



Czech adolescents on the Internet: multiple communication and its particularities

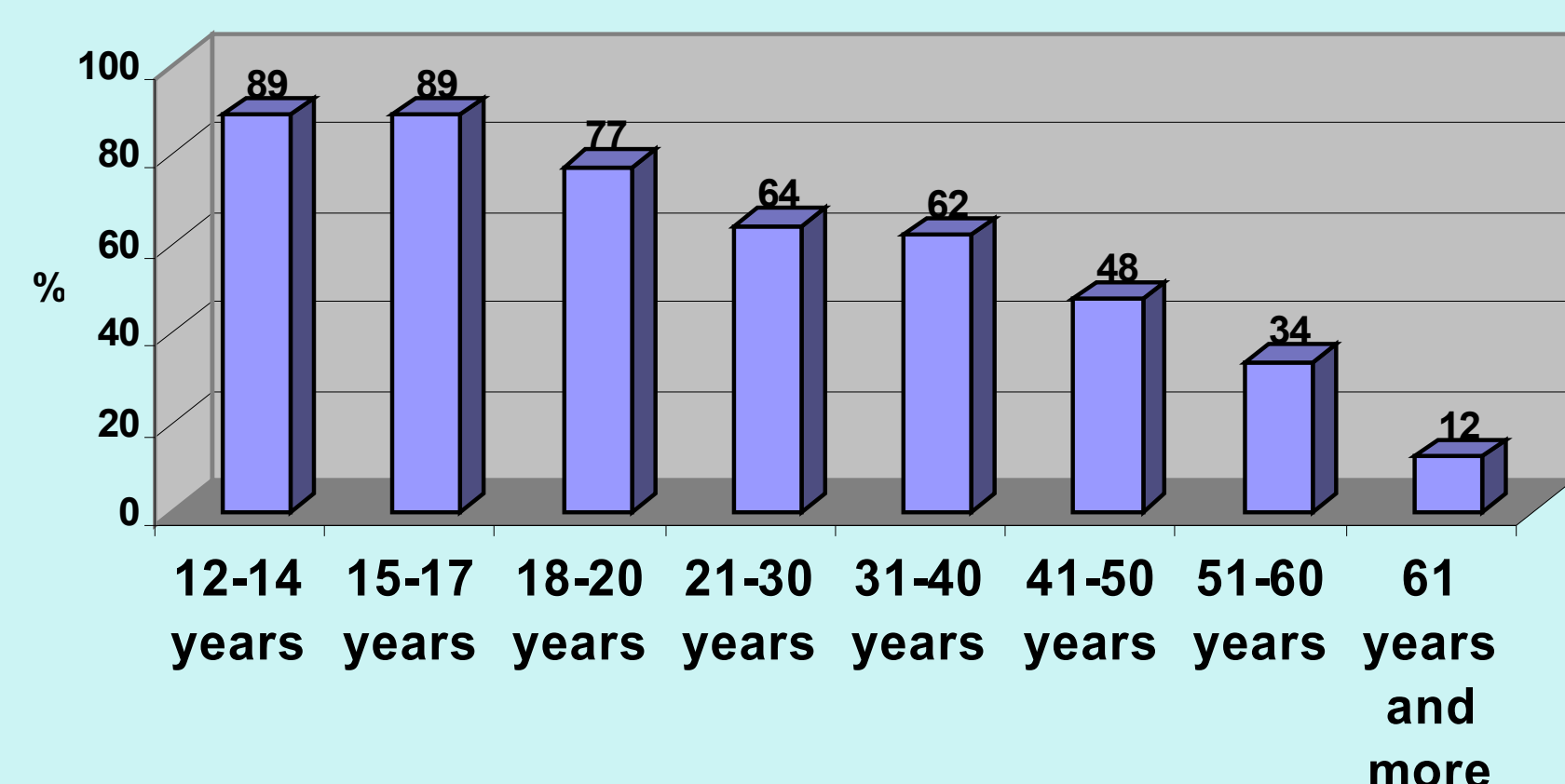


David Šmahel, smahel@fss.muni.cz, Masaryk University, Faculty of Social Studies
Institute for Research on Children, Youth and the Family, Czech Republic

Introduction

Computers and the Internet are becoming an important part of human lives. In the Czech Republic, the Internet was used by 50% of population in September 2005 (Šmahel, 2005). It is a group of adolescents that shows the highest penetration of the Internet use: the Internet was used by 89% adolescents aged between 12 - 14 years, 89% aged 15 - 17 years and 77% aged between 18 - 20 years. The Internet penetration is decreasing with a higher age - see graph 1.

Graph 1: Internet penetration in the Czech Republic



Computers allow users to do several tasks simultaneously, which is called multitasking. Previous research found out that multitasking is popular among adolescents (Gross, 2004). In this paper, we intend to investigate the phenomenon of on-line “multiple communication” (MC), which is simultaneous communication with more Internet users, usually running in different chat windows. Chat rooms and instant messengers are typical environments where multiple communication takes place; the correlation between hours spent in chat rooms and the amount of multiple communication is significant ($r = 0.37$, $p < .00$). On the other hand, adolescents may use various communication environments in different windows on the screen.

Chat rooms are pretty popular in the Czech Republic: 45% high school students maintained in our research (in 2003) that they attend on-line chats weekly and 4% spend more than 5 hours per week chatting on-line.

Method & Sample

Research1:

- Data collection May and June 2003
- Sample: 681 high-school students aged 12 - 20 years were involved
- Method: Questionnaire survey with two forms of the questionnaire - pen-and-paper + web questionnaire. Comparison of the data collected on the Internet and in the reality showed differences only in 3 items (from 95)

Research2:

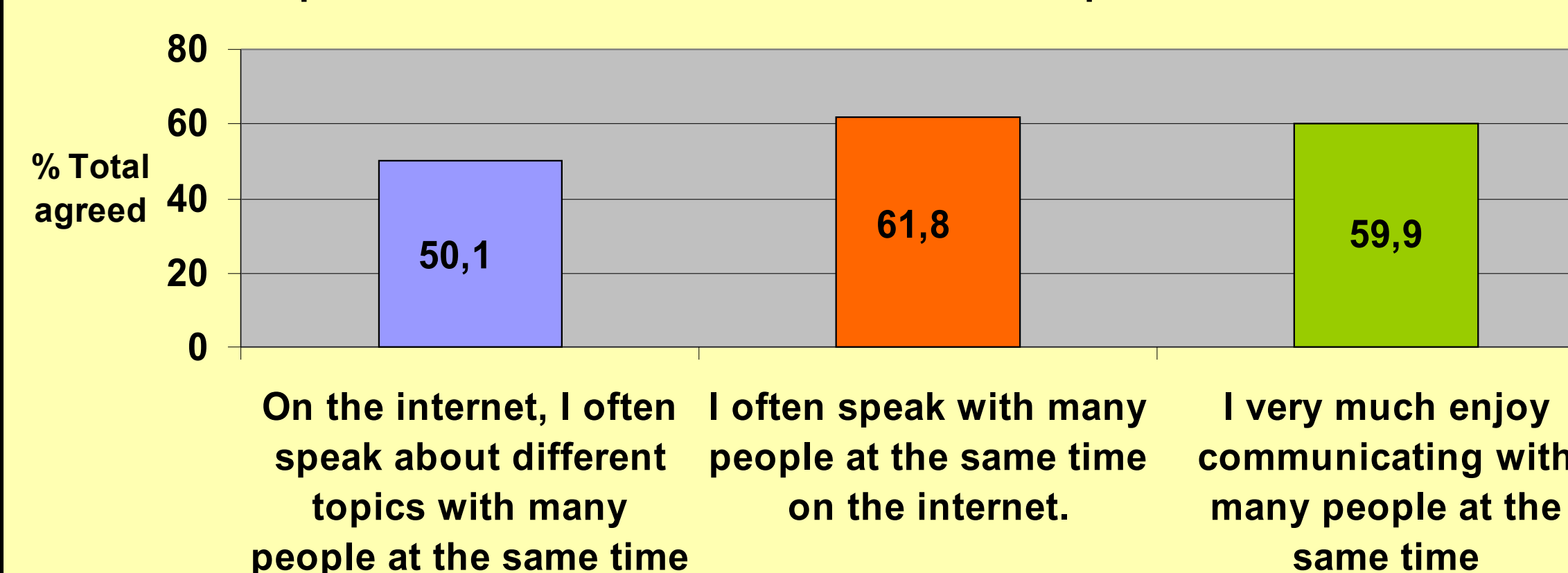
- Data collection September 2005 (part of the “World Internet Project”)
- Sample: 1,832 respondents, aged 12 years or more, research sample was made representative for the Czech Republic as far as the variables of sex, education, age, region, and the size of the respondent's domicile are concerned
- Method: a quantitative survey was carried out in the form of face-to-face interviews when respondents, together with an interviewer, filled in a prepared questionnaire

Note to the following analysis: respondents answered our questions on 4 or 6-point scales (1 = I wholly agree, 2 = I agree etc.). In order to simplify the results presentation, the graphs include only the sums of affirmative replies. However, statistical significance is based on the scales presented with the help of ANOVA tests or Pearson correlation. The following analysis includes only those Czech adolescents using the Internet (approx. 90%). When presenting the Pearson correlation, the following is always valid: $p < 0.00$.

Multiple communication particularities

We created “multiple communication score” (Cronbach Alpha = 0.88) from questions in Graph 2, where we can see the frequencies of these questions (data source: research1).

Graph 2: How much adolescents use the multiple communication?



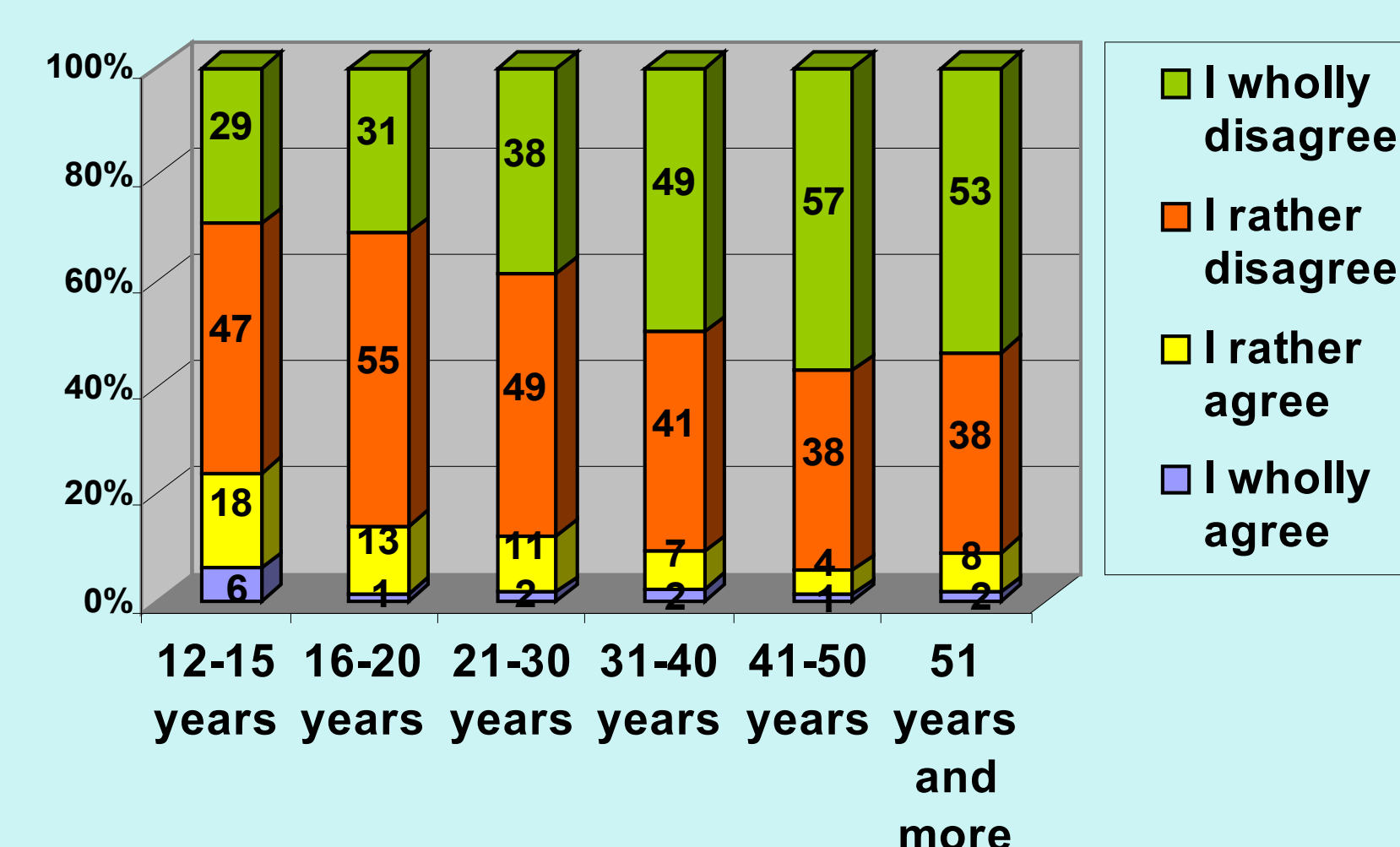
We found **no differences** according to the **age** and **sex** in the score of multiple communication!

What else are people who use MC doing? We found these connections: Adolescents are probably often experiencing feelings of “flow” in MC! : “While communicating over the internet, I sometimes forget that I am hungry or thirsty. ($r=.27$)” Interestingly, they often say that they **have many friends** on the Internet ($r=.48$), they have real friends who they met on-line ($r=.37$) and met some of their **real partners on the Internet** ($r=.27$). There is also significant but pretty low relation between the amount of multiple communication and virtual communication preference ($r=.15$) (See more in the next box.)

Virtual communication preference

Research 1 showed differences in the virtual communication preference between boys and girls in the sample of high school students (boys preferred the Internet as a means of communication more often than girls); the representative research two years later did not, however, confirm the differences. On the other hand, important differences according to the age were revealed - see graph 3 (data source: research 2).

Graph 3: “I prefer to meet people on the Internet then in a real life” according to the age



There is a big difference in virtual communication preference between 12 - 15 years old adolescents and others. Youngest adolescents prefer the Internet as a means of communication more often than others. Youngest adolescents are also on-line more open and express themselves easier on the Internet than in the real life (Šmahel, 2006). We speculate if this may be considered as a rise of the Internet generation or if it is the adolescents' particularity only.

References & acknowledgment

- Gross, E. F. (2004). Adolescent Internet use: What we expect, what teens report. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 633-649
- Šmahel, D. (2006). Czech Internet report: The rise of the Internet generation?. In: *Cyberspace 2005*. Polcak, R., Skop, M. & Smahel, D. (Eds.) Brno: Masaryk University. Download: <http://www.terapie.cz/materials/wip-smahel-new-generation2006.pdf>
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