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“The Rise of Apps Culture”

(a survey reported published Tues., September 14, 2010)

A “Beyond the Book” Interview with Lee Rainie

Founder/director of the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project

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Are Smartphones Headed to the Voting Booth? Lee Rainie thinks so.

In 2004, political campaigns and the press buzzed over “blogging”; in 2008, the technology of the moment was YouTube, providing CNN with debate questions and at least one candidate with a one-way ticket home.

*For 2012, predicts [Lee Rainie](#), founder and director of [Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project](#), smartphones and mobile “apps” will take the spotlight, and dramatically change American elections forever. Rainie spoke today with Christopher Kenneally, host of CCC’s *Beyond the Book* podcast, on the occasion of the publication of a groundbreaking survey, “The Rise of Apps Culture.”*

“The rise of mobile connectivity and its meaning to people is just beginning to wash through the culture in interesting ways,” Rainie said. “We’re going to get a road test of the 2012 election this year. We will see interesting mobile apps emerge in the mid-term elections that will then become something that is part of the standard playbook of every political consultant, every political actor, and then develops more richly for the 2012 environment.”

For the “Beyond the Book” interview, Rainie also highlighted findings of the Pew survey. He noted that “35% of U.S. adults have software applications or ‘apps’ on their phones, yet only 24% of adults use those apps. Among cell phone users with apps, the average adult has 18 apps on his or her phone. Some 18% of cell phone users with apps on their phones do not know how many they have.”

The [full report](#) became available today from the Pew Center’s Internet & American Life Project

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KENNEALLY: When is a phone not a phone? When it's a smartphone, of course.

Make calls, send text, record video and photography, and with so-called apps, have access to news, music, entertainment, and amusement. All of that and more is possible with today's new generation of handheld devices that we still call phones. The recognition is dawning that a new digital culture is beginning to emerge from within their shiny plastic and metal shells. Welcome to CCC's Beyond the Book. This is Chris Kenneally, your host, and I have the pleasure today to welcome Lee Rainie of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, who brings us a fascinating glimpse into the growing world of phone apps from a survey out today. Lee, welcome to Beyond the Book.

RAINIE: Thanks very much, Chris. Great to be with you.

KENNEALLY: Well, it's a pleasure to have you join us today. We'll tell people just a bit about your background, and about the project. Lee Rainie is the Founder and Director of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. He is coauthor of *Up for Grabs: The Future of the Internet*. That sounds very interesting indeed. We all want to know what's happening there. The first of a multi-volume book series based on project surveys that is being published by Cambria Press. Prior to launching the Pew Internet Project, Lee was Managing Editor at *US News and World Report*, after a period of covering politics and editing the magazine's national and science coverage. Before joining *US News*, he was a political reporter for the *New York Daily News*. He's a graduate of Harvard College, and has a master's degree in political science from Long Island University.

And I should mention, too, that the Pew Internet & American Life Project is one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, which is a nonpartisan, nonprofit fact tank providing information on issues, attitudes, and trends shaping America and the world. And again, Lee Rainie, it's a pleasure to have you today, and you bring us results of a survey you've conducted looking at app use, and particularly drawing some conclusions about the directions we're headed. And I wonder if you might just highlight a few things for us. And before we start, though we should discuss this rather murky app itself. What do we mean by an app?

RAINIE: Well, in the technical community, an app is a particular kind of piece of software that you put on your mobile device that downloads or accesses parts of the



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Web that are tailored to that application. But there's a lot of confusion about what it means. Of course, lots of the things that we do with the digital space are applications, and in the mobile space, it's come to take on a very particular meaning. And that's what we were trying to get at in this survey. This is the first time we, or anybody else really, has done a big national survey about the dimensions of the app-using population. And we didn't get very technical with the people we talked to on the phone. They're average Americans, they don't have, in many cases, a deep technological understanding of this stuff.

So we just asked about apps. That's the term of art that most people use, it's what you hear in the store when you buy your phone. And so that's how we refer to it to people, and the most interesting – there are a couple of interesting findings. I'll just roll off some statistics for you. Thirty-five percent of American adults now have apps on their phones. That's a pretty big number. It's actually more than a third of the population, and it's a very smart growth curve just in the past two to two and a half years. But a significant portion of the people who say they have apps on their phone do not necessarily use them, and don't necessarily know how many apps they have on their phones.

Only 24% of Americans actually use the apps on their phones. So 35% say they have them, only 24% actually use them. And of course, it's younger, better-educated people who are really deeply into the apps culture, and the rest of the population will probably be adding to this story in future months and years. But it's still pretty much an early adopter story as we see it now.

KENNEALLY: Right, and I would imagine that it's especially popular among the people who are kind of gadget-prone in the first place, right? As you mentioned, younger people, males over females, all true?

RAINIE: In the broad sense of the term, yes, but once you get into the app users, there are actually pretty interesting differences between men apps users and women apps users. Women, more than men, play games on apps. Women, more than men, use social networking apps. And so there's a pretty interesting divergence of populations once you get into the apps culture. But generally speaking, men more than women tend to be early adopters of technology, and that's playing out here in the early stages of the apps culture as well.

KENNEALLY: It's fascinating. And the thing about the smartphones, of course, is that they do so much. So much that we used to think of as being the domain of the PC or the camera, or all these other devices, but now have been combined in one. And one of the results that interested me was just the way that people use these phones, these devices anyhow. And apps, surprisingly, are at the bottom of a fairly long list.



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RAINIE: Yeah, we asked people in our survey about the variety of things that they do on their phones, and actually taking pictures now is slightly ahead of texting as the most popular feature. After that, we talk about using videos, and people who are using apps are fairly low on the totem pole, but they're gaining ground. And of course, it will become a much more prevalent thing to do as more and more apps get built and more and more companies sort of build their digital strategies around apps.

KENNEALLY: Right, and we should tell people that the report that you're publishing today is based on two surveys, a telephone survey that the Pew Center conducted, as well as a separate survey of apps downloaders by the Nielsen Company. And tell us what the Nielsen results turned up.

RAINIE: Well, the Nielsen results were very particular about what people were downloading in their apps, and the kinds of things that they were doing with their apps. And that's actually the data that I was citing about the most popular applications, actually comes from the Nielsen survey. Games are first, news and weather are second, maps, social networking, are all high on the list, but also there are features now that are coming on, like games, and like the things that media companies are putting out. And the apps environment is changing radically every day. There are now more than 250,000 apps being offered in the Apple apps store. There are close to 100,000 in the Android store. I don't know what the number is in BlackBerry.

But this is obviously a place where there's a tremendous amount of ferment in the technology community. And the Nielsen data picked that up. They found, for instance, that in recent times, Android users were more likely than Apple operating system users to be downloading apps, and then people were paying a little bit for apps. About two-thirds of apps downloads are for free, but the people who pay are paying about \$3, between \$2 and \$3 for a typical app. So there's some hope, particularly among media companies, that this might produce a new revenue stream for them, that there are folks who will be willing to pay a modest amount for content or access to content, and that this might revive any number of floundering media properties, like news organizations, magazines, and the like.

KENNEALLY: Right, but still, the jury is out on that, so about half have paid, half have not paid, and I believe the results say that most of the apps that are paid are for less than \$3.

RAINIE: Right. That's right. So we're not talking about large sums of money yet.



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KENNEALLY: Not yet, at least, right. I want to ask you about your own smartphone use, so we can perhaps personalize this, because I've got a few thoughts of my own on it. Do you use apps yourself, Lee?

RAINIE: I've got a couple on my phone, and I enjoy Google Maps. It helps me navigate my way around the traffic patterns in Washington DC, which are always fun and adventurous. I'm a Pandora listener, and I have *Washington Post* updates and feeds through my apps, and those are the primary ones that I use.

KENNEALLY: Well, you know, it's funny, I would add to that the way that I use my own iPhone as a radio. I listen to NPR programs, BBC, Radio France if I'm in the mood for that sort of thing. And I guess what I was driving at was the use on the phone of media. And you have already alluded to this hope that's out there that, for phones and other mobile devices – and I guess at some point we're going to have to merge phones and tablets, they'll all be coming together – that these new devices will provide the kind of platform that a successful business model can support. And we just don't know yet where that's going, do we?

RAINIE: No, we don't. And it's so interesting, because as these very powerful computing devices have become small enough to fit in our pockets and our purses, it has changed the way that people relate to media and information, and changed the way that people relate to each other. We're in the middle of this very large-scale social change, social disruption that's going on, and one of the things that I'm interested to hear you talking about is your use of the apps for public broadcasting and other media properties. And of course, one of the bets that a lot of media companies are going to make is that this might restore people's relationship to their local media, the local newspaper, the local radio station, the local TV station. But it might be the case that apps take us farther and farther away from our locality, if we can listen to the radio stations that we want no matter where they are, or access the news content that we care about no matter where it is.

Maybe this actually takes people a bit more away from their communities. But of course, there's another story with apps about how they are very much layering into people's lives. Locality information, there are a tremendous amount of companies now that are hoping that their app will be an attractive thing to people who want to buy in their stores, and they can offer deals on the fly, or they can offer instantaneous bargains to people who are in the vicinity and might otherwise not be shopping in those stores. So the relationship of people to information, and to distance, and to their locality now is very much up for grabs.

KENNEALLY: And in fact, even the relationship to whoever is providing them this access to the information in the first place is changing, because the phones can



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identify where you are. It knows your location. You mentioned Google Maps. When I'm taking photographs or doing things, it'll imprint where that photograph was taken. It's remarkable.

RAINIE: Yeah, and that's absolutely one of the biggest trends that's very much tied to apps, is that locality is coming back into the digital picture in a way that it really didn't exist when we were in the browser age. When we were in the computer on your desktop, or laptop, people's relationship to time and distance was very different from the way it is now, where your locality is known by your phone, and can be transmitted to people who you've given access to. And some of the most interesting, to me, and compelling apps are those that are driven by locality. I love the app that allows people to take a view of the sky in their neighborhood, or their community, and it will tell you what constellation you're looking at, and if you turn a little bit, what other constellations you might see in the nighttime sky in your vicinity. And that's only possible if the phone can tell the apps maker where you are.

KENNEALLY: Well, sometimes they can tell you where you are, but it doesn't know where you're going. And I think this is what we're all sort of driving at with this. We're talking with Lee Rainie. Lee is with the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, talking about a survey out today on app use among American consumers. A fascinating result is that among the people who have downloaded apps on their phones, Lee, 11% aren't even sure that they have them.

RAINIE: Part of the complication of doing this work, of course, was that many phones come pre-loaded with apps. And so in addition to downloading, we were asking people about what was already on their device the day they walked out of the store with it. And so I think a lot of the confusion about whether people have apps or not relates to the people who didn't necessarily download something, but were not sure what was on their phone as they purchased it. And so, again, this is part of this larger story that's very typical of the work that we've done over the past 10 years, where you see the early adopter cohort really into this stuff. They know what's going on, they're really excited about it, they download a lot, they use it a lot. It changes their use of time, it changes their relationship to people.

They're way into it. Then there are more casual people who are just beginning to learn this environment, and don't quite know about it, and probably need some help downloading an app, and probably need some other help figuring out how to use it and stuff. And so we'll see this early adopter cohort eventually mature, and more and more people will come into this space. And it'll be interesting for us to be tracking the maturation process, and the democratization process. But a couple of years from now, the composition of the apps population will be very different from



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the way it is now. It's young, well-educated, well-resourced people now, and it won't be in a couple of years, I bet.

KENNEALLY: And in fact, you really give me a terrific segue to a question I wanted to wrap this up with. You mentioned the democratization of this app culture, and just last night I was listening to National Public Radio talking about the upcoming Congressional elections, and one of the organizers that they were interviewing was talking about an app that he had on his phone that helped him to identify voters in the district that he was canvassing. And I thought, that wasn't even possible in the 2008 election. And we have yet two years to go before 2012. So it's very possible that while say, the 2008 election was the YouTube election, the 2012 election may be the apps election.

RAINIE: Absolutely. Probably more broadly, you could be talking about it as the mobile election. There will be uses of mobile devices, but simple stuff like texting, even the more elaborate stuff like picture taking, picture sharing, and things like that, the rise of mobile connectivity and its meaning to people is just beginning to wash through the culture in interesting ways. And we're going to get a road test of the 2012 election this year. We will see interesting mobile apps emerge in the midterm elections that will then become something that becomes part of the standard playbook that every political consultant, every political actor, then develops more richly for the 2012 environment. One of the really fun things to be a researcher in this space is that there is always change to start marking and documenting, and then figure out what it all adds up to.

KENNEALLY: Well, we will be turning back to the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project from time to time, I hope, Lee, to look at all those changes, and to see where this is taking us. And thank you very much, Lee Rainie, Founder and Director of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, for joining us today on Beyond the Book.

RAINIE: It was great to be with you, Chris. Thanks.

KENNEALLY: And indeed, for those listening to Beyond the Book who would like to access the full report, it is available online at pewinternet.org. And for everyone here at Copyright Clearance Center, this is Chris Kenneally thanking you for joining us today.

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