The Color of Wi-Fi: Summary of Findings
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Internet access via Wi-Fi has become a routine part of Internet users' online habits. At home and on the go, portable computing devices allow people to bring the Internet along as they go about their daily lives. Although paid subscription data plans enable much of this "on the go" access, publicly available Wi-Fi networks also play a large role in this phenomenon. By publicly available, we mean access available at public libraries, community centers, city Wi-Fi networks and schools. This report examines people's use of the Internet with an emphasis on the role of Wi-Fi networks. It also compares how communities of color – here focusing on African Americans and Latinos – engage with Wi-Fi networks in contrast to white Americans. The main findings are as follows:

A majority of online users have at some point used public Wi-Fi networks, with African Americans and Latinos more likely to have done this than white Americans.

- 55% of African Americans have used public Wi-Fi networks, defined as the use of Wi-Fi at school, a public library, a local community center, or a municipal Wi-Fi system.
- 54% of Latinos have used public Wi-Fi networks.
- 50% of whites have used public Wi-Fi networks.

Latinos and African Americans are also more frequent users of public Wi-Fi than white Americans.

- 33% of Latinos use public Wi-Fi at least *somewhat often*.
- 29% of African Americans use public Wi-Fi at least *somewhat often*.
- 22% of whites use public Wi-Fi at least *somewhat often*.

African Americans and Latinos are especially heavy users of Wi-Fi (at home or via public networks) for entertainment and searching for jobs.

- 71% of Latinos and 65% of African Americans watch videos, listen to music, look at art, or play games on Wi-Fi.
    - This compares with 63% of whites who do use Wi-Fi for these purposes.
- Minority users do these entertainment activities *more frequently* than whites.
    - 35% of African Americans who use Wi-Fi for these applications do so *very often.*
    - 32% of Latinos who use Wi-Fi for these applications do so *very often.*
    - 19% of whites who use Wi-Fi for these applications do so *very often*.
- 39% of African Americans and 37% of Latinos have used Wi-Fi to look for or apply for a job.
    - This compares to 21% of whites who have used Wi-Fi to look for or apply for work.
- Minorities search for jobs online more frequently than whites.
    - 28% of African Americans who use Wi-Fi for job searching do this *very often*.
    - 20% of Latinos who use Wi-Fi for job searching do this *very often*.
    - 9% of whites who use Wi-Fi for job searching do this *very often*.

Wi-Fi users are more likely than others to say that the Internet has positive impacts on their lives. African Americans and Latinos report greater positive impacts than whites in areas such as education, saving time on everyday activities, job search, and pursuing creative activities.

When asked to think about whether the Internet helps in specific areas in their lives, here is how African Americans, Latinos, and whites compare:

- **Education**: 62% of African Americans and 60% of Latinos say the Internet has helped with their education; 50% of whites say this.
- **Saving time**: 56% of African Americans and 54% of Latinos say the Internet helps them save time on day-to-day activities; 43% of whites say this.

- **Job searches**: 57% of Latinos and 55% of African Americans say the Internet helps them search for jobs; 40% of whites say this.
- **Creative activities**: 52% of Latinos and 50% of African Americans say the Internet helps them pursue activities such as writing, music, arts, or crafts. Just 43% of whites say this.

The impacts are greater for those who have used public Wi-Fi networks. On average, these impacts are about <u>11 percentage points higher</u> for those who have used public Wi-Fi networks.

Wi-Fi users have more positive attitudes about future-oriented Internet applications that rely on wireless networks, such as controlling home energy use or monitoring health of fitness. African Americans and Latinos show higher levels of interest than whites.

Respondents were asked whether they were interested in several different applications that are just emerging in widespread use.

- **Control home energy use**: 58% of Latinos and 53% of African Americans were "very" or "somewhat" interested this, compared with 51% of whites.
- **Monitor personal health and fitness**: 55% of Latinos and 51% of African Americans were at least somewhat interested in this; 49% of whites were.
- **Home entertainment**: 49% of African Americans and 45% of Latinos were at least somewhat interested in this; 43% of whites were.

As with questions about the Internet's impacts, Wi-Fi users were more likely to be interested in these activities – by a margin of about 12 percentage points.

Many people believe industry and government can improve the Internet by investing in wireless networks.

When asked to think about things industry and government could do to improve the Internet, here is what respondents said on several different topics:

- **Make it easier for people to secure their personal information**: 86% of whites, 85% of African Americans, and 84% of Latinos cited this.
- **Increase the speed of Wi-Fi networks**: 82% of Latinos cited this, 79% of African Americans did, and 77% of whites did.
- **Increase the availability of free Wi-Fi networks**: 79% of Latinos cited this compared with 74% of African Americans and 71% of whites.
- **Invest in wired networks to increase access speeds to people's homes**: 73% of Latinos cited this compared with 67% of African Americans and 62% of whites.

Nearly 4 in 10 pointed to improving the speed, availability, and reliability of wireless networks as the *most important* thing stakeholders could do to improve the Internet.

- 55% of African Americans said the most important thing stakeholders could do was to make it easier to protect personal information; 52% of whites and 50% of Latinos said this.
- 39% of African Americans said either improving the speed, availability, or reliability of wireless networks was the most important step stakeholders could take. Some 37% of whites and Latinos also said this.