was the case with active participation, education and income influence are related to one's feelings about their group activities. Adults with more education and higher incomes are more likely to be both proud of a group's achievements and more likely to feel they had accomplished something through a group that would not have been possible on their own. However, adults with the highest incomes are also the most likely to be disappointed in a group they belong to.

Feelings about group activities vary by education and income

% of active group members in each group who in the past 12 months have felt...

	Proud of a group's achievements or a positive difference the group had made	They accomplished something in a group they could not have done on their own	Disappointed in a group because it failed to achieve goals or lacked purpose
Education			
Less than high school	51%	35%	20%
High school graduate	53%	39%	14%
Some college	61%	47%	23%
College grad or higher	66%	52%	19%
Household income			
Less than \$30,000	58%	43%	19%
\$30,000-\$49,999	56%	44%	16%
\$50,000-\$74,999	61%	47%	18%
\$75,000 or higher	64%	50%	24%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for active members of groups=1,833.

Why people leave groups

Among all adults, one in ten (10%) had left a social or civic group or organization in the 12 months prior to the survey. Asked why they had left, the most commonly cited reason was a lack of group leadership, followed closely by having simply lost interest in the goals or purposes of the group. The least cited reason of those asked about was having too much responsibility.

What compels someone to leave a group?

Among adults who left a group in the past 12 months, % who say each is a reason...



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for active members of groups=1,833.

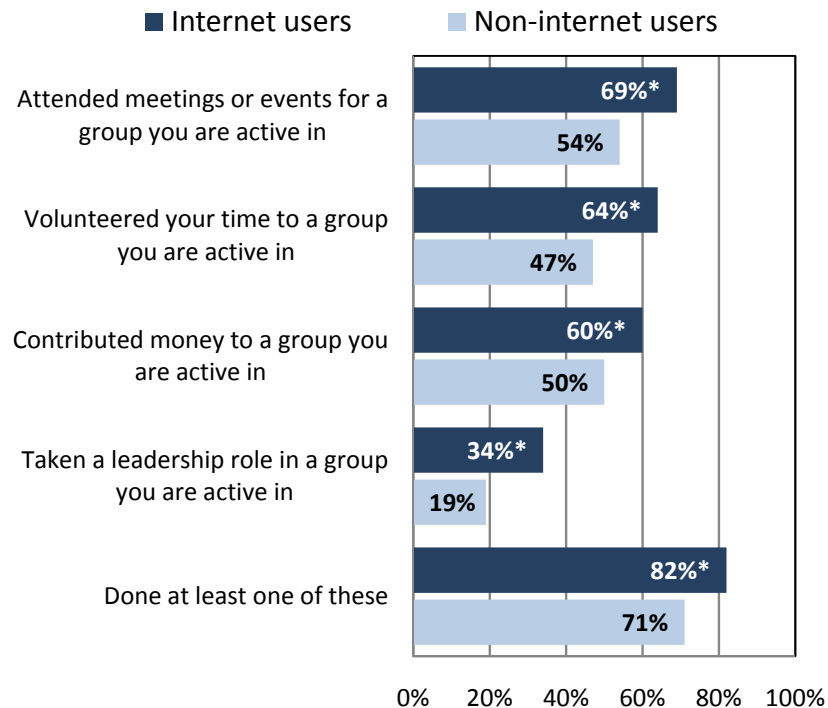
An individual's reasons for leaving a group seem fairly universal; there are virtually no differences across demographic subgroups in terms of why one decides to leave a social or civic group.

Internet users are more active participants in their groups than other adults, and are more likely to feel pride and a sense of accomplishment

Overall, internet users report higher levels of active group participation in the 30 days prior to the survey than do adults who are not online. Specifically, internet users report higher rates of charitable donations, volunteering, attending meetings and events and taking leadership roles.

Internet users are more active in their groups than non-users

In the past 30 days, have you...



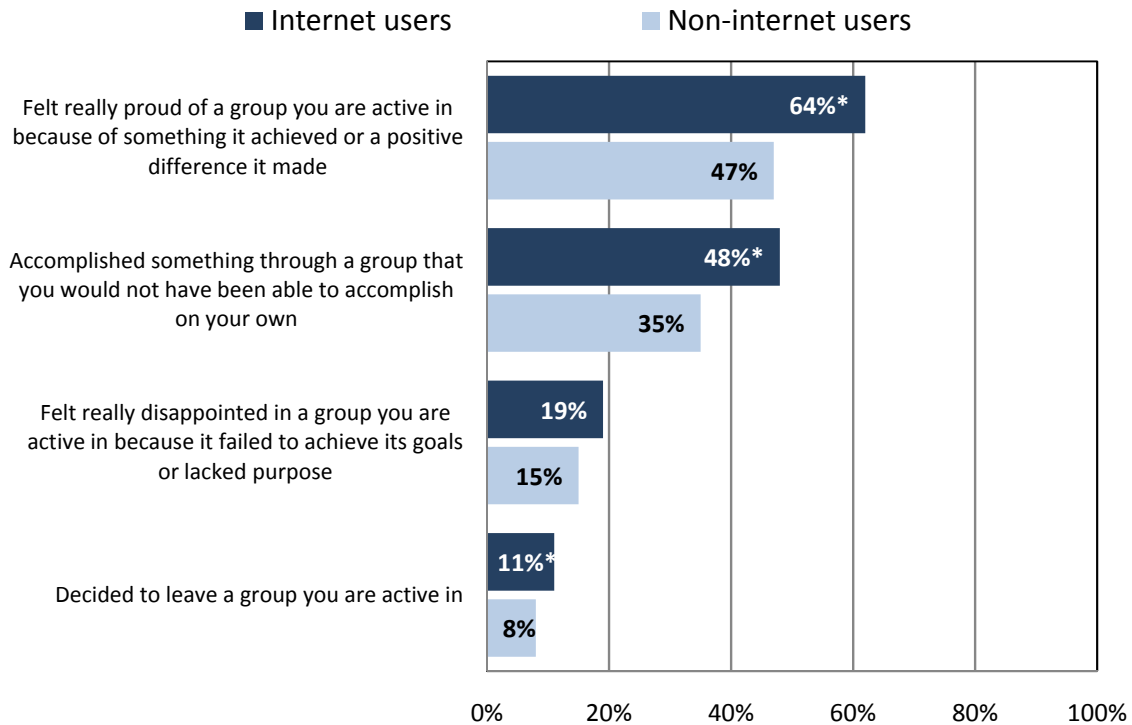
* indicates a difference that is statistically significant at the 95% level.

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for active members of groups=1,833

Perhaps reflecting their higher levels of participation, internet users are also more likely than non-users to say that, in the past 12 months, they have felt really proud of a group they are active in because of something it accomplished or a positive difference it made (62% v. 47%) and that they have accomplished something as part of a group that they could not have accomplished themselves (48% v. 35%). Internet users and non-users are statistically equally likely to say that in the past 12 months they felt disappointed in a group they are active in because it failed to accomplish its goals or lacked purpose. Internet users are, however, slightly more likely to report leaving a group in the past 12 months.

Internet users are more likely to feel pride and a sense of accomplishment

In the past 12 months, have you...



* indicates a difference that is statistically significant at the 95% level.

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N for active members of groups=1,833

Overall, adults who use the internet and those who do not are equally likely to say that meeting new people and keeping up with news and information about subjects that matter to them are major reasons they participate in the social and civic groups to which they belong. However, internet users are more likely to say that accomplishing something as part of a group that they cannot accomplish on their own is a major reason they participate (62% of internet users say this, compared with 48% of offline adults).

In weighing the decision to join a particular group, adults who use the internet and those who do not are equally likely to cite time and cost commitments, whether they think the group can achieve its goals, and whether they know someone who is already a member of the group as very important factors in their decision to join. And surprisingly, non-internet users are no more likely than internet users to say that having at least some group activity offline and in person is very important to them. However, adults who use the internet are more likely than those who are offline to say that having productive discussions about topics that matter to them is key in their decision about whether to join a group (63% v. 49% say it is very important).

Section 3: How the internet is used in groups – and the rise of social media and texting in group activities

Across the board, technology users are more likely than non users to be involved in almost all the kinds of groups in the Pew Internet survey. Moreover, the internet is now deeply embedded in group activities and in how people create, join, participate in, and sustain groups. It is also implicated in the fluidity of group involvement as people sample groups, lurk in groups, and leave groups if they do not like the tone of group activity or the direction of the group.

In this survey, 77% of adults reported being internet users; 81% said they had cell phones; and 59% said they connect to the internet wirelessly either through their laptop computer or through their smart phone. In the roster of groups we queried, tech users dominated almost all the kinds of groups queried except those that are oriented towards older adults or based in rural communities.

Group participation and technology

Percentage of American adults in each tech-user group who are active in various organizations

	TOTAL	Internet users	Non-users	Wirelessly connected	Non-users	Cell users	Non-users
Church, religious, spiritual groups	40%	41%	36%	42%	38%	51%	37%
Sports or rec leagues for themselves/their children	24%	28%	12%	31%	14%	28%	15%
Consumer groups	24%	27%	12%	29%	16%	30%	15%
Charitable or volunteer organizations such as Habitat for Humanity	22%	26%	11%	27%	16%	28%	14%
Professional or trade associations	20%	24%	6%	27%	10%	25%	7%
Community groups, neighborhood associations	19%	21%	11%	22%	14%	26%	14%
Support groups for people with illness, personal situation	18%	19%	15%	21%	15%	21%	16%
Hobby groups or clubs	17%	20%	7%	20%	12%	22%	12%
Political parties or organizations	15%	17%	6%	18%	11%	21%	10%
Alumni associations	14%	18%	3%	19%	7%	22%	7%
Parent groups such as PTA	13%	15%	6%	17%	7%	16%	6%
Literary groups such as book clubs	11%	12%	5%	13%	7%	14%	10%
Performance or arts groups	10%	12%	6%	12%	8%	13%	7%
Fan groups for team or athlete	9%	11%	5%	11%	7%	10%	5%
Youth groups such as Scouts	9%	11%	3%	11%	6%	12%	4%
Social/fraternal clubs	8%	9%	5%	10%	6%	11%	4%
Labor unions	8%	9%	4%	9%	6%	10%	4%
Environmental groups	7%	9%	3%	9%	5%	10%	5%
Sports fantasy leagues	7%	8%	4%	9%	5%	8%	4%
Gaming communities	6%	6%	4%	7%	4%	5%	3%
Fan groups for shows/celebrities	6%	7%	3%	7%	4%	5%	3%
Ethnic or cultural groups	5%	6%	3%	7%	3%	6%*	5%*
Travel clubs	5%	6%	1%	6%	3%	7%	3%
Groups where tech users don't dominate							
Organizations for older adults such as AARP	15%	15%	16%	13%	18%	26% [^]	18% [^]
Veterans organizations	7%	6%	9%	6%	9%	10% [^]	5% [^]
Farm organizations	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%
Fan groups for products/brands	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%	3%	1%

* indicates that cell phone users are not more likely to be involved in these groups.

[^] indicates that cell phone users are more likely to be involved in these groups.

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

How groups use the internet

As we noted, 75% of American adults are active in at least one group. This next segment of the report deals with that portion of the population: the Americans who participate in groups.

For them, the internet has become as important as the phone and in-person meetings in holding groups together and keeping members informed of group news and activities. Some 77% of people report that the groups in which they are active organize activities and communicate with members via email and 69% report their organizations have a website. This is comparable to their reports about in-person meetings – 76% of them say their groups have regular gatherings – and phone organizing, which 70% report is a core activity of their group.

In addition, 59% of group activists said their organizations send out printed newsletters and 40% host online discussions or message boards.

As a rule, the younger a group member is, the more likely she is to report that her groups use electronic communication. For instance, 50% of younger adults say their groups host online discussion groups or message boards, compared with 41% of those ages 50-64 who report that.

At the same time, those with higher household income and higher levels of education are also more likely than others to report that their groups rely on new media techniques for communication and information dissemination. For instance, 90% of those with college degrees say their groups use email to organize and communicate, compared with 69% of those whose schooling ended with a high school diploma. When it comes to having websites, 83% of those who live in households earning \$75,000 and above say their groups have them, compared with 62% of those who live in households earning less than \$50,000.

How people use basic internet activities to connect, contribute, and create groups

As we have noted, 80% of internet users are active in groups – that amounts to 62% of all Americans. This segment of the report will cover this portion of the population: the internet users who are active in groups. They report that much of their work in groups takes place in basic digital spaces. Here's a rundown:

- 65% of the internet users who are active in groups say they use their groups' websites. Younger adults and those with higher incomes and education are most likely to say this.
- 57% of these internet users say they exchange emails with other
- 56% of these internet users say they read their groups' e-newsletters and emails
- 24% of these internet users say they contribute material to their groups' online bulletin boards and discussions. Younger users are twice as likely to do this as people who are over age 50.

The internet is also a key tool for mobilization and expansion of groups. More than half of all internet users – 57% – say they have been invited online and through email to join a social, civic, professional, or religious group. Some 38% of the online Americans who are active in groups say they have used the internet or email invite others to join groups. Younger adults, those ages 18-29 are the most likely to have on the creation end of those invitations and the receiving end.

Invitations to groups via the internet

% of each age group who have...

	Total	Ages 18-29	Ages 30-49	Ages 50-64	Age 65+
Been invited via the internet to join a group (among all internet users, N= 1,811)	57%	64%	61%	53%	39%
Used the internet to invite someone to join a group (among internet users active in groups, N= 1,525)	38%	54%	39%	29%	20%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

In the survey, we also asked everyone (internet and non-internet users alike) if they had ever personally created a group and 8% said they had. They were asked what type of group it was and the list was diverse: sports leagues, spiritual study and practice groups, book clubs, groups for political and social causes, ethnic clubs, literacy tutoring groups, organizations to help visit the sick and shut-ins, cycling clubs, prayer circles, fundraising events, health support groups, whittling parties, aggregators for arts and culture events, union locals, poetry reading clubs, ad hoc groups to help sick friends, mentor groups for at-risk children, protest rally groups, study groups for gifted students, quilting groups, alumni specialty groups, retiree clubs, painting circles, genealogy research groups, fan-fiction clusters, investment clubs, consumer consortia, bridge clubs and gaming sessions, car clubs, weight-loss groups, ex-patriot clusters, author-admirer clubs, and wine-tasting groups.

Some groups come and go pretty quickly online. One of the hallmarks of the digital age is that groups can form and disband easily and it turns out that 9% of internet users say they have been part of a group that formed online and lasted less than a year. As in many aspects of online life, this phenomenon most frequently occurs among younger adults: 14% of the internet users between the ages of 18-29 say they have been part of a short-lived group that started online vs. 6% of the internet users who are over age 50. Of course, there are several reasons why the group might not have lasted and we did not ask the particular reason the group disbanded.

The growing role of social media and texting in the life of groups and organizations

New communications patterns have now been woven into group life. The activity at organizations and informal groups is increasingly taking place in social networking spaces like Facebook, on Twitter, in blogging, and in cell phone texting. This section will report on several subpopulations and their group activities, which tend to be more intense and more engaged than other technology users.

In this sample, 62% of online Americans use social networking sites such as Facebook and 12% of internet users are on Twitter. Overall, 82% of those who use social networking sites are active in groups and 85% of the Twitter users are active in groups – in both cases that figure is notably higher than in the general population, where 75% of people are active in groups. The people who use those social media platforms often stand out in a variety of the types of groups that were covered in this survey.

Where social media makes a difference in groups

% of social media users who are active in groups ...

	Total	Social Networking users	Twitter users
Groups where social media users are more likely to be active			
Consumer groups	24%	29%	36%
Sports or rec leagues for themselves/their children	24%	30%	37%
Charitable or volunteer organizations such as Habitat for Humanity	22%	29%	30%
Professional or trade associations	20%	27%	26%
Community groups, neighborhood associations	19%	22%	26%
Support groups for people with illness, personal situation	18%	21%	27%
Hobby groups or clubs	17%	21%	21%
Political parties or organizations	15%	19%	22%
Alumni associations	14%	20%	25%
Parent groups such as PTA	13%	17%	22%
Literary groups such as book clubs	11%	14%	18%
Performance or arts groups	10%	13%	16%
Fan groups for team or athlete	9%	13%	19%
Youth groups such as Scouts	9%	12%	15%
Social/fraternal clubs	8%	10%	13%
Environmental groups	7%	10%	15%
Sports fantasy leagues	7%	11%	12%
Gaming communities	6%	8%	13%
Fan groups for shows/celebrities	6%	8%	13%
Ethnic or cultural groups	5%	7%	10%
Fan groups for products/brands	3%	5%	9%
Groups where social media users do not dominate			
Church, religious, spiritual groups	40%	39%	36%
Orgs for older adults, such as AARP	15%	12%	10%
Labor unions	8%	9%	9%
Veterans organizations	7%	5%	5%
Travel clubs	5%	6%	6%
Farm organizations	4%	4%	7%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

Social media and other newer digital activities are also becoming part of the communications and dissemination toolkit for groups:

- 48% of those who are active in groups say that those groups have a page on a social networking site like Facebook
- 42% of those who are active in groups say those groups use text messaging
- 30% of those who are active in groups say those groups have their own blog
- 16% of those who are active in groups say the groups communicate with members through Twitter

The people most likely to report their groups are keen on new digital technologies are younger adults (those ages 18-29) and those who have higher incomes and educational levels. The table below illustrates the point:

Where new digital technologies fit into group behavior

These data cover people in different age cohorts who are active in groups. The percentages of each age cohort whose groups ...

	Total	Ages 18-29	Ages 30-49	Ages 50-64	Ages 65+
Have a page on a social networking site like Facebook	48%	68%	55%	42%	20%
Organize group activities with members via text messaging	42%	56%	48%	38%	24%
Have their own blog	30%	39%	34%	28%	15%
Communicate with members through Twitter	16%	24%	16%	14%	8%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone. N for those active in groups=1,833.

Not only are groups using social media to communicate and mobilize members, but the members themselves are often active in using social media to connect with the group and evangelize for the group with others: Some 65% of those who are social network site users say they read updates and messages on these sites about the groups in which they are active and 30% say they have posted news about their groups on their SNS page. The numbers are similar when it comes to Twitter users: 63% of the Twitter users who are active in groups say they read updates and posts on Twitter about their groups, and 21% say they post news on Twitter about their groups.

Some 45% of the texters who are active in groups say they send and receive texts with other group members and leaders.

Again, younger group members are the most likely to have used technology in these ways.

How people use social media to interact with groups

These data cover people in different age cohorts who are active in groups. The percentages of each age cohort whose groups ...

	Total	Ages 18-29	Ages 30-49	Ages 50-64	Ages 65+
Read updates on social networking site about your groups (among social network users active in groups that use social network pages, N=579)	65%	75%	60%	64%	41%
Post news about your group on a social networking site (among social network users who are active in groups, N=895)	30%	40%	27%	25%	15%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone. N for those active in groups=1,833.

Compared with other technology users, those who use social network sites like Facebook and Twitter users are considerably more likely to be engaged with group creation and maintenance. Half of the social network users who are active in groups (48%) have used the internet to invite someone to join a group vs. 21% of the non-SNS users who have done this. Fully 65% of the Twitter users who are active in groups have issued invitations via the internet to others vs. 34% of the non-Twitter users who have done that.

More than two-thirds (68%) of SNS users who are active in groups say they have been invited via the internet to join a group vs. 41% of non-SNS users who have had that experience. And more than three-quarters of Twitter users (79%) have been invited by another to join a group vs. 54% of non-Twitter users. In a similar vein, SNS and Twitter users are more likely than others to have personally created a group.

At least some of the groups that these social media users joined were the temporary sort. Some 11% of SNS users and 16% of Twitter users said they had been part of a group that had formed online and lasted less than a year, a higher incidence than for internet users who do not participate in those social media activities.

Social obligation and groups

With all these group invitations being passed along, it is clear there are times when people feel a social push to join groups. Some 16% of adults say they felt obligated to join a group because someone they know invited them. Here are some of the people for whom this is particularly the case:

- **Young adults.** Those ages 18-29 are almost twice as likely as those over 50 to say they have felt obligated to join a group because of a friend's invitation (23% vs. 13%).
- **Higher socio-economic status individuals.** Some 19% of those with college degrees say this has happened to them, compared with 10% of those who did not complete high school. And 19% of those in households earning more than \$50,000 have felt this way, compared with 14% of those in households earning less than \$50,000.

- **Tech users.** Some 17% of internet users say they have felt obligated to join a group because of a friend's invitation, compared with 10% of non-internet users. The pattern is similar for those who connect to the internet wirelessly vs. non-wireless connectors (18% vs. 11%).
- **Social media users.** Social network users are considerably more likely than the internet users who do not use such sites to feel obligated to join groups (20% vs. 12%) and the difference applies to Twitter users compared to others (25% vs. 16%).

Section 4: The impact of the internet on group activities

How Americans view the internet's impact on groups

When asked to assess the impact of the internet on the ability of social, civic, professional, religious or spiritual groups to engage in a number of activities, Americans express generally positive views. Nearly seven in ten (68%) believe that the internet has a “major impact” on the ability of groups to communicate with their members, and roughly six in ten feel that the internet has a “major impact” on the ability of groups to draw attention to issues (62%), connect with other groups (60%), impact society at large (59%), and raise money (52%). For each of the nine group-based activities we measured in this survey, three-quarters of Americans or more feel that the internet has had at least some impact (if only a minor one) on the activity in question.

“Finding people to take leadership roles” is the activity for which the internet is viewed as having the smallest impact—35% of Americans feel that the internet has a “major impact” on this aspect of group dynamics, a figure that is notably smaller than the other group impacts we evaluated.

Attitudes towards the internet and its influence on groups

Overall, would you say the internet has a major/minor/no impact on the ability of social, civic, professional, religious or spiritual groups to... (based on all adults)

	Major Impact	Minor Impact	No Impact	Don't know / Not online
Communicate with members	68%	16%	9%	7%
Draw attention to an issue	62%	21%	11%	6%
Connect with other groups	60%	21%	11%	7%
Impact society at large	59%	24%	10%	7%
Organize activities	59%	23%	12%	6%
Raise money	52%	27%	13%	8%
Recruit new members	51%	29%	13%	7%
Impact local communities	49%	32%	13%	7%
Find people to take leadership roles	35%	41%	16%	8%

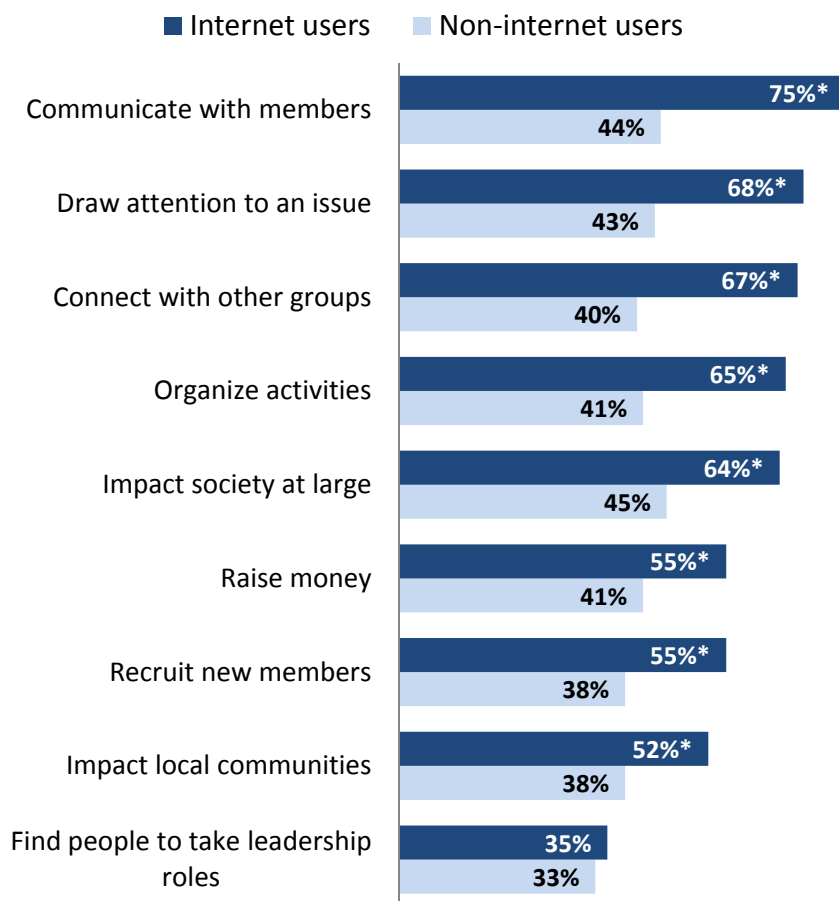
Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

Demographically, college graduates have particularly positive attitudes regarding the internet's impact on groups—they are significantly more likely than non-college graduates to say that the internet has a “major impact” on the ability of groups to communicate with members, draw attention to issues, impact society at large, organize activities, and raise money. Younger Americans are also more likely than their elders to view the internet as having a “major impact” on groups. In particular, 18-29 year olds are significantly more likely than those in other age groups to feel that the internet has a “major impact” on groups' ability to recruit new members (64% feel that the internet has a major impact in this regard) and find people to take leadership roles (44% cite this as a major impact of the internet on groups).

These questions were asked of all adults (regardless of whether or not they go online), and it is instructive to compare the attitudes of those who go online and those who are not internet users. Across nearly all of the categories we measured, Americans with experience using the internet are significantly more likely to say that the internet has a “major impact” on group structure and behaviors compared with those who do not go online.

Attitudes towards the impact of the internet on groups

% of adults who say the internet has a “major impact” on ability of groups to...



*Indicates statistically significant difference between internet users and non-users.

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone.

How the internet impacts group members' ability to keep up and be involved with the groups they belong to

In addition to asking how the internet impacts groups in a general sense, we also asked active group members about the ways in which the internet has or has not impacted *their own* ability to take part in group activities. Overall, these group members feel that the internet has had the greatest impact on

their ability to keep up with news and information from the groups they belong to. Among group members who go online, 53% say that the internet has had a “major impact” on their ability to keep up with group news, and an additional 30% say it has had a “minor impact” in this regard. Just 17% feel that the internet has had no impact one way or another on their ability to keep up with group news.

On the other end of the spectrum, these group members tend to feel that the internet has had a relatively modest impact on their ability to contribute their time or money to the groups they belong to, or to create groups of their own. Roughly three-quarters of group members believe that the internet has had either a “minor impact” or “no impact” on these aspects of their participation in groups.

How the internet impacts participation by group members

Overall, would you say the internet has had a major/minor/no impact on your ability to... (based on % of internet users who are active in groups)

	Major Impact	Minor Impact	No Impact
Keep up with news and information from the groups you are active in	53%	30%	17%
Organize activities for the groups you are active in	41%	33%	26%
Find groups that match your interests <i>(based on all internet users)</i>	39%	32%	29%
Invite friends and acquaintances to join the groups you are active in	35%	36%	29%
Create your own groups	28%	28%	42%
Volunteer your time to groups	24%	40%	35%
Contribute money to groups	24%	34%	41%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone. N for those active in groups=1,833.

Notably, users of social networking sites and the status update service Twitter are significantly more likely than other group participants who go online for group activities, to say that the internet has a “major impact” on their ability to engage with their groups.

Twitter and social network users are more likely than non-users to say that the internet has a “major impact” on their group activities

(Based on internet users who are active in any groups)

% who say internet has “Major Impact” on ability to:	Use Social Networking Sites		Use Twitter	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Keep up with news and information from the groups you are active in	62%*	38%	75%*	50%
Organize activities for the groups you are active in	51%*	25%	68%*	38%
Find groups that match your interests <i>(based on all internet users)</i>	49%*	22%	62%*	36%
Invite friends and acquaintances to join the groups you are active in	47%*	14%	62%*	31%
Create your own groups	35%*	15%	50%*	24%
Volunteer your time to groups	30%*	14%	41%*	22%
Contribute money to groups	32%*	10%	46%*	21%

* Indicates statistically significant difference between users and non-users

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone. N for those active in groups=1,833.

How the internet impacts group discovery and time spent with groups

Although group members (and the public at large) feel that the internet has generally contributed in a positive way to group communication and dynamics, they are somewhat more measured in assessing the impact of the internet on helping them find out about new groups and spend more time with the groups they currently belong to.

While some active group members discovered their groups online, a majority of these group discoveries occur offline.

Among active group members who also use the internet, one-quarter (24%) say that they discovered at least some of the groups they belong to on the internet, and most likely would not have known about them were it not for online tools. Still, three times that number of active group members (75%) did not discover any of the groups they belong to online.

Demographically, discovering groups online is most prevalent among those younger than 50. One third (34%) of internet-using group members ages 18-29 and 27% of those ages 30-49 have discovered groups on the internet, compared with 18% of such members ages 50-64 and 13% of those ages 65 and up. More than eight in ten group members over the age of 50 (83%) say that none of their groups were discovered online.

Around half of group members who go online participate in a greater total number of groups thanks to the internet

A total of 46% of internet users who are active in one or more groups say that the internet has helped them be active in “a lot” (26%) or “a few” (20%) more groups than they would otherwise. The remaining 53% of these group members say that the internet has had no impact one way or another on the number of groups they take part in.

As with discovering groups, young adults (in particular those ages 18-29) are more likely than older group members to say that they participate in more groups thanks to the internet. Among group members who also go online, fully 39% of 18-29 year olds say that the internet has caused them to take part in “a lot” more groups than they otherwise would; this compares with 27% of such 30-49 year olds, 20% of 50-64 year olds and 12% of those ages 65 and older. Additionally, African-American (37%) and Latino (41%) group members are significantly more likely than white group members (22%) to say that they participate in “a lot” more groups because of the internet.

Seven in ten internet users say that technology has not impacted the amount of time they spend on group activities

Overall, seven in ten internet users (70%) say that the internet has had no impact on how much time they spend participating in group activities. However, those online adults who say that the internet has impacted their “group time” are more likely to say it has done so in a positive direction than in a negative one—23% of internet users say they spend more time participating in group activities thanks to the internet, while just 6% say that the internet causes them to spend less time on these activities. Those under the age of 50, as well as the well-off and well-educated, are particularly likely to say that they spend more time on group activities because of the internet.

Social media use is correlated with higher rates of online group discovery and engagement

Users of Twitter and social networking sites stand out dramatically from other group members when it comes to their attitudes towards the impact of technology on their own group behaviors. Compared with group members who go online but do not use these services, Twitter and social networking site users are significantly more likely to say that they discovered some of their groups online, that the internet helps them participate in a greater number of groups, and that they spend more time participating in group activities thanks to the internet.

Twitter and social network users are more likely to discover and engage in groups thanks to the internet

(based on internet users who are active in any groups)

	Use Social Networking Sites		Use Twitter	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Have discovered groups on the internet	32%*	11%	47%*	21%
Internet makes it possible to participate in “a lot” more groups	33%*	15%	51%*	22%
Spend more time on group activities because of the internet	30%*	12%	46%*	20%

* Indicates statistically significant difference between users and non-users.

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone. N for those active in groups=1,833.

The role of the internet in achieving group objectives

To evaluate the role of the internet in helping groups achieve relevant objectives and outcomes, we first asked all active group members whether or not any of the groups that they participated in had accomplished certain outcomes in the preceding twelve months; for those that had achieved those outcomes, we then asked what role the internet played (if any) in achieving those goals. The active group members in our survey reported that their groups accomplished the following objectives in the twelve months preceding our survey:

- 55% of active group members say they were in a group that provided **emotional support to someone in need**; 32% of active group members say that the internet played a role in accomplishing this goal
- 51% of active group members say they were in a group that **provided financial support to someone in need**; 29% of active group members say the internet played a role in accomplishing this goal
- 50% of active group members say they were in a group that **raised money for a specific cause**; 34% of active group members say the internet played a role in accomplishing this goal
- 48% of active group members say they were in a group that **raised awareness about an important social issue**; 39% of active group members say the internet played a role in accomplishing this goal
- 34% were in a group that **solved a difficult problem or achieved change in their local community**; 22% of active group members say the internet played a role in accomplishing this goal
- 27% of active group members say they were in a group that **solved a difficult problem or achieved change in society at large**; 20% of active group members say the internet played a role in accomplishing this goal
- 17% of active group members say they were in a group that **got a candidate elected to public office**; 14% of active group members say the internet played a role in accomplishing this goal

The role of the internet in achieving group goals

% of active group members

Achieved Issue?	Yes			No
	Major	Minor	None	
Role of the Internet:				
Raised awareness about an important social issue	22%	17%	9%	48%
Raised money for a specific cause	17%	18%	15%	47%
Provided emotional support for someone in need	15%	17%	23%	41%
Provided financial support or assistance for someone in need	13%	16%	22%	44%
Solved a difficult problem or achieved change in society at large	10%	10%	7%	68%
Solved a difficult problem or achieved change in your local community	9%	13%	12%	61%
Gotten a candidate elected to public office	9%	5%	3%	79%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone. N for those active in groups=1,833.

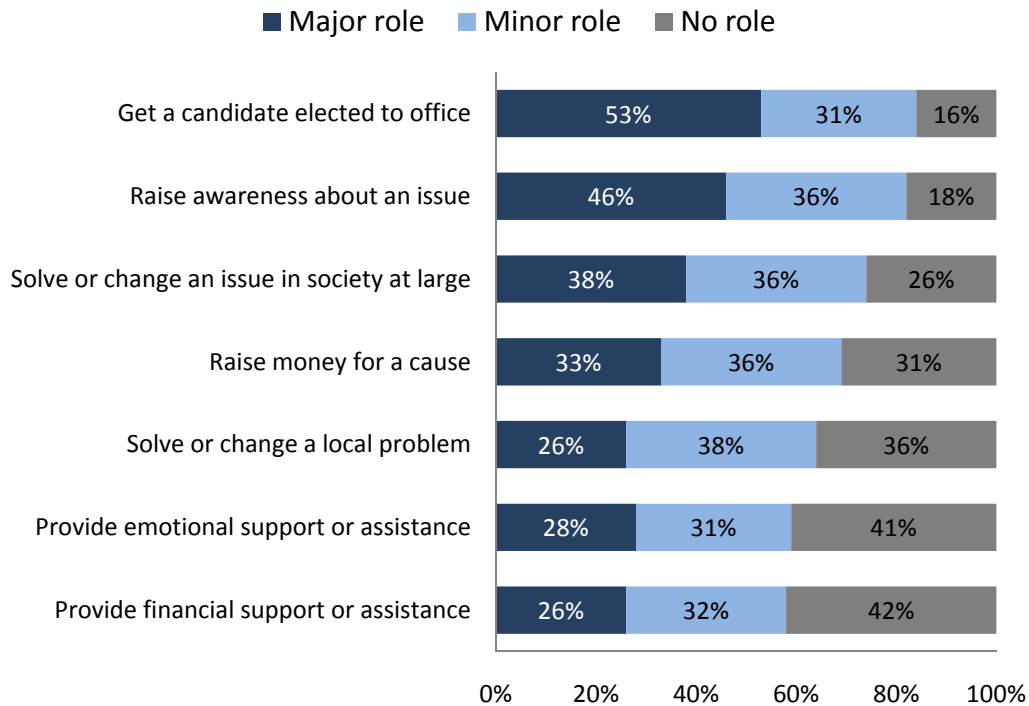
Clearly, not all of these group objectives were accomplished equally frequently (for example, respondents were twice as likely to be part of a group that provided emotional assistance to someone in need as they were to be part of a group that got a candidate elected to public office). In order to provide an apples-to-apples comparison of the relative importance of the internet in helping to achieve these objectives, we can filter out those groups which did not achieve each individual objective in the preceding twelve months and compare only those groups who were successful in doing so.

When we conduct this side-by-side analysis of “successful” groups, the internet stands out as especially relevant to electing candidates to public office (fully 53% of those who are part of a group that did this say that the internet played a “major role” in doing so) and raising awareness about issues (46% of those who are part of a successful awareness-raising group cite the internet as playing a “major role” in this effort). The internet also plays a relatively important role within groups that successfully address larger societal issues or raise money for a cause.

In contrast, groups that solved a local problem or issue, and those that provided emotional or financial support to someone in need, were comparatively less reliant on the internet to achieve these goals. Members of groups that successfully accomplished these objectives were more likely to say that the internet played no role in their success than they were to say that the internet played a “major role”.

The role of the internet in achieving group goals *among groups whose goals were achieved*

% among those who are members of a group that achieved each goal in the preceding 12 months



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 23-December 21, 2010 Social Side of the Internet Survey. N=2,303 adults 18 and older, including 748 reached via cell phone. N for those active in groups=1,833.

The power of the internet and social media for group engagement

It is hard to underestimate the impact of social media and internet use on group engagement. As noted in several places in this section, social network site users and Twitter users are much more likely than online group members who do not use these tools to say that the internet has a major impact on almost all aspects of their group engagement. This relationship is confirmed in regression analyses when other important factors such as age, education, income, personal efficacy, religiosity, and trust are controlled.

In fact, among all of these key predictors of online behavior and group involvement, being a daily internet user, being a social network site user, and being a Twitter user are among the most powerful predictors of whether people perceive the internet as having a major impact on their ability to find groups that match their interests, bring others into their groups, keep up with the groups they belong to, organize group activities, contribute money or volunteer their time, and even create their own groups. Moreover, among active group participants who are online, social network site use, Twitter use, and daily internet use are more powerful predictors of discovering new groups online, participating in “a lot more groups,” and spending more time participating in groups than other factors such as age, income, education, and efficacy.

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a 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 from November 23 to December 21, 2010, among a sample of 2,303 adults, age 18 and older. Telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by landline (1,555) and cell phone (748, including 310 without a landline phone). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,811), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.6 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.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

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 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at a sampled telephone number. 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 number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male or female currently at home based on a random rotation. If no male/female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult of the other gender. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample. The first-stage weight is the product of two adjustments made to the data – a Probability of Selection Adjustment (PSA) and a Phone Use Adjustment (PUA). The PSA corrects for the fact that respondents in the landline sample have different probabilities of being sampled depending on how many adults live in the household. The PUA corrects for the overlapping landline and cellular sample frames.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced by form to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The White, non-Hispanic subgroup is also balanced on age, education and region. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the continental United States. The population density parameter was derived

from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the July-December 2009 National Health Interview Survey.¹

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Table 2: Sample Disposition

Landline	Cell	
37,781	14,999	Total Numbers Dialed
1,759	360	Non-residential
1,843	40	Computer/Fax
6	—	Cell phone
17,607	5,722	Other not working
1,716	129	Additional projected not working
14,850	8,748	Working numbers
39.3%	58.3%	Working Rate
572	43	No Answer / Busy
2,832	1,891	Voice Mail
79	10	Other Non-Contact
11,367	6,804	Contacted numbers
76.5%	77.8%	Contact Rate
648	802	Callback
8,965	4,528	Refusal
1,754	1,474	Cooperating numbers
15.4%	21.7%	Cooperation Rate
87	51	Language Barrier
—	623	Child's cell phone
1,667	800	Eligible numbers
95.0%	54.3%	Eligibility Rate
112	52	Break-off
1,555	748	Completes
93.3%	93.5%	Completion Rate
11.0%	15.8%	Response Rate

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

- **Contact rate** – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made

¹ Blumberg SJ, Luke JV. Wireless substitution: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, July-December, 2009. National Center for Health Statistics. May 2010.

- **Cooperation rate** – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- **Completion rate** – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 11.0 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 15.8 percent.