# Social Interaction in the Virtual Stockholm Region

REPORT 11:2007

# Foreword

**One of the central aims** of the forthcoming regional development plan for Stockholm is to ensure that social development is addressed in an adequately forward-looking manner and in a way that gives the stakeholders in the region a sound basis for concrete collaboration.

Through dialogue and analysis undertaken in 2006-2007, RTK (Stockholm County Council's Office for Regional Planning and Urban Transportation) identified Social Capital – i.e. the mechanism by which citizens build networks and trust towards each other and the institutions of society – as an important asset to develop. Social capital is developed and maintained through encounters between people.

Social interaction facilitated by the web has been an unknown factor in regional planning. What we did know is that hundreds of thousands of people browse the web every day. In particular, young people seemed to have embraced modern technology as a key element of their social interactions.

This report was commissioned in order to shed light on the social role that the web plays in the lives of the people who live in the Stockholm Region and to kick-start a discussion of the potential of the web to act as a bridging institution (meeting place) in which closer ties between the region's inhabitants can be established.

The results point to the fact that the region also exists in the virtual world, a meeting place that is at least as popular as the world of clubs, voluntary associations or entertainment establishments. The challenge of taking full advantage of on-line life for the benefit of the Stockholm region's development lies ahead of us.

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Stockholm, August 2007

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# Summary

**Introduction**

This report on Stockholm residents' Internet-based social relationships forms part of RTK's planning endeavours, which seek to develop long-term visions, objectives and strategies for the Stockholm region.

The report helps to map out Stockholm as a social system and it confirms that the Internet is a potential arena for creating trust among the inhabitants of the region and generating social capital.

The Internet is a breeding ground for a whole host of social relationships that may serve to strengthen the social capital of a region. Trust between people is also tested in a number of different on-line contexts. Although Internet-based relationships have many things in common with those in the real world, new tools may bring with them new ways of interacting.

The aim of the report is to show how social capital is currently created on the Internet and, subsequently, how society's institutions can use this arena to develop trust and networks between citizens and to generate trustworthy relationships between the institutions and the general public.

The report is based on the findings of a number of surveys: We started by commissioning public opinion researchers Sifo to carry out telephone interviews with Stockholm County residents. We then published a web survey to collect data from the most active Internet users. A third, more qualitative, element was four in-depth interviews held with representatives from the Koll.se, Match.com, Svenskafans.com, Lunarstorm.se and Blog.se websites[1]. The fourth and final element was a series of focus group discussions with active Internet users. Three focus group discussions were held. The groups, which comprised 7–10 people, were split by demographics; one group with young people (aged 13–23), one with students (aged 19–33) and one with adults (aged 30–40). The most important results are summarised below.

**The spread of contact networks on the Internet build trust**

Trust and social contacts among Stockholmers on the Internet is now a wide-spread phenomenon. One in five Stockholmers with Internet access[2] are in regular contact with someone they met on the Internet (around 280,000 of Stockholm's 1.9 million inhabitants). Some 13 percent of Stockholmers have established a sufficiently trusting relationship with someone via the Internet that they have decided to organise a real-life encounter

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1   www.koll.se is a site where people buy and sell all sorts of second hand goods, www.match.com is a dating site, www.svenskafans.se is a website where sports, in particular football, is discussed, www.lunarstorm.se is a community for young people and www.blog.se is a site where you can start your own blog (a personal on line commentary), read and comment on other peoples blogs.

2   For the purposes of simplicity, we will refer in this report to Stockholmers who have Internet access (81 percent of the County's inhabitants) as Stockholmers. It is important for the reader to remember that when we say 'Stockholmer', we are only talking about 81 percent of the County's population.

(provided that meeting did not happen by chance). One third of Stockholmers aged 15–29 are in contact with someone they met on the Internet, and 25 percent of this age group have had at least one real-life encounter with an online acquaintance.

Internet users perceive a notable expansion of their social networks with acquaintances that are different to those they might otherwise meet "in real life". Around 60 percent of the active Internet users group[3] believe that, for the most part, they would not have established relationships with those people they have met online if it were not for the Internet. Approximately 20 percent of Stockholmers are in contact with people on the Internet whose interests are different from their own and who they would not have met without the Internet. Almost a tenth of Stockholmers have regular contact with someone they have met on the Internet and have then gone on to meet them in real life. In the active users group, 70 percent have actually met someone they started up a friendship with online.

Some 80 percent of the active users group thought that they could "be themselves" on the Internet. Younger users thought they would be lonelier without the Internet; which gives evidence of its important role as a networking tool for young people. All of the focus groups interviews mentioned the Internet as a way for enabling insecure young people to take their place in society.

The fact that social relationships are so extended and can build this level of trust, encouraging people to undertake tangible, concrete actions, shows the importance of the confidence that can be generated on the Internet. It provides society with enormous potential to take advantage of opportunities to develop trust-building relationships on the Internet. However, it also makes substantive demands on institutions in society to take action in respect of the landscape before us.

**Stockholmers search for information about what's going on**
We began our quantitative survey by asking what Stockholmers use the Internet for, focusing on more social activities or activities that may be of interest to social interaction in a city or region. Around 75 percent of Stockholmers search for information about what's going on in the city. Some 40 percent participate in networks related to their profession, interests or hobbies, and one third of Stockholmers use chatrooms.

The fact that 75 percent of Stockholmers use the Internet to search for information about what's going on in the city is a remarkable figure. That means that approximately 1 million of the County's inhabitants[4] regularly visit websites that give ideas about what to do in Stockholm. This is a clear indication of the link between the physical region and the virtual. Consequently, the Internet constitutes an important forum for the public institutions to make Stockholmers aware of what's going on in the city, in addition to other existing platforms of communication.

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3   The "active Internet users" group comprises respondents to the web survey conducted by GK through free advertising on websites visited by relatively advanced Internet users.

4   Based on 75 percent of the County's inhabitants with access to the Internet being at least 10 years old.

### Visibility builds many different forms of trust

Younger Stockholmers (in the 15–29 age range) engage in activities with a significantly higher level of social contact than those in the 30–49 age group. They chat, upload pictures of themselves or family members and participate in discussion forums. Around one third of Stockholmers aged 15–29 also play online games and/or blog/comment on blogs. In contrast, users in the 30–49 age group search for information about what's going on in the city, communicate with authorities, join e-mail lists, buy and sell second hand goods and participate in networks.

A number of functions or tools are available on the Internet that complement communication tools in the physical world or communication by telephone and e-mail. Communities enable you to build networks and establish new contacts through your existing friends. These common community friends ensure that you can trust new contacts. Discussion forums can be used to discuss issues with likeminded people and get tips and information about gadgets, events or interests. Chatrooms enable you to keep in touch with friends both old and new in a more ephemeral way than using the telephone. E-mail lists can be used both with friends and acquaintances, as well as specialist issue and interest groups.

Experience gained from these different types of forum shows that those who present themselves, participate in debates and create a network develop trustworthy relationships with other Internet users. It is important that decision makers are familiar with the various types of tool in use so that they can choose from the full palette available to them when communicating with the public. There is scope for authorities and institutions to paint a clearer, more comprehensible picture of their organisations by way of personal presentations and blogs written by officials. Such an approach will go a long way to reinforcing public trust.

### Common interests create trust

The study highlighted that the possibility of meeting people with similar interests forms one of the main driving forces behind establishing social contacts on the Internet. The thing most Stockholmers have in common with those they are in contact with on the Internet, and the reason for most meeting people in real life, is shared interests.

Forums stand out as being excellent platforms to meet people in discussions concerning subjects of interest. If authorities and institutions want to raise the discussion concerning an area for which they are responsible, online forums could be an appropriate option.

### Consumer focus creates opportunities

From the interviews conducted it is clear that searching for consumer information will be an increasingly important aspect of the Internet. People are already sharing tips and making price comparison postings on blogs and in forums, and goods fly off the shelves if they get a favourable review on the main blog sites.

This creates scope for augmenting the presence of municipalities' trading standards departments on the net. With service institutions focusing on user requirements, it

should be possible to develop better comparisons of relatively equivalent organisations such as schools or hospitals. Such comparisons would also serve as tools for evaluating public services.

**Abuse damages trust**

Perhaps the biggest barriers to building social capital on the Internet mentioned by those we interviewed are e-bullying, racism and paedophilia. In order for the Internet to be regarded as trustworthy it is important that there are mechanisms in place to punish (exclude) those who abuse the service. A functioning mechanism for reporting abuse or providing contact feedback may be one way of addressing the issue of misuse and maintaining the integrity of networks.

**Education level and age influence how social contacts are established**

Different population groups in the region have different levels of bridging and bonding[5] in their online contacts. For older users and those of a higher education level, "shared interests" with those they have contact with over the net is more important. Older users, and those with a higher level of education, also appear more "discrete" in the way they look for contacts, i.e. they don't post pictures of themselves or chat as frequently.

If public institutions and authorities look to offer services and provide specific information to diverse population groups, it is important to be aware of the ways in which the various target groups communicate on the Internet. This could well be an area that warrants further research. It may be the case that highly educated men will be the ones to avail themselves of initiatives launched on forums, whilst young people and those with a lower level of education may instead be reached in broad networks or via personal profiles.

**Gender differences in Internet relationships**

Women have more contact with friends and relatives and less with people whose interests differ from their own. They are also less likely to arrange real life encounters with people they have gotten to know on the Internet than men. Men spend more time in discussion forums than women. Men also play more network games than women, particularly younger men. Women shop online and subscribe to e-mail lists. Consequently, the Internet is an area where women have the scope to extend their bridging contacts in order to build networks and social capital.

A significant proportion of men say that they are in contact with people who have similar interests to their own. They also say, to a greater extent than women, that they have gotten to know people on the Internet. According to representatives of the www.match.com website, one of the major problems in society is loneliness. Men could benefit from

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5   Bonding means socialising in an already known social context within an homogenous group. Bridging means socialising in a less well known social context with a more heterogeneous group. The latter is usually portrayed as being more interesting and valuable from a regional planning perspective (see section 3).

following the example of women and increase their contacts with friends and relatives on line.

The planning of online initiatives should take similar factors into account. To build trust between women who have never previously met, mother and toddler groups could be developed on the Internet. Similarly, youth clinics and psychiatric clinics can develop and strengthen their activities online. Perhaps it may encourage more young men to discuss relationships and family life?

### The Internet – a way to avoid discrimination

Inhabitants born outside Sweden and women state, more than other groups, that they would rather meet people on the Internet than in real life. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Internet initiatives may constitute an important instrument for these groups in establishing contacts that they would otherwise be unable to replicate in the physical world. Immigrant women should be given particular support.

Foreign born inhabitants state that they would rather have contact with people online than in real life and according to the survey this group currently seem to have many contacts on the Internet that they wouldn't otherwise have, which suggests that bridging social capital is being generated..

From society's perspective, it is possible to imagine that newly arrived immigrants, who may find it difficult to establish contacts in their new surroundings due to discrimination and language barriers, can be informed about the opportunities available for social contact in the Swedish Internet community.

### Internet more important outside the city

This study shows that, for those living in the Stockholm region, but outside the major urban areas, the Internet leads to more contacts with people who would have remained complete strangers had it not been for the Internet. These people also have a greater propensity real life encounters with the people they get to know on the Internet. In short, the Internet links together the more peripheral parts of the region, both in the virtual and the physical worlds. The Internet should thus be regarded as an important arena for communication and cohesion between the central and peripheral parts of the region.

### Potential for contact across frontiers and over distances

The anonymity of the Internet lays the foundations upon which the disabled and the socially excluded can build new contacts. The internet is increasingly useful and important for people who have difficulties in finding new friends, for instance those who are on their way to move into the Stockholm region.

# Introduction

This report on Stockholmers' Internet-based social relationships forms part of RTK's planning work that seeks to develop long-term visions, objectives and strategies for the region.

The vision for the region that is currently being formulated is that Stockholm should strive to become "the most attractive city region in Europe". One strategy for creating an open, accessible and dynamic region is to empower people to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. It's about enabling the inhabitants of the region to realise their potential and participate in society.

Trust, both in respect of other people and the institutions of society, is key to being able to bridge social divides, develop personal potential and actively participate in society.

The societal institutions of the region work daily on strengthening both personal wellbeing and trust, but also on establishing trustworthy relationships with citizens by providing services and information.

This report forms part of the work of mapping and developing Stockholm as a social system. It earmarks the Internet as a potential arena for creating trust and social capital.

The remit of the authors[6] was to raise the visibility of the web's current social function amongst the residents of the County of Stockholm, and to investigate the potential of the Internet to act as a bridging institution and generator of social capital. The report explores the breadth and depth of relationships built up online. In addition, an investigation was also conducted to establish whether social interaction on the web differs between user groups and whether the web has the potential to act as an arena in which social capital can be developed, both in general terms and for specific groups. The relationship between physical and virtual interaction was also examined.

As the potential for building social capital may be assumed to be greatest in areas where a relatively developed level of interpersonal contact is prevalent, the report focuses on more social activities, primarily within the areas of social interaction and interests.

The aim is to demonstrate how social capital is currently being built on the Internet and how society's institutions can use this arena to create social capital in the region and to generate trustworthy relationships between institutions and the general public.

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6   Consultants Geelmuyden.Kiese under the supervision
    of Martin Ängeby of RTK.

# Social capital in brief

Social capital is a concept that has no single and universally accepted definition. In developing this report, we have used the definition of Robert Putnam[7] as our point of departure. Putnam defines social capital as "bonds between individuals – social networks and the standards of reciprocity and trustworthiness that emerge from them." Putnam believes that it is positive for society if its citizens participate in social networks as these are based on reciprocity, which in turn leads to a sense of confidence amongst citizens. Confidence is for Putnam one of the cornerstones of democracy.

Putnam defines bonding and bridging as two distinct methods of making social ties. Bonding involves socialising in an already known context within a homogenous group. This type of socialisation with family and friends can be valuable, particularly from an individual perspective, and may involve developing personal potential. Bridging is a broader type of social capital creation between people of more heterogeneous groups. It is principally this type of relationship that may be regarded as strengthening the development of democracy, social participation and inspiring confidence in society's institutions.[8] The boundaries between bonding and bridging are not fully established and it is possible that certain types of relationship may overlap.

The Internet hosts a wide array of social relationships that may serve to strengthen the social capital of a region and trust between people is tested in a number of different virtual contexts. Although Internet-based relationships have many things in common with those in the real world, new tools may bring with them new ways of interacting. The study takes a more in-depth look at how social capital and trust work on the Internet.

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7   Putnam, Robert D, 2000, Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of
    American Community, New York, Simon & Schuster.

8   idem

# Method

The completed investigations are presented in an inductive and descriptive manner. The report does not aim to support or reject any particular theory. Instead, the report throws light over the current situation regarding social relationships on the Internet and suggests threads for more thorough research to pursue.

The study is based on research conducted in the field and not in books. Its focus is to describe the extent to which Stockholmers use the Internet, what they use it for and how they use it, according to gender, age, education and, in certain instances, origin and income.

The survey used both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

In the first stage, public opinion research firm Sifo was commissioned to conduct telephone interviews with a random sample of 1030 residents of Stockholm County, who were asked about their access to the Internet, what they used the Internet for, the type of relationships they have with people on the Internet and if they had met anybody they had gotten to know on the Internet "in real life".

We then published a web survey to collect data from the most active Internet users. We supplemented the Sifo research with more searching questions concerning the various types of relationship, as well as asking respondents for their take on the notion of the Internet as a social arena. The web survey was designed as an advert and run on the Svenskafans.com, Koll.se and Blog.se websites during January. The survey received 1064 responses. Of these, 382 stated that they lived in Stockholm County, with 22 stating they had found out about the survey on the Svenskafans website, 11 on the Koll website and 323 the Blog website. (26 stated that they had found out about the survey on another website, despite the fact that it was only run on the three aforementioned sites). It is upon the answers given by these 382 respondents that the statistics for active users in the report are based. In addition to the advert being run as a banner on Blog, this confirms that very active Internet users (those who write or comment on blogs) responded to the survey.

A third, more qualitative component was four interviews conducted with representatives from the Koll.se, Match.com, Svenskafans.com, Lunarstorm.se, and Blog.se websites. The sites were selected in consultation with RTK and considered to represent a broad field of social contacts on the Internet.

The fourth component was a series of focus groups involving active Internet users. Three focus group discussions were held. The groups, which comprised 7–10 people, were split by demographics; one group with young people (aged 13–23), one with students (aged 19–33) and one with adults (aged 30–40).

## Definitions

The numerical values stated in the report refer either to the Sifo survey or the web survey. When referring to the Sifo survey respondents, we will use the designation "Stockholmers". For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to "Stockholmers with Internet access" (81 percent of the County's population) simply as "Stockholmers". Therefore, it is important for the reader to remember that when we say Stockholmers, we are only talking about 81 percent of the County's population. When referring to web survey respondents, we will use the designation "active users".
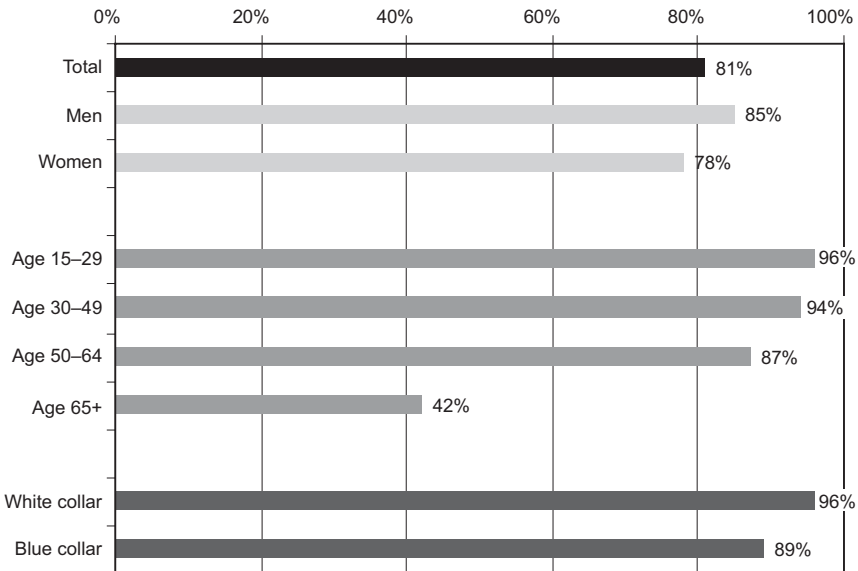
# Internet access

## Eight out of ten County residents online

The Sifo survey shows that 81 percent[9] of the population of Stockholm County have access to the Internet. Men have slightly more access to the Internet (85 percent) than women (78 percent). Internet access, which is 87 percent in the 50–64 age bracket, falls by half for Stockholmers above pensionable age. These figures are in line with statistics obtained from the rest of Sweden.[10]

On the whole, all Stockholmers under the age of 50 have access to the Internet. Of those who do not have an Internet connection, women over 65 have the lowest level of access (33 percent). Blue collar workers and members of LO (the central organization for affiliated workers unions) have less access to the Internet than white collar workers, as well as individuals with only a high school education (58 percent). Those on high incomes and with a high level of education generally have greater access to the Internet.

**Diagram 1. Stockholmers' access to the Internet**

| | Access |
|---|---|
| Total | 81% |
| Men | 85% |
| Women | 78% |
| Age 15–29 | 96% |
| Age 30–49 | 94% |
| Age 50–64 | 87% |
| Age 65+ | 42% |
| White collar | 96% |
| Blue collar | 89% |

Source: GK, Sifo

The survey conducted by Sifo shows that eight out of ten Stockholm County residents have Internet access. This figure corresponds to the data gathered for Sweden as a whole by Statistics Sweden.

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9   805 out of a random sample of 1030 people living in Stockholm County had access to the Internet. The margin of error for the entire population is 2.5 percent.

10  Statistics Sweden 2005, Private use of computers and the Internet 2005.
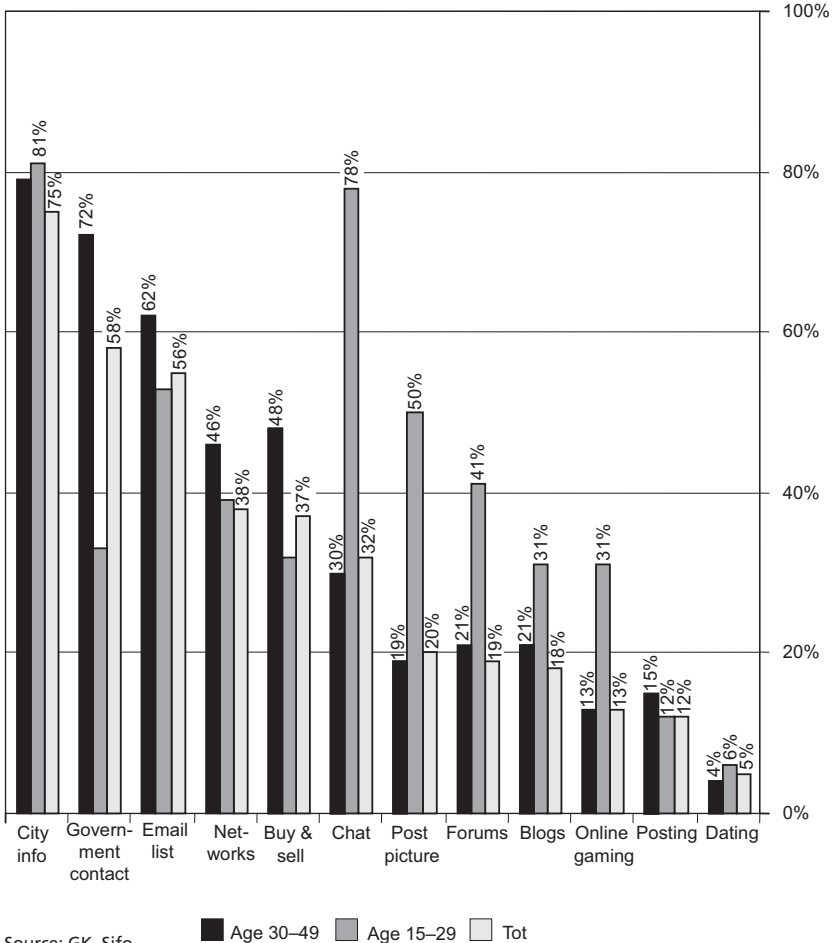
# What do Stockholmers do on the Internet?

## 80 percent of Stockholmers search for information about what's going on in the city

The quantitative survey began by asking what Stockholmers use the Internet for, focusing on more social activities or activities that may be of interest to contacts in a city or region. The most popular of our listed activities was "search for information about what is going on in town" (75 percent). Other popular activities included "contact with authorities" (58 percent) and "subscribing to e-mail lists" (56 percent)

Another of the more social activities that proved to be relatively popular was "participating in networks relating to work, education or leisure" (38 percent). Chatting also seems to be popular (32 percent). The focus groups largely confirmed the findings of the Sifo survey.

**Diagram 2. Activities on the Internet**



Source: GK, Sifo

Age 30–49   Age 15–29   Tot

## Younger users socialise, older users communicate with authorities

### Young Stockholmers – "Everyone's on Playahead"

There are big differences between what Stockholmers of various ages do on the Internet. Younger users (aged 15–29) spend time on activities involving a significantly higher level of social contact than those in the 30–49 age bracket. They chat (78 percent as opposed to 30 percent), uploaded a picture of themselves or someone in the family (50 percent as opposed to 19 percent), participate in discussion forums (41 percent as opposed to 21 percent). Around one third of people aged 15–29 also play online games or blog/comment on blogs.

*Teenagers in the focus group* stated that they usually visit forums to engage in role play. They also play online games. All of the teenagers we talked to have their own profiles on Playahead[11]. Users upload pictures, music and video clips to their pages, and frequently make postings in friends' guest books. The teenagers also download music and video. In addition to professionally produced material, this may also include demos or tracks recorded at gigs.

Amongst *university students in the focus group*, one popular activity is reading the news from the websites of the major Swedish newspapers. Many also purchase books and music, pay bills and request forms from CSN [the Swedish student loans/grants agency]. Approximately one third of the students in the group have their own page on Myspace[12]. Some of the students also run their own blogs, but the majority read other people's. They also look up information such as addresses and telephone numbers or how much people earn. All university students in the group state that the biggest benefit of the Internet is downloading video and music files.

### Middle-aged Stockholmers – "The Internet is a good way of finding a job"

Stockholmers in the 30–49 age bracket do not demonstrate the same social behaviour patterns as their younger counterparts. However, they do have a considerable propensity for searching for information about what is going on in town. Otherwise, they buy and sell goods (48 percent as opposed to 20 percent), have contact with authorities (72 percent as opposed to 33 percent), subscribe to e-mail lists (62 percent as opposed to 53 percent) and participate in work/interest/leisure time-related networks (46 percent as opposed to 39 percent). Amongst those in the 50–64 age bracket, the most popular use of the Internet is to communicate with authorities. Stockholmers over the age of 65 are not particularly well represented in any category.

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11  Playahead is broad network, aimed primarily at young people, where you can add a description of yourself and use other services in a similar way as on Lunarstorm.
12  Myspace is a network that, in certain respects, is similar to Lunarstorm and Playahead, but appeals to a slightly older audience. Focus on music.

*The over 30s focus group* stated that they pursued activities similar to those of the university students – reading news, shopping on "Ebay" or "Blocket" and communicating with official bodies.  Parents of small children usually use the Internet for buying and selling, e.g. Ebay and Blocket. Other parent activities include surfing the net for information pertaining to day nurseries and illnesses, e.g. vårdguiden.se and netdoktor.se, and getting their child on a day nursery waiting list. Fathers also use networks to which they belong to find jobs and to search for recopies. Mothers check out baby swimming classes.

| *15–29 year-old´s Top 7* | *30–49 year-old´s Top 7* |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Search for information about what's going on in town (81%) | 1. Search for information about what's going on in town (79%) |
| 2. Chatting (78%) | 2. Contact with official bodies (72%) |
| 3. E-mail lists (53%) | 3. E-mail lists (62%) |
| 4. Uploading pictures of themselves or a family member (50%) | 4. Buy and sell second hand goods (48%) |
| 5. Participating in discussion forums (41%) | 5. Participate in networks (46%) |
| 6. Reading and writing blogs (31%) | 6. Chatting (30%) |
| 7. Playing network games (31%) | 7. Discussion forums/Blogging (21 percent) |

## "Guys play games, girls chat"

"Guys play games, girls chat". That's how one of the teenagers in our focus group summarised the difference in younger Stockholmers' Internet use – a statement that is shown to have a grain of truth. According to the Sifo survey, men spend considerably more time in discussion forums than women. Men also play more network games than women, particularly in the younger age brackets. Amongst Stockholmers in the 30–49 age bracket, men make more postings on newspaper web pages.

Buying and selling second hand goods online and finding out what's going on in town seem to be equally popular for both men and women. Men tend to dominate other activities.

The focus groups confirm the opinion that women seem to prefer using the Internet to keep in touch with friends, whilst men look for forums dedicated to shared interests. For example, a father may be a member of a forum set up for well-informed Djurgården supporters, whilst a mother may keep in touch with friends from a now defunct boxing club via an e-mail list. The e-mail list used to provide members with information about training sessions, now it is mostly concerned with social messaging, e.g. when people have children.

A woman started an e-mail group with her family, all of whom live in Stockholm, in order to keep each other up to date concerning what will happen in the run-up to Christmas. Another woman mentions that she would like to have more contact with friends who, due to a lack of time, she only meets infrequently: "Having a web page to which everyone can upload pictures of each other may be one way of keeping in touch. We had such a page, but it fizzled out," she says.

## Blue collar workers chat, white collar workers network

In the Sifo survey, Stockholmers who defined themselves as being "blue collar workers" chat and participate in discussion forums more frequently than those who defined themselves as "white collar workers". White collar workers use the Internet for official communications and are subscribers to e-mail lists. Those employed in private companies have a greater propensity to shop online and post messages on newspaper websites, whilst those working in the public sector participate in networks associated with their jobs or interests.

Some 40 percent of Stockholmers with a basic high school education have posted a picture of themselves on the Internet, whilst only 14 percent of Stockholmers with a degree have done the same. Around 23 percent of people with household incomes below SEK 600,000 have posted pictures. In the case of Stockholmers with annual incomes in excess of SEK 600,000, this figure is somewhat lower (13 percent).

## City-dwellers find out what's going on in town

Searching the Internet for information about what's going on in town was more popular (but not significantly so) amongst those who told Sifo that they lived in Stockholm (77 percent as opposed to 72 percent), which is perfectly natural as it should be easier for those people to attend events in the city (accessibility and availability).

Stockholm also seems to be a good market for goods, housing and network creation, particularly job-related networks. Those who told Sifo's researchers that they lived in the city also showed themselves to have a greater propensity to participate in networks related to their jobs, education or leisure pursuits (particularly white collar workers in the public sector) and buy and sell used goods (particularly white collar workers in the private sector), compared to those stating that they did not live in the city. Shopping second hand goods online may be easier for those living in Stockholm City either due to the large array of sellers available nearby or because of a higher level of access to cars.

## Summary

The quantitative survey explored what Stockholmers use the Internet for, focusing on more social activities or activities that may be of interest to contacts in a city or region. 80 percent of Stockholmers search for information about what's going on in town. Some 40 percent participate in networks related to their profession, interests or hobbies, and one third of Stockholmers use chatrooms.

Younger Stockholmers (in the 15–29 age range) engage in activities with a significantly higher level of social contact than those in the 30–49 age group. They chat, upload pictures of themselves or family members and participate in discussion forums. Around one third of people aged 15–29 also play online games and/or blog/comment on blogs.

In contrast, users in the 30–49 age group search for information about what's going on in town, communicate with authorities, join e-mail lists, buy and sell second hand goods and participate in networks.

Men spend considerably more time in discussion forums than women. Men also play more network games than women, particularly in the younger age brackets. Women shop online and subscribe to e-mail lists.

In the survey, Stockholmers who defined themselves as being "blue collar workers" chat and participate in discussion forums more frequently than those who defined themselves as "white collar workers". White collar workers use the Internet for official communications and are subscribers to e-mail lists.

# What sort of contacts do we have on the Internet?

## The Internet is important for getting to know new people

More than 80 percent of Stockholmers keep in touch with friends online, with 50 percent being in contact with people who have similar interests. Bonding is therefore the most common form of contact on the Internet.

The four bars on the right in Diagram 3 below illustrate the contacts that may lead to bridging in a region. Approximately 20 percent of Stockholmers are in contact with people whose interests differ from their own and who they would not have met without the Internet, if they were not previously known to them or if they were people they got to know on the Internet. Compare this to how common it is for Stockholmers to get to know people in the physical world, and the Internet can easily be viewed as a very important arena for getting to know people that were previously strangers.

In the active users group, 85 percent had established contact on the Internet with people they had never previously met.

**Diagram 3. Types of Internet contact**
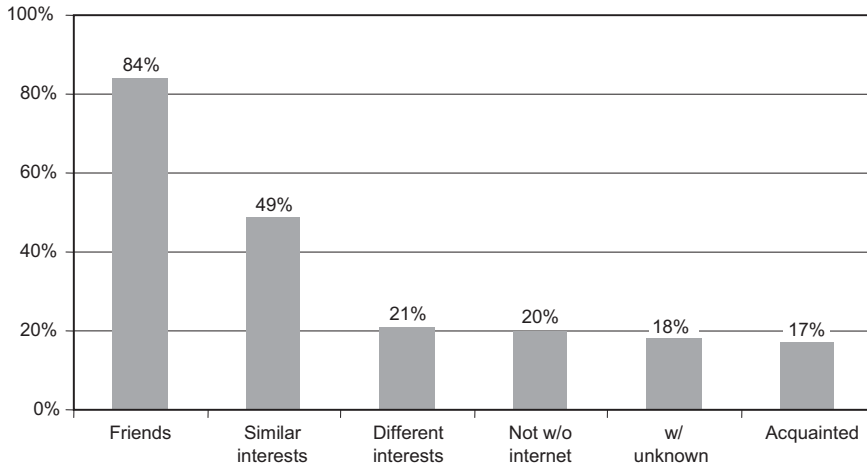


Source: GK, Sifo

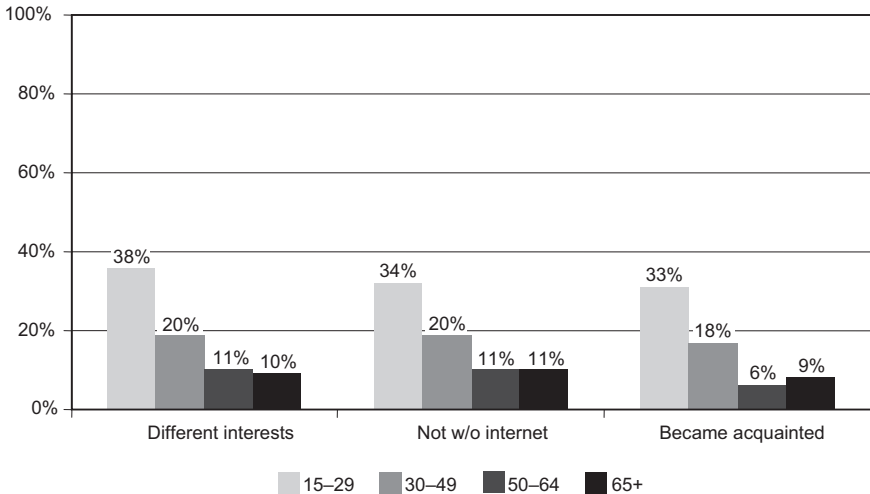## Women communicate with friends, men with people who share their interests

Amongst Stockholmers, women have more contact with their friends than men do (89 percent as opposed to 84 percent). All the other listed social contact categories are dominated by men. Men's contacts differ significantly from the average in the "contact with people with similar interests" (58 percent), "contact with people I would not have gotten to know without the Internet" (25 percent), "contact with people I did not previously know" (23 percent)" and "contact with people I got to know on the Internet" (21 percent) categories.

The picture painted by Sifo is confirmed by the web survey, which showed that 86 percent of men say that they have met people online that they did not previously know, with 84 percent of women saying the same.

## One third of people aged 15–29 are in touch with someone they met on the Internet

Younger people are considerably more open in their contacts than their older counterparts. All categories of Internet contact in which the younger age group differs sharply from the average are "bridging categories". The diagram below shows that just over a third of people aged 15–29 have contact with people they got to know on the Internet, people they would not have gotten to know without the Internet and people whose interests differ from their own. (Apparently, senior citizens had more contact with people they had gotten to know on the Internet than those in the 50–64 age bracket, a fact that may be ascribed to having more time on their hands.)

**Diagram 4. Types of Internet contact – age**

| | Different interests | Not w/o internet | Became acquainted |
|---|---|---|---|
| 15–29 | 38% | 34% | 33% |
| 30–49 | 20% | 20% | 18% |
| 50–64 | 11% | 11% | 6% |
| 65+ | 10% | 11% | 9% |

Source: GK, Sifo

## "Blue collar workers" more open to new contacts than "white collar workers"

Those who told Sifo that they define themselves as blue collar workers have a higher level of contact with people that they met on the Internet than those who regard themselves as white collar workers (22 percent as opposed to 9 percent). Blue collar workers also have a greater level of contact with people which interests differ from their own than white collar

workers (26 percent as opposed to 16 percent). It is also more common for low skilled and low paid workers to have contact with people they get to know on the Internet and for low paid workers to have contact with people whose interests differ from their own.

High income workers and those with advanced education seem to be more selective in their online contacts and have a greater propensity to engage in bonding rather than bridging.

## Summary

More than 80 percent of Stockholmers keep in touch with friends online, with 50 percent being in contact with people who have similar interests. Approximately 20 percent of Stockholmers are in contact with people whose interests differ from their own and who they would not have met without the Internet, if they were not previously known to them or if they were people they got to know on the Internet.

Men, young people and those who define themselves as blue collar workers are significantly more open in their contacts than women, older people and white collar workers. They frequently have contact with people who have personalities contrary to their own.

# Are our online friends like us?

## The Internet expands networks – from bonding to bridging

What type of people do users have contact with on the Internet? Around 60 percent of active Internet users agree (usually or always) that they would not have established contact with those people they have met online if it were not for the Internet. This response shows that people believe the Internet expands their networks by adding contacts that are wholly different to those they would encounter "in real life", which is indicative of the Internet being a contributing factor in bridging.

**Diagram 5. I wouldn't have got to know my Internet contacts had it not been for the Internet (Active users)**
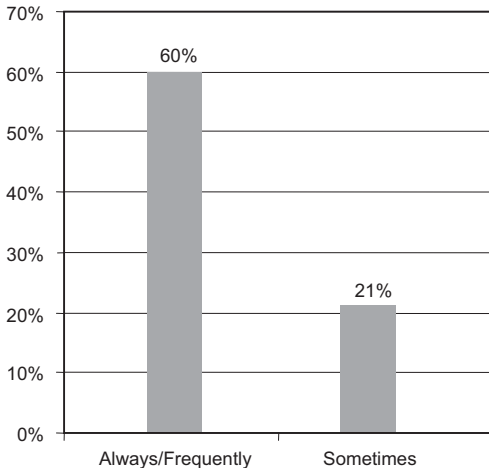
Source: GK, Sifo

Amongst active users, those who live outside the Stockholm suburbs frequently responded that they would not have gotten to know their Internet contacts had the Internet not existed (67 percent), compared to those living in the suburbs (61 percent) or those living in the city (54 percent). This seems reasonable, partly as there is a generally greater chance of meeting more people in town and partly because it is possible (if not obvious) that those who live outside the city have Internet contact with people scattered over a larger area. (According to the web survey, if you live outside the city, you have a lesser chance of meeting someone from the same town on the Internet.)

The survey showed that there was a (statistically insignificant) tendency that the further away from Stockholm you live, the fewer interests you will share with people on the Internet. This possibly confirms the picture painted by the previous section of an educated and financially secure elite living in the city who have interests in common with their online contacts.

Diagram 6 shows that it is common to have a shared interest with contacts and that they are usually of the same age.

In particular, men state that they share interests with the online friends. For example, amongst active users, 66 percent of men answered "always" or "frequently" compared to 54 percent of women. At the same time, men have more contact with strangers and people who they would not have gotten to know without the Internet than women.

Not only does sharing the same interests have a bonding effect, it can also lead to bridging. Svenskafans is a perfect example of how shared interests can bring people together who might not otherwise have met. Many foreign teams have fans in Sweden who have no matches in Sweden to get together for. However, the Internet gives these people the opportunity to meet like-minded individuals.

Young people agree that they meet people with similar interests to their own on the Internet: "If you share something, have something in common, it doesn't matter where you come from. For example, if you start talking with someone from another country in a game you have the game in common."

Svenskafans is perhaps the clearest example from the websites we talked to of how shared interests contribute to establishing Internet contacts. But even the people at Blog say that shared interests are critical to social contacts on the Internet. As an example of how individual blogs form networks, they state how many blogs about anorexia have chosen to join Blog: "These bloggers have gotten together and are now in the midst of a joint discussion."

**Diagram 6. Common interest with online contacts**
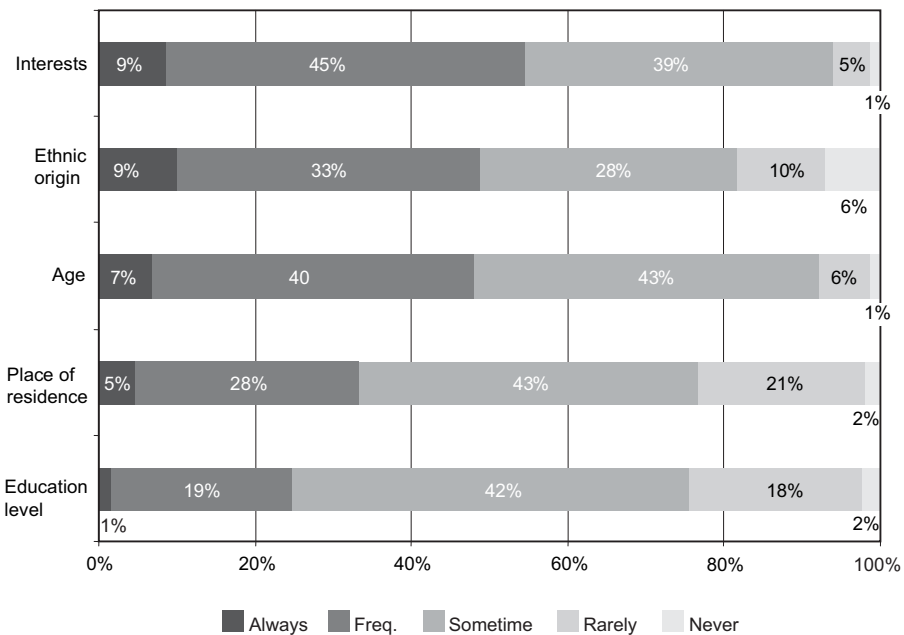


Source: GK

Both young people and adults give examples of how they often they take the approach that the people they have contact with on the Internet through discussion forums and network games are usually much older (or younger) than they at first believed:"Sometimes it's the case that you think the person you're talking to is much like yourself, but after a while it becomes apparent that the person is 35 and lives in Spain. You just don't think that older people are interested in things like new games."

The fact men believe they have more interests in common with their contacts than women do may be due to those "interests" being associated with typically manly activities. However, because men have more contacts that they got to know on the Internet it seems to indicate that their efforts in this respect lead to bridging.

## Interest "niching" increases with age and education

Active users who have a university degree usually share more interests with their Internet contacts (66 percent responded "always" or "frequently") than those with just a basic high school education (56 percent). There may be a certain covariation in terms of age, but this tendency reinforces the impression that a higher level of education and participation in a white collar profession results in people having more shared interests with their Internet contacts.

On Lunarstorm, which may be regarded as a less specialised site, you get the feeling that visitors to the site come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Even single mothers who only have a basic education manage to find their way on to the net and discover Lunarstorm.

## Immigrants look for bonding

Active users originating overseas usually share more interests with their Internet contacts (67 percent responded "always" or "frequently") than those with Swedish parents (58 percent).

This seems to indicate that immigrants use the Internet to find likeminded people. As we have seen before in the case of men, bonding has a tendency to cross over into bridging.

One example of immigrant bonding that we discovered is emergence of fan clubs for teams playing in the Spanish and Turkish football leagues and their popularity amongst young immigrants. This type of bonding may evolve into bridging if and when Svenskafans takes note of their writers and employs them in the Svenskafans organisation. This will ensure that the site has a fully representative readership.

Lunarstorm also ran a club called "Andra generationens invandrare" [second generation immigrants], in which issues related to this section of society were discussed. This type of bonding does not need to be perceived as negative. Lunarstorm is also usually young immigrants' first point of contact with the Swedish Internet community as they try to find out how to obtain a Swedish personal identity number.

**Diagram 7. Interests shared with those I am in contact with on the Internet – frequently or always according to background variables (Active users)**
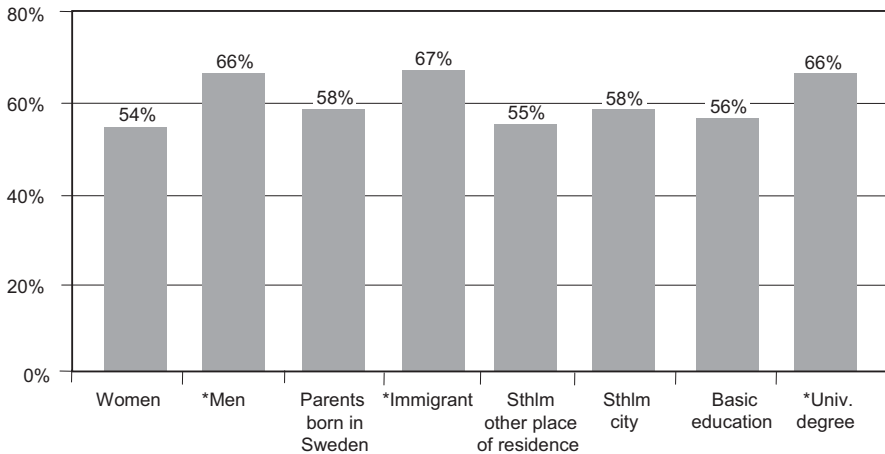


Source: GK (Asterisk denotes that the group scores above the mean value)

## Disabilities

Lunarstorm reports that many of its disabled users say that it is liberating not to have to reveal that they are disabled straight away. Instead, the "reveal" can be done as and when they want to and on their terms.

Blog also agrees that the Internet "affords an additional dimension in terms of diversity": "It doesn't matter what you look like or whether you have a handicap. You know that the Internet has great significance for wheelchair users as they don't immediately need to show their disability."

## Summary

Internet users believe the Internet expands their networks by adding contacts that are wholly different to those they would encounter "in real life" and is indicative of the Internet being a contributing factor in bridging. Around 60 percent of the more active Internet users usually or always agree that they would not have established contact with those people they have met online if it were not for the Internet. This tendency is stronger the further away from the city you get.

Many people, particularly men, state that they share interests with their online friends. Examples from focus groups and interviews show that people who meet each other through the Internet usually share interests without necessarily sharing a social background or being of a similar age.

Those who have a university education usually have more interests in common with their online contacts than those who only have a basic high school education.

Immigrants usually have more interests in common with their online friends than other users. There are examples of positive bonding and bridging.

The anonymity of the Internet creates the criteria for disabled people to establish new contacts.

# The relationship between physical and virtual social interaction

## More than 10 percent of Stockholmers have met someone they have got to know on the Internet

Around 13 percent of Stockholmers have met someone they got to know on the Internet. Some 8 percent have regular contact with someone they have met on the Internet and have then gone on to meet them in real life.

**Diagram 8. Have you met anyone in real life that you got to know via the Internet?**
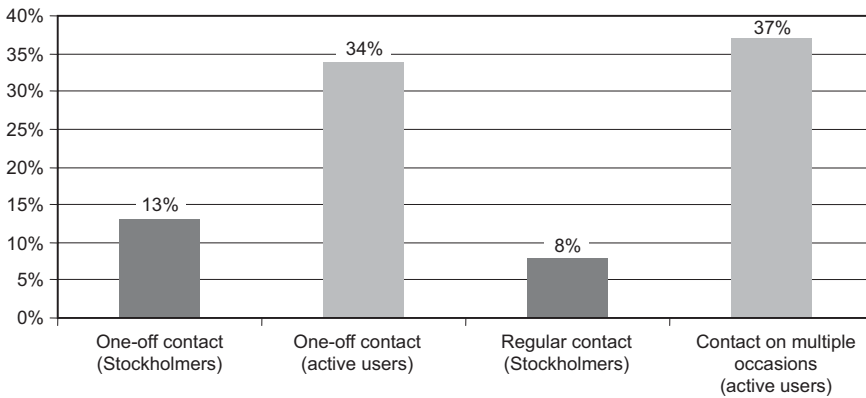


Source: GK, Sifo and GK

Amongst active users, 37 percent have met someone they got to know on the Internet several times, with 34 percent meeting such people in a one-off situation.

According to the answers given to the web survey, the main reason for meeting someone people met online is a shared interest. The second most popular answer of our listed response options was dating.

**Diagram 9. The reason why I met a person that I got to know on the Internet in real life (Active users)**
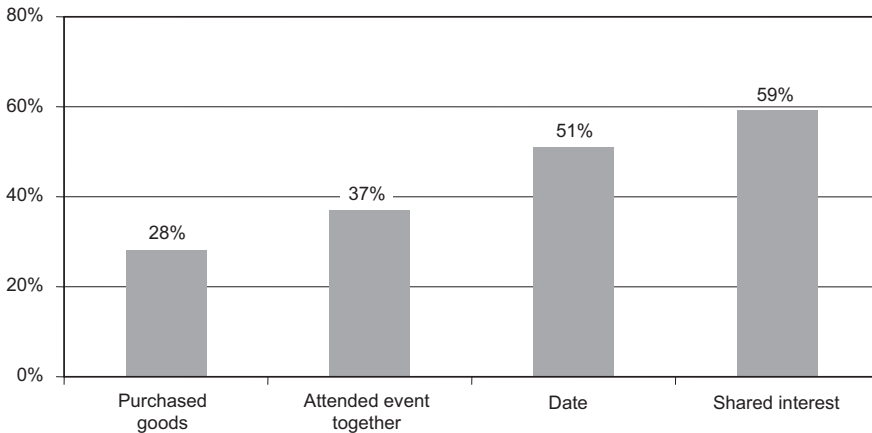


Source: GK

## Men meet more Internet contacts IRL to cultivate interest

The Sifo survey highlights a relatively wide gap between men and women. Around 81 percent of women have never met anyone they got to know on the Internet, whilst the same applies to only 74 percent of men.

In the web survey, just as in the Sifo survey, a slightly larger proportion of men (42 percent) than women (34 percent) say that they have met someone they got to know on the Internet in real life on several occasions. Men also dominate the one-off meeting category, scoring 36 percent. This picture seems to confirm what we already knew. In other words, women establish fewer contacts with strangers on the Internet and that they also meet fewer people they have gotten to know on the Internet.

Men generally meet more people (69 percent) than women (58 percent) due to a shared interest.

## One in four aged 15–29 have met Internet contacts IRL

The Sifo survey shows that younger people have a greater propensity to meet people they have gotten to know on the Internet: Some 25 percent of those surveyed met someone once, whilst 13 percent claim to have regular contact. The level of meetings with Internet contacts then falls with age.

In the active users group, the main reason for those in the 26–30 age band meeting Internet contacts is dating (74 percent). It is also more common for those with only a basic education (correlation with young people) to have visited an event with the person they have met.

## Unskilled and blue collar workers have more IRL contacts

Respondents with a basic education (active users) and those on low incomes (Sifo) stand out as they have met people on a one-off basis more than any others. The differences between blue collar and white collar workers are not statistically significant, but indicate that blue collar workers meet their Internet contacts more frequently. This reinforces the image of lower skilled people being more active creators of broad contacts, i.e. bridging.

## Internet more important for meetings outside the city

In the active users group, those that live outside the city or in its immediate suburbs have usually people in real life (approx. 40 percent on multiple occasions and approx. 27 percent on a one-off basis) than those who live within the city (39 percent on multiple occasions and 23 percent on a one-off basis). Consequently, the Internet seems to be more important for contact with people in real life if you live outside the city, which is a reasonable attitude to adopt as those who live in the centre may not have the same need to socialise on the net with those who live nearby.

It is slightly more uncommon to visit an event together with someone if you live a considerable distance from each other.

## Four out of ten Internet users usually visit physical locations after reading about them online

Some 44 percent of the active Internet users group usually visit places they found out about on the Internet.

According to students and teenagers, "if you just surf, you may, for example, find that something's going on in Kungsan – just by chance". Adults, on the other hand, tend to search for information about events or places after first being given a tip by a friend.

Alltomstockholm, kalendarium (Stockholm club guide), sfbio and ticnet (event tickets) are mentioned as examples of sites with tips about meeting places. Other websites, such as thepage (clubs) and those of the Swedish students' union, provide more specialist tips.

**Diagram 10. I visit places, locations or events in real life that I find out about on the Internet (by background) (Active users)**
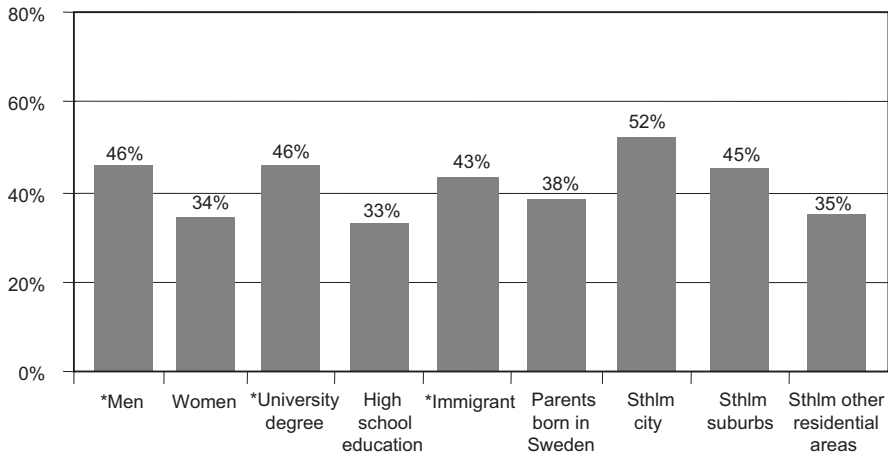


Source: GK. The asterisk denotes that the category has a higher mean value than the group as a whole.

## Internet a driving factor in event attendance and IRL contacts

According to the web survey, if you go to an event that you look for information about on the Internet it is likely that they event is related to a particular interest. Men, immigrants and those with a higher level of education tend to visit places they get information about from the Internet.

One clear example of an activity that starts on the Internet and leads to a meeting in real life is Internet dating. A less clear example is how bloggers that have met in blog forums meet in real life. There is also the example of how a discussion of the Hultsfred festival on the Lunarstorm forum resulted in ten people meeting in a particular corner of the festival camp site having previously arranged a meeting in the forum. Others decide that they shall go to gigs and events together.

It is interesting to note that whenever the most popular fashion blogger, Engla, writes about something in her fashion blog, the product can disappear from stores that very day.

On Svenskafans, the fan club forum is used as a way of drawing in people to matches. The clubs mobilise to "outsing" their opponents by taking more people to the next match. They usually advertise that they have seats on their coaches to fill.

In this way, forums become a way of encouraging physical meetings at matches. Forums also arrange football trips and bear witness to people of different ethnic and social backgrounds meet on these trips. What's more, Svenskafans has now started its own travel agency.

Young people in the "we meet at an online gaming café" focus group are also good examples of how shred interests on the Internet lead to gatherings in a physical place. The

gaming café becomes a sort of youth centre in which you can talk and socialise with those you play against whilst the game is in progress.

Active users that live in the city usually attend events they obtain information about on the Internet (52 percent) than those who live in the suburbs (45 percent) and those who live in other parts of the County (35 percent). This function probably plays a greater role where there are relatively more events to visit nearby. On Match.com it is apparent that users (quite naturally) usually want to meet people who live close to them. In addition, Lunarstorm users and those in the youth group stress that there is a point to having Internet contact with people who live in the same area as there is more common ground.

An interesting counter-development to this is that real life events are beginning to move on to the Internet. On Svenskafans, several thousand people talk whilst matches are in progress. During a match, the larger forums may have as many as 2000 people online and the debate is intense. Immediately after a Stockholm derby, some 500 people write on the forum, with 7–8000 people online reading the messages.

## Summary

More than one in ten Stockholmers, and one in four Stockholmers between the ages of 15 and 29, have met someone they got to know on the Internet. Almost 10 percent have regular contact with someone they have met on the Internet and have then gone on to meet them in real life. In the active users group, 40 percent have actually met someone they stuck up a friendship with online.

The most common reason for active users meeting someone they got to know on the Internet is a shared interest. This is particularly true for men. The second most popular reason is dating.

The Internet seems to be a more important tool for those who live outside the city. Amongst active users, several who live outside Stockholm have met someone they got to know on the Internet.

One in four active users frequently visit places they find out about on the Internet. From the focus groups, it is evident that young people often surf around and identify activities whilst adults search for information prior to a potential visit. There are also many examples of how websites constitute an enticement to people to visit a particular place, such as Svenskafans, which attracts people to go on football trips and which recently started its own travel agency. Similarly, Lunarstorm acts as a platform to attract groups to festivals. One interesting "counterphenomenon" is that events, such as football matches, are beginning to "migrate to the Internet".

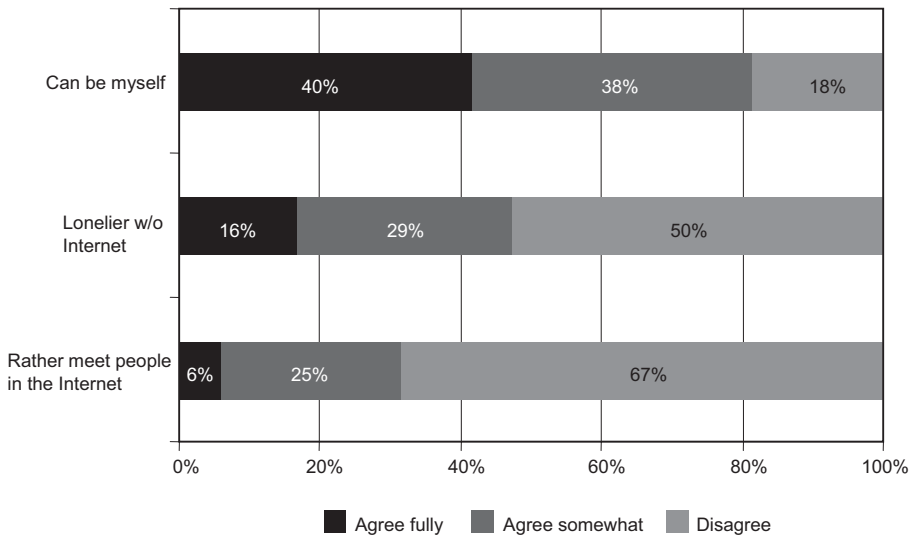# Personal attitudes to online relationships

## A place for young people to be themselves and find their place in society

We made three statements concerning people's relationships on the Internet that the active users group were confined to. The statements read:

• I try to meet people on the Internet rather than in other places
• I can be myself on the Internet
• I would be lonelier without the Internet

The biggest response was to the statement "I can be myself on the Internet", to which 78 percent either agreed or agreed somewhat.

**Diagram 11. Personal attitudes to relationships on the Internet (Active users)**



| | Agree fully | Agree somewhat | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| Can be myself | 40% | 38% | 18% |
| Lonelier w/o Internet | 16% | 29% | 50% |
| Rather meet people in the Internet | 6% | 25% | 67% |

Source: GK

More of those with basic education agreed with the statement "I can be myself on the Internet" (46 percent) than those with a university education (33 percent). More of those with basic education also agreed with the statement "I would be lonelier without the Internet" (20 percent) than those with a university degree (13 percent).

A significant proportion of the young people in the focus group agreed that they would be lonelier, or at least have fewer friends, without the Internet. "It's much easier to keep in touch if you meet at a festival and not see each other again except for on the Internet and in chatrooms."

One student describes the role the Internet plays in the lives of young people: "Young people are quite insecure and the net can be a way for them to find their place in society."

One man who plays network games also has experience of how young people spend their time gaming as an escape from a demanding reality: "Sometimes, people join the game who you notice are a little younger and may have problems in establishing social relationships. Network games can act as an escape from the demands of reality. The rules are relatively simple and predictable. The games themselves are not subject to particularly many requirements, especially in relation to the demands placed on young people by society. It may, perhaps, be unhealthy for young people with social problems to spend excessive amounts of time playing network games. However, gaming teaches you to collaborate with others and understand that you can't behave towards your opponents inappropriately. The simplicity of games also means that the consequences of your actions are relatively predictable."

Students, young people and adults in our focus groups seem to agree that various parts of someone's personality find expression both on the Internet and in reality: "Some people who adopt sick social attitudes on the Internet are completely different in reality. Many are more reserved in the real world," says one of the young people.

**Diagram 12. I try to meet people on the Internet rather than in other places (by background) (Active users)**
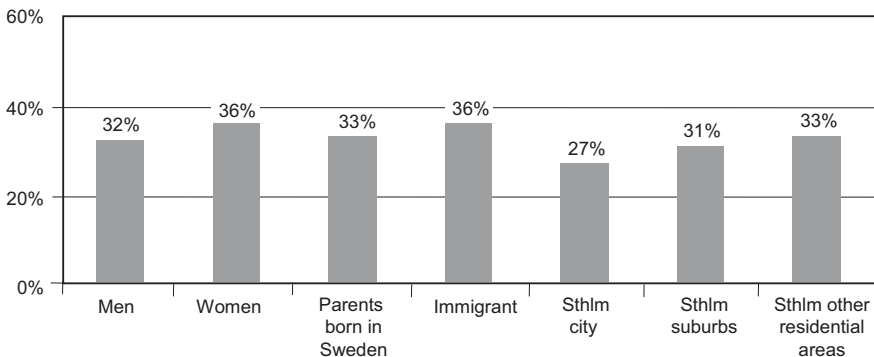


Source: GK

## Women and immigrants prefer to meet people on the Internet than in real life

Amongst active users, 36 percent of women, compared to 32 percent of men, agree or agree somewhat with the statement "I rather meet people on the Internet than in real life". Some 10 percent of immigrants and 5 percent of Swedish-born parents agree with the statement "I rather meet people on the Internet than in real life". This may be the result of women and immigrants feeling disenfranchised by society and them seeing the Internet as a way of getting round their disenfranchisement.

Of those who agree or agree somewhat with the statement "I visit clubs or networks that I would not have participated in had it not been for the Internet", immigrants are

overrepresented (78 percent) compared to those with Swedish parents (67 percent). This means that the Internet has particular potential for those with of a non-Swedish origin to extend their networks.

## Summary

Some 80 percent of the active users group thought that they could "be themselves" on the Internet. This indicates that they feel trust towards those they interact with online. Younger users, more so than their older counterparts, thought they would be lonelier without the Internet, confirmation of its important role as a networking tool for young people. All of the focus groups portrayed the Internet as a way for enabling insecure young people to take their place in society.

In the active users group, immigrants and women (more so than any other group) would rather meet people on the Internet than in real life. This is probably due to the barriers facing these groups in the physical world.

# The future of the Internet

## Development of current services

In the interviews and surveys we conducted, people were asked what they thought the future held for the social realm of the Internet. In many ways, the comments received in response to this open question in both the survey and in the focus groups provide answers to what the Internet is currently used for. Chatting, communicating, contacting new and old friends, managing all aspects of life online, work and school, entertainment, shopping, searching for the latest fashions, booking hotels, buying food, engaging with authorities, downloading files, etc.

Match believes that communication will become faster and use voice and video. In addition, video profiles will also undergo a process of evolution. A number of megasites with broad networks will emerge, even if several new niche networks are developed. Broad networks mainly cater for people's exhibitionism and their desire to present themselves to the world. In contrast, niche networks are more about giving advice and meeting people.

## Women have a greater presence thanks to their increased consumer power

At Blog, they see the current focus of the Internet being on the housing market (hemnet) and the job market (Monster), so the future will deal more with consumer issues. A lot of current Internet content focuses on consumption. "Blogs already feature a high level of consumer information and will soon render Sverker Olofsson [a Swedish consumer issues journalist] and Plus [a consumer issues magazine programme produced by SVT] superfluous." The power of the consumer will increase. Blog writers usually provide tips as to where you can buy various products or highlight interesting shops.

Blog is indicative of the prevailing trend of women being the dominant force in the blogging sphere. It is also widely known and accepted that women are the ones who decide what products are bought in the household. Koll also believes that women's presence on the Internet will grow stronger: "Women have the clearest opportunities for development in terms of building social capital on the Internet. In our business, we see women taking the initiative and realising their business potential."

## Increased opportunities for contact with newcomers and the socially excluded

Online networks enable people who have difficulty establishing any real social life getting access to services and contacts. They also make things easier for people moving into a new area – many of those that come to Stockholm to work simply do not have the time or inclination to go to a bar to meet people. Newcomers can both support maintain old networks and create new ones over the Internet. Divorcees with small children form another interesting group for match.com. They don't have the energy to go out whenever they have time away from the children, and such an approach isn't very effective.

## E-bullying and poor language skills a barrier

All of the websites we talked to seem to agree that e-bullying, people that do not respect others or perpetrate harassment, e.g. through racist abuse, constitute the biggest barriers to building social capital on the Internet. Dealing with this issue consumes significant resources for both Svenskafans and Blog, but its effects are perhaps most keenly felt by Lunarstorm.

Lunarstorm also states that the information flow about what sites are available for various types of service is difficult to absorb, but believes that young people are really on the ball in this respect.

The importance of language mastery or the correct use of idioms is also mentioned as an important factor in being able to create social capital on the Internet.

Another potential barrier to bridging that we noted during the study is that as people get older, they tend to gravitate towards more niche interest groups and interact with fewer people not already in their circle of acquaintances. To a certain extent, this tendency may be due a lack of Internet savvy on the part of older people, a situation that will change over time. As this trend seems to correlate with social life outside the virtual world, it is fair to assume that it will continue in the future to some degree.

## Summary

Based on the interviews, focus groups and surveys in our study, it is clear that the Internet will be used to accomplish the same things it is used for today, but in a slightly smarter way. Consumer advice and price comparison websites are being championed as an important development of the Internet – and women may be at the vanguard of this process. The Internet also has a growing significance for people who find it difficult to socialise due to a detachment from the society in which they live, i.e. newcomers or the socially excluded. Barriers to the development of social capital on the Internet are principally factor that jeopardise interpersonal trust and confidence such as e-bullying.

# Conclusions

To tie together the threads of this report, we now present our conclusions concerning the areas that are most relevant to the development of the region. We will link important aspects of how the region's social institutions can adapt to the today's Internet community, which exists in parallel with the rest of society, with the aim of increasing social capital in the region.

### Stockholm as a virtual meeting place

The generation of social capital – or networks and trust – on the Internet is now a widespread phenomenon in Stockholm County. One in five Stockholmers with Internet access are in regular contact with someone they met on the Internet. That's the equivalent of 280,000 of the County's population[13]. Some 13 percent of Stockholmers have established a sufficiently trusting relationship with someone via the Internet that they have decided to organise a meeting (provided that meeting did not happen by chance). Almost a tenth of Stockholmers have regular contact with someone they have met on the Internet and have then gone on to meet them in real life.

One third of Stockholmers aged 15–29 are in contact with someone they met on the Internet, and 25 percent of this age group have met someone they got to know online in reality. It may involve visits to festivals, football tours or dating. In the active users group, around 40 percent have actually met someone they stuck up a friendship with online.

Some 80 percent of the active users group thought that they could "be themselves" on the Internet. Younger users thought they would be lonelier without the Internet, evidence of its important role as a networking tool for young people. All of the focus groups portrayed the Internet as a way for enabling insecure young people to take their place in society.

The study has shown the Internet to be an alternative contact network to "real life" and illustrated how contacts can be established based on interpersonal trust gained online.

The expansion of social relationships on the Internet may motivate people to take concrete action and engage in shared activities away from the computer keyboard. It shows the importance of the trust and confidence created on the Internet. It provides society with enormous potential to take advantage of opportunities to create social capital on the Internet.

However, it also makes substantive demands on players in society to behave appropriately in respect of the landscape before us. A first step in this process may be to conduct further studies and raise the level of knowledge within institutions on the breadth of social interplay prevalent on the Internet.

### Visibility, a profile and list of activities builds trust

Experience from the Internet is that those who present themselves, participate in debates and create a network develop trustworthy relationships with other Internet users.

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13  Based on 20 percent of the County's inhabitants with Internet access being at least 10 years old.

A number of functions or tools are available on the Internet that complement communication tools in the physical world. Communities enable you to build networks and establish new contacts through your existing friends. These common community friends give you the confidence to trust new contacts. You can use discussion forums to discuss issues with likeminded people and get information about events or interests. Chatrooms enable you to keep in touch with friends both old and new in a more "superficial" way than using the telephone. E-mail lists can be used both with friends and acquaintances, as well as specialist issue and interest groups.

In blogs, forums and communities, users can create their own identity or image. By uploading a picture of themselves, establishing a good, expansive network, participating in forum debates and blogs in order to create a profile, users become recognised as being someone to reckon with. Visibility on the Internet through postings is a good way of generating contacts and creating the impression that a person is important and is worth getting to know and taking seriously.

It is important for decision makers to be familiar with the various types of tool in use so that they can choose from the full "palette" available to them in their communications with the public. There is scope for authorities and institutions to paint a clearer, more comprehensible picture of their organisations by way of personal presentations and blogs written by officials. Such an approach will go a long way to reinforcing public trust.

**Common interests create trust**
The study highlighted that the possibility of meeting people with similar interests is one of the main driving forces behind both bonding and bridging on the Internet. The thing most Stockholmers have in common with those they are in contact with on the Internet, and the reason for most meeting people in real life, was shared interests. (The study also gave examples of how these shared interests do not need to be static during bonding.)

Forums stand out as useful platforms to meet people in discussions concerning subjects of interest. If authorities and institutions want to raise the discussion concerning an area for which they are responsible, online forums would seem to be an excellent option. Not only would such an approach reach a large group of interested individuals, up to date and relevant postings, as well as a well maintained forum, would garner the trust of several groups. This applies to both those who have invested in the subject area and actively participate in the discussion and those who have a more passive interest and read postings without actually participating. Of course, a forum also builds relationships between those who participate in the debate. It is also usually the case that the debate already exists, regardless of whether you participate or not.

**Abuse damages trust**
Perhaps the biggest barriers to building social capital on the Internet named by those we interviewed are e-bullying, racism and paedophilia. In order for the Internet to be regarded as trustworthy it is important that there are mechanisms in place to punish (exclude) those who misuse the service.

This is important to bear in mind for municipality-developed Internet services, particularly in respect of the application of relevant laws. A functioning mechanism for reporting abuse or providing contact feedback may be one way of addressing the issue of misuse and maintaining the integrity of networks.

### The Internet as a source of event information

A striking fact that emerges from the mapping of Stockholmers' web habits is that 75 percent of those with Internet access search for what is going on in town. That means that approximately 1 million of the County's inhabitants[14] regularly visit websites that give ideas about what to do in Stockholm. This is a clear indication of the link between the physical region and the virtual. Sites visited may include alltomstockholm, kalendarium, eniro, ticnet or the websites of individual institutions or arrangers.

This means that the Internet is a fantastic place for the County's institutions to make Stockholmers aware of what's going on in the city in addition to other channels of communication it currently uses. The fact that all members of our youngest focus group are registered on Playahead further simplifies contact with this group of people.

### Consumer focus creates opportunities

From the interviews conducted it is clear that searching for consumer information will be an increasingly important aspect of the Internet. People are already sharing tips and making price comparison postings on blogs and in forums, and goods fly off the shelves if they get a favourable review on the main blog sites.

This creates scope for augmenting municipalities' trading standards departments' presence on the net. With service institutions focusing on user requirements, it should be possible to develop better comparisons of relatively equivalent organisations such as schools or hospitals. Such comparisons would also serve as tools for evaluating public services.

### Education and age influences how social contacts are established

Different population groups have different high levels of bridging and bonding in the online contacts. With age and education, the level of shared interests amongst your online sphere of contacts increases. You also become more "discrete" in the way you look for contacts, i.e. you don't post pictures of yourself or chat as frequently.

It is possible to speculate whether this trend of people narrowing their search for contacts as they get older is the result of general social behaviours or whether it is indicative of unfamiliarity on the part of those in older age brackets with the Internet and its etiquette. It is probably reasonable to assume that general social patterns constitute the primary cause. At the same time, it is likely that Internet networking will become increasingly important once the generation currently growing up on blogs and playing network games enter new networks that are in line with their future life situations as consumers, parents or pensioners.

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14  Based on 75 percent of the County's inhabitants with Internet access
    being at least 10 years old.

In the case of societal institutions looking to offer services and provide specific information to diverse population groups, it is important to be aware of the ways in which the various target groups communicate on the Internet. This may be an area that warrants further research. Is it the case that highly educated men will dominate any focus on forums whilst the young and less well educated are more likely to be reached in broad networks?

### Gender differences in Internet relationships

The fact that women have less contact with people whose interests differ from their own and meet fewer people that they got to know on the Internet that men do is one area in which women have scope to increase their bridging contacts in order to build social capital on the Internet.

Women use the Internet more to contact their friends, which may be regarded as more bonding than bridging. Bonding can also have value for social wellbeing. One of the major social problems identified according to representatives of the Match website is loneliness. Men would do well to follow the example of women in increasing their contacts with friends and relatives.

The planning of online initiatives should take similar factors into account. In order to build trust between women who have never previously met, e.g. pre/post-natal/mother and toddler groups, should be developed on the Internet. Eventually, an extended online youth service would work as a way of including men in discussions about relationships and family life.

### The Internet as a possible way out of discrimination

The tendency of women and foreign born to meet people on the Internet rather than in real life is very interesting. This is another area that justifies further research in the future. It is possible that Internet initiatives may be important instruments for these groups to establish contacts that they would otherwise be unable to replicate in the physical world. Immigrant women should be given particular support.

Despite the fact that immigrants state that they would rather have contact with people online than in real life, they currently seem to have many contacts on the Internet that they wouldn't otherwise have, which is indicative of bridging.

From society's perspective, it is possible to imagine that newly arrived immigrants, who may find it difficult to establish contacts in the physical society around them due to discrimination and language barriers, can be told about opportunities for bonding (through country associations) or bridging (e.g. Lunarstorm, etc.) available in the Swedish Internet community.

### Region versus City

This study shows that, for those living outside the major urban areas, the Internet leads to more contacts with people who would have been complete strangers had it not been for the Internet. People in the periphery also have a greater propensity to real life encounters with people they get to know on the Internet. In short, the Internet links together the

more peripheral parts of the region, both in the virtual and the physical worlds. There-fore, it is reasonable to believe that the Internet will have greater importance in places where there are fewer activities in the immediate vicinity.

The Internet is appearing as a useful arena for initiatives that enable people areas outside the city to communicate with each other and with the central parts of the region.

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