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**SURVEY SHOWS WIDESPREAD ENTHUSIASM FOR HIGH TECHNOLOGY**

**Americans Love Their Computers and the Internet;  
'Digital Divide' Still Exists, but There Is Good News, Too**

Americans love the technological revolution. A new poll by National Public Radio, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government shows that people overwhelmingly think that computers and the Internet have made Americans' lives better. Although people recognize some dangers in what they see (and would like the government to protect them from these dangers), they are not particularly bothered by potential perils like information overload or phones, faxes and e-mails that never stop. They are buying computers at a fast pace, they are hooking up to the Internet from home, and, for the most part, they like what they see. A separate survey of children age 10-17 shows that they are even more positive than adults, and nearly all of them have access to modern technology at school.

Enthusiasm for computers and the Internet runs wide and deep, across all incomes, all regions of the country, all races, all political ideologies, and most age groups. Of course, there are people who find themselves on the other side of the "digital divide" — especially those with lower incomes, less education, and over the age of 60. For instance, only about half of employed Americans under age 60 with incomes less than \$30,000 per year use a computer at work, compared with four out of five of those with higher incomes; and lower-income Americans are less than half as likely as those with higher incomes to have an Internet connection at home. Nevertheless, a surprisingly high proportion of poorer families now have computers, and many lower-income people do have access to the Internet from home. Only older Americans, as a group, seem out of the loop.

Reports based on the NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School survey of Americans on technology will be aired on NPR news programs beginning February 29, 2000 and can be heard on Morning Edition, All Things Considered, Weekend Edition, Weekend All Things Considered, and Talk of the Nation through March 5, 2000. Check your local NPR stations for times or visit the NPR website at [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) for details and complete results. Key findings from the survey include:

**The Love Affair**

Americans over 60 are only half as likely to have ever used a computer as younger people. In fact, so few older Americans have any experience at all with the latest technological advances (only 22% have ever even used the Internet) that overall attitudes are clearer when one looks at the under-60 group. Focusing on them, it is apparent that some kind of threshold has been crossed: Computers are part of everyday life for most Americans, and the Internet is close behind.

- ***Virtually all Americans under age 60 say they have used a computer*** (92%), and most of them have used the Internet (75%) or sent an e-mail message (67%) at some point in their lives. In addition, more than 8 in 10 Americans under age 60 currently use a computer at home or work (81%).
- ***Americans under age 60 are enthusiastic about computers and technology.*** Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) say computers have made life better for Americans, and more than 7 in 10 (72%) say the Internet has made life better. About three-quarters of Americans under age 60 report they like having so much information to choose from (78%) and like the way new technologies allow them to keep in touch (76%). By contrast, only 20% say they are overloaded with information, and only 23% say they don't like the way new technologies let people get in touch with them all the time.
- ***Americans say computers are a necessity at work.*** More than two-thirds (68%) of working Americans use a computer at work, and 84% of them say it is essential for their jobs. About one-third of working Americans (34%) have access to the Internet at work, and of those who do, 63% say it is essential for their jobs.
- ***Americans under age 60 are rapidly adopting new technologies in their homes.*** More than half (52%) of those who have a computer at home bought their first computer in the past five years. More than half (53%) of Americans under age 60 now have Internet or e-mail access at home.

## **The Concerns**

Despite their overall positive attitudes, Americans do see some problems with computers and technology. They worry about potential dangers on the Internet, and they want the government to do something about their concerns. Across the board, women are more concerned than men about potential problems of the Internet and even more likely to favor government regulation.

- **Concerns About Inequality**
  - ***Polarization.*** Americans are more likely to say computers widen the gap (45%) in income and opportunity between the haves and have nots in society than to say computers narrow the gap (11%) or do not make much of a difference (39%).
  - ***Lending a hand.*** Most (57%) believe the government should help low-income people get access to computers and the Internet (and 78% say the government should help low-income children).
- **Concerns About Content**
  - ***Internet fears.*** Americans' worries about potential dangers of the Internet include the possibility of dangerous strangers making contact with kids (85% say this is a "major" problem); the availability of pornography to children (84%); and information on how to build bombs (73%). There may be justification for some of these worries; nearly a third (31%) of kids age 10-17 from households with computers (24% of all kids 10-17) say they have seen a pornographic web site.
  - ***Concern translates to support for government involvement.*** More than three-quarters of Americans say the government should do something about the potential for dangerous strangers to make contact with children (79%), the availability of pornography to children (75%), and information on how to build bombs (75%). Americans also say the government

should regulate false advertising (62%), the ability to purchase guns (61%), pornography (61%), and hate speech (53%). Furthermore, more than half (57%) of Americans say that “the federal government needs to regulate what is on the Internet more than television and newspapers because the Internet can be used to gain easier access to dangerous information.”

- **Concerns About Personal Impacts**

- ***More than half say computers have led people to spend less time with their families and friends*** (58%). Furthermore, slightly fewer than half (46%) of Americans say that computers have given people less free time, although 24% who say computers have given people more free time and 28% who say computers haven’t made much of a difference.
- ***Privacy concerns are high.*** More than half of Americans worry that an unauthorized person might gain access to their financial records or personal information on the Internet (59%), with 21% saying they are “very worried.” And over half (54%) say the government should do something about loss of privacy on the Internet. Few (4%), however, have experienced such problems themselves.

## Digital Divide

- ***Americans over age 60 are the most likely to be left out when it comes to computers and technology, but they do not appear to be worried about being left behind.*** Only around a quarter of Americans over age 60 have computers at home (27%) and use the Internet or e-mail at home (24%). But while three-quarters (75%) of Americans over age 60 recognize that they are being left behind when it comes to computers, only 11% say that not having a computer is a problem for them. The most common reason over-60s without computers give for not having a computer at home is that they don’t need one (64%). Nonetheless, more than half of Americans over age 60 say that computers (69%) and the Internet (50%) are making life better for Americans.
- ***The “digital divide” also exists among certain groups of people under age 60.***
  - ***Income and education are key.*** Americans under age 60 with incomes under \$30,000 per year and those with a high school education or less are considerably less likely to use a computer than their higher income and more educated counterparts. For example, 54% of lower-income employed Americans use a computer at work, compared with 81% of those with higher incomes. Furthermore, only 18% of employed people with lower incomes use the Internet at work.
  - ***These gaps may be narrowing.*** Nearly half (48%) of Americans under age 60 who make less than \$30,000 now have a computer at home, and 31% have access to the Internet at home. Moreover, the most recent computer owners are more likely to come from the groups who have historically been less likely to be computer owners. Recent computer owners under age 60 (those who purchased their first computer within the past two years) are more likely than longer-term owners to be low-income (30% versus 14%) and to have a high school education or less (59% versus 33%).
  - ***Racial differences.*** While there has been much talk about the digital divide by race, we find that gaps between blacks and whites under age 60 are more pronounced in the home than at work. We also find they are more pronounced at lower-income levels than at higher-income levels. There is a gap of 11 percentage points between blacks and whites using computers at work (46% vs. 57%); but there is a larger, 22 point gap between blacks and whites who have a computer at home (51% vs. 73%). Similarly, a gap of 8 points exists between blacks and whites using the Internet at work (21% vs. 29%) compared with

a larger 19 point gap in access to the Internet or e-mail at home (38% vs. 57%). Although there is a 17 percentage point gap in home-computer ownership between low-income blacks and low-income whites, the differences virtually disappear at upper-income levels.

- ***“Have nots” under age 60 generally share positive views about technology with the “haves.”*** The majority of people without computers under age 60, like people with computers, tend to say that computers (76%, 89%) and the Internet (56%, 76%) are making life better for Americans. Most “have nots” and “haves” say that computers will widen the income/opportunity gap (42% and 47%) or make no difference (43% and 38%), though a few say that computers will narrow the gap (13% and 13%). Furthermore, the “have nots” (85%) and “haves” (87%) say they are not concerned they might lose their jobs because of advances in technology. While “have nots” (74%) are more likely to say they are being left behind by technology than “haves” (35%), only around quarter of “have nots” feel left out because they do not use a computer at work or at home (25%) or feel that not having a computer is a problem for them (24%). The main reason that “have nots” under age 60 give for not having a computer is that they are too expensive (44%).

### **Kids Are Even More Positive about Computers**

- ***Children are more enthusiastic about and comfortable with computers.*** Eighty-five percent (85%) of kids report that they are keeping up when it comes to computers; only 14% think they are being left behind. Adults, by contrast, are evenly split: 49% say they’re keeping up; 49% say they’re being left behind. Compared with adults (38%), kids have more trust in the information on the Internet (56%) and less concern about violent games (39% for kids, 56% for adults). On the other hand, kids do admit that computers affect kids’ lives. While half (50%) of kids believe computers haven’t made much difference in the amount of time kids spend with friends and family, a majority (61%) do believe that the use of computers has led kids to spend less time outdoors, and 63% say they know kids who are addicted to video or computer games.
- ***Kids without computers are more concerned that they are missing something than adults are.*** Kids without computers at home are far more likely than such adults (42% to 23%) to think that not having a computer at home is a problem, and kids are more likely (37% to 17%) to feel left out because they don’t have a computer.
- ***Many kids do see pornography on the Internet.*** Almost one-third (31%) of kids age 10-17 with computers at home have seen a pornographic website, even if by accident. This is truer for older users: 45% of those 14-17 years old compared with 15% of those 10-13 years old.
- ***Parents are more likely than their kids to think they have rules in place about what their kids can do on the computer.*** More than three-quarters (76%) of parents say they have rules, but only 57% of their own children agree. More than half of kids (53%) say their parents know “a lot” about the things they do and the sites they visit, but this is considerably truer for younger kids (67% of 10-13 year olds) than for older kids (38% of 14-17 year olds).
- ***Schools appear to be playing an important role in equalizing access to computers for kids.*** While African-American kids (44%) and kids from lower income households (41%) are considerably less likely to use a computer at home than white kids (76%) or kids from higher income families (83%), virtually the same percent of all kids have used a computer at school (55% of white kids, 60% of African-American kids, 56% of high-income kids, and 59% of low-income kids). Furthermore, kids give their teachers and schools good marks on their ability to teach kids about computers — 87% say their teachers know how to use computers, and 75% say their school has done a pretty good job teaching them about computers.

Methodology:

The NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll is an ongoing project of National Public Radio, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Representatives of the three sponsors worked together to develop the survey questionnaire and to analyze the results, with NPR maintaining sole editorial control over its broadcasts on the surveys.

The project team includes:

From NPR	Marcus D. Rosenbaum, Special Projects Editor
From the Kaiser Family Foundation	Drew Altman, President and Chief Executive Officer
	Mollyann Brodie, Vice President, Director of Public Opinion and Media Research
	Rebecca Flourney, Research Associate
From the Kennedy School	Robert J. Blendon, a Harvard University Professor who holds joint appointments in the School of Public Health and the Kennedy School of Government
	John Benson, Deputy Director for Public Opinion and Health/Social Policy at the Harvard School of Public Health

The results of this project are based on two telephone surveys conducted between November 15 and December 19, 1999, with nationally representative samples. The first survey interviewed 1,506 adults, 18 years or older, including an over-sample of African-Americans (results are listed for the total population and for the 1,237 adults under the age of 60 years). The second interviewed 625 children age 10-17 years, including an over-sample of African-American children. (For each survey, the results are weighted to reflect the actual distribution in the nation.) The fieldwork was conducted by ICR/International Communications Research. The margin of sampling error for the adult survey is plus or minus 3 percentage points, and plus or minus 5 percentage points for the survey of children. For results based on subsets of respondents, the margin of error is higher.

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