

The Social, Political and Cultural Impact of New Technologies: Insights from Surveys on Contemporary Patterns of Internet Use

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Paul DiMaggio, research director of the Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, and Eszter Hargittai, a graduate affiliate of the Center, are working with John Robinson and colleagues at the University of Maryland on a project to examine the social impact of new technologies.

Using survey data collected from the Year 2000 General Social Survey, researchers will examine the impact of the Internet on social inequality, democracy and cultural choice. Researchers are interested in several orienting questions - 1) To what extent does the Internet make knowledge more widely available and to what extent does it provide privileged access for high-status persons, thereby exacerbating social inequalities? 2) To what extent does the Internet promote civility, social capital and democratic participation verses increased opinion polarization, political alienation and extremism? And, 3) To what extent does Web use expose people to diverse and wide-ranging cultural sites and artistic forms; and, to what extent do Internet users gravitate to a few major sites that offer mainstream news and entertainment?

The project is supported by grants from the National Science Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trust.