

Wired young Canadians

by Michelle Rotermann

Young people today can access vast volumes of information and visit new worlds, at a click of a mouse. Using electronic mail (e-mail), they can interact with anyone, anywhere, quickly, conveniently and at low cost. Parents often worry

about whether the Internet is a blessing or a curse. They wonder if it is an advantage of growing up in the 21st century or if it distracts from more healthy pursuits, encourages social isolation and exposes users to offensive material.

Using data from the 2000 General Social Survey (GSS), this article examines access to and use of the Internet by young Canadians aged 15 to 24. It explores their motivations and their concerns about security and privacy. The article also investigates where

CST

Young people with home Internet access are more likely to use the Net from all locations...

	All	Home	School	Work	Other ¹
	% aged 15-24 who used the Net in the last month				
Total	85	56	42	21	53
With home access	97	97	52	25	57
No home access	69	n.a.	29	16	49

... and young adults spend more time on the Net than teens

	All	Home	School	Work	Other
	Average hours on Internet last week				
15-24	9.3	9.1	3.1	7.5	1.9
15-17	8.8	9.3	2.2	5.0	1.8
18-19	9.2	9.5	3.3	6.8	2.1
20-24	9.8	8.8	4.2	7.6	1.9

n.a. = not available.

1. "Other" refers to friends' and relatives' homes, libraries, Internet cafés and other public access points.

Note: Each column refers to a different sub-population and so cannot be added to get average total hours of use from all locations.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2000.

Internet access occurs and how location may influence its use.

Who uses the Net?

The most "connected" young Canadians are teens between 15 and 17 years: 92% of them used the Internet at least once during the year 1999-2000. Internet use declines for each successive age group, to 86% of 18- to 19-year-olds and 79% of 20- to 24-year-olds. In general, men and women aged 15 to 19 are equally likely to use the Internet; among 20- to 24-year-olds, men (82%) are slightly more likely to do so than women (77%).

Home use most popular

In 2000, 56% of 15- to 24-year-olds (2.3 million) were connected to the Internet at home, making this the most popular point of access, as opposed to school, work and other locations such as friends' and relatives' homes, libraries, Internet cafés and other public access points. Almost half (45%) who used the Net from home did so every day, whereas daily use was less common from work (22%), school (14%) and other locations (2%).

Connections outside the home gave Internet access to nearly 1.3 million young people who did not have home access. However, those who already had home access were most likely to use the Net in other places as well. For example, 52% of those with a home connection also used the Internet from school, compared with 29% of 15- to 24-year-olds without home access.

Home users surf nearly four times more hours than other users

Young people in "connected" homes averaged 12 hours per week on the Net (about 9 hours from home and 3 hours from other places). In contrast, those without a home connection were online for about 3.4 hours per week. This suggests there are barriers to Net use outside the home. For example,

Internet use from schools, libraries and other locations may be constrained by hours of operation, time limits, waiting lines and geographic location. Pay-per-use Internet cafés often charge by the hour, a constraint that may limit use, while home users may have unlimited access for a monthly fee.

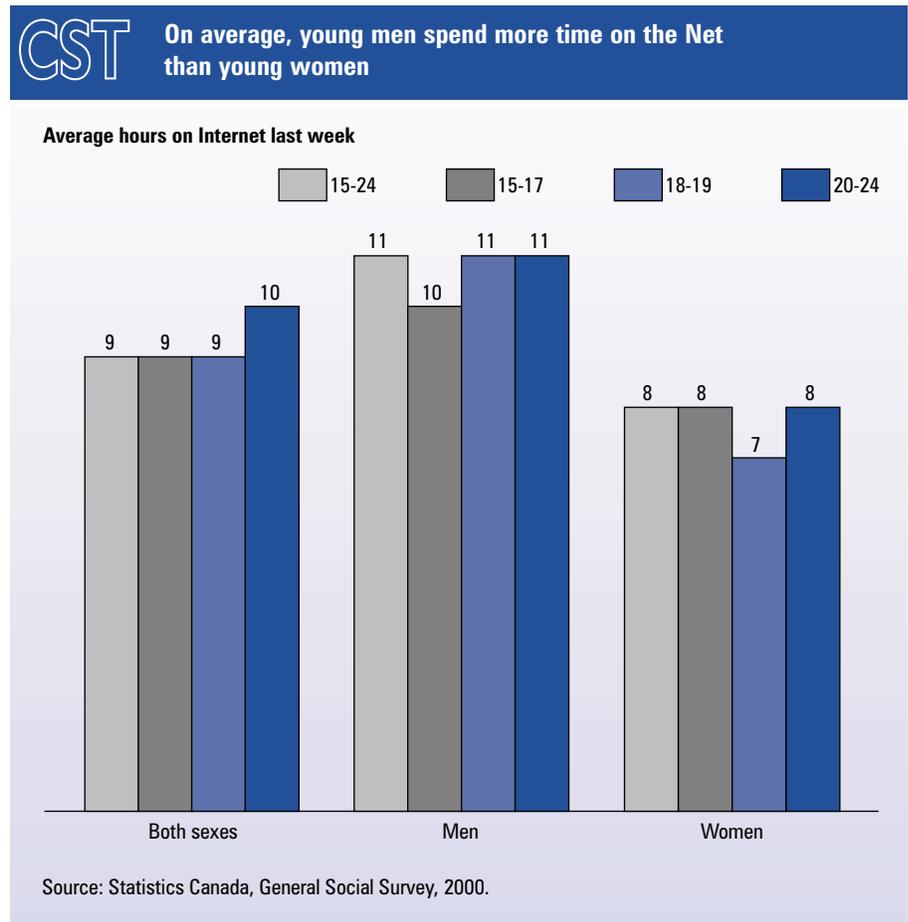
Gender also has a bearing on how much time is spent on the Net. Young men use the Internet for an average of about 11 hours per week, while young women average less than 8 hours. This difference may be due to the way each sex uses the Net. Typically, men report entertainment as a reason for logging on; they are more likely to play games, build Web pages and search for information on topics and products of interest. While young women engage in these types of activities as well, some research suggests they tend to be more goal-oriented

when online;¹ other studies show they are also more likely to use the Internet as a means to communicate and to save time.²

E-mail is the principal Internet activity

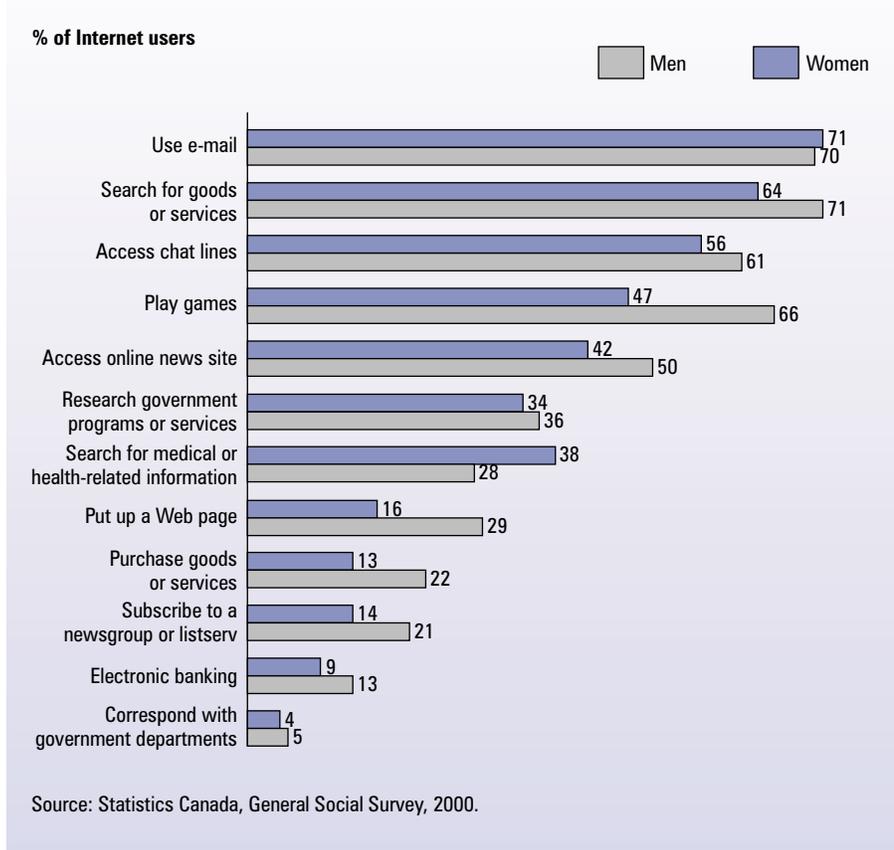
E-mail is the most popular Internet activity among Canada's young people (71%), and its rate of use does not vary

1. Media Metrix. September 12, 2000. "Teens Spend Less than Half as Much Time Online as Adults, Jupiter and Media Metrix Research Finds." <http://www.jup.com/company/pressrelease.jsp?doc=pr000912>.
2. Maynard, Rona. January 1997. "Here's to digital women," *Chatelaine Online*. <http://www.chatelaine.com/read/computers/dig fem.html>; Shiver, Jube. May 11, 2000. "Internet Gender Gap Closes in U.S., Study Says." *Los Angeles Times*. http://www.latimes.com/news/state/updates/lat_netgap000511.htm



Activity	Age		
	15-17	18-19	20-24
Use e-mail	72	70	70
Search for information on goods or services	60	65	74
Access online chat services	71	63	48
Play games	65	59	50
Access online news site	36	49	52
Access information on government programs or services	23	36	42
Search for medical or health-related information	28	35	36
Put up a Web page	26	26	20
Purchase goods or services	11	13	24
Subscribe to a newsgroup or listserv	19	18	15
Do electronic banking	4	9	18
Correspond with government departments	3	5	5

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2000.



by gender or age. Presumably, young people use e-mail to stay in touch with friends and family, to communicate with teachers, to send and receive documents and to interact with their co-workers and clients. E-mail may also be used to exchange photos, confirm e-commerce orders and subscribe to newsletters and press releases.

Other popular uses of the Internet are to search for information on goods and services (67% of users), to access online chat groups (59%), and to play games (57%). Only about one in 10 young users bank online (11%).

Many young people look for information on goods and services — the equivalent of “window shopping.” Nearly 75% of 20- to 24-year-olds have searched for products and services, but only 24% have purchased something online; the figures for 15- to 19-year-olds are smaller. Teens may be less likely to buy because online shopping requires a credit card and, at some Web sites, parental permission.³

Higher percentages of 15- to 17-year-olds play games than those aged 18 to 24. This suggests that the younger set may be using the Internet for entertainment, while the older group may value it more as a source of information. Regardless of age, young men are considerably more likely to play games than young women (about 66% versus 47%).

Participating in chat rooms is enjoyed equally by 15- to 17-year-olds of both sexes and more by men than women aged 18 to 24. For these young users, chat rooms are places to share elements of youth culture, as well as a place to meet people.

With few exceptions, many of the remaining Internet activities, including

3. *Business Wire*. June 1, 2000. “Teen Purchasing Power Weak in Online Shopping Arena, PricewaterhouseCoopers’ Survey Reports.”

designing Web pages, joining news groups, and doing online banking, are more popular among men than women across all age brackets. The only online activity more common among women than men is searching for medical and health-related information.

Most young people started to use the Net for personal interest

Young people have grown up surrounded by digital media. Computers are commonplace in many of their homes and at school. Their teachers instruct them to use the Internet for assignments and their friends encourage them to e-mail, chat online, and check out Web sites of their favourite sports teams, performing artists and merchandise.

The majority of young Internet users began using the Net for personal interest (63%). School ranked second as a reason for starting to surf (34%), while work-related reasons were reported by only 2%. Whereas men were more likely to cite personal interests (69% versus 57% of women), women more frequently named school as a reason for beginning to use the Internet (40% versus 28%).

Many concerned about security and privacy but few have encountered problems

Concerns about security and privacy are less widespread among young people than among adults. Seventy-two percent of 25- to 44-year-olds were greatly or somewhat concerned about security when making purchases or banking over the Internet, compared with 60% of 15- to 24-year-olds. Protecting privacy was also a more important issue among older people: 66% compared with 56% among young people. In some cases, these apprehensions may inhibit Internet use. Interestingly, young Internet users are somewhat more anxious about security than non-users.

Quebec has lowest rate of Internet use among young people

Just over three-quarters (77%) of 15- to 24-year-olds in Quebec are Internet users, compared with the national average of 85%. Lower rates of Internet use may be due to francophones' reluctance to use the Net because much of the content is available only in English. According to the General Social Survey (GSS), young francophones are less satisfied than their anglophone counterparts with the provision of content in their mother tongue. Virtually all young anglophones who use the Internet believe that there is enough English whereas only 59% of francophone users feel that there is enough French and most would prefer to access French-language sites.

Language is a challenge for all non-anglophone Internet users, however. A 1997 article in *Scientific American* estimated that 60% of the Internet's host computers are located in the United States and most of these feed English language content to the Net.¹ The Quebec government has taken steps to get more families in the province connected. An initiative entitled "Brancher les familles sur Internet" (Connecting families to the Internet) was implemented May 1, 2000.² This program was implemented after interviews for the 2000 GSS began and therefore its full impact is not reflected in the data.

% of young adults using the Internet

Canada	85
British Columbia	92
Ontario	87
Atlantic Region	84
Prairies	83
Quebec	77

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2000.

1. Oudet, Bruno. March 1997. "Multilingualism on the Internet", *Scientific American*. <http://www.sciam.com/0397issue/0397oudet.html>.
2. The "Brancher les familles sur Internet" initiative has connected more than 284,000 low income families to the Internet and has helped almost 218,000 families to buy or rent a computer as of June 26, 2001. <http://communiqués.gouv.qc.ca/gouvqc/communiqués/GPQF/Mars2001/05/c0930.html>. <http://www.familles.mic.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/index.htm>.

	Concerned about security				Concerned about privacy			
	Age 15-24		Age 25-44		Age 15-24		Age 25-44	
	Total	Users	Non-users	Total	Total	Users	Non-users	Total
Greatly/somewhat	60	61	51	72	56	57	50	66
Hardly	8	9	4	5	10	11	6	7
Not at all	26	26	25	15	30	30	28	19
No opinion	6	4	19	7	4	2	16	8

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2000.

Although security awareness is widespread, only 8% of 15- to 24-year-olds reported they had experienced problems such as hacker attacks or computer virus infections. Not surprisingly, those who have come across security problems had greater concerns about this issue.

This wariness, however, did not stop young people from meeting and becoming friends with someone online. A surprising 33% of Internet users have met and become friends with people online. Teens aged 15 to 17 were most likely to form online friendships (46%), while 20- to 24-year-olds were least likely to do so (23%). Yet young people were cautious about their online relationships: some 62% of Internet users who had formed an online friendship believed that most people cannot be trusted and that they themselves cannot be too careful.

The possibility of young people accessing or receiving material that is offensive, threatening or inappropriate is one of the most controversial aspects of the Internet. According to the 2000 GSS, there is a very real possibility that the majority of Internet users have come across this type of material.⁴ About 60% of Canadians aged 15 to 24 who use the Net have found Web sites that contain pornography, 24% have come across content that promotes hatred or

violence, and another 10% have received an e-mail that they considered threatening or harassing.

Conclusion

In many respects the Internet is still in its infancy, leaving much to be learned and understood. Nevertheless, one thing is certain: our lives — for better or for worse — have been transformed and these changes are most obvious in the young. They use it to stay in touch, form new relationships, search for information, entertain, and play online games. Youth, some of whom have not known life without computers, will grow up in a surprisingly different society than their parents. However, this is not the first time that new communication technologies have

changed society. In the past, it was the telephone, radio and television; today, it is the Internet.

4. This statement reflects the subjective judgment of the respondent as to what constitutes offensive or inappropriate material.



Michelle Rotermann is an analyst with Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.

Do you enjoy reading *Canadian Social Trends*?

Do you use our publication in your business?

How long have you been a reader?

Send your comments to:

Editor-in-Chief,
Canadian Social Trends,
7th floor, Jean Talon Bldg.,
Statistics Canada,
Ottawa, Ontario,
K1A 0T6.

Fax number (613) 951-0387.
Internet e-mail: cstsc@statcan.ca.

WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU.