

# Changes in the Patterns of the Internet Use and Social Positions: From School to Work

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The Internet has been growing fast in Korea in last two years. Until recently policy makers have tried to make the Internet universally available by providing computers and communication lines at a cheaper price. As more and more households have an access to the Internet and use it as a communication medium, a new problem has emerged, namely the fun-oriented use of the Internet. This orientation generates a social problem that people tend to treat information on the Internet not seriously and that it is hard to build trustful relationships in cyber space. One way to approach this issue is to diversify websites in terms of social groups' needs. In so doing, it is important to understand the ways in which different social groups use the Internet.

The Internet is a cluster of various types of information and services. Internet users collect and exchange information, formulate opinions, purchase goods and services, and play games. Although all these things are available in the Internet, people utilize only some part of it. Typically, more educated people tend to use the Internet for information, while less educated people use it for fun. This means that activities on the Internet are partly determined by the social position that a user occupies in the real world. This paper attempts to understand the quantitative relationships between the ways in which people use the Internet and their social positions.

The Korean National Information Center (KRNIC) and Internetmetrix collected the information about the use of the Internet of 3,500 households and 100,000 individuals three times, August 2000, December 2000, and March 2001. Because of the panel characteristics of the data, it is possible to trace changes in social positions and their influence in the use of the Internet. By looking at changes in the use of the Internet and changes in individuals' social positions, we can directly identify the role of social positions in the ways in which people use the Internet.

Data contain three kinds of changes in social positions: from school to labor market, from one occupation to another, from one region to another. Among these changes, this paper will mainly focus on from school to work transition and changes in the use of the Internet. A tentative hypothesis is that the transition from school to labor market will change the use of the Internet from fun to information oriented.

Below I describe the overall changes in the ways in which people use the Internet over the 9 months period. In the survey, Internet users are identified as those who access the Internet at least once a month on average. In the 9 months period, Internet users grew rapidly, from 38.5% (16.4 million) to 48.6% (20.9 million) of the whole population over age 7 (42.6 million). Using previous surveys in 1999 and early 2000, the growth rate is more salient: 22.4% (9.4 million) in November

1999, 33.0% (13.9 million) in March 2000.

The fastest growing Internet user group is the elementary school students. The proportion of those who access the Internet increased from 22.3% in December 2000 to 64.0% in March 2001. Along with the fact that almost all high school and college students (95.6%) already use the Internet, this implies that the formal education system is the leading force of Korean society towards the information society.

The importance of the formal education system in the use of the Internet implies unequal distribution of the Internet use by educational levels. While 73.5% of college graduates use the Internet, only 3.1% of those who have less than junior high school education use the Internet. Traditionally, the level of educational achievement also influenced the gender differences in various aspects. However, as the proportion of females who attend college has grown to almost the same level as the male in the late 1990s, the gap between the two has become smaller. In November 1999, 30.0% of males and 14.8% of females used the Internet, and the gap was 15.2%. These figures have changed to 50.9% and 38.6% respectively in December 2000, and 55.6% and 41.6% in March 2001. One interesting thing in this change lies in a certain discontinuity between December and March figures. While the gap between female and male was 12.3% in December 2000, it was widened a little bit, 14.0% in March 2001. It can be hypothesized that this temporary regress takes place because females' weak labor market power. This study will look at the school to work transition more closely to understand the gender difference as well.

Another feature to look at is the ways in which people use the Internet. Younger people tend to use the Internet for fun, such as games and chatting, while older people tend to use it for information. This paper will look at the changes occurred in the use of the Internet before and after the transition from school to work, and identifies the influence of work environment in the use of the Internet.