The Oxford Internet Surveys

Internet Use, Behaviour and Attitudes in Great Britain
2003-2015

Oxford Internet Institute
University of Oxford
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OxIS is the longest-running academic survey of Internet use in Britain, describing how Internet use has evolved from 2003 to the present day. Run by the Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford, this biennial survey provides unrivalled data, rigorous analysis and policy-relevant insights into key aspects of life online. This report introduces some of the applications for research and policy.

Age, income and education are the main predictors of Internet use and behaviour

Tracking the rise of mobile

Mapping digital inequality across Britain

The myth of the digital native

Health and the Internet

Social media and the (supposed) death of privacy

Using our datasets for research and policy

Researchers: Grant Blank, Victoria Nash, Rebecca Eynon, Darja Groselj, Ulrike Rauer, Mark Graham, Elizabeth Dubois, Gillian Bolsover.
Age, income and education are the main predictors of Internet use and behaviour

The Internet has become a fundamental part of our social life, our culture and our economy, and OxIS provides a fresh, evidence-based perspective on how these critical relationships are changing over time. People without Internet access may struggle to participate fully in society—such as interacting with government, or finding a job. But many of the differences in the ways we access, use (and indeed think about) the Internet can be explained by just three factors: age, income, and education. This could result in exclusion of certain sectors of society; ‘digital first’ strategies may present problems for the elderly, the poor, and the uneducated. Over the years, OxIS researchers have worked closely with government departments, NGOs and Ofcom to inform policy aimed at reducing these sources of digital exclusion.
Tracking the rise of mobile

Owning both mobile and fixed devices is an important trend in Internet adoption and use. By studying Internet use across devices we are better able to understand how portable devices contribute to online engagement, and whether a new—mobile—digital divide is emerging. Early results indicate that mobile Internet users are likely to be younger, better educated, and have higher incomes. They are also more likely to go online to communicate, socialize and entertain themselves. These differences have major implications for research on digital inequality, as well as for policy-making in the field of digital inclusion, since the underlying motivations and meanings of mobile Internet adoption and use are profoundly different from those shaping adoption and use of computers.

Mobile Internet use has increased dramatically in recent years. In 2013, 70% of Internet users had a smartphone. Mobile Internet use is likely to make the Internet a more integral part of everyday life and work.
Mapping digital inequality across Britain

Britain has one of the world’s largest Internet economies but digital inequality means some local economies are disadvantaged

Internet use is concentrated in the South East, with London dominating. Bristol, Southampton, and Nottingham also have high levels of use, as well as the rest of the south with estimated usage levels of 78-83%. The entire North East region is in the lowest category of 59-70% estimated use.

![Map showing Internet use percentages across Britain](image)

Researchers: Grant Blank, Mark Graham, Claudio Calvino. Supported by the ESRC.

The Internet has made an enormous difference in our social life, culture, and economy, but we still don’t know enough about local patterns of Internet access and use across the nation. Combining OxIS data with the census can reveal for the first time the local patterns of digital inequality across Britain.

Census data are available for very small areas, but have no data on Internet use. OxIS, however, is a rich source of information on all kinds of Internet activity, behaviour and attitudes. By combining our detailed understanding of Internet use from OxIS with the basic demographic data of the census we can estimate Internet use across Britain at the local level. The breadth of the census is combined with the depth and predictive power of OxIS.

Britain has one of the world’s largest Internet economies, contributing about eight percent to GDP. Businesses are likely to locate to areas with good digital access, boosting local economies, creating new jobs and increasing income growth.
Because the Internet has made such an enormous difference to our social life, culture, and economy, it’s important to bring people online, to encourage them all to participate and benefit. But despite the clear benefits of the Internet, there is a marked inequality in its uptake and use (the ‘digital divide’), and little is known about who is and isn’t connected.

More than five percent of 17-19 year olds in Britain describe themselves as ‘ex-Internet users’: a group we found in the OxIS data and explored further through face-to-face interviews. Why have these young people stopped using the Internet given its obvious value? We aimed to determine the extent to which this is due to reasons of digital exclusion—or choice—and to explore the implications of non-use in their daily lives: negotiating job search, government services, housing, and social interactions with their peers.

The widely held (but inaccurate) public assumption that the current generation of youth is ‘born digital’ is so powerful that it has informed numerous policies and initiatives that determine young people’s lives. Such strategies may pose a threat for young people with restricted resources who are high users of government services but very limited users of the Internet. As this group is actually willing (if unable) to use the Internet, and see it as a normal and necessary part of life, we believe targeted intervention is possible. Follow-up qualitative research of this kind adds detail to our understanding of Internet use and non-use; it’s important to recognise this nuance in discussion and policy-making around digital inclusion.

Powerful trends are pushing the UK to be increasingly knowledge intensive, and the Internet and good education are both central to this. This is important because education is something that can be influenced by government policy. Speaking to a panel about youth and the Internet with Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, Grant Blank presented OxIS data showing education to be a major driver of Internet use.
How does Internet use affect health behaviour, perceptions and outcomes? Combining OxIS with secondary datasets provides novel insights into many issues of interest to policymakers, with small-area mapping techniques allowing initiatives to be targeted to specific areas. We are undertaking spatial microsimulation modelling to create a dataset of everyone in England with their Internet use, attitudes and skills (from OxIS), self-rated health status (from the census) and health service use (from the NHS), allowing insights into the relationship between them: down to the local level.

Combining OxIS and government datasets allows a rich picture to be built across many dimensions. In a time of budget cuts, research on how health outcomes relate to Internet use will be valuable.

The OxIS datasets are a valuable resource for UK policy-makers, in and around government.

- Grant Blank chairs a Working Group of the Digital Inclusion Delivery Board tasked with recommending a set of measures of digital inclusion for the UK. This will feed into the government’s Digital Inclusion Charter.
- The Dept for Work and Pensions used OxIS to estimate the percentage of households eligible for Universal Credit who use/do not use the Internet, and their demographic breakdown. Our consistent sampling methodology allowed them to estimate future trends.
- The Scottish Government has used OxIS data on digital participation to support their Digital Strategy.
- Dot.rural, a RCUK Digital Economy Hub, is using OxIS data to understand how Internet access influences the quality of life in rural areas.
- OxIS 2011 results were presented at 10 Downing Street to a meeting of the Prime Minister’s Digital Communications team, the No.10 Policy and Analytics Unit, and selected heads of e-comms and digital engagement from across Whitehall.
Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced in 2010 that privacy was no longer a “social norm”. Young people are widely supposed to be sharing their private lives online because they don’t fully understand the implications, but little systematic research has investigated the relation between age and online privacy behaviour. OxIS asks about privacy behaviours, so it brings systematic data to bear on the question, “Are young people really completely unconcerned about their privacy online?” In a word, the answer is No. We actually find a clear inverse relationship—almost all teenage SNS users have checked or changed their privacy settings, dropping to about 30% of SNS users over 65. Young people do indeed care about their privacy—and they act on it. US and Australian datasets show the same pattern, implying a need to rethink this perception.

Social media provide a valuable source of data for research on personal ties and communication, collective action, privacy, and identity. Above: OxIS data presented at our 2008 social media conference. Use of social media has plateaued since then at about 60% of Internet users.

Researchers: Grant Blank, Gillian Bolsover, Elizabeth Dubois

Young people care more about their online privacy than older users

Social Media Users who have Changed their Privacy Settings by Age (UK, USA, Australia)

Young people are more, not less, likely to have taken action to protect the privacy of their personal information on social networking sites than older people. The strength of this effect is remarkable: between the oldest and youngest the difference is over 62 percentage points.
Using our datasets for research and policy

OxIS is a multi-stage national probability sample of 2000 people in Britain, enabling us to project estimates to Britain as a whole. Undertaken every two years since 2003, it surveys users, non-users, and ex-users, covering Internet and ICT access and use, attitudes to technology, and supporting demographic and geographic information.

Although face-to-face surveys are expensive to run, they improve the likelihood of getting high-quality answers to every question, and enable coverage of a large number of items. OxIS data are first checked and analysed by our researchers, and sponsors can use the data as soon as they are clean. Two years later the data are released for use by outside academic and government users; other users may be able to use the data for a fee.

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OxIS datasets can be made available to interested parties. Please email: oxis@oii.ox.ac.uk for details.

Website: http://oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/