

2. New Media and Social Divides. A Comparative Analysis of Stockholm and St. Petersburg

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The Internet has been at the heart of the social discourse during recent decades – and increasingly so in research. In the public debate, not least among politicians on a supranational level, many hopes have been expressed of improving societal, civil and personal life by bridging digital divides, i.e., hopes of better health, security, education, careers, of reducing inequalities between population groups, of increased democracy and participation among citizens – and with these improvements also economic growth in the world. There are also hopes of reducing poverty, resolving terrorism and achieving sustainable world markets.¹

More modified assertions about the media, the Internet and democracy also exist. For example, in 2009, the European Union announced the European Commission's (EC) Recommendation on media literacy,² saying in the press release that “We must make sure everyone is media literate so nobody is left out. Citizens are being talked to all the time, but can they talk back? If they can use the media in a competent and creative way we would take a step towards a new generation of democratic participation.”³

As a matter of fact, the hopes expressed by politicians and in the public debate about eradicating the digital divides – i.e., that access to and use of the Internet will lead to equal improvement of societal, civil and personal life – have counterparts in early and later theoretical literature both on the media and on the postindustrial information society. In this large body of literature, many authors apply a consensus approach, meaning that the digital media – cf. Meyrowitz below – and the information society – e.g., Bell,⁴ Martin,⁵ Stonier⁶ – bring

¹ World Summit on the Information Society 2003 and 2005, Digital Divide.Org 2009.

² The European Commission 2009: the EC defines media literacy as “the ability to access, understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and communicate in a variety of contexts. It relates to all media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet and all other digital technologies”.

³ The European Commission, press release on August 8, 2009.

⁴ Bell 1973.

⁵ Martin 1978.

⁶ Stonier 1983.

with them a new era of more harmonious lives and societies, where divides and conflicts of the past subside.

An issue for the present article is whether the Internet contributes to increased equality, democracy and civil participation. In this context, we will question the usefulness of the concept of digital divide, which often refers to the gap between those persons, groups and countries who have (physical and) regular access to digital information and communication technology (ICT), primarily the Internet, and those without such access (the “haves” and “have nots”), as well as to gaps related to skills in using digital information and in communicating digitally.

Within the now extensive Internet research, there are a multitude of empirical studies taking as their starting point the concept of “digital divides” or “digital gaps”, and showing which groups in society are lingering behind and which gaps have levelled out over time.⁷

Several other researchers – taking a more theoretical perspective, yet like politicians – have seen new possibilities in the developing digital media for political life in Western democracies. In such contexts, the growing amount of societal information that has become easily available to more and more people via the Internet is regarded as an important factor of enlightenment, at the same time as more and more discussion forums and blogs on the Net are expected to promote political activity.

One of the researchers who already in the 1980s perceived the capacity of the future media in this regard was Meyrowitz,⁸ who considered that digital media can bring about development of new forms of intelligence that, among other things, embrace the ability to reduce the amount of knowledge for a special situation until one masters it, something that becomes necessary and easier with the rapid access to all information signified by the Internet. New competences can evolve – above all the ability to see patterns and relations between different kinds of information.

In this perspective, the digital media can appear as a factor which automatically gives rise to several societal mechanisms that result in increased equality, a factor which tends to involve all people in a common sphere of action, where it becomes difficult to discern hierarchic societal status, and gender and age roles among people.⁹

Such a view is also interesting in view of certain other (among them, so-called postmodern) theories, which emphasize a view of the mass media as an important cultivating factor that to a great extent has replaced traditional socializing institutions such as family, school, and work. Unlike previous social systems in which social identity (and lifestyle) was largely a function of the individual’s

⁷ E.g., Forskningsgruppen för Samhälls- och Informationsstudier (FSI) 2004.

⁸ Meyrowitz 1985.

⁹ Meyrowitz 1985.

social background and occupation, the “postmodern” identity is said to have become much more unstable and changeable.¹⁰

Meyrowitz’ and others’ positive view of the developing digital media differs sharply from those of several critics of the massmedial “postmodern” society. Poster¹¹ maintains, among other things, that in the computer era (which differs in several respects from the periods of print and traditional electronic media) the databases of the digital media generate new patterns of dominance. And unlike Meyrowitz, Poster means that it is only technological determinists who believe that the databases can become decisive conditions for a really educated population – in the ICT society information is instead something that is carefully controlled by market forces, he says.

Several other authors have emphasized, for instance, that the new ICT, especially the Internet, is also at the centre of the on-going globalization, which according to certain critics¹² means that a greater and greater proportion of political and economic power is concentrated to a diminishing number of transnational companies, whose dominance in the media area leads, among other things, to cultural standardization and impoverishment of Western societies’ democratic potential.

Lyon¹³ discusses the roots of the information society, among them military, commercial and government power, the dominant classes’ control over the economy and knowledge, and the fact that information is an economic factor in its own right with vested interests. Basic and concrete questions must therefore be posed concerning the labour market, education system, social relations, global divides, culture, leisure and consumption, etc., in order to understand that the arrival of the information society and the ICT certainly appears to be, but is not, a natural event.

In addition to the many studies on access to and amount of media/Internet use, and as a consequence the existence of digital divides, empirical research on the media and Internet has tried to discover whether there is a deliberate public sphere in Habermas’ sense of the word.¹⁴ Such research, however, has been forced to modify this starting point. The Internet does not seem to automatically pique users’ political interest – but if we relax the criteria of reasoned deliberation among equals for a common good, we might accept the presence of multiple public spheres within the media and everyday life, which work more or less effectively and in which people show more or less “civic engagement”.¹⁵ The

¹⁰ E.g., Ziehe 1989.

¹¹ Poster 1990.

¹² E.g., Herman & McChesney 1997.

¹³ Lyon 1988.

¹⁴ Habermas [1962]1989.

¹⁵ Butsch 2007.

question is, though, whether these many public spheres or today's "civic cultures"¹⁶ "make a difference" compared to the structures of past decades.¹⁷

One critic of using the concept "public sphere" is Fraser,¹⁸ who states, among other things, that it is wrong to assume that the media and the Internet can contribute to social equalizing, because inequalities continue to operate through cultural hierarchies of everyday life. This view has similarities to Bourdieu's theory,¹⁹ which posits that social background and societal path is decisive for people's tastes, values, leisure activities, etc., and calls into question the supposed importance of the Internet as a source of knowledge, political participation and social equalization by referring to the necessary conditions that must be fulfilled for social agents to engage in a specific "game". In order to devote oneself to a specific activity (e.g., search for a certain kind of societal information on the Internet or participate in a political forum), one must be furnished with a corresponding habitus, a disposition meaning that one conceives of as relevant the social game a particular activity comprises.

Another critic of a "public sphere" in a Habermasian sense is Dutton,²⁰ who says that this concept refers to the past and therefore is not able to capture the rise of an entirely new sphere of influence, such as the Internet constitutes. Dutton builds on Castells' depiction of the Internet as a "space of flows" in contrast to a space of places and has introduced the concept of the Fifth Estate (referring to the press as the Fourth Estate), meaning a "network of networks" (one-to-many, one-to-one, many-to-one, many-to-many), that is, "the growing use of the Internet and related digital technologies is creating a space for networking individuals in ways that enable a new source of accountability in government, politics and other sectors", something that "could challenge the influence of other more established bases of institutional authority" and "support the vitality of liberal democratic societies".²¹

However, at least in Sweden empirical research shows that although people mean that the Internet contributes to more accessible information, they are sceptical regarding the import of the Internet for democracy. And although the Internet has increased people's contacts with others who share the same hobbies and interests, and with friends and colleagues, it has not, according to them, increased people's political contacts – rather the reverse. On the other hand, the Internet has become an important platform for those already interested in politics.²²

¹⁶ Dahlgren & Olsson 2007.

¹⁷ Butsch 2007.

¹⁸ Fraser 1992.

¹⁹ I.a., Bourdieu 1979, 1997.

²⁰ Dutton 2009.

²¹ Dutton 2009, p. 1.

²² Findahl 2009.

Partly similar results come from a telephone survey in the U.S.²³ on civic engagement, pointing to the fact that the Internet is not changing the socio-economic character of civic engagement (such as e-mailing a government official, signing an online petition or making a political contribution). Just as in offline politics, the well-off and well-educated are particularly likely to participate in online activities that mirror offline forms of engagement.

However, there are some hints that social media (i.e., social networking sites (SNS), blogs, and the like) may alter this pattern, the same report says, because the differences in socio-economic status (SES) are not as clear among the younger persons (18-34 years of age) who use these sites and blogs more often for, e.g., posting a political or civic comment than older people do. On the other hand, SES is more difficult to measure among the young, many of whom are still studying. Furthermore, we do not know what the real motives are for this civic engagement – for example, using SNS and blogs may also largely be a self-confirming activity. And the impact of these new tools also depends in large part on what happens as this younger cohort of “digital natives” who use the social media most gets older. “Are we witnessing a generational change or a life-cycle phenomenon that will change as these younger users age? Will the civic divide close, or will rapidly evolving technologies continue to leave behind those with lower levels of education and income?”²⁴ Thus, the interpretation of the findings is still on the level of speculation.

In the present article, we have theoretically tried to relate the empirical wholes to some of the above-mentioned different perspectives. We discuss the importance of the Internet for individuals and society in light of empirical data from our research project, in which we compare the habits, lifestyles and attitudes of young and middle-aged people in St. Petersburg and Stockholm. The design of our studies is presented in “Foreword and Introduction” and in one of the Appendices.

As for the Internet, which is primarily in focus when discussing digital divides, it is less spread in Russia than in Sweden, which offers relatively low and mostly fixed costs due to broadband connection, strong competition between telecom operators, etc. In 2006, 80 per cent of the Swedish population aged 9-79 years said they had access to the Internet at home, in 2007 the figure had risen to 83 per cent and in 2008 to 85 per cent.²⁵ Among young people (aged 15-24) in Sweden, home Internet access is even higher. In Russia as a whole, Internet access was estimated at 21 per cent in December 2007 and 27 per cent in March 2009,²⁶ but this figure is higher in Moscow and St. Petersburg. A report based on figures from 2008 points out that Internet access at home was 25 per cent in the

²³ Smith, Schlozman, Verba & Brady 2009.

²⁴ Smith et al. 2009, p. 7

²⁵ *Nordicom-Sveriges Mediebarometer 2006* (2007), *2007* (2008) and *2008* (2009).

²⁶ Internet World Stats 2009.

whole of Russia, 55 per cent in Moscow and 52 per cent in St. Petersburg, these figures having risen relatively little from two years before.²⁷

Our own previous empirical data²⁸ have given rise to the hypothesis that digital divides, at least on the level of population groups within society, must be understood not only in terms of access to and use of the Internet and other digital equipment, but much more in relation to, and as rooted in, economic, social and cultural determinants. When access to and use of the Internet have become more or less equal among population groups, it seems that they, among other things, use the Internet for entertainment and social communication to a similar extent, but that there still are great differences as regards use of such knowledge on the Internet that could be called “societal information” or that is associated with “legitimate” (economic, scientific, cultural, etc.) capital in society – in other words, the kind of knowledge that often is regarded as facilitating citizens’ active participation in public life. Such differences in the individually chosen fields of ICT application seem, in their turn, to be connected to the persons’ backgrounds and general lifestyles – that is, their social identity – and reveal other kinds of digital divides than access to and use of ICT.

In the four groups in our current quantitative data collections – 17-year-olds and middle-aged people in St. Petersburg and Stockholm, respectively – access to and use of the Internet appear in the following ranking order:

- 45- to 55-year-olds in St. Petersburg, of whom 51 per cent had Internet access at home at the time of the study. 12 per cent used the Internet at home nearly every day and 32 per cent at least once a month. Using the Internet at work was less common.
- 17-year-olds in St. Petersburg, of whom 74 per cent had Internet access at home, 38 per cent used the Internet at home nearly every day and 71 per cent at least once a month.
- 45- to 55-year-olds in Stockholm, of whom 92 per cent had access to the Internet at home. Thirty-five per cent used the Internet at home nearly every day and 82 per cent at least once a month. The figures are roughly the same for using the Internet at work.
- 17-year-olds in Stockholm, of whom 99 per cent had Internet access at home. 70 per cent used it at home nearly every day, while 98 per cent used the Internet at home at least several days a week.

²⁷ “Развитие интернета в регионах России” (“Development of the Internet in the Regions of Russia”) 2009.

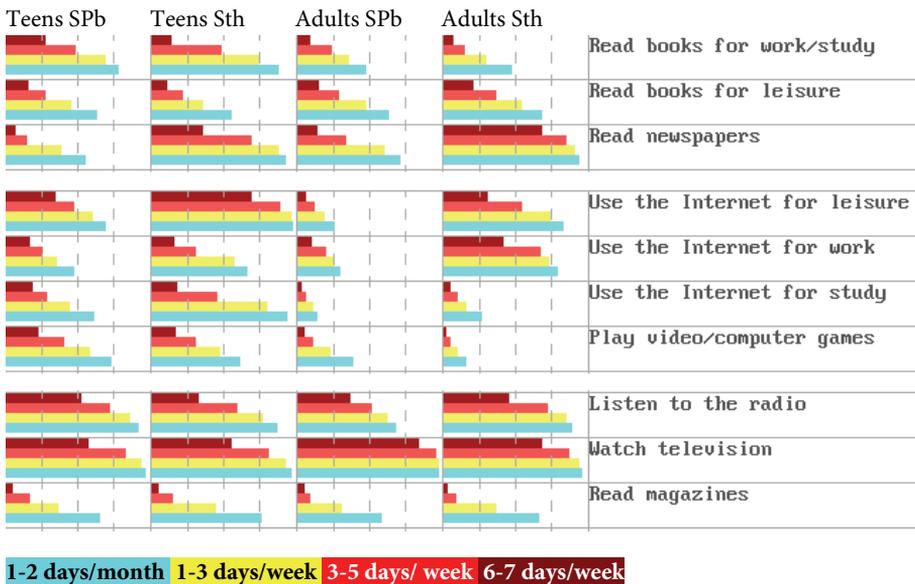
²⁸ Petrov 2000, Petrov & von Feilitzen 2005.

Is it possible to draw any conclusions about digital divides based on a comparison of these four groups? The following quantitative data are interspersed with utterances in the qualitative group discussions.

Media use by age and city

Use of the Internet is included in a pattern of other media use. Taking these other media into consideration, we find partly different media habits in all four groups studied. For example, the medium most often used among the St. Petersburg teens is television, closely followed by radio. The adults in St. Petersburg use television most often of the four groups, and then radio – but compared to the young generation in their city, adults are heavier TV viewers and lighter radio listeners. Among the Stockholm teens, however, using the Internet for leisure is the most frequent activity, followed by TV viewing. And among the Stockholm adults, TV viewing and newspaper reading are the most common media habits (Figure 2:1).

Figure 2:1. How often do you use the following media?
(by age and city, cumulative per cent)



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

Certain media habits are especially conditioned by age, both in the sense of life-cycle characteristics and of media generational patterns. The 17-year-olds use books for study/work and the Internet for leisure and study, respectively, more

often than the middle-aged people in their city do. As previous research and our group discussions point out, young people listen more than adults do to music, as well. The middle-aged, on their part, read newspapers, use the Internet for work, and watch television more often than the young persons do.

Computer and video games

As expected, the young persons also play video and computer games much more than middle-aged persons do. The young game players in both cities consist above all of males – and computer playing is typically connected with certain other interests, such as an interest in techniques of various kinds, with (perceived) computer skills, with playing games on the mobile phone, with playing games at friends' homes, and with an interest in action, science fiction, sports and thrillers on television. Young game players also tend to be interested in media topics such as cars and pornography and to surf to corresponding places on the Internet. Furthermore, they more often than others in their age group tend to spend a long time on the Internet, to download films and computer programs from the Internet, to search for entertainment information there, as well as to play cards and bet money on football pools, lotto, horses, and the like. Not surprisingly, the music genres most preferred among these young computer game players are bitpop and in Stockholm also hard rock and metal.

In some of the group discussions explanations emerged as to why video and computer games are so popular. Some young men prefer one-player games, while others engage in multi-player games, sometimes online games with other players all over the world. The interviewees refer, among other things, to the interactivity of the games, that you in a way “are somebody else” and “can do what you want when more or less gearing the game, you see”. Compared to books and films, where it takes time to identify with the main character, the interviewees say that you “become” the role person in a game within a few minutes, and “you immediately forget yourself”. “It is a flight from reality” and the playing “gives you kicks”.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the young players are not lone wolves – they meet with friends and family as often as other 17-year-olds do. And we find no correlations between game playing and moods, such as often or seldom being glad, appreciated, depressed, anxiety-ridden, or stressed.

At the same time, playing these digital games is more popular among the inhabitants of St. Petersburg, both the young and the middle-aged ones, than among the Stockholmers. Because game playing is not connected to number of children in the household or household size, one speculation is that the more frequent playing in St. Petersburg may be associated with higher status in using these games, as computers and the Internet generally are newer phenomena for the Russian than for the Swedish population. On the other hand, according to the World Internet Institute, which compared *online* playing in several countries

(not Russia, however), such play is much more common in, e.g., the U.S. and England, and above all in several Asian countries, than in Sweden,²⁹ which is why the more frequent playing in St. Petersburg compared to in Stockholm may be due to other factors.

The adult digital game players in our study often have similar interests as the young players with one important difference, which naturally affects the interest pattern: Unlike among the adolescents, playing among middle-aged persons in Stockholm has only a slight correlation with gender, and among the adult players in St. Petersburg, there is no gender correlation in the frequency and length of video and computer game playing at all. Furthermore, digital game playing is not related to education among the adults in both cities. But among the young people in the two cities, the frequency and time of playing have slight positive relations to attending a practical study programme.

Otherwise our analyses reveal that the St. Petersburg adults' computer and video game playing is related to many ICT and entertainment variables, such as using the computer and Internet frequently, viewing films on video/DVD and the computer, finding the Internet important for entertainment and pleasure, and the notion that entertainment generally is an important area for the media to deal with. The picture is more or less similar among the Stockholm adults, but here some more pronounced "male interests" reappear, as well.

Mobile phones

Practically all persons in our surveys have access to and use mobile phones. However, there is a marked age pattern (Figure 2:2) in that the young generation in both cities more often than the middle-aged adults send and receive SMS and use the phone's "extra functions" – listening to music, shooting pictures, sending/receiving pictures, using e-mail/the Internet, and changing settings on the phone. And of all four groups, the young Russians are the most diligent users of mobile phones, including almost all their services. Further ahead we will see that corresponding fields of application on the Internet also attract young people more than adults.

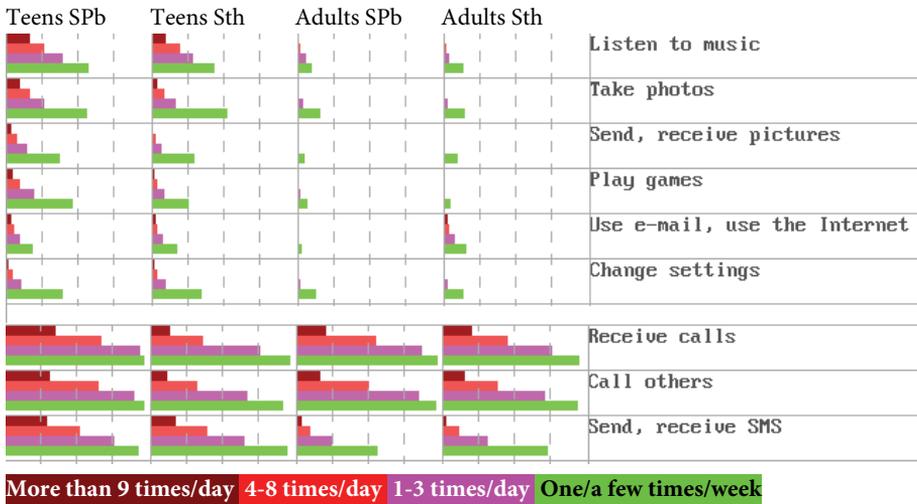
Gender differences in using mobile phones are not especially marked among the young people. However, the St. Petersburg and Stockholm girls use SMS more than the Russian and Swedish boys do, respectively. And the Russian boys play games with their phones more often than the Russian girls do, while the Swedish boys use their cell phone more often for e-mail/Internet than the Swedish girls do.

Among the adults in St. Petersburg, there are no gender differences as regards mobile phone use, as is the case also with using video and computer games, mentioned previously.

²⁹ Findahl 2008.

However, a sub-group stands out – the use of mobile phones is in several respects male dominated among the middle-aged adults in Stockholm. The adult men there use the mobile phone and exploit several of its extra functions more often than the other persons studied do. One explanatory factor is the gender hierarchy on the Swedish labour market, where men’s mobile communication more often than women’s is partly or wholly paid for by the workplace.³⁰ Men’s greater interest in technique also plays a role. In St. Petersburg, there are relatively few adults whose mobile phoning is subsidized by employers, even if it then, to a certain extent, also more often is a benefit to men.

Figure 2:2. How often do you use the mobile to ...
(by age and city, cumulative per cent)



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

Use of mobile phones is hardly related to education. In the two Stockholm surveys, no such connections appear at all. In the St. Petersburg surveys, there are a few weak relations: adults with a higher education use SMS somewhat more than do adults with a lower education. And young people attending theoretical study programmes use the mobile phone for e-mail/Internet somewhat more often than do young people in practical study programmes.

Going further into our database, we see that the Russian adults who often make calls via the mobile phone are also inclined to use ICT in general more than other people do, as well as to use other forms of mediated personal communication (such as sending and receiving e-mails, chatting, instant messaging, and entering communities on the Internet). These middle-aged Russians are also

³⁰ Cf. also Bolin 2007.

more likely than the average person to search for a variety of information on the Internet (for instance, travel information, entertainment information, scientific information) and download music, computer programs and films. As for the rest, they have a lifestyle pattern that implies highly direct personal intercourse – going to the cinema, visiting restaurants/pubs, going to parties, etc. People who often make telephone calls via the mobile phone also tend to have a better household economy than the average person does.

In Sweden, mobile phone habits are, besides being related to more general ICT use, also connected to a stable family situation, having a high work position and a successful career, being a “good consumer” (i.e., being influenced by brands and advertising on the Internet, finding it important to follow fashion and trends as regards clothes and sports, etc.). This consumer pattern is even more marked among Swedish youths who are more focused on brands, etc., than among the adults. This conspicuous consumer behaviour is furthermore related to a positive attitude towards such TV programmes as soap operas, reality TV, fashion reports, MTV and other music channels, as well as to music genres such as hip-hop, R’n’B and other popular genres.

Newspapers

There are media habits characteristic of each city. Before going into the details of the Internet, we will make some basic comments on the use of newspapers and television. The most salient trends are that the persons in Stockholm use the Internet for leisure and work and read newspapers, respectively, much more often than do the persons in St. Petersburg, who watch comparatively more television.

Both media experts and participants in the group discussions in our project have commented upon the sharply decreasing frequency of newspaper reading in Russia after the Soviet era. In contrast, Sweden has kept its (internationally) high level of newspaper reading.

Figure 2:1 above demonstrates that, in St. Petersburg, slightly more than one tenth of the middle-aged persons read newspapers every day, compared to ca. 70 per cent of the middle-aged in Stockholm. Reading newspapers now and then is, thus, most common in St. Petersburg and most people do not subscribe to any newspaper, in contrast to during the Soviet era when it was standard to subscribe to one or several papers. In the Russian group discussions, the emerging picture was to buy a daily or weekly some time per week or to get a newspaper from a friend, family member or at the workplace now and then.

A series of reasons for not placing newspapers especially high up on the list of favourite media appeared in these Russian discussions: “it takes time” to read newspapers; “there’s such an inertia”; “sight problems”; it is not good to subscribe nowadays because “many letterboxes are broken by youths”; “it is a silent protest since the 70s (when it was compulsory to subscribe)”; “you get the infor-

mation (or more full information) on television” with its many channels instead. Some persons also mentioned radio or the Internet as alternatives to newspapers.

Another relatively frequent comment was that “it is expensive (to buy newspapers)”, something that one of our interviewed media experts waved aside:

The cost some people say... there was a crisis, etc. A mug of beer costs more than a newspaper [...] Men will not abstain from a mug of beer, but buying a newspaper... ‘Oh, there is no money!’ It is a subterfuge.

However, quite a few persons in the St. Petersburg group discussions said that they do not read newspapers because they are critical of their sensational, “yellow” content.

Frankly speaking, all main newspapers [...] what we can see is only a big female breast on the front page.... even in central newspapers... (I am) sick of it. (middle-aged man, low education, St. Petersburg)

Now we allegedly have democracy [...] fake democracy... an immense choice. These newspapers which are imposed on me... I don’t want to read anymore... *Komsomolka* or anything else... other newspapers that are up to 70 per cent yellow press, in which I am not interested at all. I despise it and don’t read. (middle-aged woman, high education, St. Petersburg)

Of course, some persons are positive to a particular named paper (such as *Izvestiya* - News, *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* – St. Petersburg News, or *Argumenty i fakty*) generally or for some special reason.

In the group discussions with the young people in St. Petersburg, partly similar reasons for not reading newspapers were mentioned, for instance: all information is on the Internet; reporting on television is usually longer; laziness; they are yellow press. Some persons meant that newspapers are not trustworthy. Furthermore, many adolescents have seen through the papers and feel they are partial and contain biased information:

Newspapers and magazines in most cases work for someone. The information, which goes through them, serves someone’s interests. [...] It is someone’s view, frequently not objective. (young man, theoretical gymnasium, St. Petersburg)

As is the case in many countries, the young generation reads newspapers less often than the adult generation does. In the group discussions with the Russian teenagers, there were also “youth-related reasons” for not reading papers: “the language in newspapers is very boring and there are just facts”; “it seems to me that newspapers are for older people”.

In the group discussions with the middle-aged Stockholmers, on the other hand, no special reasons for reading papers appeared – such a habit seemed to be

self-evident. Practically all 17-year-olds in Stockholm also read newspapers, although not as regularly as the adult Swedes. In the youth discussions in Stockholm, it turned out that some preferred traditional morning papers and were critical of both newspapers that are free of charge and the evening press. Even so, it is strange that not more people in Stockholm complained about fragmented stories and an overflow of pictures, sensational stories and advertisements in the press, which on the whole seems at least as yellow in Stockholm as in St. Petersburg. On the contrary, several 17-year-olds in Stockholm praised the gratis press (which is especially read by young people and people in housing areas with less resources):

But therefore I think that *Metro* is so ingenious. 'Cause I can't manage reading through *DN* (*Dagens Nyheter*, The Daily News, the biggest morning paper). I haven't even time in the mornings to do it. So... *Metro* is terrific, they have, like everything. [...] I use to check the weather in *DN*. (girl, theoretical gymnasium, Stockholm)

... when you go to school... I travel so awfully far [...]. Eeh, then I think it's important to read *City*, because it is good, I think, because then I get like a good picture of what's happening. And then I'm very interested in sports, so I read very much the sports too. [...] It's not that I sit reading everything, but still you get to know a little of everything. [...] And it's an easy text, too, that makes me understand [...]. I notice that if I read *DN* in the morning, for instance, then there's so, you know, extremely much of everything. So you sit like this and exert yourself as much as you can and so... I don't... OK, I don't get the context. (girl, practical gymnasium, Stockholm)

Television

Still another reason for the decrease in newspaper reading in St. Petersburg is the many new television channels that have been gaining ground, particularly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Our quantitative studies show that people in St. Petersburg on average have access to many more TV channels than the Stockholmers do and that, as mentioned, especially St. Petersburg adults watch considerably more television than Stockholmers of the same age do. A participant in the group discussions in St. Petersburg also underlines that even a poor family can have a television today.

Furthermore, as dealt with in Article 1, the genre of fiction increased substantially on the state-controlled channels (represented by *Rossiya* and *Perviy Kanal* in the study) since the 1990s, making up about half of the output.³¹

In the group discussions, there were, naturally, a host of individual attitudes towards television, the different TV channels and their programmes. What can be said in sum, however, is that the Russian adults most often chose television as

³¹ Degtereva 2007.

their favourite medium and among several of them the enthusiasm over television was great:

Television – it’s universal, i.e., it’s absolutely everything. We get all information via television and radio. (middle-aged woman, low education, St. Petersburg)

Television. It’s unambiguous. We have TV sets in all rooms [...] In general, everything is interesting. (middle-aged woman, low education, St. Petersburg)

Television is in the first place because when you come home, you immediately switch it on. And also in terms of news... if you are not satisfied with information on one news channel, you can switch to another one, to a satellite channel. This is why for me, I would not be able to live without television, though I’m not saying that... not saying that it’s so good but this is already [part] of life. (middle-aged woman, high education, St. Petersburg)

Among the Swedish adults, the opinions on television and its outlet were similarly varied and generally positive, but there were relatively more persons who were hesitant about television:

You see, I am a bit cynical and say that I feel that manifoldness became simplicity... I mean, in any case regarding the TV output, I think. I am sad, you see. But, no... [...] But it was said that we would get so unbelievably many more programmes since the output would be so much bigger with many more TV channels. And I feel that it’s precisely the other way around. [...] It’s so damn little... (middle-aged woman, high education, Stockholm)

... television, video and radio are what is gone for me. On the other hand, I use the Internet very much. There you can watch television, news, programmes, films, and so on. Now, streamed television [...] is also in progress. It will be quite interesting then. (middle-aged man, low education, Stockholm)

The TV channels most often watched by the average adult in St. Petersburg are, according to our survey results (where the following TV channels were included), the state-controlled channels Rossiya (Russia), Perviy Kanal (Channel One) and NTV. Fourth popular is the regional Pjatyj Kanal (Channel 5, St. Petersburg). Other channels watched relatively often but nevertheless rather now and then, or regularly by a minority of the city’s population, are Kultura (Culture, Russian channel), STS (Russian commercial entertainment channel), TNT (foreign “global” drama channel) and TV3 (Russian commercial entertainment channel). “Global” channels such as Discovery (science, history, etc.), TV1000 (film), Eurosport (sports), CNN/BBC/Euronews (news) and MTV (music) are alternatives used more seldom by the average adult or more intensively by smaller parts of the population. For example, highly educated people are more frequent users of CNN/BBC/Euronews.

This pattern is partly different among the Russian adolescents. The 17-year-olds in St. Petersburg most often use STS (Russian commercial entertainment channel), MTV (“global” music), TNT (“global” drama), Muz TV (New TV, Russian entertainment), and state-controlled Perviy kanal (Channel One, Russian). In other words, they are on the whole, and like young people over the world, more oriented towards entertainment channels and some “global” channels than the adults are.

In Sweden, the two traditional public service channels (SVT1 and SVT2, Swedish Television) have less fiction than the new hybrid public service channel TV4, which in its turn has less fiction than two Swedish-speaking private commercial channels, Kanal 5 and TV3, which transmit from Great Britain and predominantly offer fiction. These five TV channels are the most watched among the middle-aged Stockholmers, although the public service channels to a higher degree. Highly educated adults also tend to watch the traditional public service channels more than the average Swede does. The adults in Stockholm do not watch “global” or foreign channels more than adult St. Petersburgers do.

The teenagers in Stockholm are not as fond of the traditional public service channels as the adults are, but search mainly for entertainment in the Swedish-speaking private commercial channels and to a lesser extent – like the teenagers in St. Petersburg – in “global” music and film channels.

On a general level, then, the structure of choice of channels is similar in the two cities (see also Article 1). Middle-aged persons stick primarily to channels in their own language, and primarily to public service/state-controlled television, now and then interrupted by visits to other commercial and private channels. The adolescents are more likely to choose commercial, private and to some extent “global” channels.

It is, naturally, impossible to talk about plurality, manifoldness and impartiality in the TV outputs without conducting detailed content analyses. However, based on the general TV viewing pictures in the two cities, the choice of channels seems relatively similar. The number of TV options is also greater in St. Petersburg. The Stockholmers, on the other hand, use, as mentioned previously in this article, newspapers and the Internet more than the Russians do. A crucial question – not illuminated by our studies – is whether the content used in newspapers and on the Internet contributes to greater plurality and diversity of facts and opinions, or whether it rather falls into the society’s dominant discourse.

The Internet

The spread of the Internet might give rise to the assumption that increased access to and use of the Internet (as in Stockholm) is replacing use of television. However, even if a slight tendency towards decreased TV viewing has been

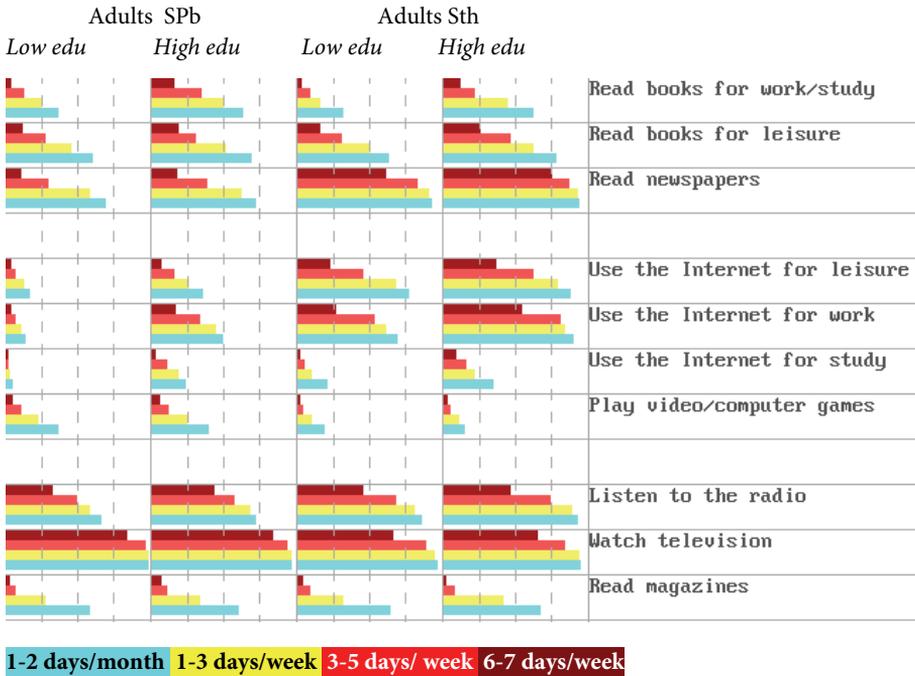
reported now and then in press articles for specifically male adolescents in countries with widespread access to the Internet (e.g., the U.S.), several researchers have simultaneously pointed out that the seemingly negative correlation between television viewing and Internet use in the whole population is due to the fact that more educated people, who are heavily overrepresented among the early providers and users of the Internet, watch television less than do persons with a lower education level, independent of their Internet use. This is the case also in our study, both among the St. Petersburg and Stockholm adults, i.e., high education prognosticates more Internet use and low education more TV viewing.

However, among the Russian adolescents this pattern is less clear and among the young people in Stockholm, there is even a weak positive correlation between TV viewing and Internet use, maybe a sign of so-called multitasking, that is, chatting and the like on the Internet, while at the same time doing homework, talking on the mobile phone, and having the TV set on, watching now and then “when something happens”, as one of the young interviewees put it.

Thus, adults with a higher education in St. Petersburg and Stockholm clearly use the Internet for work, study and leisure more often than do people with a lower education; the relations are very strong in the work context. Beside the fact that persons with a higher education in both St. Petersburg and Stockholm read more than do persons with a lower education in their city, Internet use (for leisure, study and work, respectively, regarding frequency as well as amount of time spent) is, taken together, the media habit that best distinguishes people with a high vs. low education (Figure 2:1b).³²

³² Household economy also correlates positively with Internet use, both for work/study and for leisure, among all four groups studied. However, the relationships with economy are mostly rather weak and partly spurious. Household economy tends to go together with higher education, especially among the Russian adults, and when correlations between Internet use and household economy are controlled for by education, the relations with economy diminish. Education is, thus, a much stronger explanatory factor.

Figure 2:1b. How often do you use the following media? (by education and city among the adults, cumulative per cent)



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

In a similar vein, access to and use of the Internet among the 17-year-olds in St. Petersburg is clearly associated with attending a theoretical study programme. More “theoretical” pupils in the Russian city have a computer at home, and they use the Internet for work, study and leisure more often than “practical” pupils do.

This educational pattern levels out, however, when all four groups are taken into account. In Stockholm, there is no difference between the number of computers in the homes of pupils studying practical and theoretical programmes. In principle, all Stockholm adolescents also have access to the Internet at home and use it to the same degree. There is a difference, however, in that the pupils in theoretical classes tend to use the Internet for study more often than pupils in practical classes do. Using the Internet for leisure is, on the other hand, equally distributed – but the “practical” adolescents spend somewhat more time on such activities. In both cities, Internet use for leisure correlates positively with playing computer and video games and (to a lesser extent) with reading magazines and speaking on the mobile phone.

This is, thus, an interesting fact that points to the absence of digital divides in terms of access to and use of the Internet among young people in Stockholm – and

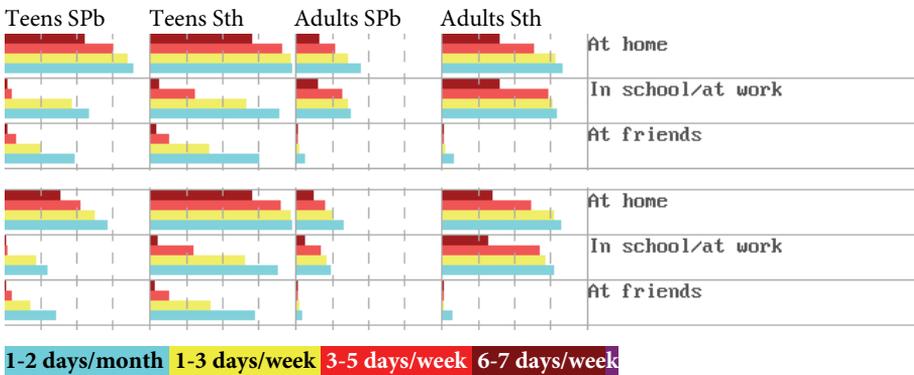
it might well be that the young generations in St. Petersburg will be in the same situation within a few years, when Internet access has spread and become cheaper.

Otherwise, our studies show that the overall patterns of media use (Figure 2:1) (obtained by factor analyses – see how the activities are grouped in the figures) are basically the same in the two cities.³³ Internet use generally (independent of aim – for leisure, work or study) stands out as a factor of its own, especially if we consider both the amount of time and the frequencies of using the different media. (Frequent Internet users also stay with the medium for longer periods.)

Places, skills, functions of ICT

At the same time as the Stockholm inhabitants use computers and the Internet much more than the corresponding age groups in St. Petersburg do, the places for ICT use are characterized by age differences. Whereas young people use computers and the Internet mostly at home, adults use them at home and at work to a relatively similar extent (Figure 2:3).

*Figure 2:3. How often do you use a computer...? (the upper part of the Figure)
How often do you use the Internet... (the lower part of the Figure)? (by age and city, cumulative per cent)*



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

Among the adults, persons with a higher education in both cities tend to use computers and the Internet more often at all places than persons with a lower education do. The Russian young people attending a theoretical study programme also use computers and the Internet more at all places than do the “practical”

³³ This means that persons who watch television a great deal also tend to use radio and weeklies/monthlies more than other people, while persons who often read books also are inclined to read newspapers more often than the rest of the population.

adolescents. Turning to the Swedish adolescents, however, there are no differences at all regarding places for ICT use depending on theoretical and practical study programme.

When it comes to perception of one's computer skills, the differences due to both age and city are great. Young persons much more often than adults generally and in each city consider themselves to be in possession of technical knowledge and skills – in all aspects asked about – for handling computers and the Internet. And adult inhabitants in Stockholm say more often that they are skilled in this respect than do persons of the same age in St. Petersburg (Figure 2:4).

Figure 2:4. How good are your computer skills for managing the following things? (by age and city, cumulative per cent)



Master without problem **Manage reasonably**

The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

Not having computer skills seems to be one reason why many middle-aged adults still are not really integrated into or interested in the virtual space. Two such utterances from the group discussions are the following:

[...] well, Internet... I can't use it myself but I often have to search for something for my work... this is with the help of my children, of course. (middle-aged women, high education, St. Petersburg)

Internet... yes, I have it at home but I don't care about opening it. [...] I have nothing against the apparatus per se... or maybe you would say the channel or so, but there's so much fuss with... there are so many other bits and pieces that follow, if one doesn't follow up every day, isn't there? [...] There's a high threshold for using the Internet in some way, I feel. (middle-aged man, low education, Stockholm)

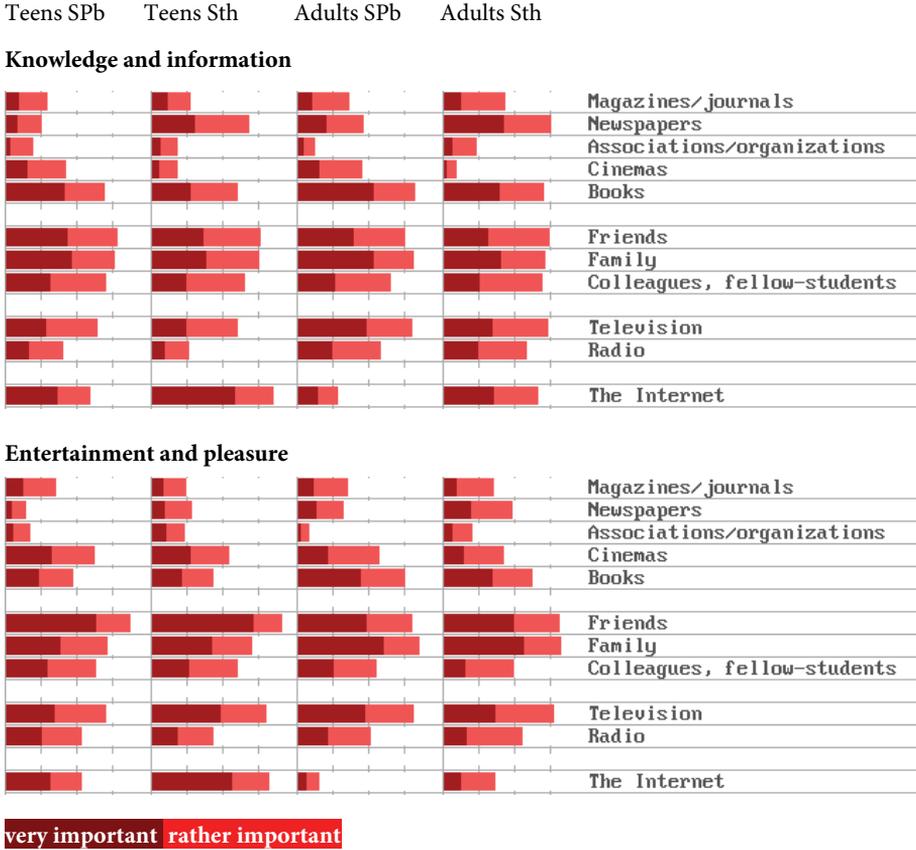
The adults in both cities with a higher education level also declare much more often than persons with a shorter education that they have computer skills.

Having computer skills is a pronounced male trait in all four groups (although weaker among the adults in St. Petersburg), which corresponds with men's stronger interest in technique in general.

In our data, the Internet is recognized as being one of the major media for *knowledge and information* among the young people in both cities and among the adults in Stockholm. For the young Stockholmers, the Internet even turns out to be the *most* important source of knowledge and information, even surpassing personal sources (family, friends, fellow students). Books and television are rated higher as sources of knowledge and information in the other three groups, and also newspapers among the Swedish adults (Figure 2:5).

The young Swedes have also designated the Internet as the most important source (only surpassed by friends) when it comes to *entertainment and pleasure*. Among the young people in St. Petersburg, cinema, television, friends, the family and fellow students are instead regarded as better sources for entertainment and pleasure than the Internet. Regarding entertainment and pleasure, the adults in St. Petersburg prefer almost all other media and personal contacts to the Internet, and most popular in this regard are the family, friends, television, books and fellow workers. Even if the adults in Stockholm find the Internet more entertaining and pleasurable than the Russian adults do, the middle-aged Stockholmers nevertheless find several other media and personal contacts more amusing than the Internet, such as family, friends, television and books (Figure 2:5).

Figure 2:5. How important are the following media and persons to you when it comes to knowledge and information (the upper part of the Figure)? ~ when it comes to entertainment and pleasure (the lower part of the table)? (by age and city, cumulative per cent)



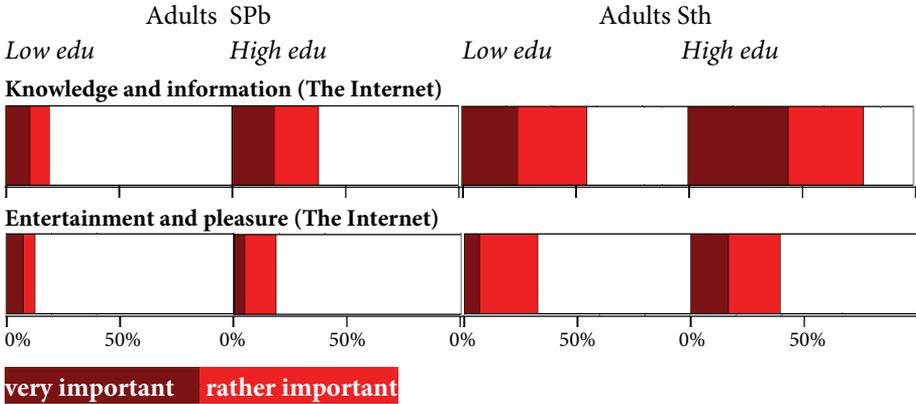
The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

It appears that the adults with a higher education in both cities more often than those with a lower education find the Internet particularly important for knowledge and information, but also for entertainment and pleasure. A similar pattern is valid for the St. Petersburg teens attending a theoretical study programme; they are more disposed than the “practical” students to finding the Internet important for knowledge and information and, although slightly, for entertainment and pleasure. But among the Stockholm adolescents, such differences between “theoretical” and “practical” students have faded away with increased access to and use of the Internet.

Even among the Russian adults with a higher education, the proportions who find the Internet an important source of knowledge and information and for

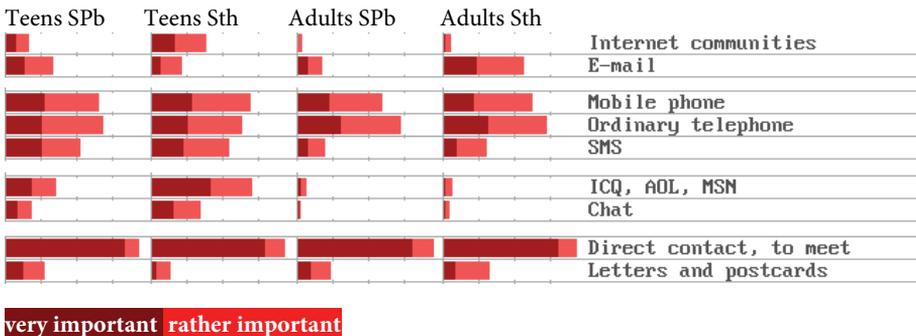
entertainment and pleasure, respectively, are considerably smaller than the shares of less well-educated Stockholmers who have the same opinion (Figure 2:5b).

Figure 2:5b. How important is the Internet to you when it comes to knowledge and information? ~ when it comes to entertainment and pleasure? (by education and city among adults, cumulative per cent)



Comparing certain aspects of *socializing with other people*, all four groups say that direct contact is by far the most important mode of social intercourse, followed by the ordinary telephone and mobile phone. However, the young people in Stockholm more often than the other groups mention different social media on the Internet – chat and instant messaging, as well as communities (social networking sites) – as important for social intercourse (Figure 2:6).

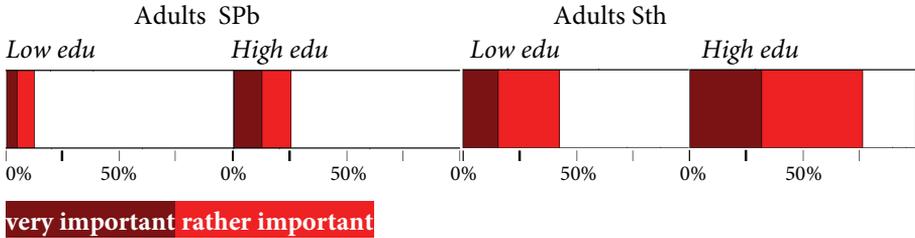
Figure 2:6. How important do you think the following means are to your social intercourse with other people? (by age and city, cumulative per cent)



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

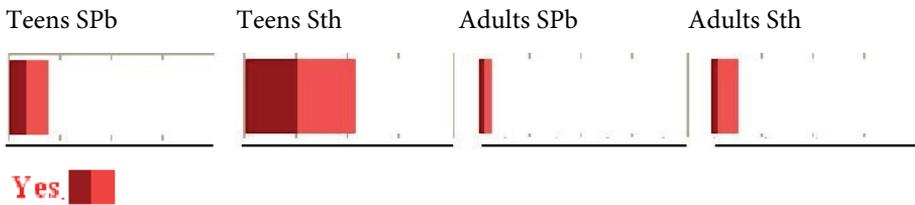
Among the Stockholm adults e-mail is appreciated especially among those with a high education level. The Russian adults with a higher education level find e-mail less important than do Stockholmers with a lower education level (Figure 2:6b)

Figure 2:6b. How important do you think e-mail is to your social intercourse with other people? (by education and city among adults, cumulative per cent)



Given the great focus on the Internet among Stockholm teens, it is not surprising to learn that they much more often than the other three groups mean that they depend on the Internet. However, the fact that more than half of them express this is remarkable (Figure 2:7).

Figure 2:7. Do you find the Internet addictive on your part? (by age and city, per cent)



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

The relation between Internet dependence and education is insignificant in all four groups.

But what do the respondents really mean by being dependent on the Internet? Our data show that in all likelihood the great majority are not addicted in the sense of having withdrawal symptoms if they have no access to the Net (a range of criteria, defined by researchers in the addiction field, must be met before addiction is a fact). The persons in our four groups who say that they are Internet dependent are above all persons who use the Internet frequently and for long periods, not least in leisure time, and who exploit the Internet in a variety of ways – to serve practical, social, entertainment and information purposes. However, there are no clear relations with other variables in our database, indicating, for instance, that these persons are isolated or depressed, or something similar. Instead, they meet with their family and friends as often as other persons do,

they have no special divergent opinions or leisure activities and they generally have the same emotional state as other persons, as least according to how we have measured these phenomena in the quantitative surveys. There is one exception however, namely that the Stockholm adolescents who say they are Internet dependent slightly more often say they are anxiety-ridden ($r = 0.14$ ³⁴). Also worth noting is that the respondents' judgements of being Internet dependent do not have any particular connection with the statement "People devote too much time to the Internet" – a statement that the majority of the respondents in all four groups agree with.

Because Internet dependence is mostly spread among the Stockholm teens, these adolescents generally regard such dependence as something normal, at least referring to the group discussions. They mostly admit that it is easy to "get stuck there", as there is so much on the Internet – there is always something to do, you can do everything on the Internet – or that it is "habit-forming" and, in sum, has become part of everyday life in a McLuhanian sense (that the media are extensions of man).³⁵ More genuine symptoms of addiction are, however, expressed by a few who cannot refrain from playing computer games. A couple of group participants also say that always being "up-to-date" has become a need and a source of stress: Perhaps one feels that "Now four billion people are sitting connected and if I disconnect, what will I miss?", "You can miss out on whatever. You may be the first person to learn about some worldwide news, or sort of be the first to see the pictures of the weekend being blogged out." Simultaneously, these two young men (studying social sciences, Stockholm) add that "often when you sit on the Internet, nothing happens. You can press the inbox 220 times, before anything comes". Other examples of similar more strongly felt Internet dependence are the following:

...for instance, I was without recorded music for a good while when I was abroad and then I was on the point of going mad about that. I was without computer games for about a month when my computer crashed. I still had the Internet and so on, but still I was going crazy about it. Then I was without the Internet. I had computer games but went crazy over (lack of) the Internet and then... It is like one is disappearing a little, you see, it's your life. (young man, natural sciences, Stockholm)

The more you are there, the more social life you get, and the more you want to be there. (young woman, fashion and design, Stockholm)

³⁴ Here as in the rest of the articles, we use Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient.

³⁵ In a wider perspective, the media as human extensions have an influence on human beings' way of being, perceiving, and behaving towards other people, and also structure everyday life (and thereby society), see, e.g., McLuhan [1964]1967. A large body of research literature has developed similar thoughts in relation to ICT, as the Internet and mobile phones can be used at any time and place, serving to wipe out the borders between work and leisure, the public and private spheres, day and night, etc., see, e.g., Turkle 1984 who relatively early talked about the computer as part of the ego.

I believe that many use their sites, of the type *Bilddagboken* (The Picture Diary), as some sort of confirmation that 'I have pals' and that 'my life is interesting'. (young woman, fashion and design, Stockholm)

Well, when I sit by the computer and don't use the Internet, then I feel... well the hardest thing that I get anxious about, it is that I feel lonely. You know, you sit in front of a computer kind of and then you feel lonely, see? Because if you're online, then you know you're not lonely. I'm not the only person sitting there, like... if you only... (Interrupted by another participant in the group: Online... you just feel secure knowing that they [other people] are there.) Yeah. It's like having a heroin shot next to you, just push in the needle, like, whenever you want to. (young man, theoretical college, Stockholm)

Another question in the qualitative group discussions – about what it would be like if the Internet disappeared – also points to the fact that Internet dependence for the majority is mostly something habit-forming rather than something truly addictive. It is true that certain adolescents have strong negative feelings about the hypothetical disappearance of the Internet: "everything would be shit", "impossible", "nothing can then be done", "boring". Still another person, a young woman in a practical study programme in Stockholm, says she would go mad, because she gets all her information, be it about clothes or the world, on the Internet.

However, many of the young people in Stockholm take a possible disappearance of the Internet more calmly and express mainly discontent with the fact that it would be impractical and time-consuming without the Net – when searching for information, buying clothes, communicating with friends, playing games, etc. There are also a couple of teenagers in Stockholm who explicitly state that they would prefer not having the Internet, as it would mean less stress, and they would probably do other things more often, such as moving around and talking face-to-face.

As shown, among the adult Stockholmers and the young and adult St. Petersburgers there are far fewer who consider themselves dependent on the Internet. The middle-aged Stockholmers, then, often refer to young people when it comes to the issue of Internet dependence. But some Swedish adults admit nevertheless that they feel stressed if they, for instance, cannot check their e-mail.

The opinions of the Russian participants in the group discussions are more divided. Here we find, for example, that young people frequently condemn their Internet dependent peers (condemnations that, thus, are on the whole valid for other persons than themselves). Internet dependent persons are often depicted as "possessed", "sick", "crazy", "weak", "depressive", "shy" or "lonely" people. Many discussants mention as a negative "fact" that Internet dependent people replace real life with virtual life. Internet addicted people live outside society, have forgotten their natural needs and must instead become "normal" people. Similar comments are:

It's a pity, as for me. Yes, it is. Because I think it's like a disease, seriously. Because... looking at such people, they are unhealthy, seriously. They try to find any free minute to run home, sit down at a computer... sit down, yes, and get on the Internet in a hurry... here they sit with red eyes, all nervous, excited, they want more and more. (young woman, chemistry, St. Petersburg)

Maybe it's a method of self-realization through the Internet... through a computer for people with mental deflection? Who cannot find themselves in real life, in society. (young man, electro-technical college, St. Petersburg)

Many people cannot fulfil their hopes and themselves, it seems to me, and therefore they fulfil themselves on the Internet. (young man, information technology, St. Petersburg)

Some Russian adults explain that people live on the Internet because it is easier; it is a way to avoid problems, duties and the necessity of doing something in real life. Other adults are concerned because they think the Internet has a negative impact on their children, and that people on the Internet communicate less in real life. Still other adults in St. Petersburg see some abnormality in the fact that young people are sitting on the Internet for long periods, but at the same time believe that one cannot escape this – it is the nature of our epoch.

Nowadays, it's a speeded-up tempo, that is, they need everything faster, in a hurry. They need everything in this way. (middle-aged woman, low education, St. Petersburg)

Some women with a high education level, who see the Internet as something evil, consider that “we must fight” against the Internet by spending more time with our children, reading to them, and giving them opportunities to do different things, not just sit in front of a computer.

Others believe that Internet addiction is related to the fact that today's parents spend all their time on making money – parents have no time to spend with their children, which is why the children, left to themselves, plunge into the Internet.

I think more about the youth because my daughter is growing. And I worry about her because they spend so much time on the Internet now. And all this... virtual communication... I even remember myself when I was young, at that time we went dancing, we went somewhere, we communicated somewhere with each other and now they have no place to go except for the Internet. (middle-aged women, low education, St. Petersburg)

A few adults in St. Petersburg take other societal perspectives:

Mass media – that's a business. Moreover, it's a very lucrative business. Therefore the financial resources are directed there. If there are financial resources, it means

there is rapid development. So people are searching for means to advance it. There is a dependence on these games, so they drive (the dissemination of) these games. They get engaged in it. They develop it purposefully. It is a (question of) social demand. [...] The supply is growing. (middle-aged man, high education, St. Petersburg)

I have a feeling that I don't like talking either on the phone or by any other means: writing letters, sending SMS. When you meet a person, look into his eyes and you can get an idea of whom you're dealing with... But the majority of young people... maybe it's the reason for the enormous criminality... by the way, they prefer to make contact on the Internet, communicate with each (other). It's safe, you're at home, talking. But on the other hand, society disintegrates because of that... becomes like mechanisms and they can't stick together later when they have to struggle for something, for their rights or for something else. [...] He sits and he can only send a message on the Internet. That's it, that's all the struggle. (middle-aged man, high education, St. Petersburg)

Another question in the group discussions was: "If one thinks about the fact that people use the Internet and mobile phones more and more, then their way of being together has also partly changed. What difference is there between communicating with other people directly and via media, do you think?"

The Stockholm youngsters delivered a succession of detailed advantages and disadvantages of communicating via the new media in different situations and with different persons. Even if some of these teens meant that face-to-face communication with people was preferable, and that it could be stressful to be perpetually able to reach others and be reached oneself (especially given that one has many extra Internet friends), most of the Swedish teenagers seem to regard "virtual communication" as practical and supplementary to real-life dialogue. A more detailed picture of the Swedish answers to this and similar questions in the group discussions, both with young people and adults, is presented in Article 7.

In St. Petersburg, it was much more common to underline the negative aspects of communication via the new media. "I think it's wrong to sit between four walls in front of the screen, not to see daylight. Live communication is very important", as a young man, studying design, put it. Quite a number of the young persons in St. Petersburg said that they prefer live communication where you can see the other person's eyes, a communication that reveals facial expressions and emotions, which in turn means more sincerity and that you understand people better. Communication via the Internet was said to be more artificial and flat, involving a greater opportunity to deceive others. However, it was added that there are some practical benefits of the mobile phone, which makes you more flexible, and of the Internet, which allows you to communicate with people in other places.

Quite a number of the St. Petersburg adult participants in the group discussions stressed that direct personal communication was much more common when they were young.

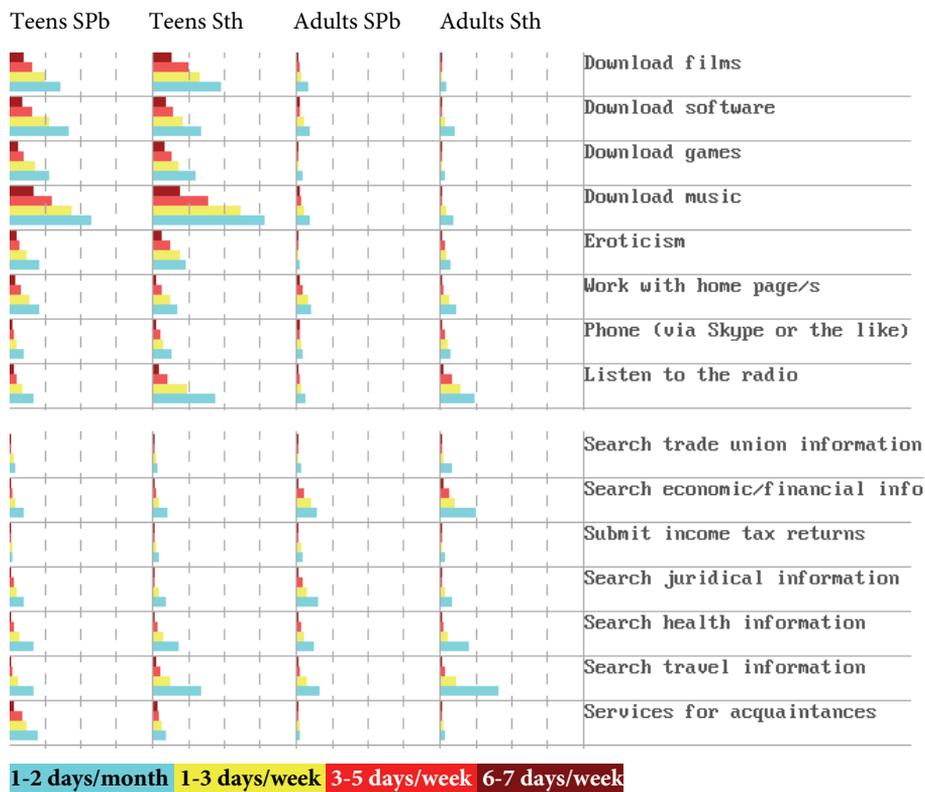
ICT activities

If we consider the findings on “digital divides” so far, it is obvious that Internet divides are greatest among the adults in St. Petersburg – and in most respects rubbed out among the young people in Stockholm. Let us, however, also take a more detailed look at what people are doing with the computer and on the Internet.

As regards the 34 fields of ICT application asked about in the quantitative studies, generation differences are the most common (Figure 2:9). The young people use ICT more than the adults in their city for chatting/instant messaging, visiting communities, writing and reading blogs and posting pictures of themselves and others on the Internet. The same holds for downloading music, films, games and computer programs. Young people also more often than adults listen to the radio on the Internet, use the Net for eroticism, work with home pages, make telephone calls (e.g., via Skype), search for acquaintances/dates, process pictures, edit films, and search for study information. Thus, young people are largely using the Internet for social networking and for downloading and uploading materials, especially entertainment materials, something that also has been found in previous research.

The adults, on the other hand, use ICT more than the young people for text processing and compilation of tables – activities often connected to work. The adults also search for certain kinds of information, such as economic and financial information, more often than young people do.

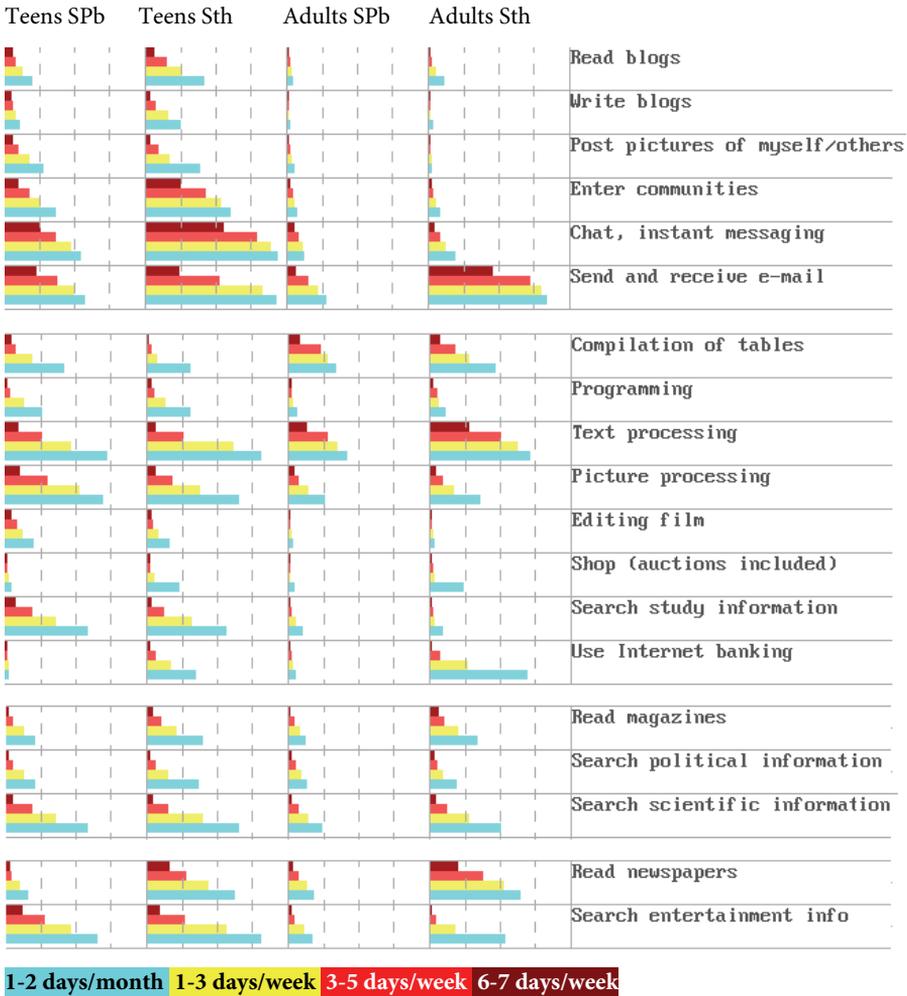
Figure 2:9. How often do you use the Internet for the following things?
(by age and city, cumulative per cent)



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

(continued)

Figure 2:9 (continued). How often do you use the Internet for the following things? (by age and city, cumulative per cent)



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

Given the fact that the Stockholmers have much greater access to the Internet (especially via broadband), and that they typically have a better household economy than the St. Petersburg respondents, it is no wonder that the young people and adults in Stockholm use the Internet more often than the corresponding age groups in St. Petersburg for e-mailing, reading net newspapers and magazines, searching for entertainment information, searching for travel information, shopping, using Internet banks, and programming. Inhabitants in St. Petersburg, on the other hand, seem to search more for juridical information on the Internet

than the Stockholmers do, which may have to do with the host of new laws being enacted in the radically changed Russian society, and the sometimes uncertain applications of justice.

Besides generation and city differences, certain ICT activities are characterized by gender. However, as is the case for the St. Petersburg adults' use of mobile phones and video and computer games, gender differences in computer and Internet use among these Russian 45- to 55-year-olds are conspicuous by their almost total absence. The Russian women and men use computer and Internet to the same extent for "work", "study" and "leisure" and in different kinds of places. The same is nearly true of what the Russian women and men are doing on the Internet. And their attitudes to the Internet are remarkably similar. The few exceptions that exist after all are that the men more often than the women in St. Petersburg search for eroticism on the Net and that slightly more men than women are of the opinion that the Internet is "important for entertainment and pleasure". Men are also somewhat more likely to talk about their superior computer skills.³⁶

As regards the other three groups studied, young men in the Russian city and men of both generations in Stockholm tend to, for example, download music, films, games and computer programs more often than young and adult women do, use the Internet for eroticism more, and more often read newspapers and journals/magazines on the Net.³⁷ There are few Internet activities that distinguish women. However, the young women in Stockholm tend more than young men in the same city to publish pictures on themselves and others on the Internet, and to write blogs.

While gender differences in computer and Internet issues are hardly visible among the middle-aged persons in St. Petersburg, the variation related to education is striking. It ought to be added that gender and education are independent of each other, that is, the Russian women and men are comparable as regards education levels, something that is also true of the Swedes in our studies.

Thus, the adults with a higher education in both cities do a range of things with the computer and on the Internet more often than do persons with a shorter education. Actually, of all the ICT activities studied, there are none that the middle-aged with a low education level tend to engage in more than persons

³⁶ One hypothesis to be tested is that the lack of gender differences in this respect has its roots in the former Soviet structure.

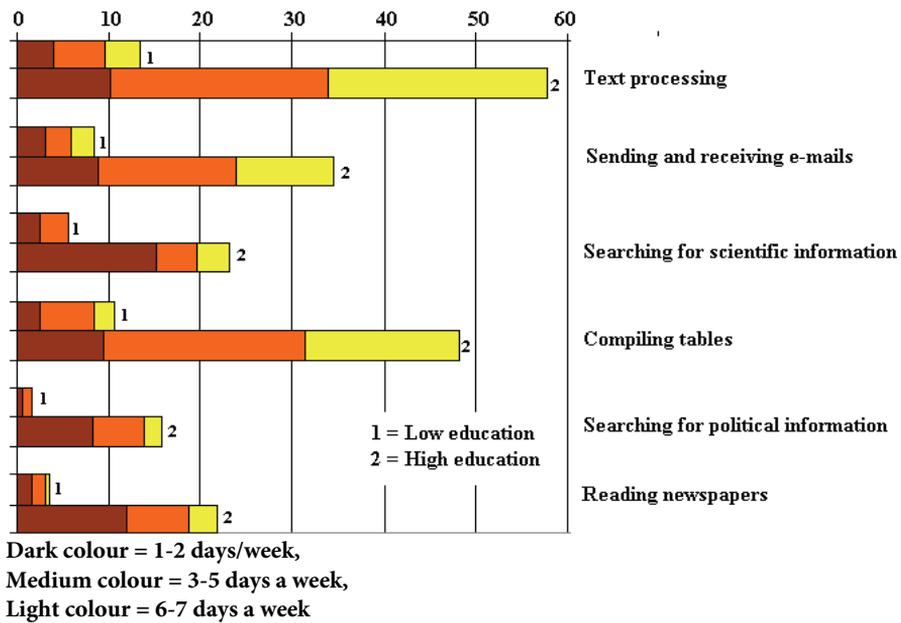
³⁷ In Stockholm, there are additional male-dominated ICT activities, such as listening to the radio on the Net, viewing films on the computer, cutting films, phoning, compiling tables on the computer, programming, using the computer for picture processing, entering communities, and becoming acquainted with new persons in the workplace. In sum, men are more inclined than women to use the technical opportunities that ICT offers. Besides technical interest and use of ICT's technical opportunities, we find some information areas that are more associated with the adult men than the adult women in Stockholm, such as searching for economic and financial information, scientific information, and political information on the Internet.

with a higher education do. But there are activities that both groups engage in to a similar extent, such as making acquaintances/dating and downloading games and films.

St. Petersburg adults

Even if most fields of ICT application are more used among the highly educated than among the less well-educated adults in St. Petersburg, Figure 2:10 displays the strongest correlations between high education level and ICT activities for these Russians.

Figure 2:10. St. Petersburg adults with lower (1) and higher (2) education and the most distinguishing ICT activities, performed at least once a week (%)



The ICT activities most strongly connected with higher education among the adults in St. Petersburg are, thus, partly a group consisting of “text processing”, “compilation of tables” and “sending and receiving e-mails” – activities that are largely connected to work. For the rest, the most distinguishing variables as regards education are “searching for scientific information”, “searching for political information” and “reading newspapers” on the Net.

Several of the correlations are very strong ($r = 0.40-0.50$). There are only a few other aspects in the whole questionnaire that have similarly strong connections with higher education among these adults, namely the mother’s education, the father’s education and the view that “intellectuals” are a group that one personally “can say ‘we’ about”.

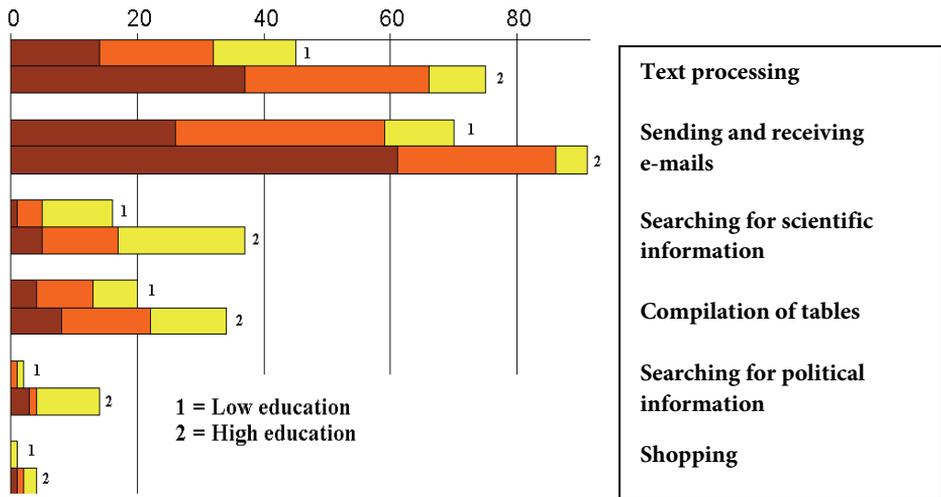
The six activities in Figure 2:10 group well together and are also clearly related to the great majority of the other ICT variables in the questionnaire. Apart from these, “searching for scientific information”, “searching for political information” and “reading newspapers” on the Net have positive connections with above all cultural capital, e.g., going to a restaurant, to the opera, ballet and theatre, to museums and exhibitions, to concerts with classical music, as well as appreciating abstract photographic motifs. A correlation with economic capital (better household economy) exists, but is only slight. Furthermore, particularly searching for political information and reading newspapers on the Internet implies little trust in the state-controlled media, and to some degree the same is valid for trust in the President, church and trade unions.

The overall picture of the St. Petersburg adults searching for scientific and/or political information and reading newspapers on the Internet is, thus, one of a cultural and intellectual elite. Using the computer and Internet for these (and many other) activities stands out as highly relevant to their professional and private life.

Stockholm adults

In a similar vein as for the Russian adults, Figure 2:11 displays the strongest correlations among the Stockholm middle-aged persons between education and what they are doing on the computer and the Internet:

Figure 2:11. Stockholm adults with lower (1) and higher (2) education and the most distinguishing ICT activities, performed at least once a week (%)



Dark colour = 1-2 days/week,
 Medium colour = 3-5 days a week,
 Light colour = 6-7 days a week

Figure 2:11 (and the correlation coefficients on which it builds) gives distinct proofs that higher education among the adult Stockholmers – as among the same age group in St. Petersburg – is associated with work-connected “text processing”, “sending and receiving e-mails” and “compilation of tables”. In Stockholm, as in St. Petersburg, “searching for scientific information” and “for political information” are also markedly associated with higher education.

However, more aspects of ICT activities in Stockholm than in St. Petersburg are independent of education. A great many of these ICT uses are social in nature or related to entertainment, and involve using certain Internet services (such as “submit income tax returns or the like”) and searching for certain kinds of information on the Internet (such as “travel information” and “health information”).

Going further into the database, we see that persons associated with different ICT directions have related dispositions offline. Just to mention a few examples: The Stockholm adults who relatively more often “search for scientific information” on the Internet are – besides having a higher education – inclined, among other things, to “read books for work/studies”, to find “history/science an important issue for the media to deal with”, to readily listen to classical music and to public service radio, as well as to go to museums and exhibitions. A similar situation applies to persons who are apt to “search for political information on the Internet”. These adults are – besides having a higher education – e.g., inclined to prefer “TV programmes on current debate/political discussions” and to claim that “they themselves can influence the societal development in Sweden”. In addition, their activities and values in society represent to a great extent “high culture” activities, as is the case also for persons often “searching for scientific information”.

Like in St. Petersburg, although in a partly different manner, among Stockholmers searching for scientific and/or political information on the Internet is intertwined with a cultural life style and with a relatively established societal position. There is, in sum, no doubt that both our adult surveys support findings from our earlier studies – showing that persons’ different social realities (activities, values, social identity and work positions outside the Internet) have significant bearings on their different orientations in the virtual space.³⁸

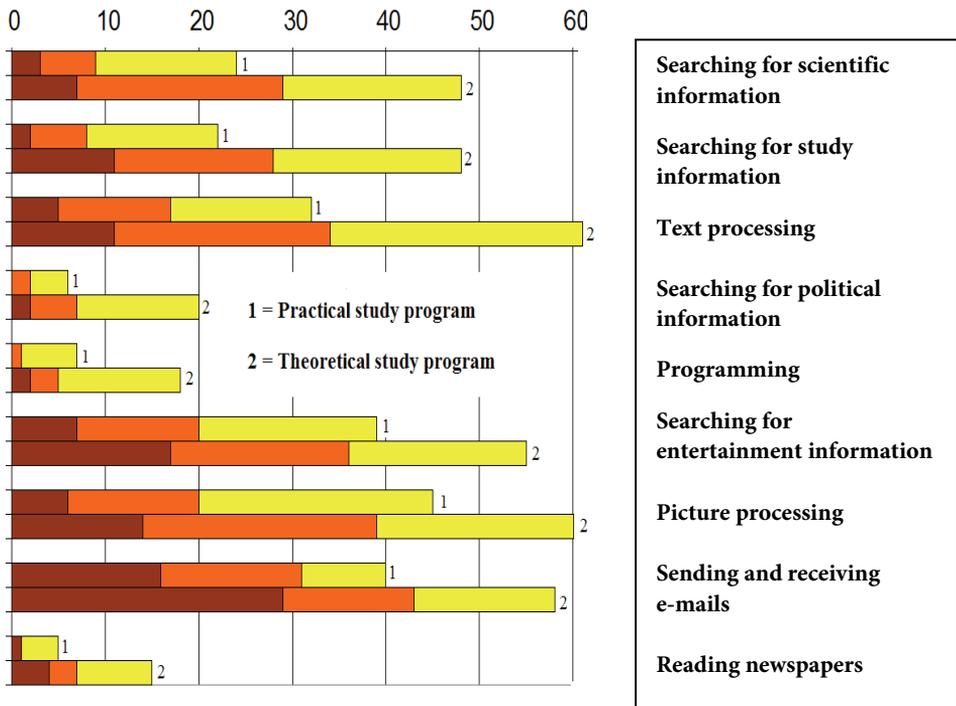
St. Petersburg teenagers

As mentioned, access to and use of ICT among the adolescents in St. Petersburg is still clearly associated with attending a theoretical study programme in school. Therefore a great number of positive correlations appear between attending such a programme, on the one hand, and different ICT activities and values, on the other.

³⁸ Petrov 2000, Petrov & von Feilitzen 2005

Figure 2:12 displays the strongest correlations between attending a theoretical study programme and the different ICT directions among the young people in St. Petersburg.

Figure 2:12. Young people in St. Petersburg attending practical (1) and theoretical (2) study programmes and the most distinguishing ICT activities, performed at least once a week (%)



It is remarkable that the strongest positive correlations among the Russian teenagers in several respects coincide with the correlations that distinguish adults with a higher education in St. Petersburg: “searching for scientific information”, “searching for study information”, “searching for political information”, “sending/receiving e-mails” and “reading newspapers”. Furthermore, the positive correlations above correspond to four of six positive correlations among Stockholm adults with a higher education.³⁹

³⁹ “sending/receiving e-mails”, “searching for scientific information”, “searching for political information”, and “text processing”.

A corresponding analysis, like that done on the adult samples, of the tendency among young people in St. Petersburg to search for scientific information on the Internet reveals a cultural lifestyle pattern, including, for instance, dispositions to view artistic films and cultural and scientific programmes, to listen to blues, classical music and jazz, to go to museums, exhibitions and the theatre, and to appreciate books. Several of these characteristics also go along with searching for political information that moreover is related to, e.g., interest in all kinds of news, especially international news, watching CNN/BBC/Euro-news, and the opinion that the economy, corruption, economic gaps in society, and aid to developing countries are important issues for the media to deal with.

Searching for scientific and/or political information is also connected to the parents' high education level and to some extent to a better household economy than in the average family. As in the two adult surveys, the young people in St. Petersburg who are engaged in the mentioned Internet activities seem to belong to a group of persons who on average are relatively well-integrated into society, have culturally "legitimate" and in some measure economic capital, and are on their way up on the social ladder.

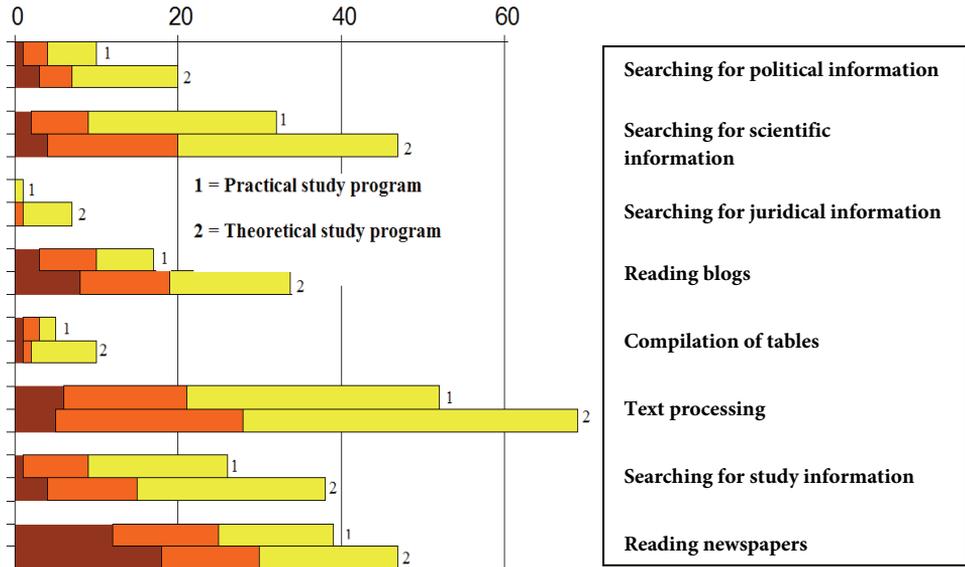
Stockholm teenagers

As mentioned, there is in principle no digital divide at all when it comes to access to computers, general use of ICT and perceived ICT skills among the young people in the Stockholm area, the group among the four studied that use the Internet most of all. However, pupils in theoretical classes tend to use the Internet "for studies" more often than pupils in practical classes do, but use the Internet "for leisure" somewhat less time than the "practical" pupils do.

As regards what the pupils are inclined to do with computers and on the Internet, it becomes apparent that most of these ICT orientations are independent of participation in a theoretical or a practical study programme. We see, just as for the Swedish adults, that the activities that are independent of type of study programme are mostly of a social and/or informative/practical character, or related to entertainment.

However, pupils in practical classes are more inclined than the "theoretical" students to play video/computer games, while young people in theoretical classes are more disposed (as are adults with a higher education) to use the computer for "text processing" and "compilation of tables", to mention but a few examples. And the strongest positive correlations appear between attending a theoretical study programme and "searching for political information", "scientific information" and "juridical information" on the Internet – see Figure 2:13, which ranks the most powerful correlations between attending a theoretical programme and the different ICT directions.

Figure 2:13. Young people in Stockholm attending practical (1) and theoretical (2) study programmes and the most distinguishing ICT activities, performed at least once a week (%)



Dark colour = 1-2 days/week,
 Medium colour = 3-5 days a week,
 Light colour = 6-7 days a week

Compared to the young people attending a theoretical class in St. Petersburg, five of the strongest correlations among the Stockholm adolescents in the same kinds of schools coincide: “searching for political information”, “searching for scientific information”, “text processing”, “searching for study information”, and “reading newspapers”. Furthermore, the two ICT directions that appear on the list of the strongest correlations among all four groups in our surveys are “searching for scientific information” and “searching for political information”.

The Stockholm young people searching for scientific and/or political information on the Internet have corresponding interests in the social world. These students tend to prefer “watching science programmes on television”, as well as “programmes on current debate/political discussions”, “factual programmes” and “cultural programmes”. They also tend, more often than the other young Swedes do, to believe it is important to them that the media deal with a range of societal questions, among other things: history and science, environmental issues, foreign news, economic gaps in society, corruption, aid to other countries, and “the relation between different ethnic groups in Sweden”. These pupils also go to the theatre and to museums and exhibitions more often than the average student does, and listen more readily to classical music. Not surprising-

ly, searching for scientific and/or political information are also significantly related to the mother's and father's higher education and (slightly) to a better economic situation in the household. In sum, these pupils' lifestyles and position or identity in the social space clearly influence their inclination to search the Internet for certain societal information that is relevant to them.

As for digital divides, they are, consequently, still there. They do not concern access to the Internet, skills for using it, or time devoted to it. Neither do they concern the subjectively experienced benefit of the Internet in general – there is no correlation between theoretical/practical class in Stockholm, on the one hand, and agreeing on the statement “Internet has nothing important and relevant to offer me”, on the other. But the digital divides are there because of different *kinds* of experienced benefit. For both “theoretical” and “practical” young people, the Internet has a manifold of social, entertainment, practical and informative functions, but “theoretical” pupils have a greater inclination to make use of the socially relevant information on the Internet that will help them attain higher positions in the social hierarchy in the near future. Because searching for such information is a meaningful engagement for them, they have the inclination to invest in such engagement both owing to their cultural capital and to the expected advantageous consequences. Although the pupils attending theoretical study programmes use the Internet for social, entertainment and practical purposes to the same degree as other young people do,⁴⁰ they also reproduce important lines of activity patterns found among adults with a higher education.

The differences in fields of ICT application between young people in Stockholm and St. Petersburg attending theoretical and practical study programmes, respectively, are fewer than among higher and lower educated adults in the same city. It seems, thus, that digital differences depending on education, one of the most potent factors distinguishing Internet use, are levelling out in the younger generation. On the other hand, it is conspicuous that certain ICT activities persistently connect to high education/theoretical study programme in all four groups, namely “searching for scientific information” and “searching for political information” on the Internet. Given the related lifestyle patterns, implying a great deal of cultural capital (and a little economic capital), this means a position relatively high up in the societal hierarchy.

The concept of “digital divide” is, as a consequence, insufficient – it does not take social divides into account.

⁴⁰ See also Petrov 2000.

Attitudes towards ICT, civic engagement and societal media contents

As we have seen in Figures 2:9 to 13, only a minority of people regularly search for political information on the Internet, even if the proportion is somewhat greater among the teenagers in Stockholm, the group among the four studied who use the Internet most of all. However, what are our respondents' viewpoints regarding the Internet as a platform for democracy and civic engagement?

In the quantitative studies, one question comprised eight statements expressing attitudes towards ICT, sorted by factor analyses into three dimensions (Figure 2:14). As for the first dimension, the inhabitants in St. Petersburg say more often than the Stockholmers do that "The new information technology with the Internet and mobile phones makes the world a better place", while the respondents in Stockholm more often than those in St. Petersburg agree with the statement: "People who do not have access to the Internet are in a seriously disadvantageous position". More young people than adults consider that "Ordinary people can influence what is happening in society by making their voices heard on the Internet".

The second dimension consists of one statement, "The Internet has nothing important and relevant to offer me", which is the least endorsed statement of all, although more of the adults in St. Petersburg agree with it. This is natural, as they use the Internet to a lesser extent than the others do.

The third dimension includes four statements of which the majority agree with two: "Children have access to a lot of unsuitable material on the Internet" and "People devote too much time to the Internet". Sorted in this factor is also "It is disquieting that authorities and employers have increased opportunities for surveillance and control via the Internet", which is most often affirmed by the middle-aged respondents in St. Petersburg. Relatively few believe, however, that "Information technology will lead to increased unemployment in society".

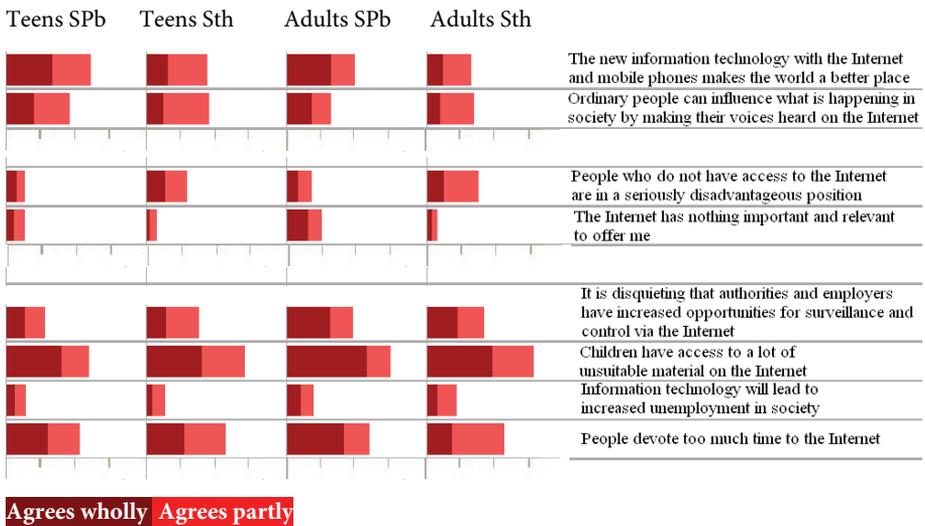
The adults with a high education level more often have positive attitudes towards ICT than do adults with a low education level. Among the young people in both cities, there are hardly any differences in these ICT attitudes depending on theoretical/practical study orientation.

Especially relevant in the discussion on the Internet's possible contribution to democracy and citizenship is the statement "Ordinary people can influence what is happening in society by making their voices heard on the Internet". Even if the adolescents agree with this to a higher degree than the adults do, it appears from Figure 2:14 that a majority dissociate themselves from this assertion.

The ways for ordinary people to influence and try to change society were also dealt with in the group discussions. When it came to the Internet in this respect, opinions were divided. Some expressed the belief that the Internet implies a means to be better heard. A few middle-aged Swedish men said, for example,

that blogs “are democracy to 100 per cent, aren’t they?”, and that “blogging is a very potent channel when it comes to democracy, society, extension, and so on. (But) it is only in its infancy”. Other Stockholmers confirmed that everyone can express his/her opinions on the Net and, in principle, is allowed to say whatever s/he wants. Still others maintained, however, that it is very difficult to make one’s voice heard on a site, blog or forum in all the noise. “When everyone has a blog of their own, then reading them will be a hard work.” And one Swedish adult man expressed in this context strong concern about all the bullying and harassment, and the fact that it is possible to be truly mean and distort information as much as you like on the Internet.

Figure 2:14. Below are some statements on new information technology. How well do they agree with your personal opinions? (by age and city, cumulative per cent)



The vertical lines/marks represent every 25 per cent.

But even if one can be heard on the Internet, opinions about the Internet’s ability to eradicate social gaps and inequalities were more hesitant, especially among the Russian adults in the group interviews:

It has to be greatly developed to overcome social distinctions. I don’t understand how it’s possible to make it on the Internet? To express your opinion is certainly good. But... In general the Internet is freedom... you may express... you may not express what you think. You may receive information... may not to receive it. You can have fun. In other words, such freedom. You will not overcome social distinctions, certainly not. No, I consider... But there is a small possibility but not on the Internet. For example, on TV or... A lot has to be changed to overcome it, because we have big gaps in social distinction in our society. (middle-aged woman, high education, St. Petersburg)

How can I raise myself via the Internet? If I have nothing... no socks, boots, trousers, food, nothing. Well, I created my site and what is next? In a week I collapse by the computer? What is the meaning of cheating yourself? No sense. (middle-aged man, low education, St. Petersburg)

When relating the attitude “Ordinary people can influence what is happening in society by making their voices heard on the Internet” to other variables in our quantitative studies, it turns out that intensive Internet users in Sweden (and especially Swedes using the Internet for leisure) more often than others agree with the statement. In a similar way, using the Internet a great deal for leisure also tallies with the opinion stated in another question that “The Internet is important for people’s ability to express their views” (a statement that on average was affirmed by about half of the young and adult respondents in both cities).

At the same time, however, high Internet use has no special relations (or only slight ones) to aspects that the respondents find are characteristic of democracy (see further Article 3), whether democracy has become worse or better in the country, how satisfied one is with the development of democracy in the country, whether equality between ethnic groups and men and women, respectively, has deteriorated or ameliorated in the country, to what extent the country lives up to the UN conventions on human and child rights, and whether there are important possibilities other than the Internet to influence societal issues.

Moreover, heavy Internet users, or persons agreeing with the statement “Ordinary people can influence what is happening in society by making their voices heard on the Internet”, do not stand out as especially interested in social issues at all.⁴¹ There are, for these persons, no or weak negative correlations with interest in the social issues included in the questionnaire.

Several factor analyses of 36 preferences for media contents among the young and middle-aged people in the two cities show that media tastes are basically structured in the same way, on the one hand, among the young people and, on the other, among the adults. In the upper part of Table 2:1, a reduced model of such factor analyses is exhibited, effectuated with all the adult persons and only with variables for which there are no or small differences (no significant correlations) in the distribution of answers between the two cities.⁴² In relation to our discussion on Internet and democracy, we would like to call attention to the first two factors, grouping items of interest in media content dealing with social issues and with news, respectively.

⁴¹ Measured by the question “How important is it for you personally that the media deal with the following issues?”.

⁴² The upper part of the table presents the correlations of the four factors with the separate variables. Variables are sorted along the factor with which they have the strongest correlation, thus explaining the meaning of this factor.

Table 2:1. Factor analyses of items included in the question “How important is it for you personally that the media deal with the following areas?” (extraction method: principal component analysis, adults in both cities)

Factor	1	2	3	4	
,890	-,253	,199	,166		The homeless persons' situation
,869	-,276	,179	,153		The relations between ethnic groups
,851	-,161	,265	,258		HIV/Aids
,258	-,933	,131	,071		National news
,270	-,919	,082	,100		International news
,198	-,863	,169	,060		Local news
,194	-,138	,743	,188		Food, cooking
,263	-,084	,768	,320		Home furnishing
,127	-,095	,719	,241		Fashion
,133	-,028	,257	,870		Cars
,246	-,113	,320	,865		Technology, computers

Partial correlations between the extracted factors 1-4 above and the variables in the question “How important do you think the following methods are for people’s ability to express their views?” (controlled for gender)

,241	-,074	,131	,138	Appearance on the radio
,180	-,006	,137	,062	Telephone call in TV broadcast
,144	-,036	,216	,112	SMS to TV programme
,102	-,133	,084	,073	Appearance on TV broadcast ⁴³
,117	-,110	,186	,026	General opinion polls
,170	-,151	,150	,028	Letters to the press
,091	-,031	,129	,133	The Internet
,165	-,195	,164	,107	Being in a political party
,231	-,169	,125	,087	Being in another organisation
,342	-,169	,016	,051	Strikes
,299	-,177	,072	,035	Demonstrations, protest meetings

(continued)

⁴³ An alternative factor analysis in which we included the four topics grouped here gave the same solution, in which these four topics sorted along a separate factor (almost independent of the earlier four factors) with almost identical correlation pattern.

Partial correlations between the extracted factors 1-4 above and internet use (controlled for gender)

Factor	1	2	3	4	
	,003	-,126	,038	,186	Internet for work (how often)
	,091	-,096	,030	,125	Internet for study (how often)
	-,020	-,125	,059	,119	Internet for leisure (how often)
	-,014	-,111	,054	,135	Internet for work (how long time)
	,082	-,033	,019	,118	Internet for study (how long time)
	-,049	-,028	,052	,120	Internet for leisure (how long time)

Partial correlations between the extracted factors 1-4 above and education (controlled for gender)

	,011	-,085	-,005	,084	Respondent's education
	-,003	-,063	,030	,093	Education of respondent's mother
	,009	-,053	,018	,089	Education of respondent's father

As the extracted factors are variables in themselves, we can correlate them with any other survey variable. In the middle part of the Table, we see the correlations between the four extracted factors and the adults' opinions on the possibilities of expressing opinions via different media and via direct political actions. Further down, the four extracted factors are correlated with Internet use. One can notice, among other things, that Factor 1 (grouping interest in media content dealing with different kind of social issues⁴⁴) correlates relatively strongly with the last two items "strikes" and "demonstrations, protest meetings", but has no correlation with the various "Internet questions". In other words, interest in social issues is independent of frequency and amount of Internet use (for work, study or leisure), as well as of the opinion that the Internet is an important platform for expressing opinions.

The last three lines show that interest in social issues does not correlate either with one's own or one's parents' education. On the other hand, persons who believe that direct actions such as strikes, demonstrations, and the like, are important for expressing opinions are considerably more often interested in the above-mentioned kinds of social issues in the media.

The picture is similar among the young people in both Stockholm and St. Petersburg. Agreeing with the statement "Ordinary people can influence what is happening in society by making their voices heard on the Internet" or thinking that "The Internet is important for people's ability to express their views" have no or slight correlations with, for example: Internet use; searching for societal information on the Internet; interest in societal questions in the media generally; opinions on whether the country's development of democracy has been worse or

⁴⁴ Other social issues, for instance "economic divides in society", "labour market issues", "gender equality issues" and "child care and family issues", are also strongly correlated with the first factor.

better; and that one can influence societal development oneself. And there are no relations with the parents' education and household economy. On the other hand, the views that "demonstrations, protest meetings", "strikes", "being in a political party" and "being in another organization" are "important for people's ability to express their views" are clearly connected, especially among the Stockholm adolescents, to a range of societal issues that they think are important for the media to deal with.

In sum, in relation to the discussion on the importance of the Internet as a means for political participation and democratic discussion, it is essential to emphasize that access to and use of the Internet in general do not give evidence of people's interest in societal issues (economic and other injustices, ethnic tensions, environmental issues, etc.). The findings show instead that interest in such societal issues is connected with considering other kinds of political actions than using the Internet as important means for people to express their opinions. The Internet and Internet use in general do not stand out as an important platform in this regard.

Concluding words

All in all, based on the surveys in St. Petersburg and Stockholm, we cannot draw the conclusion that access to ICT per se – and the possibilities to use its growing amount of information, to enter its communities and forums with like-minded persons, etc. – leads to the often-hoped-for increase in enlightenment and political engagement. ICT per se is not a factor that appears to counteract the social mechanisms that give rise to inequalities between different population groups. Even if ICT offers many new outlooks and activities, gives opportunities for its users to generate their own contents, and is a practical and rapid tool for many actions that formerly only belonged to the "real" world, the profits gained by using the Internet seem in the main to be dependent on more basic and very different needs and motives among its users, which is why the Internet primarily reinforces the different dispositions, values and activities that users bring to it.

The term "digital divide" is problematic in several respects. It often refers only to the technical access to, use of and skills in handling ICT, at the same time as more and more content in the convergent media landscape is becoming digitally transmitted (besides the Internet, computer games and mobile phones, this applies to music on CD, films on DVD, the digitalized television nets, as well as the fact that radio, newspapers, films, television programmes, etc., to an ever greater extent are available on the Internet). The notion of "digital divide(s)" therefore has become too woolly. More accurate would be to analyse which different contents people are receiving (and producing) and thereafter find out which platform(s) was used.

Obscurity also characterizes concepts such as “information haves and have-nots”, “information rich and information poor”, “information society” and “knowledge society”, as “information” and “knowledge” have different meanings for different individuals. Politicians, debaters and researchers must necessarily distinguish in detail between the many purports of these notions.

The main objection to concepts such as “digital divide(s)”, “information haves/have-nots”, etc., is, however, based on the findings of the surveys dealt with here. The surveys represent different generations and countries and can, in the case of the Swedish surveys, also be compared with previous studies. We see that when “digital divides” in terms of access, use and skills are bridged, as among the young Stockholmers, distinct “digital divides” remain or become clear that are related to people’s social identities and positions in society. Differences in people’s ICT orientations arise because of the individuals’ *social divides* – their social backgrounds, dispositions, tastes, values and the activities that guide their engagement in and expected advantages regarding ICT use. The spread and use of ICT turn out to be closely interwoven with the economic, social and cultural inequalities in society. The concept of “digital divide” – in terms of access, general use, and even “profit” in general⁴⁵ – is, therefore, a reducing and ideological construction based on a technologically deterministic perspective that conceals existing power relations and the factors that cause digital divides to arise.

There are many thoughts about, hopes for and advantages of ICT that our questionnaires do not deal with, such as the possible consequences of the “new language” that a computerized world signifies and that might imply a new way of perceiving and relating oneself to the surrounding world.⁴⁶ Neither do the surveys deal with the consequences for a range of restructurings of the societal field, not least within the economic sphere, where they manifest themselves in, among other things, rapid transfers of money, companies and labour, new ways of directing business and handling relations to clients, etc.⁴⁷

But what our surveys do show is that the new media do not contribute to restructuring society in such a radical way that social divides and hierarchies are levelling out and gradually disappearing, constituting identities of individuals in new ways in the virtual space,⁴⁸ so that the “ICT society” would come to be composed of unique individuals who cannot be understood by means of, e.g., Bourdieu’s theory, that is, who are independent of social origins and positions.

⁴⁵ The International Telecommunication Union says that the real issue is not so much about access to digital technology but: “Digital Divide refers to the gap between those who benefit from digital technology and those who do not” 2007.

⁴⁶ Cf. Baudrillard [1970]1998, Manovich 2001.

⁴⁷ Castells [2001]2002.

⁴⁸ E.g., Meyrowitz 1985.

Our studies indicate instead that the virtual space can be structured in relation to the social space – that it is possible to apply Bourdieu’s theory and draw the conclusion that the societal order is built on the same fundamental mechanisms as it was before. ICT per se do not lead to more enlightenment, political participation and increased democracy, even if the digital media change the ways we carry out many social activities, give rise to a range of new practices, and entail that symbolic resources (and the different forms of capital) may partly change values on the symbolic market.

Many of the results on access to and use of ICT in the current research project also correspond to findings from our earlier analyses,⁴⁹ which indicated that important differences in tastes and behaviours that are due to persons’ social backgrounds in the “real” world, are finding a hold in the virtual space as well. This seems to confirm Tichenor et al.’s hypothesis⁵⁰ of differential growth in knowledge, i.e., that growing access to information in practice often leads to widened knowledge gaps between different social groups.

As mentioned previously, it has often been pointed out that people with a high education and income are more frequent and heavier users of the Internet – especially in the early stages of the spread of the new medium. This is also the case with our adult respondents, particularly in St. Petersburg. But among the young people, differences also exist depending on whether they attend a theoretical or practical study programme – even if many such educational differences have levelled out among young people in Stockholm. We have seen that, in many respects, there are no significant digital divides in basic terms among the Swedish adolescents. Still, however, there are distinctions in the fields of ICT application. Certain ICT activities persistently connect to high education/theoretical study programmes in all our four groups studied, namely “searching for scientific information” and “searching for political information” on the Internet.

In our in-depth interviews in the special study with media experts, we asked whether all people in St. Petersburg and Stockholm, respectively, are able to find the necessary information for becoming and remaining well-informed citizens. Practically all experts answered in the affirmative, even if many of them earlier in the interview had pointed out that important subjects, genres, etc., are lacking or are underrepresented in the output of the traditional media. According to these informants, such scarcities were compensated for by the Internet, where all kinds of alternative information were easily accessible for “those who so wish”, as well as various possibilities of communicating with other people and, thereby, also participating in public life.

⁴⁹ Petrov 2000, Petrov & von Feilitzen 2005.

⁵⁰ Tichenor, Donohue & Olien 1970.

However, the respondents in our surveys, above all the adults, hold different views. A majority of adults especially dissociate themselves from the statement “Ordinary people can influence what is happening in society by making their voices heard on the Internet”. Further analyses show that interest in societal issues is connected with appreciating traditional kinds of political actions (such as demonstrations, protest meetings, strikes, etc.) and not with the view that the Internet is an important platform for changing society.

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