

Muslims who go online see U.S. culture in better light

by [Omar Sacirbey](#) in the [June 26, 2013](#) issue

Want Muslims to have a better opinion of the United States? Get them on the Internet.

That would seem to be the lesson from an analysis released May 31 by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. The study found that Muslims who use the Internet are much more likely to see similarities between Islam and Christianity and have favorable views of Western music, film, and television.

But in a survey of roughly 38,000 Muslims in 39 countries and territories, just 18 percent said they used the Internet. Online use was as low as 2 percent in Afghanistan, compared to 56 percent in Kosovo, an autonomous region in Serbia.

The new analysis supplements a larger Pew report on global Muslims released April 30.

Internet users in the countries surveyed tended to be younger, better educated and male, but even Muslims who were not in these categories were more likely to see Muslim-Christian commonalities and view Western culture favorably if they were online.

On the question of similarities between Islam and Christianity, the differences between Internet users and nonusers was most pronounced in Pakistan, where 35 percent of Internet users saw similarities, compared to only 7 percent of nonusers. The differences were also significant in Iraq (a 19-point spread) and Senegal and Niger (both 16 points). The differences were much less significant in other countries, and even inverted in Morocco.

On the question of Western culture, differences in opinion between Muslim Internet users and nonusers were much wider. This is especially true in Kyrgyzstan, where Internet users are 35 percentage points more likely to have a positive view of Western entertainment, Senegal (32 points), Russia (32 points) and Indonesia and

Tajikistan (both 31 points).

Yet among Muslims who used the Internet and those who didn't, there was no difference in religious certainty, the analysis said, as majorities in most countries surveyed said there is only one true way to interpret Islam and that only Islam leads to eternal life.

"Internet use does not always mean more openness," said Neha Sahgal, a senior researcher at the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life who drafted the analysis.

—RNS