

## **"Germany and the digital world": Information on Internet use available online**



Extensive information on Internet use in Germany and internationally are to be found on the new website [www.digitale-teilung.de](http://www.digitale-teilung.de). The website contains the results of a secondary analysis based on national and international Internet studies, carried out under the title of "Germany and the Digital World – Update Internet 2003".

How do young people use the Internet? Why do some people use the Internet and others not? The main results of the new analysis: The Internet's relevance for the individual increases with use. Once people go online they want to continue using it. On the other hand, non-users increasingly have personal reasons that gain importance compared to 'objective' access barriers not to use the Internet. In the meantime, for young people the Internet seems to be a "must", with entertainment and communication ranking first.

From the authors' point of view distinctions should be made not only between users and non-users. The different usage patterns suggest a new dimension of the digital divide ("Second level digital divide"): between those who make use of the Internet competently and to their benefit, and those who use the medium rather rudimentarily and exclusively for distraction and entertainment purposes. This kind of divide among users becomes more obvious when looking at the factors education and income.

Based on the extensive material the research team from Marl and Düsseldorf has developed recommendations for digital integration. They can be found on the website as well as a summary with projects and initiatives which contribute to preventing a digital divide.

### **Analysis**

Based on the "Internet 2002"-study's results the analysis of national and international surveys focuses on the following questions:

- Who uses the Internet, and which developments can be observed in terms of the users' and non-users' demographic profile?
- How do people actually use the Internet, and what are their priorities, attitudes and behaviours?
- What are the main reasons and motives which prevent non-users from using the Internet?
- What is particular about young people's Internet and media use?

## **Analysis: Who is online?**



### **Stagnation or “restart”? Developments in Internet use**

Current studies on Internet use in Germany assume that more than half of the population uses the Internet. Compared to the previous year, the growth rate increased between 2002 and 2003. The present increase took place in the age groups of 40 to 59 years and 14 to 19 years.

International developments show that the general high growth rates slowed down between 2001 and 2002 in particular. After a period of uncertainty after the Dotcom crash there seems to be a “restart” in interest in the Internet. However, the former growth rates belong to the past in countries with a high rate of Internet penetration.

### **Young, well educated and well-to-do? Users’ and non-users’ demographic profile**

Though the Internet has become a part in everyday life for many people this does not necessarily change the problem of a digital divide between different demographic groups of population. Basically, the national and international studies underline that people aged 60 and older in particular do not use the Internet. In recent years, gender differences have become less important in relation to the question of whether people use the Internet or not.

A more important factor in terms of usage or non-usage is education which is strongly linked to the income structure: The higher the formal educational background of a person, and the higher the household income, the more likely that person goes online. The same applies to occupation. People in education, training or profession are more likely to use the Internet than people who are not, or no longer occupied.

### **The necessity of broadening the definition of Digital Integration**

When discussing digital integration it is no longer only about who does or does not use the Internet. A broadened approach to the digital divide should also consider those who go online, but use the Internet diversely and with different priorities. The varying use of the Internet within the group of users suggest a “second level digital divide”. In other words, this might mean that the divide between those who make use of the Internet competently and to their benefit, and those who use the medium rather rudimentarily and exclusively for distraction and entertainment purposes increases.

## **Analysis: Why use the Internet?**



As results from "Internet 2002" show the know-how and with it the concrete knowledge of the real benefit grows with experience online. Experienced Internet users are more self-confident regarding their Internet competence. All in all, users are satisfied with medium. The European Institute for the Media and the ecmc analysed selected studies and interviewed experts with respect to users' usage patterns, attitudes and behaviours.

### **Usage patterns and time spent online**

Many people use the Internet from home and for personal rather than work purposes, implying a great demand for entertainment and communication services. Indeed, many users go online from different places and spend more time online. They use the Internet more universally for private, school or professional activities. Furthermore, the data show interesting results on Internet use and language: Users prefer to surf the Internet in their mother tongue. Thus, the idea of a global net has little to do with the daily practice.

### **User competence**

The level of Internet experience varies considerably between the different countries. Obviously, users from countries with a high rate in Internet use such as the US or Sweden are particularly experienced. With higher levels in Internet penetration, user characteristics show that new users seem to have different priorities. These so called often "restrained" or "unobtrusive" users increase the number of people who use the Internet rather 'passively', recalling information or writing e-mails, but not putting information online or creating websites. Shunji Mikami, Toyo University, Japan, stressed in the expert interviews that there are noticeable differences in literacy between early adopters and the new users.

### **Consumer behaviour**

Germans are sometimes called "world champions" in online shopping. In reality, more than half of users have already shopped over the Internet, however, only a few do so on a regular basis.

### **Media use and trust**

The Internet is gaining in importance as a medium for information and entertainment. The article available online discusses controversial results and views on the issue of competition between the Internet and 'traditional' mass media, e.g. the question whether Internet users watch less TV. The results show that these questions can only be answered by considering the functions of the respective media in everyday life.

### **Attitudes and behaviours**

In the past, the Internet has led to speculations and concerns regarding information reliability and the potential negative effects on social life. The data at hand verify a certain (healthy) scepticism towards online information. Data also negates the assumption that Internet use may lead to social isolation.

## Why offline?



### **Background information on the debate on the digital divide and integration**

The discussion on a digital divide in society has focused mainly on issues of access. Those with access to Internet applications and Internet protocol based services such as E-Mail or World Wide Web were separated from those who do not have access. This idea of digital integration was the basis for numerous political programmes and initiatives which explicitly aimed at securing the technical network of institutions and individuals with the Internet ("... online").

In doing so, factors such as content and benefit disappeared as often as usability, costs, competence and security, briefly: the users' perspective was not really considered. The same applies to the providers' point of view and the societal framework, which can hardly be controlled or arranged, but at the same time very much determine if and to what extent computers and the Internet are used.

To open the discussion on the digital divide and to free it from the concentration on access aspects, we propose new or broadened concepts which shall describe the phenomenon, and particularly approaches for more precise solutions. Thus, general attitudes which can be conceptualised as paradigms should become apparent. Opinions and assessments on the digital divide follow the "innovation paradigm", the "participation paradigm" or the "evolution paradigm".

### **Factors of non-usage – motives and reasons**

Aside from the theoretical classification, the secondary analysis has tested the factors of non-usage, as identified in the study "NRW:online-offline". How do new studies explain why people do not use computers and Internet? The document available online describes in-depth the situation in Germany and North Rhine-Westphalia examining the question "why offline?" The results show that individual reasons become more importance compared to 'objective' barriers and are more apt to explain why people do not go online.

### **Evaluation and perspectives**

Studies on why people do not use computers, Internet and online services have different aims and have various value for explaining this issue. The secondary analysis has also shown how future offline-studies can be designed in order to be fruitful.

## Young people – different interests?



Max is 15. He attends the local grammar school, plays football in his leisure time, likes fantasy films, has his own mobile phone with a prepaid card and his own hi-fi system, a TV and a PC with modem in his bedroom. At home, he goes online almost every day, checks e-mails, surfs the web, downloads music to his computer, plays and chats online with his friends and does research for his history lessons. Meanwhile, the TV is on in the background. Is Max a 'typical' young user?

### Young people in the focus of media research

Young people have specific habits and interests which make them interesting for media research as media users, learners, consumers and future decision makers. At the same time, studies on adolescents' media use aim at understanding changes in their communication practice.

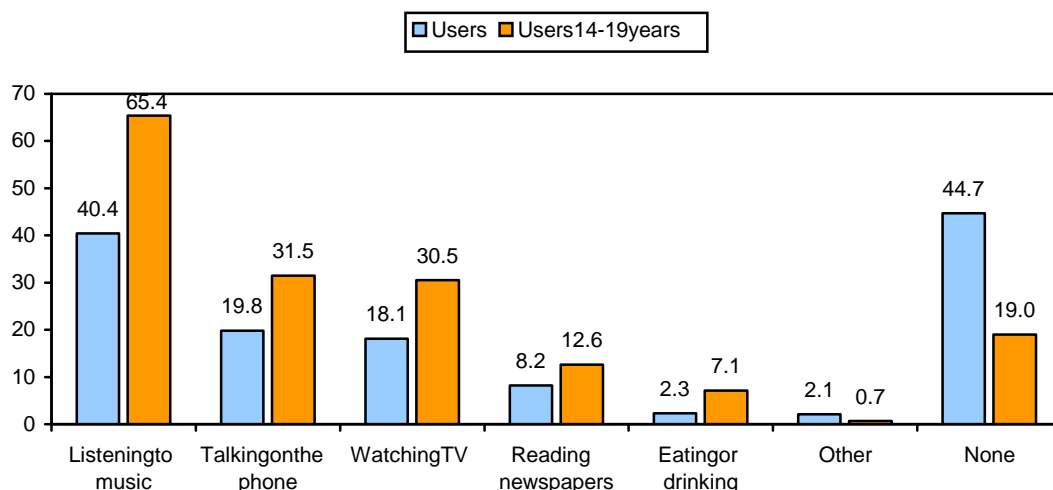
### Young people online-offline

For many young people the use of the Internet has become a "must". However, even though the majority in this age group uses the Internet, the educational divide has slightly increased as is the case for users in general.

### Online activities

In Germany, young people go online at home, regularly and mainly for private purposes. Their online activities are manifold. Entertainment, games and the possibilities to communicate, the Internet offers: e-mail, chat, instant messaging are particularly popular. As shown in the following chart, multitasking is common among younger users.

Activities of young users aside from going online, percentage of respondents



### User competence

One result of "Internet 2002" was that most parents in Germany did not control their children's or teenager's use of the Internet. The article on young people's user competence discusses this result in an international comparison.