

The Image and Experience of Internet

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The world wide Ipsos Group conducted a pan-European qualitative survey to gain insight to the image and perception of the Internet among users and non-users. 14 “traditional” focus groups were conducted in the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Hungary, and additional online focus groups in the U.K., France, Germany plus one transnational group.

Beyond the influence of individual usage and incidence rates, two major cultural trends have been determined:

- A “nordic” trend (predominantly in UK, D and B) with higher Internet penetration, where Internet usage is significant in everyday life, encouraged by higher English language proficiency and a relatively less outgoing lifestyle.
- A “latin” trend (predominantly in F, I, E and H) with lower penetration, but fast growth rates. English is barely spoken. A lower level of equipment and the outgoing lifestyle have kept their members behind Internet usage.

The image of the Internet can be summarised alongside two axes both focusing on information. The first axe describes *type of information* with the poles “education” vs. “entertainment”, the second *structure of information* with the poles “order” vs. “chaos”. Finally, the Internet is perceived as an intricate structure, requiring specific skills, initiative and an ethically minded usage.

The main functional dimensions of the Internet are *information, communication, entertainment* and *e-commerce*. Information is the most accepted in general, while communication is strongly associated with alienation by non-users. The other dimensions are ambivalent due to internal and external fears related, e.g. loss of (self) control and submission.

4 attitudinal “prototypes” of Internet usage/non-usage have been identified:

- *The Hedonist*: “no limits” type of heavy user, driven by exhilaration and fun
- *The Rational*: sound usage of Internet, driven by efficiency
- *The Follower*: trying to adjust to the trend and perceiving the relevance

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- *The Committed*: anti-user driven by ideology of evil technology

Projective future scenarios show the acceptance of the Internet as an irreversible development, with perceptions torn between oppressive structure and creative chaos on one side, between need for regulation and maintenance of autonomy the other. All expectations about the future of the Internet are motivated by a strong demand for humanisation of technology.

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