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Mobile phones to be primary Internet device by 2020, experts predict

The Web will not increase social tolerance, despite increased exposure to different cultures according to Pew Internet & American Life Project

By [Jon Brodkin](#), Network World, 12/15/2008

By 2020, [mobile phones](#) will be the primary Internet devices for most people in the world, according to a panel of experts, who also predict that Web technologies will probably not lead to increased social tolerance.

“The mobile phone – now with significant computing power – [will be] the primary Internet connection and the only one for a majority of the people across the world,” the Pew Internet & American Life Project writes in a new “[Future of the Internet](#)” report. “Telephony [will be] offered under a set of universal standards and protocols accepted by most operators internationally, making for reasonably effortless movement from one part of the world to another.”

Nearly four out of five experts agreed with this scenario, according to an online Pew survey which formed the basis of the report. Pew surveyed 578 leading Internet activists, builders and commentators, identified through various technology associations as well as an “extensive canvassing of scholarly, government and business documents from the period 1990-1995 to see who had ventured predictions about the future impact of the Internet.” A few of the experts polled were [Nicholas Carr](#), author of the Rough Type blog and The Big Switch; Havi Hoffman of the Yahoo Developer Network; Michael Botein, founding director of the Media Law Center at New York University Law School; and several members of the [ICANN](#) board.

The experts were asked if wider exposure to different groups through the Web will significantly advance social tolerance by 2020, leading to declining violence, sectarian strife and overt acts of bigotry and hate crimes.

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Only 32% of experts agreed that the Web will bring about greater social tolerance, while 56% disagreed. “A number of the survey participants indicated that the divide between the tolerant and intolerant could possibly be deepened because of information-sharing tactics people use on the Internet,” Pew writes.

Social tolerance is “not in mankind’s nature,” Pew was told by survey respondent Adam Peake, policy analyst for the Center for Global Communications. “The first global satellite link-up was 1967, BBC’s Our World: the Beatles ‘All You Need Is Love,’ and we still have war, genocide, and assassination (Lennon’s poignantly).”

In addition to the 578 experts, Pew surveyed another 618 respondents who are helping build the Web but aren't necessarily considered experts or opinion leaders. Poll results were similar in the expert and non-expert groups.

Here are some other results from the Pew report:

* 55% of experts say people will routinely interact in artificial spaces through virtual worlds and other types of "augmented reality." "Most well-equipped Internet users will spend some part of their waking hours – at work and at play – at least partially linked to augmentations of the real world or alternate worlds," Pew states. "This lifestyle involves seamless transitions between artificial reality, virtual reality, and the status formerly known as 'real life.'"

* Voice-activation and touch will be common technology interfaces by 2020, according to nearly two-thirds of experts. "Air-typing" will become common because of "a small handheld Internet appliance [that] allows you to display and use a full-size virtual keyboard on any flat surface for those moments when you would prefer not to talk aloud to your networked computer."

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* The current Internet architecture will not be replaced by a completely new system in 2020, but search, security and reliability will have been enhanced by next-generation research, 78% of experts agree. (Only 6% disagreed, and 16% did not respond).

* The lines between personal and professional time will be hard to identify, "and that's OK," in the view of 56% of Pew's experts.

* By 2020, people will be more open to sharing personal information, opinions and emotions because of Internet technology, but experts are split down the middle on whether this new transparency will heighten individual integrity and forgiveness.

* Six out of ten experts do not think strict content controls will be in place with copyright-protection technology by 2020.

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