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First Release of Findings From the UCLA World Internet Project Shows Significant ‘Digital Gender Gap’ in Many Countries

New international study of Internet use finds television viewing down among Internet users in all survey countries; high levels of trust in online information

(Note to Editors: To download charts of all of the major findings in the UCLA World Internet Project, visit www.ccp.ucla.edu.)

The “digital divide” exists in many countries around the world, and is especially apparent in the gap between the number of men and women who use the Internet, according to surveys conducted in 14 countries in the UCLA World Internet Project released Jan. 14.

The UCLA World Internet Project, the first survey of its kind to produce international comparison data on the social, political and economic effects of Internet use and non-use, found that more men than women go online in all of the surveyed countries.

Among many major findings, the study reveals:

- Television viewing is lower among Internet users than non-users in all of the surveyed countries.
- Information on the Internet is viewed as generally reliable and accurate by a large percentage of users in most countries.
- Surprisingly high levels of online use among the poorest citizens in all of the survey countries — in spite of major divisions in Internet use between the richest and the poorest.
- Important effects on social, political, economic, and religious life in urban China, where the world’s largest population finds increased ability to reach out to others, in spite of government restrictions.

“We found some online behavior is remarkably consistent worldwide,” said Jeffrey I. Cole, director of the UCLA Center for Communication Policy. “Clearly, use of the Internet is reducing television viewing around the world while having little impact on positive aspects of social life, most Internet users generally trust the information they find online and Internet use is having a major impact on life in urban China.”

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The World Internet Project — created and organized by the UCLA Center for Communication Policy, which also analyzed the international comparisons — includes studies that were conducted primarily in 2002 and 2003 by universities and research institutes in Asia, Europe, Latin America and the United States.

The countries, age ranges of respondents and survey year are: Britain (ages 14 and up, 2003), Chile (residents of Santiago, ages 12–60, 2003), China (12 cities of more than 100,000 people, ages 17–60, 2003), Germany (ages 14–75, 2002), Hungary (ages 14 and up, 2001), Italy (ages 16 and up, 2002), Japan (ages 12–74, 2002), Korea (ages 12–64, 2001), Macao (ages 18–74, 2001), Singapore (ages 18 and up, 2001), Spain (ages 16 and up, 2003), Sweden (ages 18–80, 2002), Taiwan (ages 18 and up, 2000) and the United States (ages 12 and up, 2002).

While researchers in all of the survey countries asked a basic set of questions, not all questions were asked in every country.

Internet gender gap

“Overall, we see an average 8 percent gap between men and women using the Internet,” Cole said. “That figure is not as large as we might have expected, given the gender disparities that persist around the world. However, in several technologically developed countries, the gap is surprisingly large — in some cases almost twice as many men as women use the Internet.”

The gender gap in Internet use was as high as 20.2 percent in Italy (men, 41.7 percent; women, 21.5 percent) to as low as 1.6 percent in Taiwan (where 25.1 percent of men are Internet users, compared to 23.5 percent of women).

In the United States, 73.1 percent of men use the Internet compared to 69 percent of women — about half the average gap of countries in the UCLA World Internet Project.

The gender gap of Internet use in the countries surveyed on this question for the UCLA World Internet Project is (in percentages):

Britain	men 63.6; women 55.0
Germany	men 50.4; women 41.7
Hungary	men 20.3; women 15.1
Italy	men 41.7; women 21.5
Japan	men 54.7; women 46.2
Korea	men 67.8; women 53.8
Macao	men 37.8; women 28.8
Singapore	men 47.2; women 34.0
Spain	men 46.4; women 27.2
Sweden	men 67.7; women 64.4
Taiwan	men 25.1; women 23.5
United States	men 73.1; women 69.0

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Television viewing

In every country in the World Internet Project, Internet users watch less television than non-users.

The largest gap in TV viewing between Internet users and non-users is in Chile (Santiago) and Hungary, where in both countries Internet users watch an average of 5.7 hours less television each week than non-users; following closely are Japan (5.4 hours less for users) and the United States (5.2 hours less for users).

“The first three years of the UCLA Internet Project have shown that Internet users in America ‘buy’ their time to go online from the hours they once spent watching television,” Cole said. “Now we are seeing the same trend worldwide. Clearly, we are witnessing a huge change in behavior that we are only now beginning to explore.”

Social activities: Internet users vs. non-users

In contrast to television viewing, Internet users in all of the surveyed countries spend more time than non-users in social activities.

Internet users in all of the surveyed countries spend more time or as much time as non-users socializing with friends or exercising, and spend more time reading books in all of the countries except Germany and the United States.

Information on the Internet: Is it reliable and accurate?

In most of the countries in the UCLA World Internet Project, more than half of Internet users say that “most or all” of the information they find online is reliable and accurate.

Users in Korea have the highest level of trust in online information, with 69.7 percent saying that most or all of the information on the Internet is reliable and accurate.

The least-trusting Internet users are Swedes; 36 percent said that none or only some of the information online is reliable and accurate, followed by Japan (25.3 percent), Germany (18.5 percent) and Singapore (18.3 percent).

In the United States, 53.1 percent of users say that most or all of the information they find online is reliable and accurate, while 7.1 percent say that none or only some of the information is reliable and accurate.

The Internet in China

The Internet is having a measurable impact on social life among users in urban China (12 cities of more than 100,000).

Among the findings about urban China:

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- Politics — More than twice as many Internet users in China compared to any other surveyed country say that the Internet increases their contact with people who share their political interests.
- Hobbies and recreation — Significantly more Internet users in China compared to any other surveyed country report that the Internet has increased their contact with people who share their hobbies or recreational interests.
- Religion — 11.2 percent of Internet users in China say that the Internet increases their contact with people who share their religion — more than in any other country and a significant figure for citizens of a nation in which religion officially is banned.
- Online friends — Internet users in China report an average of 7.7 online friends who they have never met in person — more than twice as many as any other surveyed country.

Overall Internet use

The percentage of Internet users varies considerably from country to country in the World Internet Project, with a high of 71.1 percent in the United States to a low of 17.5 percent in Hungary.

The percentages of Internet users in countries surveyed on this question are:

Britain	59.2
Germany	45.9
Hungary	17.5
Italy	31.2
Japan	50.4
Korea	60.9
Macao	32.9
Singapore	40.8
Spain	36.4
Sweden	66.1
Taiwan	24.2
United States	71.1

Hours per week online

Korea has the largest percentage (55.7 percent) of Internet users who are online an average of 10 hours or more per week; by comparison, 41 percent of users in the United States are online an average of 10 hours or more per week.

Internet use: The richest and the poorest users

Not surprisingly, the wealthiest quarter of the population is much more likely to use the Internet than the poorest quarter. However, in more than half of the surveyed countries, at least 20 percent of the poorest quarter of the population uses the Internet.

Sweden (49.1 percent), Korea (46.4 percent) and the United States (43.1 percent) have the highest use of the Internet within the poorest quarter of the population.

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The percentages of the poorest quarter of the population that uses the Internet in countries surveyed in this question are:

Britain	24.4
Germany	27.8
Hungary:	1.6
Italy:	10.6
Japan:	32.6
Korea:	46.4
Macao:	12.3
Singapore:	21.6
Spain:	17.6
Sweden:	49.1
Taiwan:	18.2
United States	43.1

Background: The World Internet Project and the UCLA Center for Communication Policy

The UCLA Center for Communication Policy is a unit in the UCLA Anderson School of Management and is also affiliated with the UCLA College.

In addition to creating and organizing the World Internet Project, the UCLA Center for Communication Policy also conducts the UCLA Internet Project, the comprehensive year-to-year study of the impact of the Internet on users and non-users.

Findings from Year Four of the UCLA Internet Project will be released in the spring.

The UCLA Internet Project is supported by public foundations and private companies, including the National Science Foundation, Hewlett-Packard, Accenture, Time Warner (AOL), Sony, Verizon, SBC and the UCLA International Institute.

To download the findings of the first World Internet Project, visit www.ccp.ucla.edu.

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