

The young and
The Internet in Sweden
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Summary

Internet, a natural element in the environment of young children

Since computers and the Internet exist in the home environment of preschool children, they rapidly become familiar with the Internet. Today, young people have begun to use the Internet early, already at preschool age, but this use is restricted until they begin school. The age at which 50 percent of this age group has become familiar with the Internet has dropped to four years today. Many become familiar with the Internet already at the age of three.

Younger Internet users

This means that the beginner’s age, measured as 50 percent of Internet users in a single age group, decreased by one year for every year that has passed. In nine years, from 2000 to 2009, the beginner’s age dropped from 13 to 4 years in this manner.

When did half of an age group start to use the Internet?

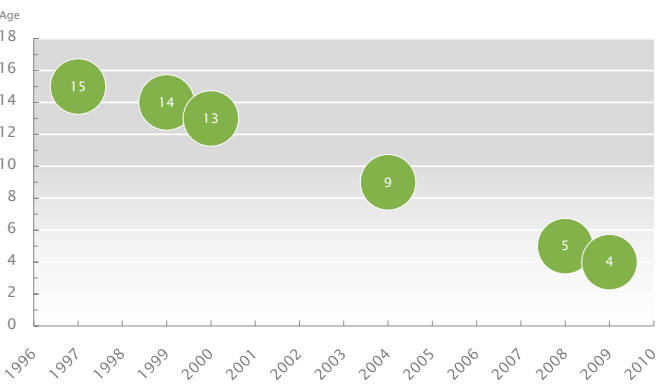


Diagram 2.1 Age when 50 percent of an age group start to use the Internet

Games and video among the youngest

Video segments and simple games represent children’s first contact with the content of the Internet. As they grow and develop into reading and writing creatures, begin school, make new friends, grow into adolescence, develop individual interests, get caught up in popular culture, and so on, their use of the Internet also changes.

What do children do when they are using the Internet?

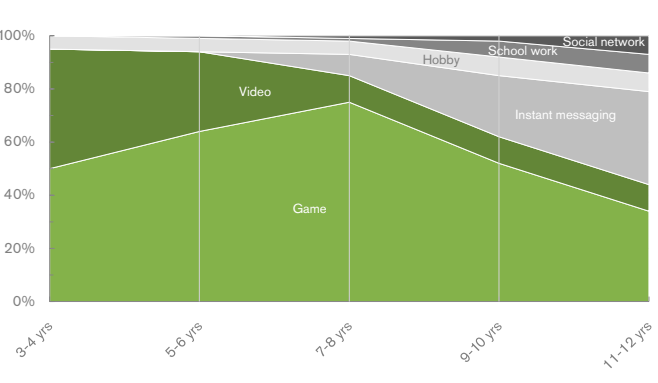


Diagram 3.1 The content of childrens use of the Internet,according to their parents.

Parents’ education significant during preschool years

The parents’ level of education is significant to preschool children. It is considerably more common among well-educated parents that their children begin to use the Internet early, although the Internet is available in most families. It is also children of well-educated parents that become everyday users of the Internet at an earlier age. Particularly when starting school, children’s Internet experience differs depending on their family circumstances. Children of highly educated parents start school well-prepared to use the Internet, while many children of less-educated parents start school without any great experience of the Internet.

How often do the children use the Internet when they start school?

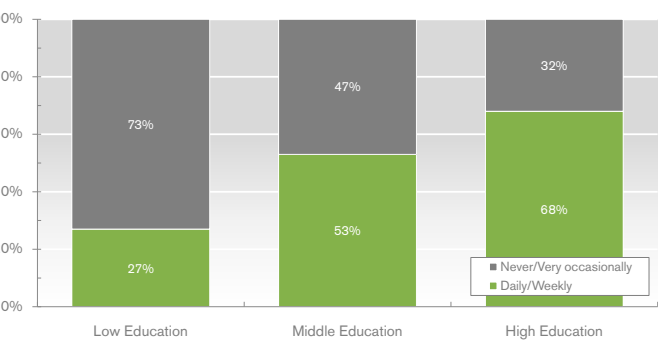


Diagram 9.3 The proportion of children 7-8 years using the Internet daily or at least a few times a week, according to their parents level of education.

Communication and social networks at school age

Young people 12-13 years of age use the Internet firstly for communication and entertainment. They use text messages, e-mail and instant messaging on a daily basis. They also play games, as well as listen to music and watch videos. They also use the Internet to research information.

Increased diversity and activity in their teens

As teenagers spend more time on the Internet, the older they get, the more diverse their use becomes. Interest in the news, social information, e-commerce, the Internet as a practical aid and fact-checking increases. With respect to using the Internet for knowledge and facts, it seems that an increase in the use of the Internet occurs at 14-15 years of age.

Boys and young men play games up to the age of 20

Simple games on the Internet are a dominant activity up to 7-8 years of age when children begin school. Girls’ playing decreases and is replaced by other activities already by 10 years of age. However, games are a dominant daily activity for boys throughout their teenage years and two of three play at least one to three times per week up to the age of 20.

Daily instant messaging for most teenagers

“Messaging” to friends is the most important communication channel up to 15 years, when instant messaging (IM) is supplemented by e-mail. Nearly everyone in the younger age groups use IM, and frequently. This is part of the daily routine for most people. However, not many people over the age of 15 are familiar with this method of communication. They are used to e-mail. Young people use both.

How much time do young people devote themselves to the Internet at home and at school?

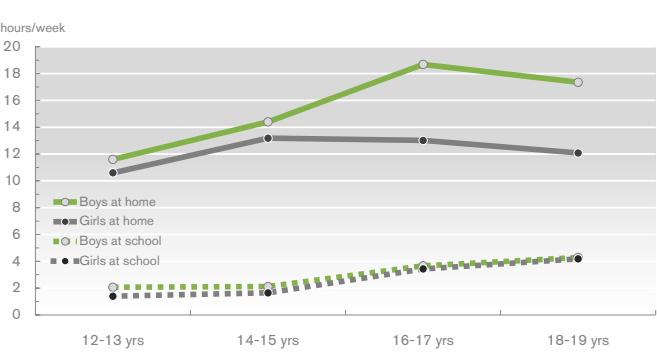


Diagram 5.4 Average weekly Internet time for boys and girls at home and at school.

Three of four are members of social networks

Girls are most active in the social networks among 12-15 year olds. Two of three are girls, and Bilddagboken (Picture Diary), where you upload photographs, is the most popular. Even more common among older youths between 16 and 25 years is being a member of a web community, primarily Facebook. Half of them visit their community on a daily basis. The differences between young men and women are small.

Close friends dominate in all communication between young people

Instant messaging is primarily directed at close friends, but also with regard to blogs and e-mail, close friends dominate Internet communication.

Differences between boys and girls arise in middle school

There are no differences in media use between boys and girls at preschool age. Girls and boys do the same things: play games, watch videos and chat. But, at 10-11 years, the interests of boys and girls begin to assert themselves. Girls search for websites with horses or fashion and cut-out dolls, while some boys become interested in such games as World of Warcraft or sports or such retail marketplaces as Blocket. It is at 11 years that some boys become more intensely interested in games.

Women blog and upload photographs

Young women are more active and begin earlier than the boys. Already at 12-13 years of age, one fifth of the girls are writing blogs and the majority writes at least once per week. The proportion does not increase but the intensity does, and around the age of 20, more than 50 percent blog on a daily basis. To this can be added those who used to write blogs but don’t anymore. The total result is that four of ten young women write or have written their own blogs. Some 69 percent read other people’s blogs.

How many young women write or read blogs?

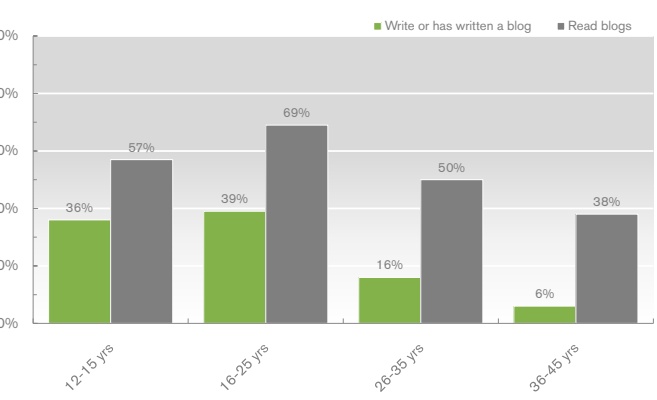


Diagram 4.12 The proportion of female Internet users with experiences of writing and reading blogs.

Young people behind the majority of user-generated contents

In recent years, the content of the Internet has been produced by the users themselves to a larger extent. Here, young people dominate. The 73 percent of those uploading videos on the Internet are younger than 25 and 65 percent of the bloggers are under 25. This also applies to 60 percent of all members in

the social networks and 54 percent of those uploading digital images. If we raise the age limit to 35, we find that about 80 percent of the user-generated content is produced by those that are younger than 35. Most active on the social websites are women in their upper teens. Two of three of them contribute to the content at least once/a few times per week.

Men, young and old, like new technical gadgets

In response to the question about whether they liked testing new technical gadgets, more men than women said yes. It was also the men who were most active in the Internet’s development and use in the beginning. Among today’s youths, this difference of opinion regarding new technology still applies between men and women. However, we can also state that three of four women consider themselves capable of installing new programs, downloading music and installing new accessories. To discover major differences between men and women, we had to consider slightly more complicated operations, such as installing a new operative system or a network. These operations are also problematic for many men to implement.

How much do young men and women like to test new technical gadgets?

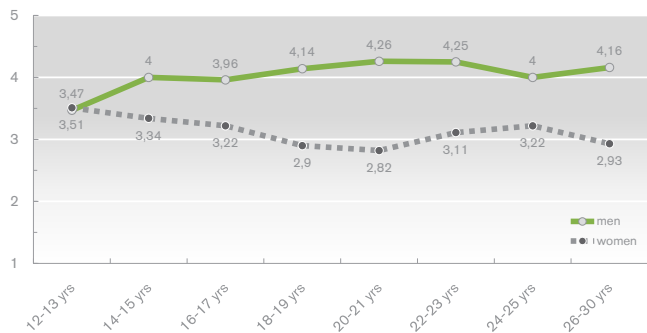


Diagram 6.1 Means of men and women (12-30 years), on a scale divided into five degrees measuring how much they like testing new technical gadgets.

Young men regard themselves as more competent

It is clear that young men (16-25 years), according to themselves, have greater technical expertise than others, including parents, and they also estimate their own general expertise as high.



Foto: Flavio Takemoto

Small differences in Internet competency between parents and young people

With respect to working with various computer programs, the differences are small between the different age groups and between young people and parents. At the same time, this shows that the differences between parents and young people in Internet expertise in most cases are quite small, with one exception pertaining to older teenage boys, who believe they have more technical expertise. With regard to preschool children and young school children, parents are still the ones who know the most.

Are the children more Internet competent than their parents?

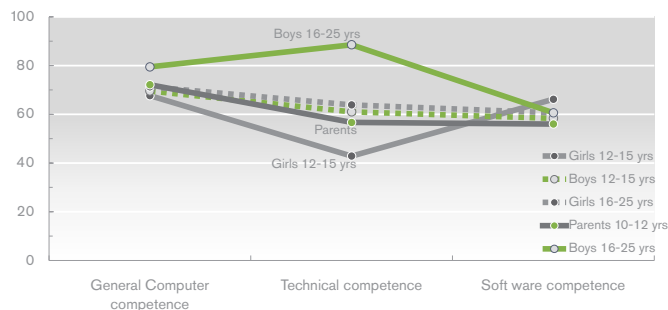


Diagram 6.15 Competence index of parents (black line) and children of different ages in three areas – general competence, technical competence and software competence.

Certain correlations between Internet usage and other leisure activities

If we look firstly at the connection with other media activities, there is a positive correlation between Internet usage and listening to music and watching TV. Those who use the Internet a lot also tend to spend more time listening to music and watching TV. One correlation is negative. This pertains to reading books. The more time spent on the Internet, the fewer books you read. This applies primarily to young women. Another negative correlation among boys is found between the Internet and exercise. The more time spent on the Internet, the less time spent on sports and exercise. However, it could also be that those who exercise little spend more time on the Internet.

Problems arise in cases of extreme use

Two of three young people feel they sometimes spend too much time on the Internet. However, only a very few percent results in serious problems that lead to discussions in the family about spending too much time on the Internet, that they are anxious and depressed when they are not online, that they forget to eat and sleep. Their time at home on the Internet amounts to several hours daily and the average number of hours per week is 30. Music and games represent a significant part of their Internet activity. However, there is no simple pattern that characterizes the Internet users who experience problems with their use of the Internet. The only common denominator is that they spend a lot of time on the Internet. ■