Pew Internet & American Life PROJECT

Faith Online

64% of wired Americans have used the Internet for spiritual or religious purposes

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Summary of Findings

64% of the nation's 128 million Internet users have done things online that relate to religious or spiritual matters.

Nearly two-thirds of the adults who use the Internet in the United States have used the Internet for faith-related matters. That represents nearly 82 million Americans. Among the most popular and important spiritually-related online activities:

- 38% of the 128 million Internet users have sent and received email with spiritual content.
- 35% have sent or received online greeting cards related to religious holidays.
- 32% have gone online to read news accounts of religious events and affairs.
- 21% have sought information about how to celebrate religious holidays.
- 17% have looked for information about where they could attend religious services.

This figure represents a substantially higher number of online religious faith seekers than the Pew Internet & American Life Project has measured before. We used a new battery of questions to prompt Internet users recollections of the things they do online related to spiritual activities.

Those who use the Internet for religious or spiritual purposes are more likely to be women, white, middle aged, college educated, and relatively well-to-do.

The online faithful are somewhat more active as Internet users than the rest of the Internet population. On a typical day, 63% of them are online. Some 56% of them have been online for six years or longer. And 60% have broadband connections somewhere in their life (at home or at work), compared to 54% of all Internet users.

- 55% of the online faithful are women, compared to the overall Internet population, which is 50-50 in its gender composition.
- 83% are white, compared to the overall Internet population, which is 75% white.
- 49% have college educations, compared to 36% of the entire Internet population.

This Pew Internet & American Life Project report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. All numerical data was gathered through telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates between November 18 and December 14, 2003, among a sample of 2,013 adults, aged 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is +/- 2%. For results based Internet users (n=1,358), the margin of sampling error is +/- 3%.

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- 47% are between the ages of 30 and 49. This is the same proportion of this age cohort as the overall Internet population.
- 31% live in households earning more than $75,000, compared to 26% of the overall Internet population.

The "online faithful" are devout and they use the Internet for *personal* spiritual matters more than for traditional religious functions or work related to their places of worship. But their faith-activity online seems to augment their already-strong commitments to their congregations.

As a group, these 82 million people are devout and more likely to be connected to religious institutions and practices than other Internet users. Half of the online faithful go to church at least once a week and many describe themselves as evangelicals.

Higher percentages of the online faithful report online activities related to personal spirituality and religiosity than activities more related to involvement in traditional religious functions or organizations. This is interesting because many analysts have assumed that the Internet would make it more likely for people to leave churches in favor of more flexible online options.

This study found that the Internet does provide people with sources of information, symbolic resources, and opportunities for networking and interaction *outside* the boundaries of formal religious bodies or traditions. Yet it also found that the online faithful seem more interested in augmenting their traditional faith practices and experiences by personally expressing their own faith and spirituality, as opposed to seeking something new or different in the online environment.

26% of the online faithful seek information about the religious faith of others. Most are doing this out of curiosity.

Some 28% of the online faithful said they had used the Internet to seek or exchange information about their own religious faith or tradition with others, while 26% said they had used the Internet to seek or exchange information about the religious faiths or traditions of others.

In a follow up question about the motives of those who got information about others, 51% said they did this out of curiosity so as to find out about others' beliefs, 13% said they did it for purposes of their own spiritual growth, and 31% said both those reasons were important to them.

The majority of online faithful describe themselves as "spiritual and religious."

This study also explored the extent to which emerging anti-institutional attitudes and "religious/spiritual seeking" sensibilities are present among Internet users. It has been assumed that Internet users would be less conventionally religious and therefore more likely to describe themselves as "spiritual" as opposed to "religious." While describing oneself as "spiritual" has achieved important currency in a culture increasingly suspicious of religious institutions, the majority here seemed most comfortable describing themselves as both spiritual *and* religious.

There is a tendency for those who do describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious" to be among the heaviest Internet users. They also tend to be more likely to engage in personal spiritual and religious behaviors associated with online "seeking" than they are to engage in online activities related to religious congregations or organizations. However, those who describe themselves as "both spiritual *and* religious" report even higher levels of these personally-oriented activities and are actually the majority of the online faithful.

- 54% of the online faithful describe themselves as *religious and spiritual.*
- 33% describe themselves as *spiritual but not religious*.
- 6% describe themselves as *religious but not spiritual.*
- 4% describe themselves as *not religious and not spiritual.*

Evangelicals are among the most fervent Internet users for spiritual purposes.

Online Evangelicals are a significant subgroup of the American religious landscape. This study found them to resemble other Protestants in terms of their Internet behaviors in some ways, but to be unique in other ways. They are slightly less experienced in Internet use than other categories of religious affiliation. Conversely, they are more likely than others to engage in all categories of online religious activity. For instance, 69% report going online for personal religious or spiritual purposes. They are also more likely than Protestants overall to seek out information about both their own religion (36% report doing so) and other religions (33% do).

Faith Online: Summary of Findings at a Glance
64% of the nation's 128 million Internet users have done things online that relate to religious or spiritual matters.
Those who use the Internet for religious or spiritual purposes are more likely to be women, white, middle aged, college educated, and relatively well-to-do.
The "online faithful" are devout and they use the Internet for *personal* spiritual matters more than for traditional religious functions or work related to their churches. But their faith-activity online seems to augment their already-strong commitments to their congregations.
26% of the online faithful seek information about the religious faith of others. Most are doing this out of curiosity.
The majority of online faithful describe themselves as "spiritual and religious."
Evangelicals are among the most fervent Internet users for spiritual purposes.
Source: Hoover, Stewart M., Lynn Schofield Clark, and Lee Rainie. *Faith Online: 64% of wired Americans have used the Internet for spiritual and religious purposes.* Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, April 7, 2004.

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About the Pew Internet & American Life Project: The Pew Internet Project is a nonprofit, non-partisan think tank that explores the impact of the Internet on children, families, communities, the work place, schools, health care and civic/political life. The Project does not advocate policy outcomes. Support for the project is provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The project's Web site: www.pewInternet.org

About Princeton Survey Research Associates: PSRA conducted the survey that is covered in this report. It is an independent research company specializing in social and policy work. The firm designs, conducts, and analyzes surveys worldwide. Its expertise also includes qualitative research and content analysis. With offices in Princeton, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C., PSRA serves the needs of clients around the nation and the world. The firm can be reached at 911 Commons Way, Princeton, NJ 08540, by telephone at 609-924-9204, by fax at 609-924-7499, or by email at ResearchNJ@PSRA.com

Part 1.

Introduction

When it comes to religion and spirituality, the Internet has introduced a flurry of expectations. Some, such as pollster George Barna, have predicted that millions of dropouts from religious organizations would turn to the Web for new forms of worship and inspiration. Sociologist Brenda Brasher has similarly argued that just as the printing press did centuries earlier, the Internet promises to inaugurate nothing short of a religious Reformation. Cyberspace, as science commentator Margaret Wertheim has argued, has certainly become for many a new location for spiritual yearning. Yet some scholars of religion, such as Quentin Schultze, have expressed concern that the speed, vastness, and surface-level materials available on the Internet can draw people away from spiritual contemplation and therefore contribute to a more superficial and less civil life.

In the post 9/11 world, there has also been interest in the Internet's role in relation to religious movements that intersect with or challenge national boundaries. In his study of the increasingly important role the Internet has played for people in the Muslim world, for example, Gary Bunt has noted the rise of what he has termed "e-jihad" and "online fatwas."

In the western world, the relationship between the Internet and religion has been explored in earlier Pew Internet & American Life studies, which have found that persons of faith use the Internet to extend their congregational activities. This survey builds on those earlier studies by focusing on how personal religious and spiritual uses of the Internet may be replacing or complementing more tradition-oriented approaches to religion online.

Part 2.

Internet uses of the "online faithful": Who are they and what do they do online?

Measuring online religious and spiritual activities

The Pew Internet & American Life Project found in several national phone surveys beginning in late 2002 that it is often the case that people do not necessarily remember everything they have done online. In addition, different people sometimes have different conceptions of the same subject.

For instance, it was our common practice to ask in surveys in 2000, 2001, and early 2002, "Please tell me if you ever do any of the following when you go online. Do you ever get health or medical information?" Throughout that period, we consistently found that about 60% of Internet users would answer "yes" to that single query. In December 2002, we asked all Internet users a battery of questions about specific kinds of health-related searches they might do online – for instance, get information about medical treatments, or seek material about mental health, or browse for details about alternative medicine, or get tips on fitness and diet issues. With the questions as reminders, some 80% of Internet users recalled going online for a health-related topic and that substantially increased our insights into the ways that the Internet was used in medical and health searches.

We saw a similar phenomenon when we asked about the use of the Internet when interacting with government agencies. When people were asked several questions about possible specific uses of the Internet for e-government matters, more of them recalled times when they had gone online to connect with government.

With those experiences in mind, the Project worked with scholars from the University of Colorado to devise survey questions that would explore a variety of ways that the Internet might be used for religious or spiritual purposes.

These new findings build on the Project's previous work on religion and the Internet, and on qualitative research conducted at the University of Colorado. The Project's previous surveys have shown how the Internet has come to play a role in congregations and other religious bodies, and how persons of faith incorporate Internet use into their practices related to those faith groups. Stewart Hoover's research has explored the relationship of the Internet to the religious "seeking" practices of those within religious traditions, and Lynn Schofield Clark has explored the significance of pass-along emails in the spiritual lives of young people.

Part 2. Internet uses of the "online faithful": Who are they and what do they do online?

This survey had two purposes. First, it was to ask about some religious and spiritual activities that people might perform online. Rather than asking the single question about whether a person went online to get religious and spiritual information, we asked about a specific series of possible searches that someone might do and about the kinds of emails she might send and receive.

Second, the survey focused on how personal religious and spiritual uses of the Internet replace or complement more tradition-oriented approaches to religion. We asked Internet users about a range of online activities related to religion as experienced within institutional settings and in practices outside of, or complementary to, those traditions. We found that the most common uses could be described in three ways: first, activities associated with traditional religious institutions; second, personal religious or spiritual practices; and third, as information-seeking about religious events.

Religious and spiritual uses of the Internet

128 million American adults use the Internet. This table reports what percentage of those online Americans have gone online for these purposes. In all 64% of Internet users said they had done at least one of these activities.

Sent, received, or forwarded email with spiritual content	38%
Sent an online greeting card for a religious holiday such as Christmas, Hanukah, or Ramadan	35%
Read online news accounts about religious events/affairs	32%
Sought information on the Web about how to celebrate holidays or other significant religious events	21%
Searched for places in their communities where they could attend religious services	17%
Used email to plan a meeting for a religious group	14%
Downloaded or listened online to music with religious or spiritual themes	11%
Made or responded to a prayer request online	7%
Made a donation to a religious organization or charity	7%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

Those questions were fielded in a national phone survey of 1,358 Internet users conducted between November 18 and December 14, 2003 and they yielded striking results. The results reveled that 64% of America's 128 million adult Internet users – or, some 82 million people – have employed the Internet for faith-related purposes. This is a considerably higher reading that the Project has gotten when it asked the single, basic question of Internet users: "Do you ever get religious or spiritual information online?" In November-December, 2002, the most recent survey where we employed that strategy, 30% of Internet users said "yes."

The most common online activities among those in this study are news reading, the sending, forwarding and receiving of email with religious or spiritual content, and the sending of greeting cards for religious holidays (the latter number undoubtedly higher than usual due to the fact that this survey was conducted in the midst of these three

holiday periods). A smaller percentage reported going online for information or ideas about celebrating holidays.

The online faithful are devout and relatively intense users of the Internet. Demographically, the online faithful are more likely to be women with high socio-economic profiles.

As a group, the 82 million people who use the Internet for religious or spiritual purposes stand out in several ways compared to the rest of the online population. They are devout and more likely to be connected to religious institutions and practices than other Internet users. Half of the online faithful go to church at least once a week, compared to 41% of all Internet users. Some 33% of the online faithful describe themselves as Evangelical, compared to 29% of all Internet users. And some 54% of the online faithful describe themselves as religious and spiritual.

The online faithful are somewhat more likely than the overall Internet population to be women, to be white, to be between ages 50 and 64, to be college educated (49% have college or graduate degrees), to be married, to live in households earning $75,000 or more, and to live in the South and Midwest. The online faithful are less likely than the overall Internet population to be between the ages of 18 and 29, to be minorities, to live in households earning less than $30,000, or to live in the Northeast.

As a group, the online faithful are somewhat more active as Internet users than the rest of the Internet population. On a typical day, 63% of them are online, compared to 54% of the entire Internet population. Collectively, the online faithful have more online experience than the overall Internet population. Some 56% of them have been online for six years or longer, compared to 49% of the overall Internet population. Some 60% of the online faithful have broadband connections somewhere in their life (at home or at work), compared to 54% of all Internet users.

Personal spiritual activities are more likely to be done online than activities connected with traditional religious practices or institutions.

Higher percentages of Internet users report online activities related to personal spirituality and religiosity than activities more related to involvement in traditional religious functions or organizations. For instance, 38% of Internet users reported forwarding spiritual email to friends or acquaintances, while just only 14% have used the Internet to plan a meeting at their church or place of worship.

This is interesting, as it has been assumed that the Internet would make it more likely for people to leave churches in favor of more flexible online options. This study found that the Internet does provide some people with sources of information, symbolic resources, and opportunities for networking and interaction *outside* the boundaries of formal religious bodies or traditions. Yet it also found that the online faithful seem more

interested in augmenting their offline practices by using the Internet to express their own personal faith and spirituality, as opposed to seeking something new or different in the online environment.

Part 3.

Information-seeking about religion: looking "inside" and "outside"

For many of the online faithful, the Internet provides a good, convenient way to handle the practical side of life in a religious organization. They use email to stay in touch with church friends and plan meetings. They use online greeting card services. They learn about local worship services by browsing the Web.

However, some are also interested in pursuing their faith journeys online. In this survey, we asked members of the online faithful if they ever go online to seek or exchange information about their own religious faith or tradition or about the faith or traditions of others. Some 28% of them said they had used the Internet to seek or exchange information about their own religious faith or tradition, while 26% said they had used the Internet to seek or exchange information about the religious faiths or traditions of others. (Eighteen percent answered "yes" to both questions.)

In a follow up question about the motives of those who got information about others, 51% said they did this out of curiosity so as to find out about others' beliefs, 13% said they did it for purposes of their own spiritual growth, and 31% said both those reasons were important to them.

Does the Internet aid those who are looking for inspiration or faith-related resources outside church?

In order to learn about the Internet's role in relation to conventional religion, we asked the online faithful about their interest in *other* religions. For the past several decades, individuals have come to exercise more and more authority over their own expressions of faith, turning to sources other than their own traditions and clergy. A new religious/spiritual sensibility, called "seeking" by sociologists such as Wade Clark Roof and Robert Wuthnow, may well underlie these tendencies and it is thought that modern means of communication are serving or exacerbating these developments in religion and spirituality. Many have wondered whether the Internet is providing support for emerging forms of religion that are outside the bounds of conventional religious institutions by facilitating this kind of religious or spiritual "seeking."

These data provide some interesting insight into these issues. Going online to attain information about faiths other than one's own may be one measure of this anti-institutional trend. We found that 26% of the online faithful reported going online for information about traditions other than their own, and 31% of them did so in part for their

own spiritual growth (13% did so exclusively for this reason). This provides support for the idea that for some, the Internet enables individuals a vastly enlarged realm in which to engage in religious seeking. Yet the story does not end here.

To explore further the notion that the Internet might be involved in the evolution of a more personal, less institutional orientation in religion, we collapsed our list of online practices into three categories and found that over half of Internet users reported going online for personal spiritual reasons.

- Category 1 -- online activities related to *personal* spiritual or religious concerns. This includes prayer requests, downloading or listening to music, sending faith-related greeting cards, and using email for spiritual matters. Some 55% of online Americans use the Internet these ways.
- Category 2 -- online activities related to *traditional institutional religion*. This includes, getting ideas for celebration of holidays, looking for places where respondents can attend church services, making donations to a religious organization or charity, and using email to plan church meetings. Some 36% of online Americans use the Internet in these ways.
- Category 3 -- online news seeking. Some 32% of Internet users go online for news about religious events and affairs.

Part 4.

Overall Internet use among those who have different reasons for faith-related online activities

If the online world is becoming a place where alternative or anti-institutional religious uses and practices are emerging, we would expect to see some evidence of this in relation to respondents' Internet use. For instance, if we were to find that heavy Internet use was associated with less conventional religion, this could support the idea that those who are online more frequently are more likely to seek out online alternatives to traditional offline religious practices. On the other hand, if conventionally religious people are as likely as others to say that they use the Internet for religious or spiritual practices, this may undermine the theory of distinct online and offline religious cultures. In that case, we would want to explore the extent to which the Internet provides resources or networks that contrast with or compete with those in an informants' own traditions or experiences.

To test these ideas, all Internet users were divided into four categories according to whether the term novice, middle, heavier, or heaviest best described their level of Internet use. We then looked at whether or not there was a relationship between attendance and level of Internet use.

Internet User Types and Attendance at Religious Services

Heavy Internet use does not seem to be linked with church attendance.

	Once a week	Once a month	Several times per year	Don't attend services
Novice*	11%	14%	9%	10%
Middle**	9	4	7	8
Heavier***	41	39	45	40
Heaviest****	38	42	38	43

** Online for less than two years and online for two years but do not go online daily.*

*** Online for three years but do not go online daily and online for two years and go online from home daily.*

**** Online at least four years but do not go online from home daily and those online for three years and go online from home daily.*

***** Online for at least four years and go online daily.*

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%..

There appears to be little association between Internet involvement and attendance at church. Nearly equal proportions of those who attend frequently and less frequently are in the heaviest Internet use category.

Part 4. Overall Internet use among those who have different reasons for faith-related online activities

Does denomination make a difference in Internet use?

We then explored whether or not there was a relationship between level of Internet use and the tendency for people to identify with a particular religious tradition. It turns out there is a slight tendency for Protestants (both overall and the Evangelical subgroup) to be lighter Internet users than Catholics or Jews, but it is slight.

Religious Identification and Internet Activities

There does not seem to be a link between denomination and Internet use.

	Novice*	Middle**	Heavier***	Heaviest****
Protestant	13%	8%	40%	38%
Catholic	9	7	47	36
Jewish	-	-	48	45
Other	12	7	40	39
None	8	16	39	42
Evangelical	15	10	40	34

** Online for less than two years and online for two years but do not go online daily.*
*** Online for three years but do not go online daily and online for two years and go online from home daily.*
**** Online at least four years but do not go online from home daily and those online for three years and go online from home daily.*
***** Online for at least four years and go online daily.*
Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%..

Does a person's spiritual profile matter online?

Respondents were further asked to identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious," "religious but not spiritual," "both spiritual and religious," or "neither spiritual nor religious" as a measure of identification with non-traditional religious practices. This question was designed to tap into the possibility that some people might wish to identify themselves as "spiritual" in contrast to the more conventional designation of "religious." Online religious seekers might be expected to be heavier Internet users who self-identify as spiritual but not religious.

Part 4. Overall Internet use among those who have different reasons for faith-related online activities

Internet User Types, Religion and Spirituality

Among the online faithful, those who are "spiritual but not religious" are slightly heavier Internet users

	Novice*	Middle**	Heavier***	Heaviest****
Spiritual, not religious	11	4	43	41
Religious, not spiritual	17	9	39	35
Religious and spiritual	10	10	42	37
Neither religious nor spiritual	6	15	26	51

** Online for less than two years and online for two years but do not go online daily.*
*** Online for three years but do not go online daily and online for two years and go online from home daily.*
**** Online at least four years but do not go online from home daily and those online for three years and go online from home daily.*
***** Online for at least four years and go online daily.*
Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%..

There appears to be a tendency for those who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious to be heavier Internet users than others, although the difference is rather small at about five percentage points. Consistent with the earlier finding, those who are neither spiritual nor religious are the heaviest Internet users.

It is notable that neither attendance, religious self-identification, nor the category of "spiritual but not religious" seem to have a clear relationship to Internet use. Nearly equal proportions among the various categories of religious behavior, identity, and belief are heavy users of the Internet (with the exception of the relatively small margin held by those who are "spiritual but not religious" over others in Internet use).

This is interesting because some have speculated that the Internet holds special appeal for those spiritual seekers looking for alternatives to conventional religious practice. If this were the case, we would expect such seekers (those who call themselves "spiritual but not religious") to be more involved Internet users. But these findings show no strong tendency in that direction.

Part 5.

Religiously-oriented Internet use among different religious and spiritual profiles

Church attendance is associated with online spiritual seeking.

There is no strong relationship between Internet use and religious self-identification with either Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Evangelical backgrounds, or no faith tradition. Yet interesting differences emerged when we looked for relationships between frequency of church attendance and the reasons that people go online for faith-related purposes.

Church Attendance and Internet Activities

Personal religious or spiritual activities are the most popular ones online

	Those who get religion news online	Those who use the Internet for personal religious and spiritual purposes	Those who use the Internet for institutional religious and spiritual reasons
Attend church at least once a week	39%	67%	51%
Once a month	36	56	45
Several times per year	27	50	26
Don't attend services	23	38	16

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents who attend religious services weekly or more report engaging in at least one of the more personally-oriented Internet behaviors. The most frequent church attenders are also the most likely to be interested in religion news. What is particularly interesting is that the personally-oriented behaviors – sending, receiving, forwarding spiritual or religious email, sending an e-greeting card, or making a prayer request online – are more popular than either the more institutional behaviors or news interest across all categories of attendance.

Earlier, we noted that we found no relationship between church attendance and overall Internet use. This means that it is not just those who are online more frequently who engage in these practices, but rather, these practices are appealing to people across all of our categories of religion and spirituality and across all levels of Internet use. We did see

some differences in the appeal of these practices among differing religious affiliations, but the differences were slight.

Denominations show some differences in online seeking activities.

Protestants are more likely than Catholics to seek out religion news, express their religious or spiritual beliefs personally, or engage in practices related to institutions of religion, and Evangelical Protestants were particularly likely to do these things. Sixty percent of Protestants and 69% of Evangelicals engage in the more personal behaviors, while fewer Catholics report doing so. Jews are more interested in religion news than Protestants in general, but Evangelicals show the highest level of interest in religion news among Protestants.

Religious Identification and Internet Activities

Evangelicals and other Protestants are the most involved in the personally-oriented online activities

	Those who get religion news online	Those who use the Internet for personal religious and spiritual purposes	Those who use the Internet for institutional religious and spiritual reasons
Protestant	35%	60%	41%
Catholic	32	51	34
Jewish	38	54	54
Other	28	55	37
None	22	29	12
Evangelical	41	69	49

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%

Faith profiles make a difference in spiritually-related Internet use.

What about the persons who self-identified as "spiritual but not religious?" Are they more likely than others to engage in the more personally-oriented religious or spiritual behaviors online?

Clearly, the spiritual but not religious online "seekers" are more likely to employ the Internet for personal religious or spiritual behaviors than to go online for either news or for reasons related to religious institutions. Yet what is particularly interesting is that when we compare this group with those who consider themselves both spiritual and religious, those who are *both* spiritual *and* religious are more likely by 15 percentage points to engage in personal religious/spiritual behaviors.

Part 5. Religiously-oriented Internet use among different religious and spiritual profiles

These findings suggest that some of the conventional wisdom about the Internet's role in fostering religious "seeking" may be misguided. To elaborate on what was said earlier regarding assumptions about those who were thought to use the Internet for spiritual seeking, we might have expected that the demographic categories most involved with the Internet—higher educated, higher income, and non-minorities—would be the most likely to eschew traditional religion and engage in spiritual "seeking" online.

Instead, the results of this survey seem to point in another direction. While the Internet does provide a range of opportunities for individuals to express themselves in religious or spiritual terms, these online behaviors seem to be as much a part of the online experience for those *within* traditional categories of religious self-identification as *beyond* them.

Religion, Spirituality and Internet Activities

Those who are spiritual and religious are the most likely to use the Internet for personal religious or spiritual purposes

	Those who get religion news online	Those who use the Internet for personal religious and spiritual purposes	Those who use the Internet for institutional religious and spiritual reasons
Spiritual, not religious	34%	51%	31%
Spiritual, not religious	22	42	26
Religious and spiritual	36	66	47
Neither	13	28	10

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

Part 6.

Online religious "seeking"

Deep connections to church matter to the online faithful as they seek spiritual material on the Internet.

One potential difference we have not yet explored is whether or not online spiritual "seekers" are more likely than those in traditional religious organizations to seek out information about a variety of religions.

People who attend religious services most frequently are more likely than others to seek information online about religion. They are also more likely to seek information about their own religion online than they are to seek information about other religions. This is not surprising, as we might expect that those who attend religious services most frequently would be more loyal to and interested in their own traditions than in the traditions of others. Similarly, those who attend less frequently are more likely to seek out information about other religions rather than information about their own.

This means that less frequent church attenders do express interest in other religions. At the same time, though, those who attend most frequently are somewhat more likely than others to seek out information about religions other than their own, making them more interested in *all* religions than those who attend less frequently. This undermines the notion that online "seeking" of information about *other* religions would be more exclusively a practice among less frequent attenders of offline religious services. There are also a few patterns of the relationship between "seeking" and religious self-identification that are worth noting.

Church Attendance and Seeking Information About Other Religions and One's Own Faith

Frequent attenders are more interested than others in online information about religion

	Seek information about own religion	Seek information about other religions
Attend church at least once a week	37%	30%
Once a month	25	21
Several times per year	20	28
Don't attend services	15	17

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

Part 6. Online religious "seeking"

The survey found that those who attend religious services less frequently were actually *less* likely to seek information on other traditions for their own growth (only 13% reported that reason for doing so), and more likely to say that they looked at information on other traditions just to find out about them (61%). Thus, those who are less frequent attenders also seem to be less interested in religious and spiritual practices in general than those who attend religious services more frequently.

Church Attendance and Seeking Practices

The most frequent attenders are the most likely to seek material about others' faiths to help them in their own faith journeys.

	Seek information about other faiths for personal growth	Seek information about other faiths just to find out about them	Both
Attend church at least once a week	16%	42%	36%
Once a month	8	74	11
Several times per year	13	61	26
Don't attend services	9	56	33

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

This is consistent with the recent research of sociologists Penny Long Marler and Kirk Hadaway. They have argued that the trend in U.S. religion is not in a change from an orientation to religious traditions to a "seeker" orientation outside of those traditions, but for those *within* religious traditions to be more "seeker" oriented and those *outside* of such traditions to be less interested in religion or spirituality altogether. Thus, Internet users who are not involved in religious organizations are less likely to be "seekers" who are finding new forms of religion on the Internet, and more likely to be as uninterested in religion online as they are offline.

Denomination makes a difference.

Catholics are the least likely to go online for information about religion either about their own tradition or about the traditions of others. Among both Protestants and Catholics, equal percentages report looking online for information about their own faith and that of others. Both Jews and Evangelicals reported more interest in looking for information about their own religion than for information about other religions. Those who profess no religious identification are — not surprisingly — more likely to seek information about other religions.

Part 6. Online religious "seeking"

Religious Identification and Religious Information Seeking

Catholics are the least interested in online information about either their own faith or the faiths of others

	Seek information about own religion	Seek information about other religions
Protestant	30%	29%
Catholic	20	19
Jewish	38	30
Other	38	27
None	27	37
Evangelical	36	33

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

What they seek often depends on the nature of their spirituality.

Those who are spiritual but not religious report a slightly greater tendency to look online for information about faiths other than their own, but a higher percentage of those who self-identify as both spiritual and religious seek information about the faiths of others.

Faith Profiles and Online Information

Those who are "spiritual and religious" are the most interested in online information about both their own faith and the faiths of others

	Seek information about own religion	Seek information about other religions
Spiritual but not religious	22%	26%
Religious but not spiritual	23	17
Religious and spiritual	34	29
Neither	15	19

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

We therefore looked at whether or not these two groups reported different reasons for why they sought out information on the traditions of others. One might expect that those who self-identified as "spiritual but not religious" would be more likely to say that they sought out information on other religious traditions for their own growth, rather than just to find out about those other traditions.

Part 6. Online religious "seeking"

The survey found that those who self-identified as "spiritual but not religious" and those who said that they were both spiritual and religious seemed to seek information on other traditions for their own growth in about equal proportions. Like those who were both spiritual and religious, the majority of those who called themselves "spiritual but not religious" reported going online for information about others' beliefs "just to find out." We then wondered whether those who attended religious services less frequently might be more interested in seeking out information on others' traditions for their own growth.

Faith profiles and the Reasons for Online Seekers to Get Information about Other Religions

Those who are "spiritual but not religious" are more likely to seek information about other religious "just to find out about them" rather than for their own spiritual growth

	Seek information about other faiths for personal growth	Seek information about other faiths just to find out about them	Both
Spiritual but not religious	15%	57%	26%
Religious but not spiritual	-	81	19
Religious and spiritual	15	45	35
Neither	-	82	18

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%. .

Where you live seems to make a difference in what you seek.

Previous research by the Pew Internet & American Life Project has shown interesting ways that urban and rural Internet users differ. The next two tables explore these differences with reference to online religious/spiritual activities and online "seeking."

Community Type and Faith Online

Rural Internet users are more interested in information about their own faith

	Seek information about own religion	Seek information about other religions
Rural	25%	19%
Suburban	30	28
Urban	26	27

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

Part 6. Online religious "seeking"

The survey found that a higher percentage of rural Internet users engage in the more personal religious/spiritual online activities than suburban and urban users. This may be explained in part by the fact that a higher percentage of rural residents identify as Evangelicals when compared with those who live in suburban or rural areas. The table above considers the reasons urban and rural users give to explain their motivation for going online for religious information.

Rural residents are much less likely to go online for information about other religions than are their urban and suburban cohorts.

Why the Online Faithful in Different Areas Get Religious Material

Rural Internet users are more likely to seek out information about other faiths "just to find out about them"

	Seek information about other faiths for personal growth	Seek information about other faiths just to find out about them	Both
Rural	30%	61%	35%
Suburban	32	53	36
Urban	33	54	37

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Nov. 18- Dec. 14, 2003 survey. N=1,358 Internet users. Margin of error is ±3%.

Part 7.

Conclusions

These findings provide insight into the relationship between religion and the Internet. First, this report calls into question the presumption that there is a widespread practice of online religious "seeking" among those who are outside of traditional religions. The study found some evidence that there were people who did use the Internet to find information about traditions other than their own, but "seeking" is clearly a relatively minor phenomenon when compared with the broader range of religious beliefs and behaviors that are expressed online. Second and on a related note, the study found evidence that the online environment is facilitating interactions of a religious or spiritual nature for a variety of people who are actively engaged in traditional religious contexts and bodies.

This second point is actually the bigger and more interesting story. The study found that those we have termed the "online faithful" are not using the Internet solely to learn about or interact with others within their own faith groups, nor are they using the Internet primarily to facilitate congregational business. Members of this group are most interested in using the Internet to express their own personal religious or spiritual beliefs (as measured in this study by the passing along of religious or spiritual emails, the sending of e-greeting cards, and the soliciting of prayer requests). To a lesser extent, they are also interested in seeking information about their own traditions and about the traditions of others.

The subset of the "online faithful" that have self-identified as Evangelical are even more likely to engage in these personal expressions of faith than those from other religious traditions. They are even more likely to seek information about traditions other than their own. Across the board, those who regularly attend religious services use the Internet for religious and spiritual purposes more frequently than those who attend religious services less regularly.

Rather than providing a safe haven for religious experimentation for those disaffected from religious traditions, therefore, the Internet seems to be fostering the development of religious and spiritual practices that are nonetheless at some distance from the traditions of organized religion. These practices are more personally expressive and more individually oriented and, consistent with contemporary research on trends in American religion, they are more likely to take place among those who have a commitment to traditional religious organizations than among those outside of those traditions.

There are several potential implications to these findings. It is possible that those currently affiliated with religious institutions will maintain a foothold in both the online and offline worlds, remaining loyal to their offline affiliations while also continuing to

use the Internet for more personal expressions of their faith. On the other hand, we may see an integration occur between the two, with offline traditions becoming more personally oriented and online practices more fully recognized and integrated into the lives of religious organizations and traditions.

While the practices of the online faithful may not result in a distinct social reality, it is clear that the online seeking and networking that we see evidence of here are serving to exacerbate the ongoing challenges that are currently faced by what we think of as traditional religion. It may be that as individuals come to exercise more and more autonomy in matters of faith, the Internet may then come to play an increasingly important role in providing resources for seeking that takes them outside of formal religious traditions. What will result remains to be seen.

Methodology

This Pew Internet & American Life Project report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet and an online survey about Internet health resources.

Telephone interviews were conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates between November 18 and December 14, 2003, among a sample of 2,013 adults, 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,358) the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 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.

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid "listing" bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. Additionally, the sample was released in replicates to make sure that the telephone numbers called are distributed appropriately across regions of the country. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at every household in the sample. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Interview refusals were re-contacted at least once in order to try again to complete an interview. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day. The overall response rate was 31.3%.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (March 2003). This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.