

Archives

[Google Groups](#)

This is the largest Usenet archive. Make sure to adjust from “my groups” to “all groups” in the search bar. Due to the large volume of posts, it is important to limit searches to specific groups and set date ranges. Much of the more recent spam is racist or otherwise upsetting.

[Usenet newsgroup search](#)

One way to find specific newsgroups is to enter keywords into a Usenet search engine. This one displays estimates for newsgroups’ sizes, which can be helpful: many newsgroups sat inactive, so it takes time to find the active hubs of discussion.

[Internet Archive Usenet Historical Collection](#)

The Internet Archive, a nonprofit organization, has preserved this private collection of Usenet posts. It spans thirty years and is quite extensive. To use it, begin by locating the newsgroup of interest in the archive, then download the mbox files. (Since these files can only be read by e-mail clients, it may be necessary to use an mbox-to-pdf converter.) These files can be large and unwieldy.

[Usenet Archives](#)

This is large Usenet database run by hobbyists. While the website is more user-friendly than the Google Groups archive, search is often slow. The website is currently being moved to a different database, however, so this may change.

[FAQ Archives](#)

This website gathers FAQs; “frequently asked questions” posts that helped new users learn the norms and expectations of a given newsgroup. FAQs reveal the concerns and forms of consensus that arose on newsgroups. This website allows for keyword searching, but the newsgroup index is often more helpful.

[Transgender Usenet Archive](#)

Begun by researcher Avery Dame-Griff, this archive gathers over 400 000 posts shared between 1994 and 2013 to six specific newsgroups, each focused on issues pertaining to transgender or gender-nonconforming identities. The archive can be downloaded in formats suitable for computational processing but is difficult to navigate for researchers who are not accustomed to these formats.

Scholarship

Brunton, Finn. *Spam: A Shadow History of the Internet*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013.

This is a cultural history of spam, from pranks on early computer networks to contemporary criminal infrastructures. Brunton offers an account of Eternal September and explains the social norms on early Usenet in the second chapter (especially pages 34-48), which contrast the neatly circumscribed rules of military-academic ARPANET with the “Wild West” that was 1990s Usenet.

Coning, Alexis de. "A 'Lifetime of Indentured Servitude:' Rights, Labor, and Gender Anxieties in a Dead Men's Rights Newsgroup." *Internet Histories* 6, no. 1–2 (2022): 223–36.

This article examines Usenet through the lens of "platform death" – Usenet is no longer popular, and the men's rights group where users posted about their gender anxieties in the 1994 to 2002 period the author studies is now inactive. The article shows that a focus on Usenet's inactivity is might lead to the misleading conclusion that the discourse that developed there has died down as well. In the case of men's rights discussions, which have not only continued but also radicalized and grown explosively, the limitations of platform-focused responses to online misogyny are especially striking.

Dame-Griff, Avery. "Herding the 'Performing Elephants:' Using Computational Methods to Study Usenet." *Internet Histories* 3, no. 3–4 (2019): 223–44.

This article reflects on the author's experience archiving Usenet posts and preparing them for computational analysis. It offers a cogent "what was Usenet?" section and highlights three challenges for the historian: accounting for the different platforms and interfaces through which users could access Usenet, contextualizing newsgroups within their contemporaneous topic-specific discursive sphere, and accounting for the ethical concerns of working with message metadata.

Dame-Griff, Avery. *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet*. New York: NYU Press, 2023.

This book examines the transgender internet from its 1980s origins to the present. The third chapter, entitled "Politics and 'Petty Useless Bickering': Transgender Usenet and the Emergence of 'Cisgender,'" reflects on Usenet in particular. It draws on an extensive archive of Usenet posts, which the author has made available for others via the [Queer Digital History Project](#), to trace the emergence of a particular vocabulary to express transness as a personal and political identity.

Dibbell, Julian. "A Rape in Cyberspace: How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database Into a Society." *The Village Voice*, December 23, 1993.
http://web.archive.org/web/20030203120248/http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle_vv.html

This journalistic account of a 1993 dispute in a small networked community – how to respond to one user's online rape of another? – has become a germinal text. It laid out how users on a MUD, short for multi-user-dungeon, considered this online domain as a place that stood apart from real-life concerns. The appearance of gendered violence in this domain necessitated the elaboration of norms, expectations, and methods of punishment or censorship. The article made a powerful point against "cyberspace" as a wholly new world and its account of this particular incident foreshadows the rise of moderation as a key question for online communities.

Fidler, Bradley. "Eternal October and the End of Cyberspace." *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* 39, no. 1 (2017): 6–7.

This short piece grapples with the internet of October 2016 – the Trump election, buoyed in part by the interests of large social media corporations – through September 1992, or “Eternal September” in 1990s Usenet parlance. If Eternal September marked the end of a “cyberspace” where all norms could be set anew, so does October 2016, which the author takes as a definitive sign that online life is subject to the same problems, challenges, and social norms as real-world “civilization.”

Fisher, Danyel, and Christopher Lueg. “Appendix: Studying Online Newsgroups.” In *From Usenet to CoWebs: Interacting with Social Information Spaces*, edited by Christopher Lueg and Danyel Fisher, 253–60. London: Springer, 2003.

This appendix to an edited volume about Usenet and collaborate web spaces offers readers an overview of Usenet’s basic structure and workings. It explains how posts move across the network, what posts looked like in a Usenet client (i.e. before Deja or Google Groups), and how a 2003 researcher might go about gathering data. The short length makes this a particularly accessible explainer.

Grosse, Meghan. “Laying the Foundation for a Commercialized Internet: International Internet Governance in the 1990s.” *Internet Histories* 4, no. 3 (2020): 271–86.

This article argues that the Clinton Administration projected a concern for an open, global internet while in actuality, the Administration pursued a U.S.-centric approach to governance that prioritized commercial interests. By the mid to late 1990s, the internet was global and American corporations got to set the agenda. The priorities that won out in this era are ones that continue to shape the contours of internet governance to this day, especially in the treatment of the internet as a technologically neutral tool that could be carried around the world and across national borders without concerns for cultural, social, or political differences.

Grossman, Wendy. *Net.Wars*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

This is a journalist’s account of the different controversies that roiled Usenet, the emerging World Wide Web, and Internet Relay Chat (a decentralized distributed messaging network) in the 1990s. The book works to disprove the early 1990s assumption that cyberspace presented a chance to invent politics anew. Many of its chapters foreground problems that are still problems in present-day online life, from the troubles caused by the commercialization of social life to the question of where to host porn and sex work. The chapters on Eternal September (1) and Usenet organizing against the “copyright terrorism” of the Church of Scientology (6) are especially strong.

Hauben, Michael, and Ronda Hauben. *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Computer Society, 1997.

This book aimed to tackle the social aspects of 1990s computer networking. It offers a history of internetworking that goes back to the 1960s, but its accounts of Usenet and the Web as they were at the time of writing are more relevant for reader’s today. The authors style themselves as chroniclers of an emerging society with its own norms and expectations and shared their optimistic descriptions of this society and its proper inhabitant – the netizen – on “the Net” before gathering them in this book. Especially notable is the fact that Usenet warrants its own treatment here; in 1997, it was not yet clear that the World Wide Web would overtake and incorporate Usenet.

Hauben, Ronda. "Commodifying Usenet and the Usenet Archive or Continuing the Online Cooperative Usenet Culture?" *Science Studies* 15, no. 1 (2002): 61–68.

This article explores the conflict between the cooperative online culture of users who have created Usenet and the corporate commodification of Usenet posts by companies archiving the posts. Focused on the transition between Deja News and Google, the essay tracks users' efforts to petition the company to protect the archives and asks whether corporatization imperils the cooperative culture that characterized 1990s Usenet.

Horbinski, Andrea. "Talking By Letter: The Hidden History of Female Media Fans on the 1990s Internet." *Internet Histories* 2, no. 3–4 (2018): 247–63.

This article draws on oral interviews with female fans to reveal how this group used computer networks to gather and organize. Predominantly female fans initially sought to self-segregate by means of locked communities, secret mailing lists and hidden newsgroups on Usenet, ceding a crucial portion of the visible internet discourse to other kinds of fans and fan practices that were more palatable to established cultural gatekeepers offline. The article traces the transition from these more intimate settings, each with their own challenges and archiving efforts, to the "fan internet" of the 2000s, which was dominated by for-profit platform websites.

O'Sullivan, Patrick, and Andrew Flanagin. "Reconceptualizing 'Flaming' and Other Problematic Messages." *New Media & Society* 5, no. 1 (2003): 69–94.

This article theorizes "flaming," a purposely aggressive and incendiary verbal style that was characteristic of Usenet debates, as a context-dependent phenomenon. While other analyses of flaming emphasize the content of messages, this article points out that flaming emerges in specific interactional contexts with their own norms. Flaming is a precursor to what became known as "trolling" in the early 2000s and foreshadows abusive posting in the 2010s. It is a communicative style that any researcher examining exchanges in 1990s Usenet newsgroups will come across with some regularity, and this article gives an overview of how scholars grappled with its pervasiveness at the time.

Paloque-Bergès, Camille. "Usenet as a Web Archive: Multi-Layered Archives of Computer-Mediated-Communication." In *Web 25: Histories from the First 25 Years of the World Wide Web*, edited by Niels Brügger, 229–52. New York: Peter Lang, 2017.

This chapter offers a history of Usenet archives and helps contextualize the Usenet messages that remain accessible to us today. Because Usenet architecture ensured that content on the network was dispersed both temporally (message files deleted on some servers remained longer on others) and spatially (message files moved slowly "outwards" from their server of origin), archiving is unavoidably partial. The chapter traces how the archive that is available today is shaped by the transition from Usenet's own architecture to the software and infrastructure of the World Wide Web, relied upon first by Deja News and later Google Group. Usenet as it is accessible to contemporary researchers, via Google Groups and through the Internet Archive's repository of Usenet messages, is a layered archive that reveals the constraints of the web as a hosting information system.

Pfaffenberger, Bryan. “‘A Standing Wave in the Web of Our Communications’: Usenet and the Socio-Technical Construction of Cyberspace Values.” In *From Usenet to CoWebs: Interacting with Social Information Spaces*, edited by Christopher Lueg and Danyel Fisher, 20–44. London: Springer, 2003.

This chapter aims to capture Usenet’s politics. This is from a time in internet research where scholars sought to theorize “cyberspace” as a place possessed of new political norms and commitments particular to this domain. For Usenet, the chapter draws out how “Usenet veterans” believe the network cannot be regulated by governmental power (it is too decentralized), is capable of being regulated through user consensus, and is always in a state of perilous decline. Through an intuitive description of Usenet’s technical functioning, the chapter explains how a “backbone cabal” in control of the decentralized servers that make up the network end up shaping its contents and priorities.

Rai, Amit. “India On-Line: Electronic Bulletin Boards and the Construction of a Diasporic Hindu Identity.” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 31–57.

This 1995 article applies theories of subaltern identity and postcolonial theory to Usenet newsgroups that revolve around Indian identity, most notably alt.hindu. In the early 1990s, when Usenet was not yet accessible through online services or through the Web, these newsgroups hosted a “counterpublic” composed of Third World professionals in the United States. Through close readings of newsgroup discussions about the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque and other Hindu nationalist projects of the early 1990s, the article excavates a diasporic identity marked by contradictions that have the potential to destabilize images of Hindu identity as capable of becoming purified and whole.

Siles, Ignacio. “The Internet as a Transnational Project: Connecting Central America through Computer Networks (1990–1996).” *Internet Histories* 2, no. 3–4 (2018): 230–46.

This article discusses how six countries in Central America – Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama – connected to and through computer networks and technologies such as UUCP, BITNET, and the World Wide Web in the first half of the 1990s. Drawing on archival research and interviews with protagonists of networking initiatives, this article argues that the establishment of these projects in Central America required forging a transnational network of collaborations, enabled by international organizations with presence in countries of the region. The example of Central America demonstrates that transnational collaboration is a key component in the Internet’s rise to dominance.

Streeter, Thomas. “Internet.” In *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture*, edited by Benjamin Peters, 184–96. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

This chapter, part of an edited volume modeled after Raymond Williams’s famous *Keywords*, lays out the different meanings the word “internet” has taken on. This is important for anyone looking to read up on computer networks and/or online cultural production, as specialized scholars often rely on more specific terms than “internet” to describe their domain of research. Searching for “internet” or “online,” especially in the 1980s and 1990s, may not yield the right results. This article presents a fine-grained and accessible history of the term that presents the 1990s as the period in which a

previously colloquial and unstable term came to refer not to an actually existing technology, but a vision for a global communicative phenomenon.

Whittaker, Steve, Loren Terveen, Will Hill, and Lynn Cherny. “The Dynamics of Mass Interaction.” In *From Usenet to CoWebs: Interacting with Social Information Spaces*, edited by Christopher Lueg and Danyel Fisher. London: Springer, 2003.

This chapter, part of an edited volume about Usenet and other collaborative web spaces, uses data-analytical tools to capture Usenet interaction. While the data analysis tools it employs are less relevant to contemporary research, the chapter contains detailed descriptions of how users participated, from the length of the average message to the demographic composition of Usenet newsgroups. While FAQs frequently forbid cross-posting to multiple newsgroups, for example, this chapter shows that this was in fact common and served as a way for content to spread beyond a given the relatively small group of active participants that usually set the tone in a given newsgroup.

Miscellaneous

[Essay](#)

This essay tracks the author’s attempt to rebuild Prodigy, the online service he made use of as a teenager. What can we still know today about the 1990s mainstay that was the online service provider?

[TV show](#)

This news item from 1987 carefully explains what online services are and how they might be properly used.

[History](#)

This is a website built in the late 1990s with the express purpose of capturing net history before it could be overwritten. Clicking the “@” symbols yields brief discussions and insider accounts of what was then the “comprehensive” networked world: Internet, web, e-mail, Usenet, IRC, Multi-User-Dungeons (a type of interactive game), and lists.