

**MASARYK UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL STUDIES
Czech Republic**

Institute for Research on Children, Youth and the Family



Online Friendships: New Form of Relationships

David Šmahel, M.Sc. et Ph.D.

The presented research was supported by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSM0021622406 and 1P05ME751).

Introduction

Lack of nonpersonal cues -> cyberspace as a impersonal medium
(Kiesler & Siegel, & McGuire, 1984)

People disclose online more than in real life (Joinson, 2001)

Internet as an opportunity for social handicapped people (Smahel, 2003).

“The Internet seems to have created a new ways of doing old things, rather than being a technology that changes the manner in which people live their lives” (Tyler, 2005)

Research questions:

Can we find a typical approach people have to online friendship?

How men and women differ in their attitudes to online friendship?

What are age differences?

About the World Internet Project

The World Internet Project (www.worldinternetproject.org) was initiated by UCLA, USA & NTU University, Singapore in 2000

Participating countries: Singapore, Italy, Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, France, Hungary, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, India, Iran, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, USA, Czech Republic

Research particularities:

International comparison

Focusing on the social effects of new technologies

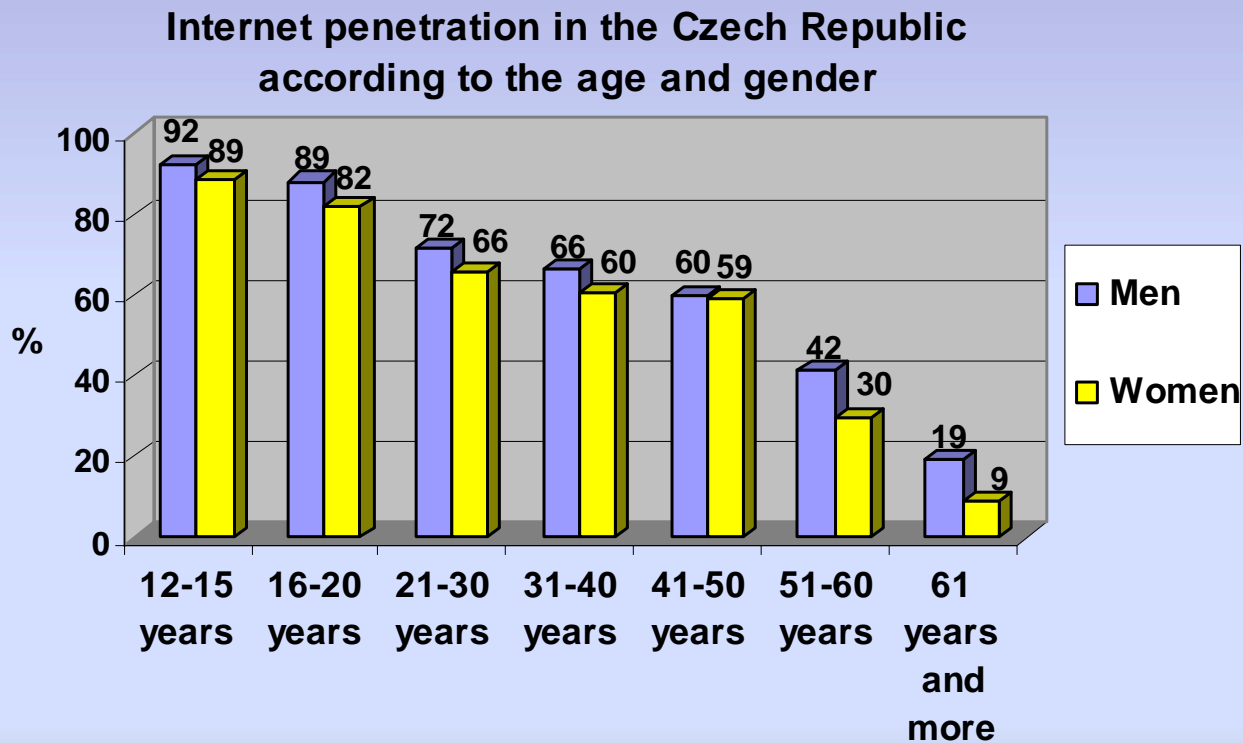
Investigating both users and non users of Internet longitudinally

Methodology and sample – Czech Republic

- World Internet Project started in 2005 in the Czech Republic
- representative sample of the population according to gender, age, education, region and size of the place of residence
- 1706 respondents aged 12 years and older
- face to face interviews, collected in September 2006
- psychological questions were added to the “core question” of WIP

Internet penetration in the Czech Republic

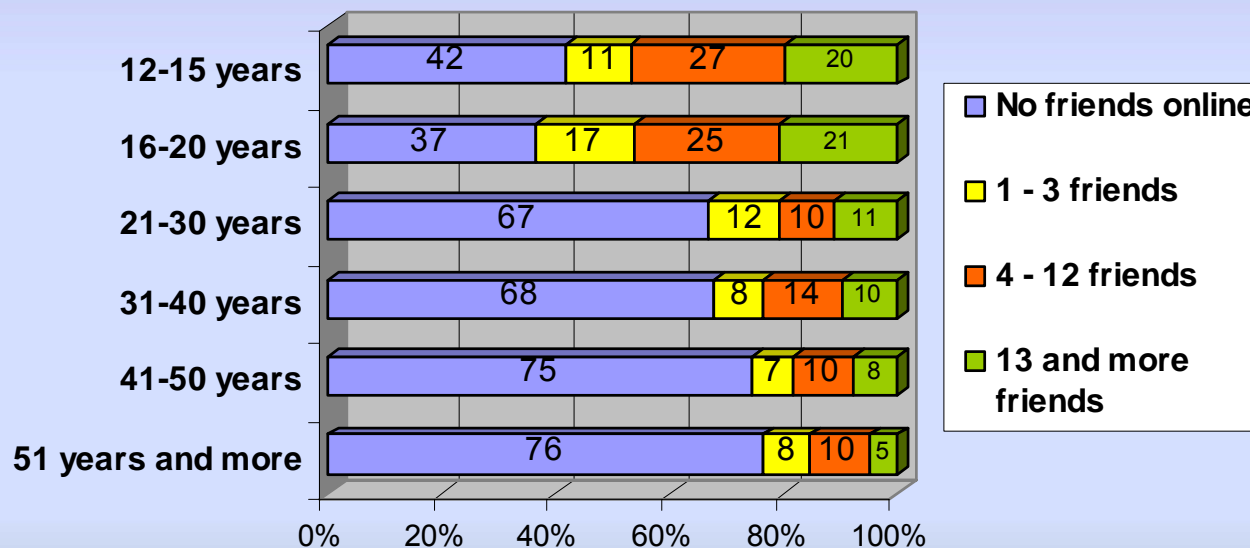
54.1% of the population use the Internet, 57.5% men, 49.1% women



Number of online friends

„How many online friends who you have not met in person have you got?“ 38% of Czech Internet users have such friends, corresponding to 21% from the whole population. No significant difference between men and women.

Numbers of friends online which people have according to the age



$\chi^2(15, N = 917) = 95.9, p = .000, \phi = 0.323$

Factor analysis

Table 1: Factor analysis of relevant questions

Items in questionnaire	Component	
	Friend1	Friend2
49.5% of variance explained		
I have online friends who are very close to me.	,767	,111
With my online friends, I share other sides of myself that I do with my real-life friends.	,617	,450
I discuss my intimate problems more often with my online friends than with my real-life friends.	,702	,228
I can rely on my online friends.	,665	-,219
I discuss other topics with my online friends than with my real-life friends.	,228	,681
I often try to transfer online friendship into the real world.	,575	,003
Some of my online friends are completely different from those I choose to those I am friends with in real life.	-,010	,752
My online friends' moral qualities are not as important as in case of my real-life friends	0,00	,646
I can say that I have already experienced a feeling of being in love when communicating with somebody who I knew only virtually.	,523	,369

True friendship x Topic oriented friendship

Factor 1: "True friendship" (Cronbach Alpha = 0.73)

- people have more online friends as very close friends to them, they discuss intimate problems with them, and they also say that they can rely on these online friends, trying to transfer these online friendships into the real world.

Factor 2: "Topic oriented friendship" (Cronbach Alpha = 0.62)

- people claim to discuss other themes with online friends than with people from their real lives; online friends are completely different from real life friends and these online friends' moral quality is not important.

($r = 0.50, p < 0.01$)

Basic overview about descriptives

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of selected questions

Items in questionnaire	strongly agree (%)	rather agree (%)	rather dis-agree (%)	strongly dis-agree (%)
I have online friends who are very close to me.	10	38	42	10
I discuss my intimate problems more often with my online friends than with my real-life friends.	5	19	40	36
With my online friends, I share other sides of myself that I do with my real-life friends.	6	39	42	13
Some of my online friends are completely different from those I choose to those I am friends with in real life.	12	42	36	10
I discuss other topics with my online friends than with my real-life friends.	12	48	32	9
My online friends' moral qualities are not as important as in case of my real-life friends	10	43	36	11

Context of two types of online friendship

- no significant differences between men and women and
- no significant differences according to age

Table 3: Pearson correlations of factors and other questions

		True friend ship scale	Topic oriented friendship scale
I prefer to meet people on the Internet than in real life.	Pearson Correlation	* 0.41	* 0.25
I am more open on the internet than in reality.	Pearson Correlation	* 0.43	* 0.39
I can better express my emotions (feelings, senses) on the Internet.	Pearson Correlation	* 0.43	* 0.36
I find it easier to express myself on the Internet than in a normal conversation.	Pearson Correlation	* 0.38	* 0.31
On the Internet, I also reveal private details from my life which I do not share in everyday life.	Pearson Correlation	* 0.50	* 0.37
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Context of two types of online friendship

Table 4: Pearson correlations of factors and other questions

		True friendship scale	Topic oriented friendship scale
Only online friends. (How many online friends who you have not met in person have you got?)	Pearson Correlation	* 0.14	* 0.13
Real life friends. (How many friends have you got in the real world altogether?)	Pearson Correlation	0.04	0.01
Online => real life friends (How many friends have you got out of those who you originally met on the Internet and who you know in person too?)	Pearson Correlation	* 0.19	0.10
Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Discussion

Questions:

- Are there other types of friendships?
- Can we find correlations between using different types of online friendship and characteristics of personality? What type of people is doing online friends?
- What are connections between real and online friendships? Are there different roles of both types of friendship? -> much more complex research on friendship should be carried out.

Weak points:

- questionnaire use – self reflection is not the true image of reality
- we asked how many friends people have but the friendship was not defined in more details – there could be gender and age differences in the understanding to the word „friendship“ (although it seems there are not big differences)
- „topic oriented“ friendship had poor reliability – what are other variables here?

Conclusion

Men and women behavior in the area of online friendship seems to be very similar!

Adolescents' approaches and behavior do not differ from adults although adolescents have much more online friends and they are much more open to technology.

Human values and preferences in the area of friendship seems to be very stable. The technology probably did not change it, just created new forms of relationships which are disembodied and therefore perhaps more disinhibited.

References

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Thank you for your attention.

Presentation will be available online:

<http://www.terapie.cz/smahelen>