

Young people propel rise in technology use among Hispanics

In recent years, Latinos have largely bridged the digital divide, to the point where their levels of connectivity sometimes exceed those of whites and blacks, according to a new study released Thursday from the Pew Hispanic Center.

The report, "Closing the Digital Divide: Latinos and Technology Adoption," found that between 2009 and 2012, the share of Latino adults going online rose 14 percentage points, to 78 percent. The rates for whites and blacks also rose, but less dramatically. And although whites were more likely in 2009 to own cellphones than Hispanics, the trend has reversed, with Latino cellphone ownership creeping up slightly past that of whites, to 86 percent.

The changes are likely due to the high percentage of young Latinos in the United States, said Mark Hugo Lopez, one of the report's authors. "Youth is really a driving factor here," he said, adding that young people across the board are more connected than older ones.

Latinos are more likely than whites to go online from a mobile device and are just as likely to own a smartphone. "This may reflect Latinos' youth," Lopez said, "but also that Latinos are using newer technologies more so than whites."

Researchers have found a strong correlation between connectivity and higher levels of income and education. Although Hispanic income levels have dipped since 2000, their rising education levels may also help explain the narrowing gap. Latinos who predominantly speak English or are bilingual were also more

connected than Spanish-dominant Latinos, the study found, and households that include children are more connected than those without. The lowest levels of connectivity were among the elderly.

Although whites are still more connected overall, Latinos now far exceed whites in using mobile devices to go online: 76 percent of Latinos vs. 60 percent of whites. The rate for blacks was 73 percent. That difference could also be age-related, said Audrey Singer, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "The smartphone is the new laptop," she said. "Younger people are more likely to be on the go, therefore less likely to be sitting at a desk using a computer. It's much more convenient and cheaper to use a device you can hold in one hand."

The digital divide has been a concern for school districts as more schools expect students to have online access off campus.

In 2010, 8 percent of Arlington, Va. public schools students reported that they had no computer at home, while 18 percent of immigrant students said they did not have one. Last year, the district began a computer lending program, distributing about 2,000 laptop and desktop computers to students who didn't have one at home.

In Northern Virginia's Fairfax County, where more than 90 percent of public school students have Internet access at home, the district last year began offering discounted loaner or free computer equipment, Internet access, and software to students who don't. Students can check out laptops from the library and may also bring mobile Internet devices, such as smartphones, to school.

But smartphones cannot replace more comprehensive online devices at home, said John Torre, a spokesman for Fairfax schools. "At home, stu-

dents who only have a smartphone to access the Internet would be at a disadvantage over those who have a laptop or a tablet with Internet access, . . . especially when it comes to writing papers or creating presentations."