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## Internet use and COVID-19: How the pandemic increased the amount of time Canadians spend online

by Howard Bilodeau, Abby Kehler and Nicole Minnema

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# Internet use and COVID-19: How the pandemic increased the amount of time Canadians spend online

by Howard Bilodeau, Abby Kehler and Nicole Minnema

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the behaviours of Canadians, particularly regarding their online activities. The Canadian Internet Use Survey, which was conducted from November 2020 to March 2021, found that 75% of Canadians 15 years of age and older engaged in various Internet-related activities more often since the onset of the pandemic. Additionally, almost half (48%) of Canadians reported performing at least one of various Internet-related activities for the first time during the pandemic.

Compared with other age groups, the trend of increased participation in online activities during the pandemic was most pronounced among younger Canadians, with over 90% of those 15 to 34 years of age indicating that they had done more activities online. Many senior citizens also engaged in more Internet-related activities during the pandemic, with more than half (54%) of Canadians 65 to 74 years of age reporting more online activities.

## Online activities for leisure purposes

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in Canadians using the Internet more than ever to stay connected with others, for entertainment purposes and to do their shopping. Over half (57%) of Canadians 15 years of age and older video-conferenced with family and friends more often since the start of the pandemic, the highest proportion among all Internet-related activities. These findings were also reflected in data for Great Britain from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, which found that 57% of individuals 16 years of age and older increased their use of video calls with family and friends during the pandemic. Using video conferencing services to communicate with family and friends was also the most frequently reported Internet-related activity that Canadians did for the first time during the pandemic (28%).

Canadians 25 to 34 years of age were the age group most likely to use video conferencing services more often during the pandemic (72%). Many senior citizens also increased their usage of these services, with over a quarter of those 65 years of age and older (29%) reporting that they used these services more often and 18% indicating that the pandemic was the first time they'd used these services.

Almost half of Canadians (48%) streamed video content, such as Netflix, Crave, news, concerts or fitness videos, more often since the start of the pandemic. Not unexpectedly, streaming video content more frequently was more prevalent among the younger population, with more than 60% of those 15 to 34 years of age indicating that they had done so.

Over one-fifth (21%) of Canadians reported that they ordered groceries online, either for delivery or pickup, more often since the start of the pandemic. Furthermore, 13% of Canadians ordered groceries online for the first time during the pandemic.

Excluding grocery purchases and subscriptions to meal delivery services, 45% of Canadians purchased other physical goods online more frequently compared to before the pandemic. This change was greatest among those 25 to 34 years of age (63%) and 35 to 44 years of age (60%) when compared with other age groups. In Great Britain, an even larger proportion of individuals 16 years of age and older made online purchases more frequently during the pandemic, with 32% reporting that they ordered groceries online more frequently and 54% reporting that they shopped online for other goods more often.



## Online activities related to work or school

With the closure of many workplaces and campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Internet has become an essential tool for employees and students. More than one-third (36%) of Canadians 15 years of age and older worked from home using the Internet more often than prior to the pandemic, with 12% doing so for the first time. Similarly, in Great Britain, 31% of individuals 16 years of age and older worked from home more often since the start of the pandemic.

Among employed Canadians, almost half (48%) worked from home using the Internet more often during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Employed Canadians 35 to 44 years of age were the age group that most frequently reported working from home more often during the pandemic, with over half (57%) doing so. Employed Canadians living in urban areas were also more likely to report working from home more often (51%) than those from rural areas (36%). In addition to telework, 7% of Canadians reported using the Internet more frequently to earn income than they did before the pandemic.

Completing online training or learning was another activity that many Canadians (29%) engaged in more often during the pandemic, particularly Canadians that were attending school (75%). Canadians living in urban areas were once again more likely to participate in online training or learning on a more frequent basis (31%) than those from rural areas (20%).

## Other demographic trends

The extent to which Canadians changed their Internet-related activities during the pandemic varied by geographic location. Four-fifths (80%) of Ontarians engaged in at least one Internet-related activity more often since the start of the pandemic, the highest among all provinces. Conversely, the Atlantic provinces reported the lowest percentage (66%) for increased Internet-related activities.<sup>2</sup> More than three-quarters (77%) of Canadians from urban areas reported that they performed more Internet-related activities since the onset of the pandemic, compared with 66% of Canadians in rural areas.

Canadians with a university degree were more likely to increase Internet-related activities during the pandemic (90%) than Canadians with some post-secondary education (75%) and high-school or less education (62%). Canadians with knowledge of both English and French were also more likely to engage in Internet-related activities more often since the start of the pandemic (83%) than those with knowledge of only English (76%) and French (50%).

Close to three-quarters of both male (74%) and female (77%) Canadians reported performing Internet-related activities more often since the start of the pandemic. The trend of similar proportions for males and females was also consistent among the various types of Internet-related activities.

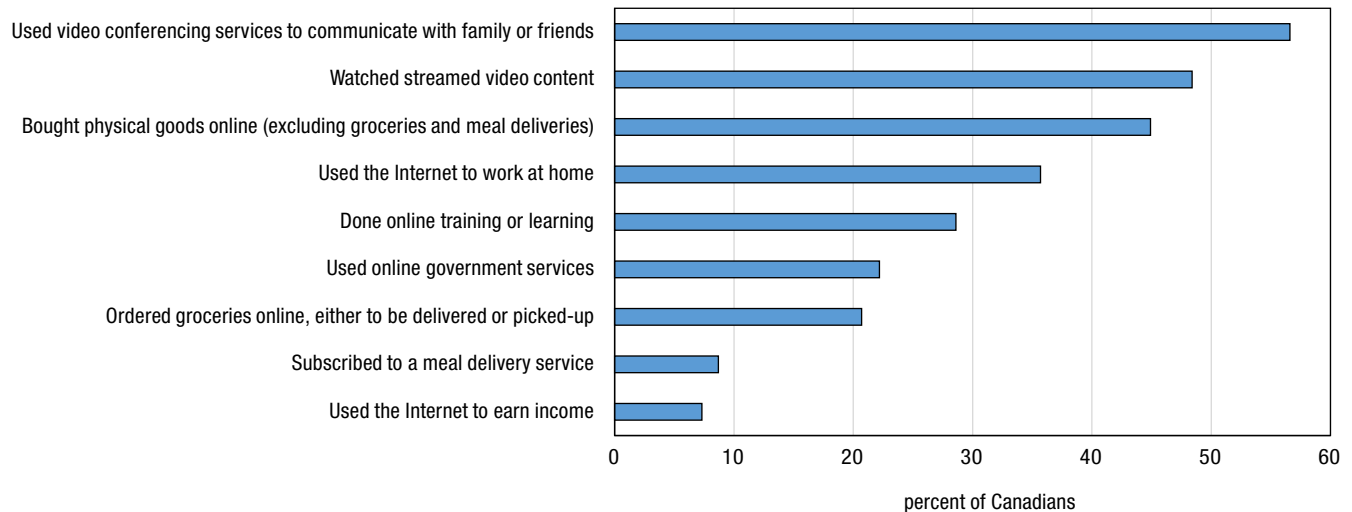
1. Respondents were considered employed if they worked at a job or business in the week prior to completing the survey.

2. The Atlantic provinces include Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.



**Chart 1**  
**Internet-related activities performed more often compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada, 2020**

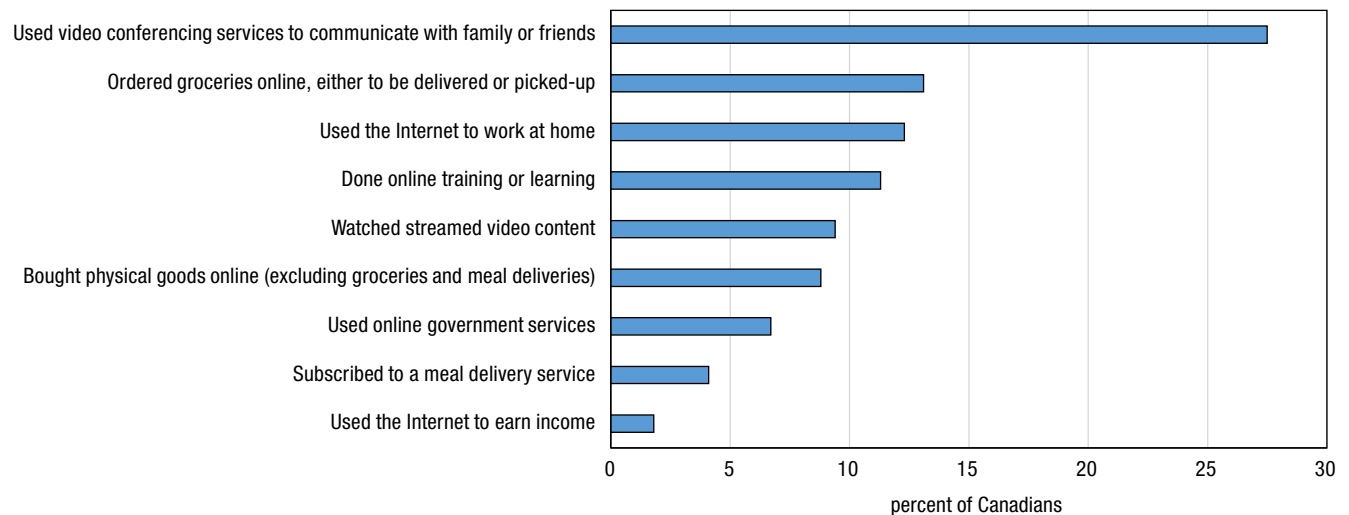
Internet-related activities



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2020.

**Chart 2**  
**Internet-related activities performed for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada, 2020**

Internet-related activities



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2020.



## Methodology

Canadian data come from the 2020 Canadian Internet Use Survey (CIUS), which was sponsored by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada and conducted by Statistics Canada. Data for the 2020 CIUS were collected from a sample of approximately 44,800 Canadians living in the 10 provinces of Canada from November 2020 to March 2021.

Two questions were added to the 2020 iteration of the CIUS in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first asked if Canadians engaged in various Internet-related activities more often, less often or about the same compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. The second asked if Canadians performed the same Internet-related activities for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data for Great Britain come from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) for the period of March 10 to 14, 2021. The OPN is conducted by the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics. Data from the OPN were included in this article since the OPN has COVID-19 pandemic-related questions which are most similar to those from the CIUS when compared with other surveys conducted by national statistical offices.

Since March 2020, the OPN has collected data on a weekly basis, with content largely focusing on topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The content of the survey is a combination of fixed questions that appear on multiple iterations, and rotating questions, such as those included in this article. The survey population includes individuals 16 years of age and older living in Great Britain, from which a sample of about 6,000 individuals is selected to participate in the survey every week. For further information on the methodology and sampling strategy of the OPN, see [Office for National Statistics 2021](#).

## Bibliography

Office for National Statistics. 2021. [Dataset: Change in behaviours during and after the coronavirus pandemic](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/datasets/changeinbehavioursduringandafterthecoronaviruspandemic), Office for National Statistics, Newport, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/datasets/changeinbehavioursduringandafterthecoronaviruspandemic> (accessed June 7th, 2021).

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