AMERICANS: ON THE INTERNET, PEOPLE DO TOO KNOW YOU'RE A DOG

Back in 1993, cartoonist Peter Steiner famously captured a largely

y held belief about the Internet: "On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog."

According to a fascinating new study from Pew, that's no longer true.

> Just 24% of adults "agree" (20%) or "strongly agree" (3%) with the statement: "It is easy for me to be anonymous when I am online." By contrast, 74% "disagree" (52%) or "strongly disagree" (22%) that it is easy for them to be anonymous.

The poll suggests this is partly because of coverage of government spying, and partly because of corporate spying.

I find two other things about this most interesting. First, the demographics on the specific answers are very fascinating. Just as one example, more affluent people are more likely to check how they come up on Internet searches.

> Self-searching activity varies greatly
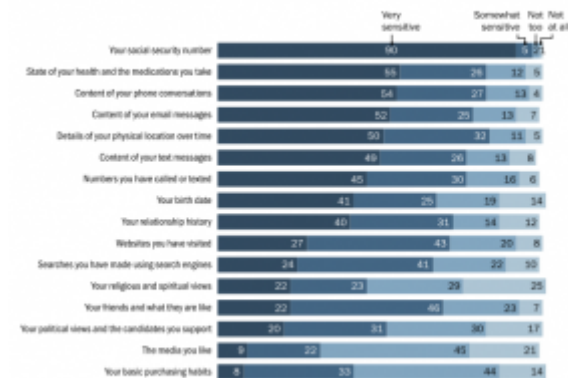
> across different groups, particularly by
> age, income, and household education.
> Adults under the age of 50 are far more
> likely to be "self-searchers" than those
> ages 50 and older, and adults with
> higher levels of household income and
> education stand out as especially likely
> to check up on their own digital
> footprints.

But I can imagine that's because they live more
of their life online (and they're more apt to
use things like Linked In to apply for jobs).
There are also demographic differences in what
people find sensitive (see differences in
sensitivity about email content at 50, for
example). Again, that may reflect the degree to
which these tools are available, and therefore
are likely to include sensitive communications.

The other thing, however, is that people appear
far less worried about metadata than they should
be. I get why people are almost universally
worried about social security privacy — and this
likely reflects the fact that the most immediate
threat to everyone is identity theft, not
government spying or abuse from Google. But in
both government and commercial hands, metadata
have become more revealing than content.
Respondents don't seem to worry about it though.