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News Release

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Perceived online surveillance leads to self-censorship

More than half of Internet users in Switzerland are deterred from freely searching for information or expressing opinions on the Internet because they suspect that they are being surveilled. These are results from a representative survey conducted by the University of Zurich on Internet use in Switzerland.

People who use search engines or express their opinions on Facebook and WhatsApp leave behind many digital traces. Internet users believe that these traces are used for surveillance purposes. According to the UZH study, 43 percent of the 1,122 people surveyed believe that online surveillance is detrimental to society. In addition, a large proportion of Swiss Internet users (45 percent) is concerned that companies like Facebook are violating their privacy online. One consequence of this is that Internet users restrict themselves online: more than half state that the possible surveillance dissuades them from searching for information freely (59 percent) – e.g., researching sensitive political content – or from expressing opinions, interests or feelings (56 percent). "Chilling effects due to perceived surveillance are alarming from a democratic political point of view," emphasizes Michael Latzer, Professor of Media Change & Innovation at the University of Zurich. "They threaten the exercise of fundamental rights and social participation via the Internet."

Eight out of ten people in Switzerland use mobile Internet
The survey conducted by Michael Latzer and his team for the fifth time shows that in 2019, more people are online than 2017. 92 percent of the Swiss population use the Internet today, it is almost 100 percent of the under 50 year-olds. 80 percent of the total population also use mobile Internet. The average usage time has doubled since 2011 and now amounts to 25 hours per week. However, 40 percent of offliners benefit indirectly from the Internet by having others do research or tasks for them. The number of non-users has been more than halved in the last eight years. The absolute number of non-users (excluding proxy users) in Switzerland is thus around 340,000. On average, the self-evaluation of Internet users in Switzerland regarding their Internet skills has been relatively stable since 2011. Women rate their Internet usage skills as poorer compared to men.

Internet most important source for information and entertainment
In 2019, the Internet is the most important media source for information in Switzerland, followed by newspapers and television. For entertainment purposes, it now also ranks first ahead of television. One exception is the 70+ age group, for whom newspapers and radio are still more important.

Digital overuse and pressure
Among other things, digital overconsumption manifests itself in the fact that about a quarter (26 percent) of Internet users believe that they lose time for more important things by using the Internet. 24 percent report spending more time online than they actually want. 38 percent of Internet users in Switzerland feel that their private environment expects them to respond quickly to messages. About three

quarters of users (73 percent) feel this in their professional environment. Social digital pressure regarding availability and skills is perceived as stronger by the young and highly educated in particular. "With an overall high level of digital well-being in Switzerland, young people feel affected by overconsumption and pressure to meet expectations significantly more often," summarizes Michael Latzer. "But young people also engage in counter practices most frequently, such as switching off notifications on their smartphones, which is not least due to digital competence. 59 percent of users, but only 22 percent of non-users, affirm a feeling of belongingness to the information society. Younger Internet users and those with better usage skills feel more integrated into the information society.

One in three Swiss sells online
87 percent of Swiss Internet users search online for product information. 82 percent shop online, with travel bookings being particularly popular (71 percent). Over a third (36 percent) also sell online themselves. Sharing economy services such as Uber and Airbnb have grown significantly compared to 2017 and are used by 28 percent; 16 percent also actively offer such services themselves. The use of social online networks has increased sharply since 2011 (53 percent) (2019: 71 percent). Currently, the majority (69 percent) use them daily or several times a day. Younger people in particular make very strong use of such online social networking sites: 99 percent of 14- to 19-year-olds and 87 percent of 20- to 29-year-olds are use online social networking sites. Around 7 of 10 Internet users (72 percent) download music from the Internet or listen to music online. The most frequently used services are YouTube (51 percent) and Spotify (35 percent). Two thirds of Swiss Internet users (66 percent) report that they watch or download videos online. The most frequently used services are YouTube (63 percent) and Netflix (42 percent).

Trust in content declines – many use the Internet to check facts
Around 6 of 10 Swiss Internet users (63 percent) consider at least half of all Internet content to be credible. There is a significant decline in the evaluation of the trustworthiness of online content since 2013. Government and public authority websites, SRG websites and paid newspapers are considered to be mostly trustworthy. Sites of free newspapers and content on social networks are trusted less. The proportion of people who check facts on the Internet rose sharply between 2013 and 2017 and amounts to 71% in 2019.

Skepticism regarding digital democratization and e-voting
Overall, the Swiss population does not believe that the Internet will further improve the democratic quality of Switzerland's political system. Only a minority believe that citizens can have more say (21 percent) and more power (27 percent) through Internet use, that they understand politics better (39 percent), or that administration and politics take what they think more seriously (27 percent). Nevertheless, there is a tendency towards increasing confidence in digital democratization. Half of the Swiss population (51 percent) would welcome electronic voting, with people aged 70 and over being much more skeptical about e-voting than younger people. "The much-discussed security issues of previous e-voting systems haven an effect, but there is a potential here to increase the low turnout of young voters," says Michael Latzer.

World Internet Project

The World Internet Project (WIP) is a comparative longitudinal study that records the penetration and use of the internet in 30 countries in an international comparison and analyzes social, political, and economic implications of the development of the internet.

The Swiss WIP project has been carried out since 2011 by the Media Change & Innovation Division in the Institute of Communication and Media Research (IKMZ) at the University of Zurich under the leadership of Professor Michael Latzer. It is based on a representative telephone survey of 1,122 persons aged 14 or over and was carried out by DemoSCOPE in May/June 2019. The project team members include Moritz Büchi and Noemi Festic.

All of the reports by topic are available for download at **http://mediachange.ch/research/wip-ch-2019**.

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