

MEDIA & ICT CONSUMPTION TRENDS

“VIRUSES AND SURVEILLANCE BIGGEST THREATS ON THE INTERNET”

The idea about the internet as an utopian space with free information and safe access for everyone is, unfortunately, not correct. Digital networks are the backbone of our society and economy, but they struggle with vulnerabilities and become increasingly subject to events of cybercrime. Hence, the topic of cyber security has become much more prominent in contemporary academic and policy debates.

In collaboration with iMinds-CiTIP-KUL, and in the context of the BELSPO BBC project, iMinds-MICT-UGent researchers surveyed internet users about their knowledge of, experience with and attitudes towards cyber security and its threats. A sample of 1,033 people, representative to the overall Belgian population, participated to our study. The Belgian National Cyber Security Strategy will implement the results of the study when developing campaigns aiming to sensitise Internet users to all aspects of cybercrime.

Perceived safety of online activities and precautionary actions

According to the results, people tend to perceive traditional online activities, such as retrieving information, consulting news websites and checking e-mail programmes as overly safe, whereas downloading, social media and online gaming are found the least safe. Internet users try to protect themselves from possible threats by installing anti-virus software (54%) and by avoiding risk-enhancing activities such as online banking (49%). 47% of the respondents adjust settings (privacy settings, spam filters); one fifth of all users indicate a reduce of internet use as a result of cybercrime. 44% of the sample claim to take at least three measures to prevent themselves from cyber threats.

Occurrence and perceived severity of different types of cybercrime

Viruses remain the biggest threats in terms of occurrence: no less than 40% of all respondents state they have been victim of at least one virus last year. Other forms of severe cybercrime include corporate surveillance (39%), governmental surveillance (25%), inappropriate content and/or conduct (18%), hacking (11%) and scams (9%). Remarkably, most events of cybercrime remain unnoticed by official instances: 42% and 57% of the population has reported scams and hacking events respectively, this figure drops substantially for viruses (15%) and corporate surveillance (10%).

In contrast, hacking (4.59/5) and scams (4.56/5) are perceived the most severe forms of cybercrime. These threats are followed by viruses (4.36/5), inappropriate content and/or conduct (4.29/5) and corporate surveillance (4.23/5). Governmental surveillance is, unsurprisingly perhaps, is considered the least serious internet crime (3.93/5), and is said to cause the victims the least damage in financial terms.

The results suggest there is a long road ahead when it comes to raising awareness about the threat of different forms of cybercrime than one can encounter. Most people tend to associate cybercrime with viruses and hacking, but are hardly aware of the purposes and consequences of other types of cybercrime. This means there is a lot of work to do in terms of prevention and sensitisation with regard to cybercrime and how to prevent against it.

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**There is a long road ahead
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awareness about the threat
of cybercrime**



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Media & ICT Consumption Trends is a partnership between iMinds Research Center Media & ICT (iMinds-MICT) and digital research institute iMinds. The project seeks to provide an overview of academic research in Flemish media and internet consumption, and links insights into transforming audiences to the current challenges for the Flemish media industries. It therefore combines results from original user-driven innovation research with conclusions from international studies and technology trends reports.

Series Editors: Tom Evens, Bart Vanhaelewyn and Lieven De Marez

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Research Center **Media & ICT (iMinds-MICT)** is affiliated to Ghent University, part of the Flemish digital research center and business incubator iMinds, and forms, together with SMIT and CUO, the research department iMinds-Digital Society. The context and focus of MICT's research is today's digital society and innovation economy, and more specifically the changes and challenges that are imposed by that environment for each of its stakeholders: industry, policy makers and, not the least, end-users.

iMinds is Flanders' digital research center and business incubator, established by the Flemish government in 2004. Building on the expertise of our 850+ top researchers located at 5 Flemish universities, it introduces digital innovation in 6 key markets including Media, ICT and Smart Cities. iMinds collaborates with research partners to convert digital knowhow into real-life products and services that change people's lives for the better. Key asset is an agile, open research mind set and proven methodology.
