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Mark G. Alessi^a & Craig A. Miller^a

^a Illinois Natural History Survey, Prairie Research Institute, University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois, USA

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Internet Use by Illinois Hunters: Ten Years After

MARK G. ALESSI AND CRAIG A. MILLER

Illinois Natural History Survey, Prairie Research Institute, University of Illinois,
Champaign, Illinois, USA

Recruitment, often defined by the creation of new members, is necessary to preserve a population and a species. In the case of hunter recruitment, state wildlife agencies are concerned with increasing the accessibility of information to interested stakeholders—in this case the younger generation—who may rely on technology for gathering information (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Tapscott, 1998).

We compared demographic data from the 2000–2001 Illinois hunter harvest survey ($n = 2,142$, response rate = 74%; see Miller, 2003) to the 2010–2011 Illinois hunter harvest survey ($n = 1,628$, response rate = 56%; see Alessi, Campbell, & Miller, 2011). Both surveys included questions on Internet use. We conducted Chi-square analyses and measured effect sizes using Cramer's V (Vaske, 2008). We also compared mean age of hunters using independent samples t -tests and measured effect sizes using Cohen's d (Vaske, 2008).

There were significant differences in the age distribution of hunters between the 2000–2001 and 2010–2011 datasets; the proportion of hunters in the 32–49 years of age category had decreased 10% and the 50–66 years of age category increased 10% ($\chi^2 = 58.18$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .13$, Table 1). Hunters from the 2000–2001 study were significantly younger ($M = 46$ years of age) than hunters in the 2010–2011 study ($M = 49$ years of age, $t = 4.97$, $df = 3,717$, $p < .001$, $d = .16$).

Eighteen percent of hunting licenses and/or habitat stamps were purchased online during the 2010–2011 season through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources website, compared to 7% who used the website to purchase a hunting license in 2000–2001 (Miller, 2003). Of those who purchased their licenses on the Internet, 72% were 32–66 years of age ($\chi^2 = 24.44$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .12$). The proportion of hunters who purchased their licenses online decreased significantly with age (<32: 21%, 32–49: 20%, 50–66: 16%, >66: 6%). Internet purchasers were significantly younger ($M = 45$ years of age) than non-Internet purchasers ($M = 50$ years of age, $t = 4.25$, $df = 1,585$, $p < .001$, $d = .21$).

In the 2010–2011 survey, 77% of the hunters had a computer in their residence, and of these, 98% also had access to the Internet. Among the hunters that did have a computer, 71% were between the ages of 32 and 66 years of age. The proportion of hunters who had a computer at home decreased significantly with age ($\chi^2 = 160.57$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .32$). Eighty-nine percent of hunters younger than 32 years of age had a computer, whereas 48% of hunters older than 66 had a computer at home.

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Address correspondence to Mark G. Alessi, Illinois Natural History Survey, 1816 S. Oak Street, Champaign, IL 61820, USA. E-mail: mgalessi@gmail.com

Table 1
Comparison of the age distribution between hunters in
2000–2001 and 2010–2011 in Illinois

Age	Year		χ^2	<i>p</i>	<i>V</i>
	2000–2001	2010–2011			
<32	19%	18%	58.176	<.001	.125
32–49	39	29			
50–66	29	39			
>66	14	15			

Past research suggested a positive relationship between annual income levels and use of the Internet (Miller, 2003). A similar relationship existed in the 2010–2011 data; hunters with higher household incomes were more likely to purchase their license online ($\chi^2 = 77.38$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .24$). For example, 13% of hunters who responded to the 2010–2011 survey had annual household incomes of less than \$20,000, and only 4% of hunters in this category purchased their license online during the prior year. Thirty-one percent of hunters who earned between \$100,000–150,000 purchased their licenses online during the 2010–2011 seasons.

State wildlife agencies perceive a need to offer stakeholders the ability to view information and purchase licenses through the Internet. Despite a 157% (7% in 2000 to 18% in 2010) increase in the proportion of hunters who purchased their licenses online during the past 10 years in Illinois, the overall proportion of hunters who purchase their licenses online remains small. The majority of hunters in Illinois are not utilizing the Internet to purchase their license. It is important that managers continue to offer these aging hunters the ability to purchase their hunting licenses at retail stores in Illinois.

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