

Internet is the primary source of information in Switzerland

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The mobile use of the internet has tripled since 2011 thanks chiefly to smartphones Credit: StockSnap

88 out of every 100 people in Switzerland use the internet. Usage time is increasing and accessing the internet from mobile devices is considerably more frequent than before. The internet is now the most important source of information, and lots of applications are a daily routine, but concerns about privacy on the internet are increasing. In addition, users confidence in their internet skills has decreased, especially amongst women. These are findings of a survey by the University of Zurich.

"Switzerland's excellent result in terms of [internet access](#) is tainted by the fact that certain parts of the population are disadvantaged, and by rising concerns about [privacy](#). Internet access is not everything", says Prof. Michael Latzer from the Media Change & Innovation Division of IPMZ at the University of Zurich. After 2011 and 2013, he and his team have now carried out the World Internet Project Switzerland for the third time. The representative survey shows that 88 out of every 100 people in Switzerland use the internet, and 5 more benefit from it by asking relatives or friends to do something for them on the internet. This means that just 7 in every 100 have no internet access at all, and these are generally people with a lower level of education, on a low income or who are unemployed.

Due to higher growth rates in Ticino in recent years, regional differences have almost disappeared. There has been a sharp increase in mobile use of the internet, tripling (63%) since 2011 thanks chiefly to smartphones. 14 to 29-year olds are leading this trend, with more than 90% of them using mobile internet, for example for social networking on Facebook.

Women lagging behind in terms of access, use and skills

A gender gap has reemerged in the past two years, with internet access increasing amongst men but not amongst women. Women are also lagging behind when it comes to using mobile internet (58% compared to 67% of men) and they also use the internet less intensively than their male counterparts. 22 out of 100 women in Switzerland spend less than 5 hours per week online - that figure is twice as high as for men. Women's self-reported [internet skills](#) have decreased more dramatically than in the case of men, with 41% of women (2013: 27%) rating their skills as poor or adequate. The corresponding figure was only around one quarter for men. "That's a problem, because at the same time poor internet skills are

correlated to users feeling less a part of the information society and taking a less active role in protecting their own data", explains Prof. Michael Latzer.

Twice as much time spent online, three times as much mobile internet use

At 22 hours a week, the average person in Switzerland is spending more than twice as long online than in 2011. 72% of internet users are also using mobile internet en route - roughly three times as many as in 2011 (26%). E-mails and search engines are used most and have become an established daily routine. While eCommerce is very common, with three quarters of users shopping online for example, this function is used comparatively seldom. Chat functions have exploded (71% of users) thanks above all to WhatsApp, although young people are far more active in this area. The proportion of people playing games online is twice as high amongst those with a lower level of education as amongst university graduates. On the whole, information is still more important than entertainment, where music apps (69%) and TV (on demand: 46%; live: 43%) have experienced especially strong growth.

Internet most important source of information for the first time

For the first time, the internet is the main source of information for the Swiss population, with print media, radio and TV trailing far behind. Almost two-thirds of the population considers half of the content on the internet to be reliable, particularly content from the SRG (Swiss Radio and Television), newspapers and the government. The content of social online networks is not considered very trustworthy, particularly amongst young people. All sources of information, including websites, are considered less reliable compared with the last study.

Public service remit still important even in the internet age

Two-thirds of the Swiss population agrees that a public service remit is important even in the internet era (67%). 38% even agree strongly with this statement. The significance attached to the public service remit is higher in Ticino, amongst older people, those with higher incomes and education levels as well as amongst men. There is less agreement with regard to the fulfillment of this remit, with 44% saying that the SRG fulfills this remit very well and 13% agreeing strongly that this is the case. Agreement is lowest amongst 20 to 29-year olds (8% agree strongly) and on the whole amongst men compared with women.

Major doubts regarding digital democratization

Since 2011, searching for political information online (43% of the population) has increased more than taking part in discussions (6%) or in digital protests (5%). By contrast, respondents still prefer to take part in political debates only offline (67%) rather than online (7%). Skepticism concerning increasing democratization through the internet has declined since 2011, but is still predominant overall. The strongest positive effect of the internet is still considered to be a better understanding of politics (42% agreement).

Growing skepticism regarding free speech

In general, fewer of those surveyed feel comfortable sharing all of their political views (45%, down 6 percentage points since 2013). Skepticism surrounding free speech online is also on the rise compared with the last study. Significantly more people than in 2013 believe that it is not safe to share all of their political views online (63%, up 15 percentage points). Nevertheless, in 2015 significantly more internet users consider

it right to be allowed to criticize the government freely on the internet (55%, up 9 percentage points). The group most in favor of free speech on the internet is the 20 to 29-year olds.

Diminishing trust in own possibilities for control - privacy concerns amongst young people

Half of the Swiss population is concerned that companies invade their privacy online. Concern about data privacy breaches by the government is less widespread, at 40%. While this concern has grown considerably amongst 14 to 19-year olds, it remains at a lower level than amongst older people. A large majority (82%) is very concerned about protecting their privacy. Interestingly, it is the oldest and youngest age group, infrequent users and those with poor internet skills who are most likely to believe they can control their privacy online.

World Internet Project

The World Internet Project (WIP) is a comparative longitudinal study that records the penetration and use of the internet in 30 countries in an international comparison and analyzes social, political and economic implications of the development of the internet.

The WIP project for Switzerland has been carried out by the Media Change & Innovation Division of the Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research (IPMZ) at the University of Zurich under the leadership of Prof. Michael Latzer since 2011. It is based on a representative telephone survey of 1,121 persons aged between 14 and 84 and was carried out in May/June 2015 by the LINK Institute. The project team members are Moritz Büchi, Natascha Just and Noemi Festic.

The WIP project for Switzerland is supported by the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Zurich and by the Swiss Federal Office of Communication (Bakom).

All of the reports by topic are available for download at <http://www.mediachange.ch>

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