# Internet Use in Switzerland 2011–2019: Trends, Attitudes and Effects

Summary Report
World Internet Project – Switzerland

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**Summary Report**
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# Contents

## List of Figures

# Executive Summary

**This report summarizes results from our representative Internet survey in 2019 and highlights major developments and trends of the past decade, based on data from our long-term biannual studies since 2011.**

The World Internet Project (WIP) is an international, collaborative science project which has been recording the dissemination and use of the Internet on an international basis since 1999. In 2019, the fifth World Internet Project – Switzerland (WIP-CH) survey was conducted. A representative sample of the Swiss population was interviewed about their Internet use and attitudes towards the Internet. Since 2011, over 5,500 interviews have been conducted within the WIP-CH, the results of which are presented in four thematic reports:[1] Internet Diffusion and Digital Divides, Internet and Politics, Internet Applications and Usage, and Trust and Concerns of Internet Users in Switzerland.

**92% of the Swiss population online – Internet penetration in Switzerland among the highest worldwide**

– Recently, the diffusion of the Internet has slowed due to saturation. In 2019, 92% of the Swiss population used the Internet (2011: 77%, 2013: 85%, 2015: 88%, 2017: 90%, and 2019: 92%).

– Switzerland ranks among the leading countries regarding Internet penetration rates, comparable with the USA (94%) or Sweden (92%). Examples for WIP partner countries that show lower Internet penetration rates are Taiwan (68%) or Tunisia (49%).

– Two thirds (66%) of the Swiss population (71% of Internet users) use social network sites.

**Major trend of the 2010s: The rise of the mobile Internet**

– In 2019, 8 out of 10 Swiss people (80%) use the Internet via mobile devices. This corresponds to 87% of Internet users. Thus, the dissemination of mobile Internet has increased once again within the past two years (2011: 20%, 2013: 39%, 2015: 63%, 2017: 72%, and 2019: 80%).

– All sociodemographic groups – although not equally strongly – show a rise in mobile Internet use. Mobile use among users aged 50–69, for example, has particularly increased.

[1] The four thematic reports can be downloaded here: https://mediachange.ch/research/wip-ch-2019/

**The Internet evolved into the most important media information and entertainment source in the past decade**

– The Internet remains the most important media source for both entertainment and information purposes and is of even greater importance in 2019 than in the years before.

– Only older users (over 70 years) still perceive traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio as more important for their entertainment than the Internet.

**The Internet is used as a multi-purpose infrastructure**

– The Internet constitutes a multi-purpose infrastructure: The Swiss use a wide range of Internet applications for informational, entertainment, and social interaction purposes.

– E-mailing (98%) and using search engines (97%) are de facto synonymous with Internet use.

– Overall, information uses are the most widespread activities. For example, searching for word definitions (92%), consulting online encyclopedias (87%), and searching for news (85%) are very popular.

– In the area of entertainment, downloading or listening to music online (72%) as well as downloading or watching videos online (66%) are widespread activities. Also, an increasing number of users watch timeshift TV via the Internet (60%).

– Apart from e-mail (98%), social interaction mostly takes place in the form of instant messaging through services like WhatsApp (90%). Internet telephony (75%) as well as private online communities (64%) are popular among Swiss users as well.

– Social network sites have experienced a great increase in use over the past decade (2011: 53%, 2019: 71%).

– Entertainment services are mainly used by younger users. Nearly all 14–19-year-olds watch or download videos or listen to or download music (98%). This proportion declines with increasing age.

– One in three Swiss users (36%) make use of e-commerce services by selling things online, while over four fifths (82%) shop online.

**Younger users rate their Internet skills higher**

– While nearly all 14–19-year-olds (98%) rate their skills as very good or excellent, only 56% of over 70-year-olds do so.

– On average, Internet users' self-evaluation of their Internet skills has remained stable since 2011, hinting at the relative nature of digital skills requirements in private and professional life.

**High skepticism regarding digital democratization**

– Overall, the Swiss population is skeptical that the Internet can improve the democratic quality of the political system in Switzerland. However, this skepticism has decreased slightly in the past decade.

– Only a minority believes that by using the Internet citizens are more likely to have a voice in the government's actions (21%), to gain political power (27%), to better understand politics (39%), or to have their opinions taken more seriously by politicians (27%).

– As few as 7–12% of respondents believe in the positive effects of Internet use on democracy and are confident in a digital democratization. Meanwhile, 25–45% of respondents do not believe in such democratizing effects of the Internet.

– The Internet is not deemed a trustworthy medium for political communication. Half of the Swiss population (52%) do not believe that the Internet is a safe environment for saying what one thinks about politics.

– Roughly half of the population (48%) feel comfortable speaking their mind freely on politics.

– The Swiss population tend to support free criticism of the government on the Internet. Overall, 58% agree with the statement that people should be able to freely criticize their government on the Internet.

– Free criticism of the government is considered most desirable among 20–29-year-olds – younger and older age groups show less agreement.

– 3 in 10 respondents (30%) support freedom of expression on the Internet. A slightly larger share of the population (43%), however, are not in favor of people unrestrictedly expressing their opinions on the Internet, even if they are extreme.

– Users tend to be more liberal-minded than non-users with regard to freedom of expression on the Internet.

**Surveillance possibilities lead to chilling effects on free information search and self-expression online**

– The majority of Swiss Internet users claim that surveillance possibilities online sometimes (44%) or often to always (15%) prevent them from searching the Internet for sensitive topics.

– Further, over half (56%) of Internet users – at least rarely – hold themselves back from expressing their interests, feelings or opinions online by posting comments or pictures due to potential surveillance.

**The majority worry about the societal risks of Internet use**

– The majority of the Swiss population acknowledge certain risks of Internet use. Around three quarters (73%) of respondents worry that people rely too heavily on the Internet.

– 63% of Swiss people see a problem in the safe handling of online data. Half of the population (53%) fear that the Internet promotes extreme

world views. 4 in 10 think that online surveillance may harm society (43%).

– Concerns about privacy violations on the Internet are significant in Switzerland. Almost half of users (45%) are worried that companies might violate their privacy online.

– Roughly 2 in 5 users (37%) worry about privacy violations by other persons, while 30% fear such violations by the government.

– Even though the majority of Swiss Internet users (71%) report being vigilant about protecting their privacy on the Internet, only 38% believe that they are able to control it. 7 in 10 users (71%) agree that they have nothing to hide.

– Roughly 3 in 5 Swiss users (63%) consider at least half of all Internet content credible. Annual comparison shows a significant decline in trust in Internet content since 2013.

– At the same time, the number of people who check facts online has significantly increased, by 19 percentage points between 2011 and 2017. In 2019, it had slightly declined again (-7 percentage points).

**High digital well-being, but also experiences of digital overuse**

– Overall, Swiss Internet users rate their abilities to cope with challenges of the digital era highly. They mostly indicate that they can distinguish personally important from unimportant online activities (85%), deliberately select which online information to follow (76%), and set up Internet services in a way that they do not distract them (78%).

– 4 out of 10 (38%) of Internet users in Switzerland feel that their personal social environment expects them to respond to messages quickly. In the professional environment, three quarters (73%) of Internet users feel this way. Especially younger users perceive intense social digital pressure regarding constant availability and skills.

– A quarter (26%) of Internet users in Switzerland believe they waste their time on the Internet while neglecting more important things and 24% report spending more time online than they would like. This is especially found for younger users.

# Data Basis WIP-CH

Analyses are based on representative samples from the language-assimilated resident population of Switzerland aged 14 and over. In every wave of the biannually conducted survey, around 1,100 people were interviewed. This results in the following sample sizes, which form the data basis for all calculations and figures:

| Sample for | 2011 | 2013 | 2015 | 2017 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Swiss Population | 1104 | 1114 | 1121 | 1120 | 1122 |
| Internet Users | 851 | 949 | 981 | 1013 | 1035 |
| Employed Internet Users | 589 | 587 | 706 | 710 | 737 |
| Non-Users | 253 | 165 | 140 | 107 | 85 |
| Proxy Users | 90 | 79 | 56 | 54 | 34 |

Calculations of absolute numbers are based on the latest data provided by the Federal Statistical Office (https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/population.html) and relate to the resident population of Switzerland aged 14 and over.
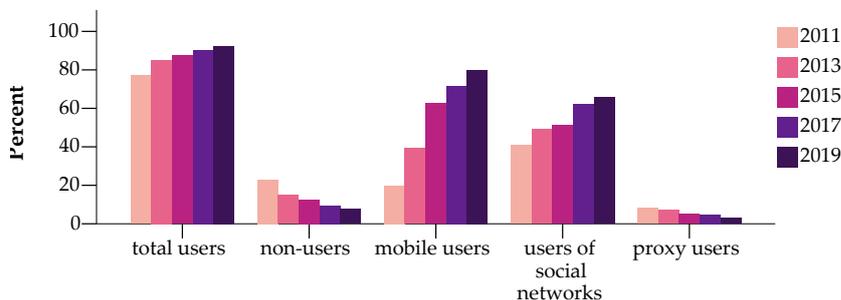
# 1 Diffusion of the Internet

A variety of country-specific and comparative studies collect data on the dissemination of the Internet. What is the situation in Switzerland? How many Internet users rely on the mobile Internet and social network sites? What percentage of the Swiss population do not use the Internet at all?

– In Switzerland, 92% of the population aged 14 and over use the Internet in 2019. Hence, Switzerland continually ranks among the highest-diffusion countries worldwide, like the USA (94%) or Sweden (92%). WIP country partners with lower dissemination of the Internet are, for example, Taiwan (68%) or Tunisia (49%).[2]

– 80% additionally use *mobile* Internet via mobile devices, such as mobile phones. This group of mobile users covers 87% of Internet users.

– In 2019, 66% of the Swiss population use social network sites such as Facebook or Twitter. This corresponds to 7 out of 10 Internet users (71%).

– Approximately 580,000 Swiss people, which corresponds to 8% of the population, did not use the Internet (anymore) in 2019. However, some non-users use the Internet indirectly (proxy users).

– 3% of the population are *proxy users*, which translates to two fifths (40%) of all non-users. These proxy users do not actively use the Internet themselves but have asked other people (primarily family members) within the last year to purchase something online, search for information, or write emails on their behalf.

**92% use the Internet, 80% also use mobile Internet**

Figure 1 shows the development of Internet penetration between 2011 and 2019.

**Figure 1: Diffusion of the Internet 2011–2019 in Switzerland**



Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH.

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[2] See *International Reports* of the World Internet Project: https://www.digitalcenter.org/world-internet-project.

**Diffusion of the Internet slowing**

– In the 2010s, the share of Internet users in Switzerland has continuously increased (77% in 2011, 85% in 2013, 88% in 2015, 90% in 2017, 92% in 2019). Since 2013, however, diffusion levels have been rising more slowly. This can be attributed to the already widespread diffusion of the Internet within the Swiss population.

– In the past eight years, the share of people in the Swiss population who use mobile Internet has steadily risen as well. While at first, the group of mobile users rapidly increased (from 20% in 2011 to 39% in 2013 and 63% in 2015), this trend, too, has slowed in the last four years (72% in 2017 and 80% in 2019).

**Social network sites still on the rise**

– Changes can also be observed in the use of social network sites. In 2011, 41% of the population and 54% of Internet users used social media. This proportion rose to roughly half of the population or 6 out of 10 Internet users in 2013 and 2015 and kept increasing up to 62% of the population or 67% of Internet users in 2017. In 2019, an even higher proportion of 66% of the population or 72% of Internet users can be observed.

**Number of non-users decreased drastically since 2011**

– In 2019, around 340,000 people in Switzerland did not use the Internet in any way (also not as proxy users) – this share has been halved since 2011.

Not all age groups are equally likely to access online content via mobile Internet.

**Dissemination of mobile Internet declines with increasing age**

– The dissemination of mobile Internet significantly declines with increasing age. While 93% of 14–29 and 90% of 30–49-year-old users access mobile Internet, this proportion is 77% among 50–69-year-olds and 36% among over 70-year-old users.

– Except for the oldest age group, the large majority of all other age groups use mobile Internet.

In the 2010s, the following trends regarding the diffusion of mobile Internet in Switzerland are observed.

**Figure 2: Diffusion of Mobile Internet by Age 2011–2019 in Switzerland**
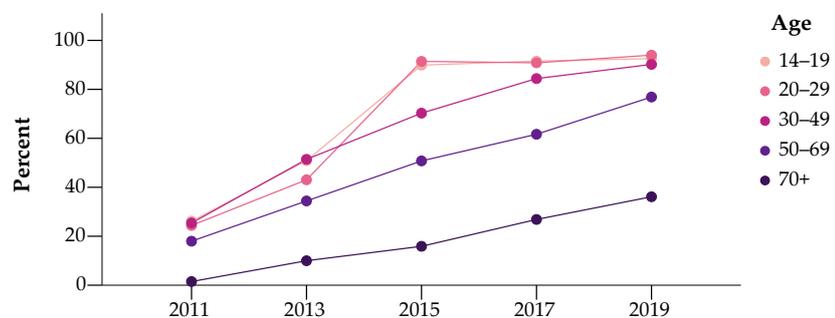


Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH.

– In recent years, there has been a continuous rise in mobile Internet use not only within the total Swiss population but also among Swiss Internet users: in the Swiss population from 20% in 2011 to 80% in 2019 (39% 2013, 63% 2015, and 72% 2017); among Internet users from 26% in 2011 to currently 87% in 2019 (46% 2013, 72% 2015, and 79% 2017).

– All age groups show an increase in mobile Internet use, although not equally strongly. In younger groups (14–29 years) the amount has only risen by 1 percentage point in the last two years. People over 50, however, are still experiencing a marked increase in mobile Internet use (+15 percentage points among 50–69 and +9 percentage points among over 70-year-olds).

**Dissemination of mobile Internet continuously increased**

# 2 Online vs. Offline Information and Entertainment Sources

**Information and entertainment sources online and offline**

Trust in platforms and content plays a central role for accessing information. How important are traditional media compared to the Internet as information sources? And what importance is ascribed to them for entertainment? In the following, the relevance of different information and entertainment sources for the Swiss population is discussed. Personal importance was measured on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

**Offline relationships and Internet as the most relevant information sources**

– The Swiss population regard interpersonal non-mediated contacts such as conversations with family or friends as the most relevant information source (mean of 4.3).

– The Internet ranks second (4.1), followed by newspapers (3.5), television (3.3), and radio (3.2).

The importance of selected information sources is perceived differently between age groups:

**Figure 3: Importance of Selected Information Sources by Age in Switzerland**
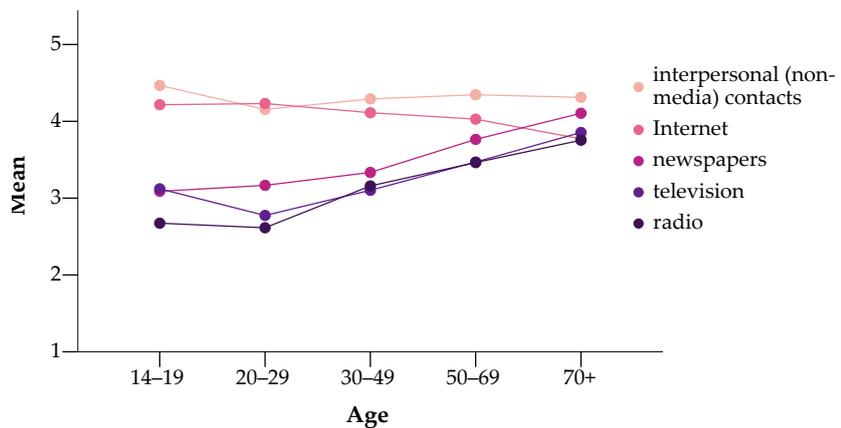


Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

– Nearly all age groups perceive interpersonal non-mediated contacts as the most important source of information. Only 20–29-year-olds assess the Internet as even more important.

– Among the remaining age groups under 70 years, the Internet ranks second. Respondents over 70 years, however, assess newspapers and television as more important than the Internet, which in turn is on par with radio.

– Hence, older respondents ascribe greater importance to traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio for information purposes than younger groups.

Respondents were also asked to assess the relevance of different entertainment sources.

– The highest importance is ascribed to interpersonal non-mediated contacts (4.4), while the Internet ranks second (3.3) regarding entertainment.

– Television (3.2) and radio (3.1) are relevant sources for entertainment as well, whereas newspapers are assigned relatively low importance (2.8).

**Interpersonal contacts rank above Internet and TV as the most relevant entertainment sources**

The importance of different entertainment sources also varies by age:

**Figure 4: Importance of Selected Entertainment Sources by Age in Switzerland**
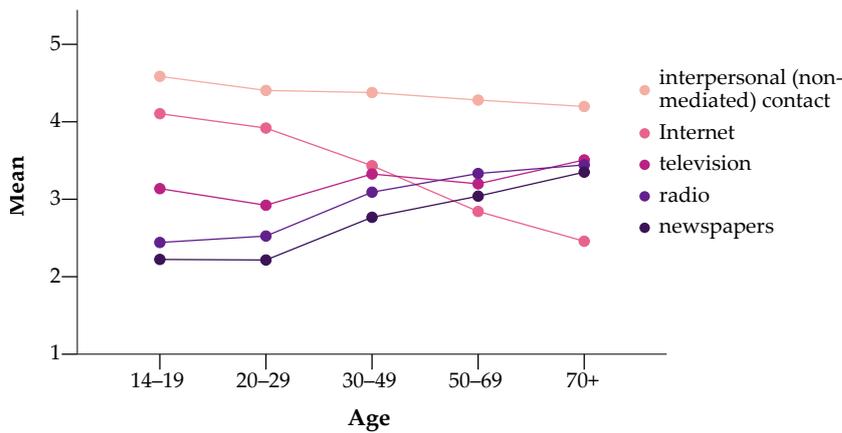


Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

– While younger users perceive the Internet as highly important for entertainment purposes, older users assess it less important (mean of 4.1 in 14–19-year-olds; mean of 2.5 in over 70-year-olds).

**Internet as entertainment source more relevant among young users**

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the continuous rise of the Internet's importance as a source of information and entertainment since 2011, while traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television show a consistent decrease in importance.

**Figure 5: Importance of Selected Information Sources 2011–2019 in Switzerland**
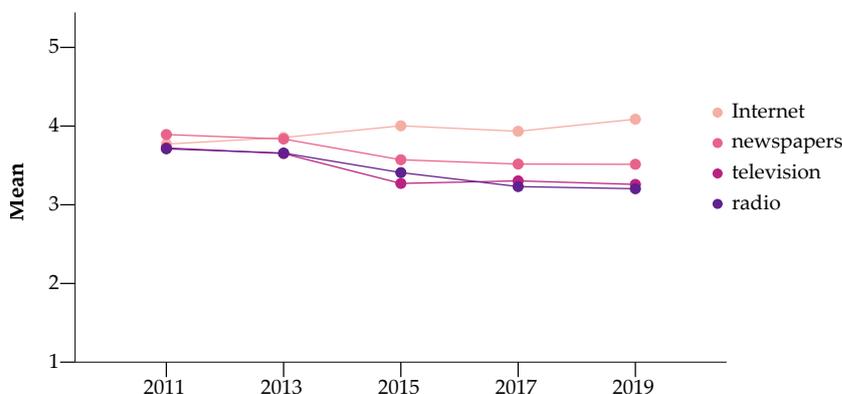


Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH.

**Internet evolved into the most important media source for information and entertainment in 2010s**

Although in 2015 the Internet was already the most important media source for information among the Swiss population, in 2017 for the first time the same became true for entertainment purposes. Since then, the Internet has shown a further increase in importance as an entertainment source.

**Figure 6: Importance of Selected Entertainment Sources 2011–2019 in Switzerland**
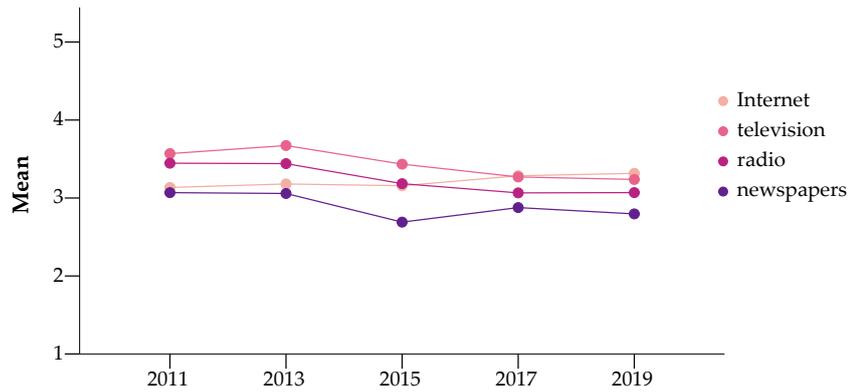


Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH.

# 3 Internet Uses

Compared to traditional mass media, the multi-purpose infrastructure of the Internet gives access to a remarkably wide range of possible activities in the private and professional sector. The Internet offers a dense variety of information, entertainment, and transaction services as well as various applications for social interaction. These possibilities are complemented by structuring applications such as search engines, which facilitate orientation and selection in the abundance of online content.

**Internet as media multi-purpose infrastructure**

Analyses of application- and offer-specific user groups in 2019 show that Internet users in Switzerland use such services and applications to different degrees.

– Nearly all Swiss users (97%) use search engines.

**Internet widely used for information purposes**

– The large majority of Swiss Internet users search the Internet for word definitions (92%) or access online encyclopedias such as Wikipedia (87%). Also, 7 out of 10 Internet users (71%) state that they check facts online.

– 85% of Swiss Internet users search for local, regional, national, or international online news.

– Around 8 out of 10 Swiss Internet users (83%) search the Internet for travel information, while 76% search for health information. 71% of respondents make travel reservations or bookings online.

– A third of Internet users (33%) use the Internet for job searching.

– The majority of Swiss users (87%) search the Internet for product information. 82% report buying things online, while 76% compare product prices online. One third of users (36%) sell things online.

**Four fifths buy things online, a third sell online**

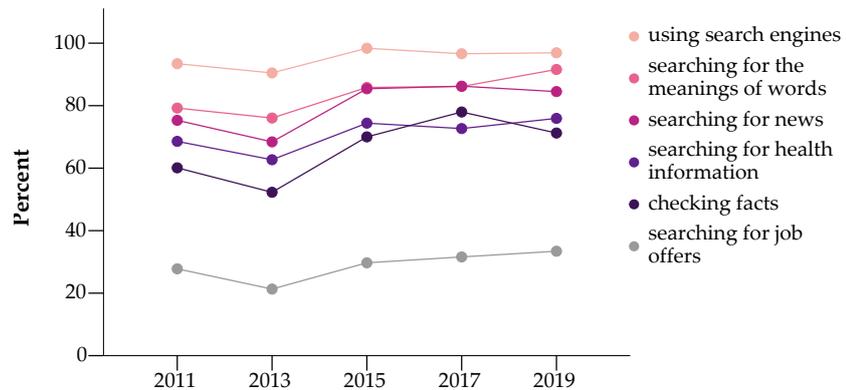– Roughly three quarters of users (77%) use the Internet to pay bills or access other banking services.

Figure 7 shows trends of several search, information and educational uses between 2011 and 2019.

**Figure 7: Selected Information Uses 2011–2019 in Switzerland**



Data basis: Internet users 14+, WIP-CH.

**Increased use of the Internet for orientation, information and education**

– The use of search engines (+4 percentage points), job search on the Internet (+6 percentage points) as well as searching for health information online (+7 percentage points) show a slight increase since 2011.

– In 2019, more Swiss Internet users looked up the meaning of words online (+12 percentage points since 2011). The number of people who check facts increased until 2017 (+18 percentage points since 2011), but then slightly decreased again (-7 percentage points since 2017).

– In 2019, the Internet was as widely used for news search as it was in the previous two years (-2 percentage points since 2017).

Applications for social interaction also play an important role on the Internet.

– Virtually all (98%) Swiss Internet users use e-mail.

**91% use instant messaging services like WhatsApp**

– Instant messaging services like WhatsApp and similar applications are slightly less prevalent (91%). Three quarters of Internet users (75%) report to make telephone calls via the Internet, e.g. using WhatsApp or Skype.

– Other important communication and interaction services are social media applications. Nearly two thirds of Swiss Internet users (64%) log into online communities or private social network sites. The user group of work-related social network sites, such as LinkedIn, is notably smaller (32%).

**Few use contact or dating sites**

– A third of Internet users (33%) post comments or messages in discussion forums, while comparably few (9%) make use of contact or dating sites.

Figure 8 shows trends in several communication and interaction services between 2011 and 2019.

**Figure 8: Selected Interaction Uses 2011–2019 in Switzerland**
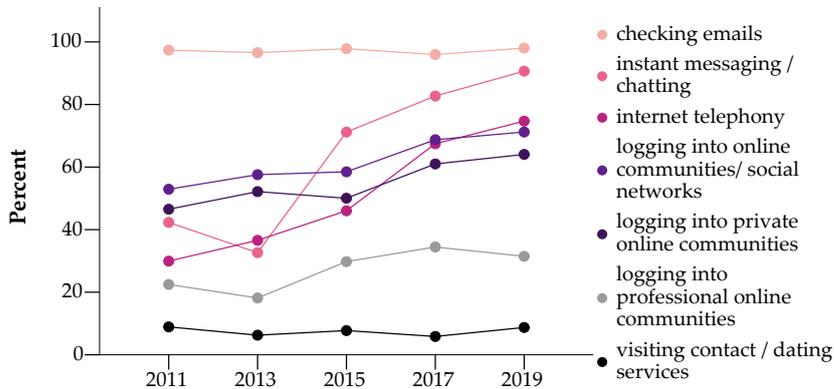


Data basis: Internet users 14+, WIP-CH.

– Since 2011, Swiss Internet users have used e-mail for communication purposes to a consistently high degree (97% in 2011, 98% in 2019).

– The use of private social network sites has risen (+18 percentage points since 2011). Also, the use of work-related online communities increased until 2017 (+11 percentage points since 2011) but is stagnating since.

– The use of instant messaging services such as WhatsApp has greatly increased since 2011 (42%). In 2019, 91% of Swiss Internet users made use of such applications.

– The use of Internet telephony has also risen rapidly: while in 2011, 3 out of 10 Swiss Internet users (30%) claim to make telephone calls via the Internet, in 2019 75% did so.

– Over the past years, the use of contact and dating sites has remained low (9% in 2019). Effects of social desirability may have to be taken into consideration to explain this result.

– Since 2013, Twitter has been used by a consistent minority of Swiss Internet users (16–18%).

Applications for social entertainment purposes are widespread overall and have a particularly pronounced dependence on age.

**Instant messaging and Internet telephony increased the most**

**Figure 9: Selected Entertainment Uses by Age in Switzerland**
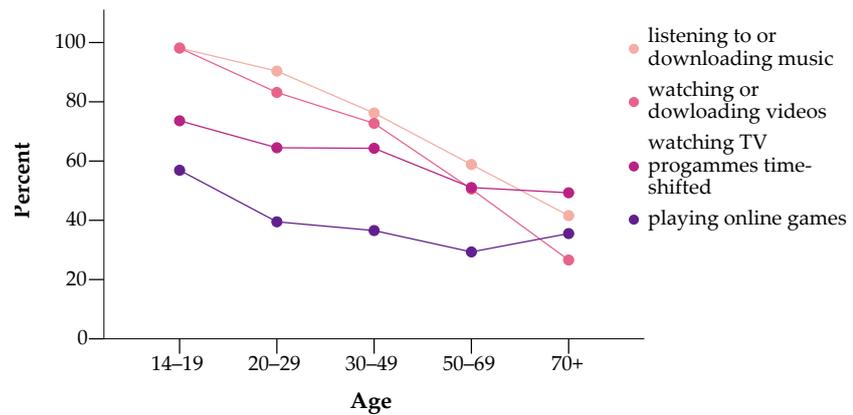


Data basis: Internet users 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

**Use of entertainment ser-**
**vices decreases with increas-**
**ing age**

– Overall, the use of entertainment services declines with increasing age.

– The most prominent differences can be found in watching and down-loading videos on the Internet: While nearly all Internet users in the youngest category report doing this (98%), the share clearly declines with increasing age. 83% of 20–29-year-olds and 73% of 30–49-year-olds claim to make use of this, whereas only half of 50–69-year-olds (51%) and as few as 27% of over 70-year-old users watch videos online or download them.

– Similar patterns can be observed regarding listening to and download-ing music: While almost all 14–29-year-old users (90–98%) make use of this, 76% of 30–49-year-olds, 59% of 50–69-year-olds and 42% of over 70-year-olds do so.

– Also, younger Internet users are more likely to play online games than older users. More than half of 14–19-year-old Internet users (57%) re-port using these services, while the second youngest group already shows a significantly smaller number of users (40%). This level remains similar among older users (29–37%).

– Three quarters (74%) of 14–19-year-olds use the Internet to watch time-shift television, while the majority of 20–49-year-olds (64–65%) and half of over 50-year-olds (49–51%) do so.

# 4 Internet Skills

Besides factual digital divides along sociodemographic variables in terms of Internet diffusion, further divides, reflected in attitudes and evaluations of Internet use and skills, are also evident.

– Based on their self-assessment, almost 8 out of 10 (78%) Internet users have at least good Internet skills. 36% rate their Internet skills as good, 29% as very good, and 13% as excellent.

– 2 out of 10 people (19%) state that they have sufficient Internet skills and only 4% describe their own skills as poor.

**Majority with good to excellent self-assessed Internet skills**

Internet skills differ regarding sociodemographic background, for example by age.

**Figure 10: Self-Evaluation of Internet Skills by Age in Switzerland**
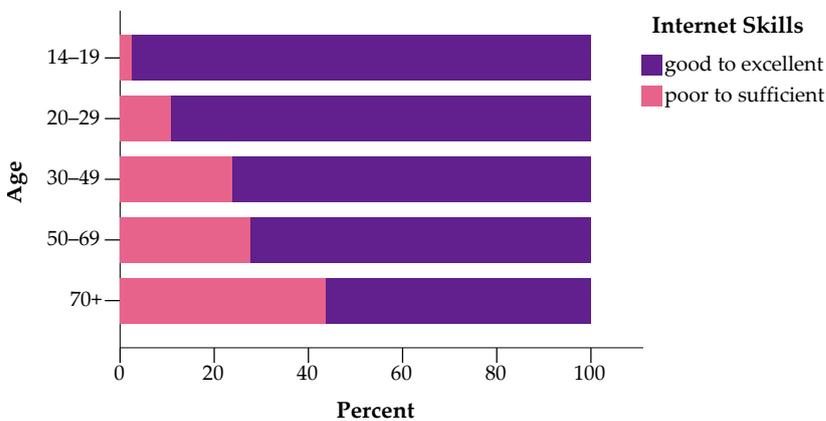


Data basis: Internet users 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

– The share of Internet users who claim to have good to excellent Internet skills declines with age.

– While nearly all 14–19-year-olds (98%) rate their skills as good to excellent, only slightly more than half of Internet users over 70 do so (56%). Accordingly, 2% of the youngest age group and 44% of users over 70 describe their Internet skills as poor to sufficient.

**Older users' perceived Internet skills markedly lower**

# 5 Internet and Politics

Along with the advent of the Internet and its new possibilities to express personal opinions came hopes and expectations with regard to improving democratic processes. What are the attitudes of the Swiss population regarding freedom of expression on the Internet? How are effects of Internet use on politics and democracy being evaluated?

As shown in Figure 11, Internet users' and non-users' attitudes to freedom of expression vary significantly: users tend to be more liberal-minded towards freedom of expression online than non-users.

**Figure 11: Users' and Non-Users' Attitudes to Freedom of Expression on the Internet in Switzerland**
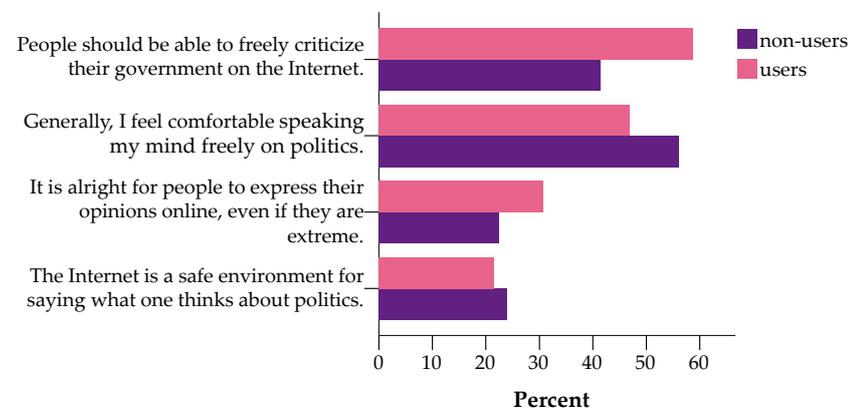


Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH.
Percent indicates the proportion of those who agree with the statements.

–Free criticism of the government on the Internet is supported by 6 out of 10 Internet users (59%), whereas among non-users it is only 4 out of 10 (42%).

**Internet users more supportive of freedom of expression than non-users**

–Internet users (47%) generally feel less comfortable than non-users (56%) speaking their mind freely on politics. In 2017, results were just the opposite. Also, users perceive the Internet as a less safe environment (22%) for political communication than non-users (24%).

–Freedom of expression on the Internet – even if extreme views are expressed – is supported by 3 out of 10 (31%) Internet users. Only 22% of non-users do so.

Beside the comparison of users and non-users, age groups, too, show varying attitudes on freedom of expression on the Internet:

–Overall, roughly half of the Swiss population over 20 years (46–52%) feel comfortable speaking their mind freely on politics. The share among 14–19-year-olds is notably lower (35%).

– Among 50–69-year-olds, slightly fewer (17%) respondents than in the remaining age groups (21–31%) agree that the Internet is a safe environment for saying what one thinks about politics. The youngest age group (14–19 years) shows the highest agreement (31%).

– Free criticism of the government is viewed as most desirable among 20–29-year-olds (67%) – younger and older respondents (under 70 years) show slightly lower agreement (56–58%). Only among over 70-year-olds did fewer than half of the respondents (46%) agree with this statement

**Strongest desire for free criticism of the government among 20–29 year olds**

– Concerning unrestricted freedom of expression on the Internet – even if opinions are extreme – two fifths (39%) of respondents under 30 years agree with this statement, while the remaining age groups only do so by 25–30%.

Regarding the effects of Internet use on politics, the Swiss population is not convinced that the Internet improves the democratic quality of the Swiss political system (digital democratization). Results of the survey imply a rather skeptical general assessment of the Internet's impact on democratic politics.

– Only a minority of Swiss people rather or strongly agree that by using the Internet citizens can better understand politics (39%), officials and politicians take citizens' opinions more seriously (27%), people are more likely to be able to gain political power (27%) and to have a voice in the government's actions (21%).

**Skepticism regarding digital democratization**

– As few as 7–12% of respondents believe in a digital democratization due to the positive effects of Internet use and, hence, strongly agree with the corresponding statements. 25–45% of respondents do not believe in such democratizing effects of the Internet and rather or strongly disagree with the statements presented.

**Some see improved democratic quality through Internet use**

– The Swiss population is most likely to believe that politics is easier to understand due to Internet use (39%). Only a quarter of respondents (25%) rather or strongly disagree.

– Moreover, a quarter to a third of respondents (25–35%) assess the impact of the Internet on democratic politics neither positively nor negatively.

Figure 12 illustrates trends regarding the assessment of the Internet's impact on democratic politics between 2011 and 2019.

**Figure 12: Effects of Internet Use on Democratic Quality 2011–2019 in Switzerland**
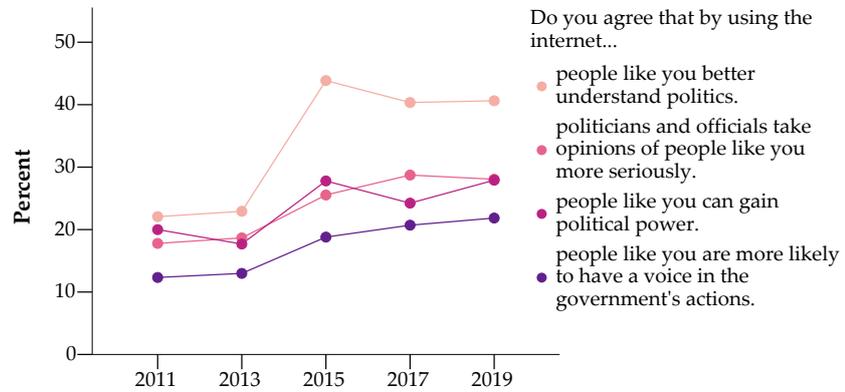


Do you agree that by using the internet...

● people like you better understand politics.

● politicians and officials take opinions of people like you more seriously.

● people like you can gain political power.

● people like you are more likely to have a voice in the government's actions.

Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH.
Percent indicates the proportion of those who agree with the statements.

**Annual comparison: overall rising confidence in digital democratization**

– Even though the Swiss population in general remains critical of the Internet's impact on politics, in 2019 slightly more people were confident in digital democratization than in previous years.

– In 2019, 41% believed that people can understand politics better due to Internet use. This percentage has remained roughly the same since 2017 (40%), although in 2015, rates were slightly higher (44%). This figure almost doubled compared to 2011 (22%) and 2013 (23%).

– In 2019, more of the Swiss population believed that by using the Internet politicians and officials take people's opinions into account more (from 18% in 2011 and 19% in 2013, to 26% in 2015, 29% in 2017, and 28% in 2019).

– In 2011 and 2013, around one in five people in Switzerland (20% and 18% respectively) believed that people can gain political power by using the Internet. These numbers have since risen slightly (28% 2015, 24% 2017, 28% 2019).

– Agreement with the statement that by using the Internet people are more likely to have a voice in the government's actions has been continuously rising since 2011 (12%), having almost doubled by 2019 (22%).

# 6 Chilling Effects of dataveillance: Self-censorship and self-restraint

The Internet enables vast surveillance possibilities, which has also received much attention from the media, potentially raising concerns in the Swiss population. The feeling of being monitored online may lead to the avoidance of certain – entirely legitimate or even socially desired – activities on the Internet. Such *chilling effects* can occur, for example, when users refrain from searching for sensitive topics online because they feel observed. How does this apply to Swiss Internet users?

**Figure 13: Chilling Effects on Information Search in Switzerland**



**Chilling Effects on Information Search**

- never
- rarely/sometimes
- often/always
- do not know/no answer
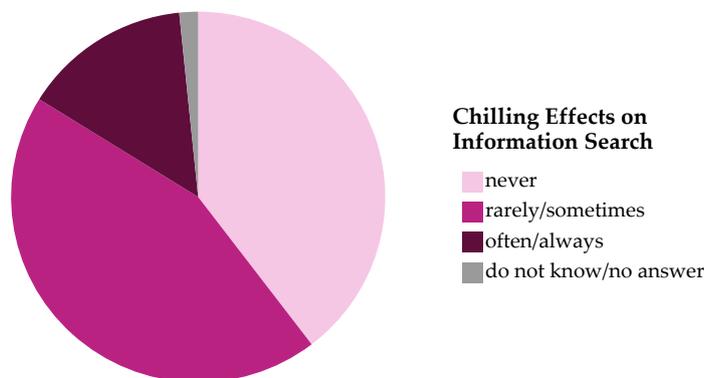
Data basis: Internet users 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

– More than half of Swiss Internet users (59%) experience chilling effects when searching for information online, as they suspect that their online activities are monitored.

– 44% of Swiss Internet users state that they rarely or sometimes feel deterred from searching for information on sensitive topics. 15% claim to often or always perceive such chilling effects, while 2% are undecided. 4 out of 10 Swiss Internet users (40%) never feel limited by surveillance possibilities on the Internet when searching information on sensitive topics.

Such chilling effects do not only occur when users search the Internet for information on sensitive topics, but also when they want to express their feelings or opinions online (e.g. by writing comments or uploading a picture). How often does this apply to Swiss Internet users?

**Chilling effects on information search experienced by more than half of Internet users**

**Figure 14: Chilling Effects on Self-Expression in Switzerland**



**Chilling Effects on
Self-Expression**

- never
- rarely/sometimes
- often/always
- do not know/no answer

Data basis: Internet users 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

– Chilling effects on self-expression are almost as high as on information search, with 56% of users being dissuaded from expressing opinions, interests, or feelings online by potential surveillance.
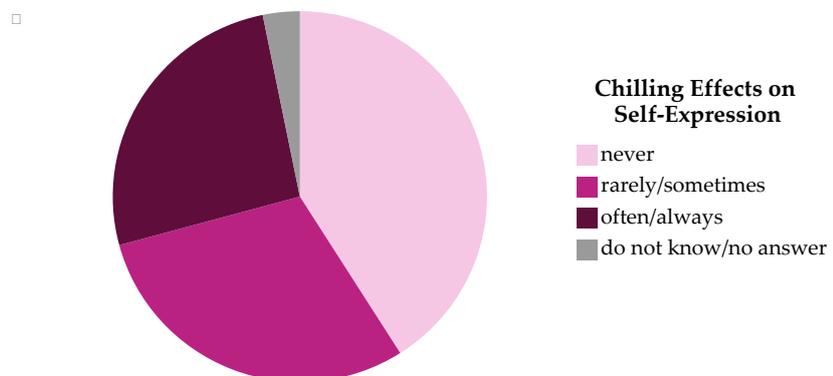
**56% deterred from express-
ing themselves online**

– 41% of Swiss Internet users state that they never feel deterred from expressing their feelings, interests or opinions online by surveillance possibilities. 30% rarely or sometimes experience these chilling effects, while over one quarter of users (26%) often or always do so. 3% did not answer or did not know.

# 7 Societal Risks of Internet Use

With the increasing relevance of the (mobile) Internet in everyday life, several societal risks, such as digital surveillance, have become subjects of debate, which may lead to concerns about online privacy. Along with this, Internet content is often criticized for poor credibility. How are such risks assessed by users and non-users in Switzerland? How concerned are users about their online privacy and what are their attitudes to it? To what degree does the Swiss population trust online content?

**Risks and concerns related to Internet use**

**Figure 15: Perceived Societal Risks of Internet Use in Switzerland**



We humans rely too heavily on the Internet.

We as a society struggle with the safe handling of online data.

The Internet promotes extreme world views.

Online surveillance harms society.
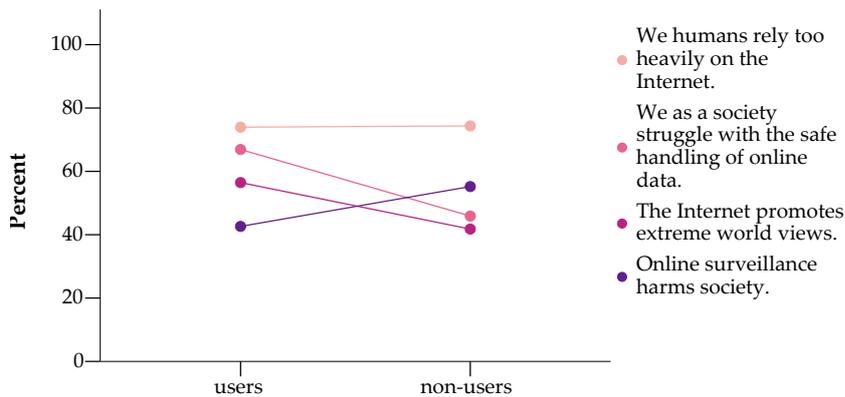
Data basis: Swiss population 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

– A vast majority (74%) of Internet users and non-users agree with the risk that people rely too heavily on the Internet. As few as 10% of Swiss Internet users and 12% of non-users do not agree, while 17% of users and 13% of non-users are undecided.

– Regarding other risks of Internet use, significant differences can be observed between these two groups. While 67% of Internet users fear that society faces a problem with the safe handling of online data, only about half (46%) of non-users agree. A fifth of each remain undecided (23% of users and 22% of non-users). Only 10% of users but a third (33%) of non-users do not agree with this concern.

**Users and non-users perceive risks differently**

– Users (57%) are also more likely than non-users (42%) to be concerned about the Internet promoting extreme world views. 15% of users and 28% of non-users do not agree, while 28% of users and 30% of non-users remain neutral.

– The fear that online surveillance might harm society, however, is more strongly perceived by non-users. While 43% of Swiss Internet users agree with the statement, more than half of non-users (55%) do so. A quarter (24%) of users and 30% of non-users do not share this concern, while a third (33%) of users and 14% of non-users remain neutral.

These perceived risks go together with concerns about privacy violations on the Internet by third parties.

**Concerns about online privacy**

**45% concerned that companies violate their privacy**

– Swiss users are considerably concerned about violations of their privacy online. Almost half of Swiss Internet users (45%) are rather or strongly concerned that companies violate their privacy online.

– 37% of users raise concerns about online privacy violations by other people.

– Users are least concerned about privacy violations by the government. Still, 3 out of 10 Swiss users are worried about this (30%).

Along with concerns about privacy violations, respondents were asked to assess their attitudes on their own online privacy.

**Vast majority is reportedly vigilant about protecting their privacy online**

– 7 out of 10 (71%) Swiss Internet users report being vigilant about protecting their privacy on the Internet, while only 12% disagree with the statement.

– At the same time, slightly less than three quarters of Swiss Internet users (71%) agree that they have "nothing to hide".

**Most also report having nothing to hide**

– Also, only 38% of Swiss users believe that they are able to control their privacy on the Internet, despite the reported vigilance about online privacy.

– A third (33%) of Swiss Internet users consider concerns about online privacy to be exaggerated. Half of users (45%) do not agree, while a quarter (23%) remain undecided.

Figure 16 illustrates attitudes of Swiss Internet users about online privacy and shows slight age differences.

**Figure 16: Attitudes to Online Privacy by Age in Switzerland**
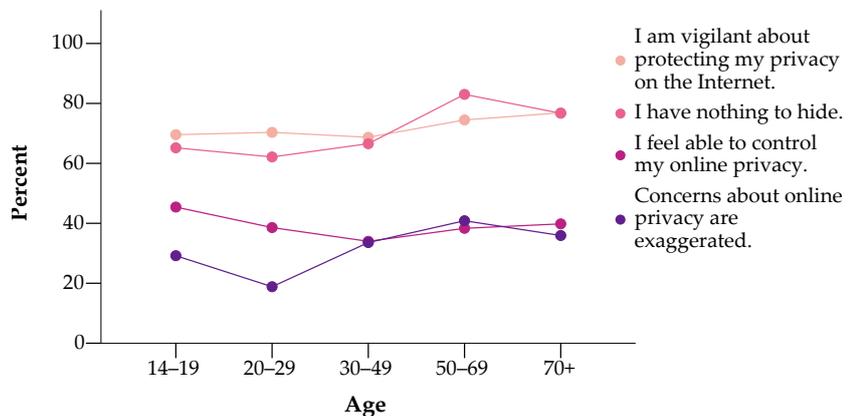


Data basis: Internet users 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

– In all age groups, the Swiss population show a high level of vigilance about protecting their privacy online (69–77%).

– More older users feel that they have nothing to hide than younger respondents. While 62–67% of Swiss Internet users under 50 years agree with the statement, 83% of 50–69-year-olds do so. Three quarters (77%) of over 70-year-olds report having nothing to hide.

– Regarding the ability to control their privacy online, users show only slight age differences (34–45%).

– Agreement with the statement that concerns about online privacy are exaggerated tends to rise with increasing age.

**Tendency to say concerns are exaggerated increases with age**

– Questions about online privacy have been answered very similarly since 2013. The user group that is vigilant about protecting their privacy has decreased by 13 percentage points since 2015 (2015: 84%, 2017: 81%, 2019: 71%).

Internet content is often criticized for poor credibility, e.g. due to anonymity on the Internet. Respondents were therefore asked to assess the trustworthiness of content on the Internet.

– 3 in 5 Internet users in Switzerland (63%) believe that at least half of all Internet content is credible.

– A significant decline in the evaluation of the credibility of online content can be observed since 2013. While in 2011 and 2013, around three quarters of the Swiss population (2011: 75%, 2013: 77%) considered at least half of all Internet content trustworthy, in 2019, this amount had decreased to 63% (2015: 64%, 2017: 58%).

**Decreasing trust in online content since 2013**

– At the same time, the number of people who check facts online significantly increased between 2011 and 2017 (+19 percentage points). In 2019, the amount had slightly declined again (-7 percentage points).

– Swiss Internet users mostly trust information on government and public authority websites (mean of 3.8), SRG websites (mean of 3.7), and sites of paid newspapers (mean of 3.3). Sites of free newspapers (mean of 2.8) and information on online network sites (mean of 2.3) are considered less trustworthy.

**Less trust in social network sites**

# 8 Digital Well-Being

**Digital well-being in Switzerland**

In 2017 and 2019, respondents were interviewed about the difficulties in dealing with the Internet in everyday life. The Internet has fundamentally changed everyday social interactions. In this context, the following three aspects that were each obtained via three questions are examined: digital coping skills, social digital pressure and digital overuse.

The large quantity of online information and communication options requires a variety of digital coping skills:

**High self-evaluation of digital coping skills**

– Swiss Internet users rate their skills in dealing with challenges of the digital era as mostly good. 85% believe that they can distinguish personally important from unimportant activities on the Internet. While a large majority of 14–69-year-olds (83–88%) state that they have this ability, only about three quarters (77%) of over 70-year-olds do so. Compared to 2017 (50%), numbers in this age group have increased.

– Three quarters (76%) of Internet users claim to be able to deliberately select which information sources they follow online. Younger respondents, however, (89% of 14–19-year-olds; 82% of 20–29-year-olds) seem to succeed better in doing so than older respondents (66% of over 70-year-olds).

– Moreover, 8 out of 10 Swiss Internet users (78%) believe that they can set up Internet services and devices in a way that does not distract them.

Swiss Internet users were further interviewed on their opinion on social digital pressure in their private and professional environment:

– Slightly less than half of the Internet users in Switzerland (46%) believe that their private environment expects them to be able to deal well with a variety of Internet applications, while over a quarter (28%) do not agree with this. Within the professional environment, notably more Internet users (71%) experience this expectation while as few as 17% do not.

**Young people more likely to feel social digital pressure**

– In this context, significant age differences are observed. Regarding the perceived expectation to be able to deal well with a variety of Internet applications, 60% of 14–19-year-olds agree with this statement for private contexts and 71% for professional environments. Among 50–69-year-olds, 40% agree for the private and 68% for the professional environment.

– 38% of Internet users in Switzerland feel that their private environment expects them to respond quickly to messages in everyday life. 3 out of 10 of users (28%) do not agree. In the professional environment, however, almost three quarters (73%) of employed users perceive this pressure, while only 14% disagree. Especially younger Internet users feel pressured to respond to messages quickly: While 43% of 14–19-year-

olds agree with this statement in professional environments and 75% in the private environment, agreement declines with increasing age. Among over 50-year-olds, fewer respondents feel this way in the private environment (33%), while rates in professional environments remain similar (71%).

Internet users were also asked about overusing the Internet according to their own judgement, with notable age gaps being found.

– While 26% of Internet users in Switzerland believe that they waste time on the Internet while neglecting more important things, 47% do not agree with this. 36% of 14–19-year-olds agree with this statement. While agreement of 20–29-year-olds (37%) and 30–49-year-olds (26%) still lies above the average for the population, notably less older respondents agree with this statement (19% of 50–69-year-olds and 14% of over 70-year-olds).

**Young people most affected by digital overuse**

– One quarter of Swiss Internet users (24%) agree they spend more time online than they would like to, while more than half of the users (56%) disagree. This perceived overuse mostly applies to younger respondents (38% among 14–19-year-olds and 32% among 20–29-year-olds) and decreases with age (10% among over 70-year-olds).

**A quarter of users spend more time online than they would like**

– One in five Internet users (21%) claim to do too many things at the same time online, whereas 60% disagree. Here again, younger Internet users show a higher tendency than older users (25% in 14–19, 31% in 20–29, 23% in 30–49-year-olds). Agreement among older Internet users is significantly lower (15% in 50–69 and 7% in over 70-year-olds).

**Figure 17: Digital Well-Being by Age in Switzerland**
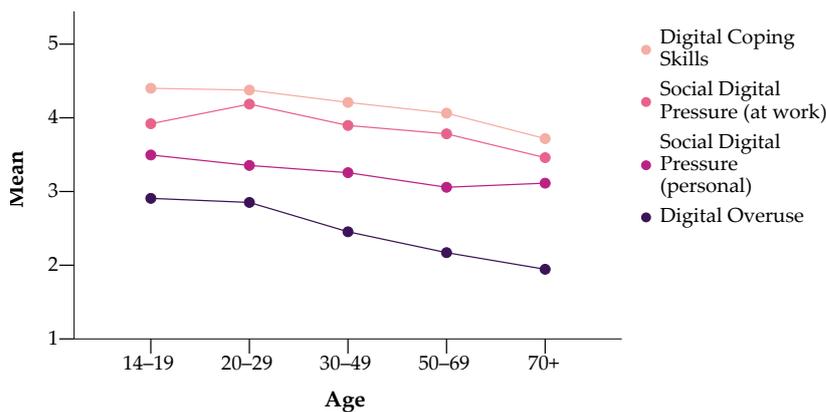


Data basis: Internet users 14+, WIP-CH 2019.

– Overall, the feeling of being under social digital pressure mostly occurs in the youngest age group of Internet users and declines with increasing age. In Figure 17, the corresponding results are displayed as mean values on a scale from 1 (disagree completely) to 5 (agree strongly). All age groups perceive social digital pressure more strongly in the professional than in the private environment. Also, younger users more often

**Overuse and social pressure higher among younger users**

report perceived digital overuse than older ones. They are more likely to spend too much time online, neglect more important things because of the Internet and often do too many things at the same time online.

**Young people better at coping with digital information flood**

– Despite these tendencies, younger respondents are also more likely to believe that they can deal with the flood of information and data online. Accordingly, they are more likely to report being able to set up devices in a way that they are not disturbing, distinguish important from unimportant activities on the Internet and consciously decide which information sources they want to follow.

# World Internet Project – Switzerland

The Media Change & Innovation Division of the IKMZ at the University of Zurich has been the Swiss country partner of the World Internet Project (WIP) since 2010. The WIP is an international, collaborative research project which has tracked the dissemination and use of the Internet on an international comparison since 1999. It is located in the Center for Digital Future of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles and is chaired by Prof. Jeff Cole. As of today, universities and research institutions in over 30 countries, e.g. Italy, France, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, United Kingdom, Hungary, Singapore, China, Indonesia, Chile, Australia, and Russia, are partnering in the WIP.

The WIP aims to collect independent and internationally comparative longitudinal data on the development of the Internet. The dissemination and use of the Internet, as well as the associated social, political, and economic implications, form the focal point of research. The WIP produces a variety of scientific publications and organizes annual conferences. Findings are further shared within the fields of politics, administrations, economics, media, and interested civil societies.

**Internationally comparative longitudinal data on social, political, and economic implications of Internet development**

The relevance of the WIP stems from a number of qualitative specifics:

– The combination of international comparability and longitudinal character, whereby general changing trends as well as characteristics of Internet development can be measured in participating countries of the WIP.
– The combined survey of behaviors (What is used in what intensity?) and perceptions (What impact does Internet use have in the private, professional, and political sphere?) enabling analyses of meaningful statistical relationships.
– The combination of an internationally standardized core questionnaire and a country-specific extension means that national focus areas can be set according to need.
– The inclusion of users and non-users in the survey, which opens the possibility of extended analyses, e.g. on digital divides.

In 2019, the Media Change & Innovation Division conducted its fifth representative WIP survey and interviewed a sample of the Swiss population on their Internet use and their attitudes towards the Internet.

**World Internet Project – Switzerland 2011–2019**

# Methods

**Representative survey of the Swiss population**

The WIP study is a representative survey of the Swiss population aged 14 and over, which is based on a periodically repeated random sample. In Switzerland, as in other partner countries, a country-specific catalogue of questions was added to the internationally standardized WIP questionnaire by the Media Change & Innovation Division of the IKMZ (University of Zurich). The Swiss survey 2019 was conducted in three languages through telephone interviews (CATI – Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) by the market and social research company DemoSCOPE between May 13 and July 13, 2019. As in 2015 and 2017, a dual-frame sampling framework was used, whereby people in households without a (registered) landline number could be reached by mobile phone.

**2019: Interviews with 1,122 respondents via fixed network and mobile phone**

In contrast to surveys exclusively carried out online, CATI surveys enable the inclusion both of Internet users and non-users. The 2019 sample by landline covered 837 respondents, while another 285 were reached by mobile phone. The total sample of 1,122 people is representative of the Swiss population over 14 years by gender, age, employment status, and the three language regions (German-, French- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland).

The 2019 sample results in a maximum confidence interval of ± 2.93 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The sample was constructed slightly disproportionally to enable statistical evaluations for the small Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. In order to balance out this regional disproportion in the population, the sample data has been weighted according to actual proportions.

The interview duration averaged 34 minutes.

Interviews in absolute numbers in 2019:

| Age | Total | G-CH | F-CH | I-CH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14–19 | 85 | 63 | 13 | 9 |
| 20–29 | 150 | 107 | 34 | 9 |
| 30–49 | 385 | 240 | 100 | 45 |
| 50–69 | 339 | 211 | 84 | 44 |
| 70–94 | 163 | 106 | 35 | 22 |
| | 1122 | 727 | 266 | 129 |

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