



## WIP Chile: Scanning the reality of Internet in Chile\*

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Ten years ago Internet was for initiates. The World Wide Web took its first steps with software like *Mosaic* and then *Netscape*, and e-mail began to be known. Initiated century XXI. How much has changed our everyday life because of Internet? This question inspired the World Internet Project (WIP), started in 1999 at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA). Nowadays 20 countries participate in WIP. Chile is the first Latin American country to participate in this an annual, internationally comparable study about uses, attitudes and effects of Internet among persons. This article briefly summarises some of the findings of the first year of the project in Chile, thanks to a grant from the National Fund of Sciences and Technology FONDECYT and executed by Universidad Católica de Chile's schools of Communications and Sociology with the support of the Chamber of Commerce of Santiago<sup>1</sup>.

The project consists on an annual face-to-face panel of 1200 men and women between 12 and 60 years, starting on 2003. The sample is probabilistic, stratified, non proportional and with random selection in each one of its phases. International comparisons are possible thanks to a common methodology and questionnaire used by WIP's affiliated countries. In contrast to similar studies about the web in Chile, WIP includes regions outside the capital Santiago as well as nonusers of the technology.

### New digital divides

An important problem concerning web usage is the digital divide, the uneven access to Internet at global level, national, between communities and even between people<sup>2</sup>. When the first electronic mail was sent in Chile between the universities of Chile and USACH in 1986<sup>3</sup>, a divide between these few early users<sup>4</sup>, and the rest of society already existed. Web penetration remained low until the mid-1990s, when the

<sup>1</sup> FONDECYT project N°1030946, led by Dr Sergio Godoy. Researchers: Francisco Fernández, Soledad Herrera. Associated researchers: Sergio Goldenberg, George Lever (Santiago Chamber of Commerce), Ellen Helsper (doctoral student London School of Economics), Cristóbal García (doctoral student MIT).

<sup>2</sup> Chen, Wenhong y Wellman, Barry (2003) **Digital divides and digital dividends**, NetLab, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

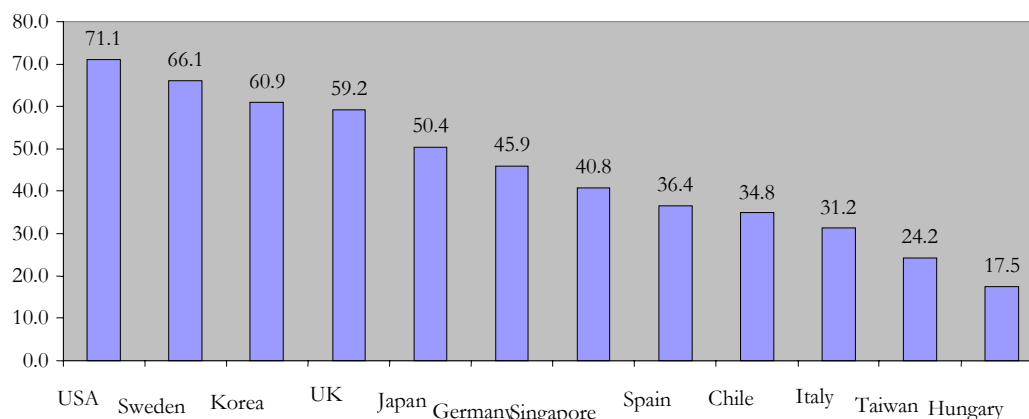
<sup>3</sup> Both state-owned universities have a strong edge on engineering, and are Chile's oldest and most reputed together with Universidad Católica. See “**La verdadera y real historia de Internet en Chile**”, in <http://www.dcc.uchile.cl/~ppoblete/sigloxxi-27Feb96.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Norman, Donald (2000): **El ordenador invisible**, Paidós, Barcelona, pp. 48-50.

prices of the computers diminished and the supply of Internet access improved. At a world-wide level, the number of users went from 900,000 in 1993 to more than 600 million at the end of 2002<sup>5</sup>. In Chile, the 200,000 users at the beginning of 1997 expanded to 2.5 million by the end of 2001<sup>6</sup>.

By the end of 2003, we found that 34.8% of Chileans over 12 years of age were web users, or internauts. This figure is slightly lower than Spain's (36.4%), Singapore (40.8%) and Germany (45.9%), but higher than Italy (31.2%), Taiwan (24.2%) and Hungary (17.5%).

Figure N°1  
Percentage of users in WIP countries, 2003



Nevertheless, penetration is not evenly spread. WIP-Chile detected that 68.5% of the richest income bracket ABC1-C2 are web users, against 24.8% of the poorest D bracket<sup>7</sup>. Also, 53% of nonusers said they did not use the technology for lacking a computer, while slightly more than a third considered it "very expensive".

However, the digital divide exceeds the economic factors<sup>8</sup>. Different studies emphasize on two new barriers: motivation and abilities. The first one refers to people who think Internet does not satisfy their needs, supporting opinions like "computers are not for me". WIP-Chile discovered that 27% of nonusers thought that way. These apathetic group are evenly distributed along the different income brackets. The second barrier refers to the lack of computing skills. 45.6% of Chileans nonusers do not know how to use Internet, but this ignorance is greater among the poorer D group (54.6%) than among the richest ABC1-C2 (26.4%).

<sup>5</sup> Chen y Wellman, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> TMG's (The Media Group) estimates from data by Net Research, Chile's Subsecretariat of Telecommunications (SUBTEL), Universidad de Chile, and EGM.

<sup>7</sup> WIP-Chile excluded the poorest "E" segment (less than US\$ 160/month of household income), 13.5% of the population in Chile in 2000. At the national level, the richest group ABC1C2 comprised 13.5% of the population, the middle C3 28%, and the lower-middle D 45%. Studying the E group would have increased both costs and time of execution without having a better insight of Internet usage, which was the main focus of the project. The most important problems and attitudes suffered by the poor can be relatively well understood by the analysis of the next income bracket, D.

<sup>8</sup> Kalkun, Mari & Kalvet, Tarmo (2002): "**Digital Divide in Estonia and How to Bridge it**", *Policy Analysis*, Praxis Center for Policy Studies, Tallinn.

Another important factor relates to the place of web access, especially when comparing Santiago and the regions. Outside the capital, those who browse from their homes are a minority. There is also lower penetration at the workplace in contrast to Santiago (17.1% as opposed to 32.2% respectively). Nevertheless, the use of Internet in schools is 17.8 % greater than in the capital, which suggests that the Ministry of Education's policy of providing state-owned schools with web access is being successful on alleviating the digital divide in Chile. Additionally, 85.9% of the users between 12 and 17 years old use the network from these places.

### **Defining a profile of the Chilean user**

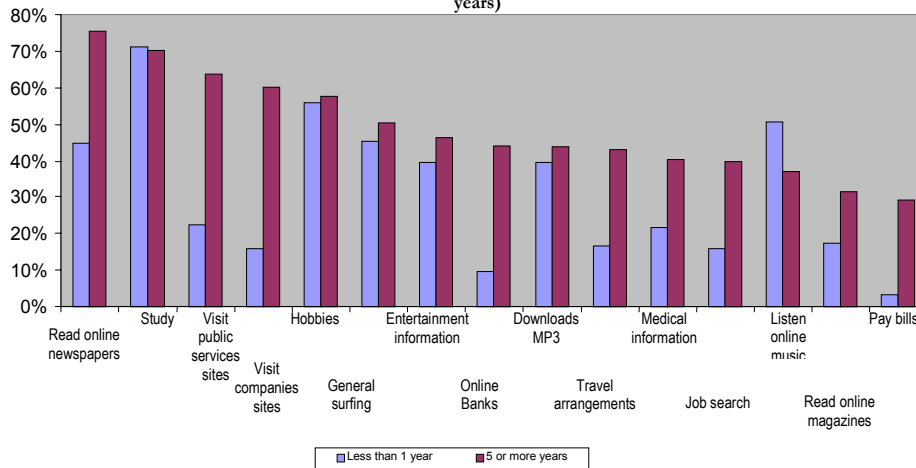
How much has internet affected our lives? Are we more or less isolated from the world? Have we changed our daily habits?

Web use depends on many factors. Experience is one of the most important, measured in years. Within the international context, Chile is still relatively a upstart. 43% of users in the USA and 55% in Sweden have more than five years of experience. In Chile, the percentage is 17.7%.

Table N°2 illustrates the fifteen more frequent uses among "experts" -those with more than five years of usage. These conducts are more pragmatic and complex than those performed by less experienced individuals. For example, 29.1% of these "experts" pay their bills online in contrast with only 5.5% of the others. The formers also check their bank accounts, purchase, participate in auctions, read online newspapers or visit government websites more frequently than the rest. In contrast, less experienced users prefer entertainment and music. Studying and browsing without a clear purpose are, in contrast, common to everybody.

Other WIP countries show that less experienced users use the web more leisurely, while their opposites report more pragmatic and complex patterns. A good example is e-commerce, a particularly relevant online conduct comprising not only important PC skills, but also enough trust as to put money on it. Hardly 19.8 % of the Chileans bought by Internet in the last twelve months, against 48.3% in Germany, 41.3% in Sweden and 38.2% in the United States. Yet when only experienced users are considered, the figure rises to 40% in Chile against 66% in Germany and Sweden, and almost 50% in USA.

Figure N.2  
The 15 most common uses of experts (5 or more years) compared with new users (between 1 and years)



### New complexities and multitasking

Internet began to expand massively in the mid-1990s. Yet there are contradictory interpretations about its influence in everyday life. One concerns its supposed harmful effects in users' sociability. WIP-Chile discovered that they share the twice as much time with friends than nonusers, while dedicating a third more to read books and to speak by the phone. These findings contradict the stereotype of users as solitary "nerds" immobilised in front of the PC screen.

Another interesting finding was that Internet usage is not uni-dimensional, but is combined simultaneously with many other activities. Multitasking occurs mainly among youngest users, and involves fragmented and nonlinear perceptions of reality. Multitasking can be either offline or online. Indeed, 64.4 % of Chilean users listen to recorded music, 25.2% speak by the phone and 14.6 % watch TV while surfing the web. It can also involve operating multiple browser windows to read e-mail or to listen music from a virtual radio. WIP-Chile detected that 42.9% "talked" through an instant messaging program (like MSN or ICQ) while surfing.

Multitasking implies new complexities to the WIP methodology. It is hard to know how much time is devoted to each parallel task, especially as online conducts become more complex. Future results from WIP-Chile will enable us to examine these trends and compare them with the rest of the world. Chile enjoys an interesting position as a country in which this powerful tool is still expanding.

### Additional references:

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