

„Usage patterns and information needs of journalists on the internet. An empirical study at USUS - the usually useful internet guide for journalist“

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Abstract of a thesis written at the Institute for Communication Sciences at the University of Munich

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## 1. Preface

This is the English abstract of my „Diplomarbeit“, something that translates best as „master thesis“ into English. It’s only the abstract since I wrote my thesis in German and I’m not an English native speaker. I suppose that a lot of those who will read this will be more interested in the results of my survey than in, say the communication-science theory behind the thesis. Thus I tried to be rather brief. At this point I would like to add that unfortunately my English is far from perfect and my word-processor lacks an English spell-checker. So please forgive me for all the typos and grammatical errors which are bound to occur.

Another thing is very important to me. And that is to say „Thank You“ to some people. First and formost I would like to thank all the people who helped me with my thesis, in particular those 213 journalists who took the time to fill out my questionnaire. Without you I would not have been able to complete my thesis. Furthermore I’d like to thank all those who helped me with more or less important problems. That is particularly true for the system-administrators at the Institute for Communication Sciences IfkW (ZW) in Munich and Dr. Werner Degenhardt who made it possible for me to install USUS on the universities server.

I also want to thank those brave people who mastered the task to correct the spelling in the German version of this thesis.

But more than anyone else I’d like to thank my mother. Without whom I’d probably never have gotten so far and who supported me both morally and finacially during all those years.

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### 3. Abbreviations

CATI = Computer-Aided-Telephone-Interview

CFML = Cold Fusion Markup Language. Language used to get HTML-documents to communicate with a Cold-Fusion Server.

CMC = Computer-mediated Communication

DNS: Domain Name Server. Translates numeric IP-Adresses into alphanumeric addresses and vice versa. E.g.: 141.84.120.20 -> www.ifkw.de

FTP: File Transfer Protocol.

GUI: Graphical User Interface.

HTML: Hypertext Markup Language.

IfKW (ZW): Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft (Zeitungswissenschaft)

The Institute for Communication Sciences at the University of Munich  
(<http://www.ifkw.de>)

IP: Internet Protocol

IRC: Internet Relay Chat.

ISP: Internet Service Provider.

JMK: Journalistik, Media och Kommunikation

The Institute for Communication Sciences at the University of Stockholm  
(<http://www.jmk.su.se>)

ODBC: Open DataBase Connectivity. Standard to access files from different databases.

OS: Operating System.

URL: Uniform Ressource Locator. The adress of a document on the internet.

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Software-package for statistical analysis

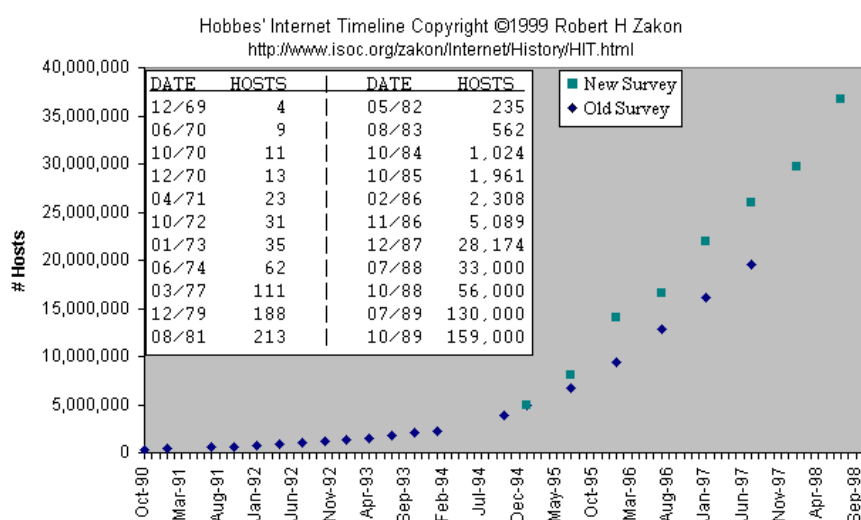
TCP: Transfer Control Protocol

TLD: Toplevel Domain.

WWW: WorldWideWeb.

## 4. Introduction

Over the last few years the internet has left the obscurity of a network for scientists and has become a medium that is being used by more than 120 Million people today<sup>1</sup>. The largest part of that growth



**Graph 1** Growth of Internet-Hosts.

Source: <http://info.isoc.org/guest/zakon/Internet/History/HIT.html> (17. Feb 99)

took place since 1995 (see Graph 1). Being a new medium and quickly becoming a new mass-medium, the internet has recently also become important for journalists. Firstly as something to report about, secondly as a medium to publish in, and thirdly as a new resource. This paper aims to shed some light on

how journalists use the internet for their job. My motivation to find that out was manifold: I've been working as a freelance journalists for some years now and have specialised on computer- and online-journalism. I've been online since 1986 and have helped develop „USUS - The Usually Useful Internetguide for Journalists“ in 1998 during a course for online-journalist at the University of Stockholm.<sup>2</sup> All those things together made me decide to write my thesis about how journalists use the internet.

<sup>1</sup> See also: Nua Ltd.: „How many online?“ [http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how\\_many\\_online/index.html](http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how_many_online/index.html) (8. Dez 98) and Euro-Marketing Associates: „Global Internet Statistics“. <http://euromktg.com/globstats/> (8. Dez 98)

<sup>2</sup> Global 98: <http://www.jmk.su.se/global/global98/> (20. Feb 99)

## 5. Status

While researching the topic I was surprised to find only comparatively little information about how journalists use the internet and what expectations they have towards the medium. As far as science is concerned with journalists and the internet, this discussion seems to center on the role of journalists in an online society.<sup>3</sup>

Some, like Nicholas Negroponte and Walter Bender from the MIT Media Lab, argue that internet will bring an active consumer about. This active consumer uses the internet to search for first-hand information online and eliminates the journalist as a gatekeeper. This line of thought considers journalists to become slowly obsolete as more and more people go online.<sup>4</sup>

Others think that society will need more and better educated journalists to filter and make sense of the sheer mass of information, gossip and opinion that is floating around the internet.<sup>5</sup>

And while there are a lot of studies who seek to describe the internet-users as such, there is comparatively little information available on the subpopulation of journalists on the internet. One of the few is the annual „Media in Cyberspace Study“, in which american journalists are being asked about their internet-usage. According to the 1997-study, 93 % of the journalists in the USA use online-services or the internet at least occasionally. Almost half of them (45 %) use the Internet daily.<sup>6</sup>

A study conducted in 1996 by Claudia Mast, Professor for Journalism at the University Hohenheim<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Brössler, Daniel (1995): „Zeitung und Multimedia“ KoPäd Verlag. München. 1995. p. 82

<sup>4</sup> Bender, Walter (1993): „Riding the Digital Highway“ In: Presstime. Mai 1993 and Negroponte, Nicholas (1994): „Bits are Bits. The Consequences of Being Digital“ In: Negroponte, Nicholas (ed) (1994): „The Future of Print Journalism in the Digital Age“ CSC Vanguard. Cambridge (Mass.)

<sup>5</sup> Bardoel, Jo (1996): „Beyond Journalism“ In: European Journal of Communication Vol. 11(3). p. 283-302

<sup>6</sup> Middleberg, Don/Ross, Steven S.: „How Often Journalists go Online“ Media in Cyberspace Study 1997. <http://www.mediasource.com/cyberstudyfour.htm> (26. Dez 98)

<sup>7</sup> Mast, Claudia et. al. (1997): „Journalisten auf der Datenautobahn - Qualifikationsprofile im Multimedia-Zeitalter“ Konstanz. UVK Medien

found that 73 % of German freelance journalists already use online-media or want to use them in the future.<sup>8</sup>

And study that was published in 1997 by the German wire service „Deutsche Pressagentur (dpa)“ found that 72 % of the editors at german newspapers used online-media at least occasionally.<sup>9</sup> Thus the authors of that study conclude that online-media have already become a common source of information in the newsrooms.<sup>10</sup> They also found that young journalists tend to be more open towards online-media than older journalists.<sup>11</sup>

In 1998 Winfried Schulz and Daniela Leidner from the university of Nuremberg published their study about the the internet as a a source for the media.<sup>12</sup> An interesting conclusion from this study is, that journalists use the internet a lot to keep an eye on their competitors. As far as the use of the internet as a research-tool is concerned, they found hardly any disadvantages and think that the internet will not replace traditional research but will be another research-tool.<sup>13</sup>

This thesis aims to add to the results that were found in the studies mentioned above. But unlike them, I have not concentrated on only one nationality or only on editors, or freelances or tv or radio or political news or sports, but have tried to get a very diverse picture of the journalists on the internet. I think that this approach, to include all journalists, regardless of beat, medium or nationality reflects the international structure of the internet best.

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<sup>8</sup> Mast, Claudia et. al. (1997): p. 135-147

<sup>9</sup> Petersen, Jens; Stadthoewer, Frank (1997): „Redaktionelle Nutzung von Online-Medien bei Tageszeitungen. Reader mit Zusammenfassung der Untersuchungsergebnisse“ Newsaktuell GmbH. Hamburg

<sup>10</sup> Petersen/Stadthoewer (1997): p. 31

<sup>11</sup> Petersen/Stadthoewer (1997): p. 12

<sup>12</sup> Schulz, Winfried/Leidner, Daniela: „Das Netz als Quelle - Die Nutzung von Internet und Online-Diensten durch Publizistische Medien“ in: Hagen, Lutz M. (ed.) (1998b): „Online-Medien als Quellen politischer Information“ Opladen. Westdeutscher Verlag. p. 169-189

<sup>13</sup> Schulz/Leidner (1998): p. 189

## 6. Theoretical Approach

I used the „Consumption of Mass Communication - construction of a model on information consumption behaviour“ by the Preben Sepstrup as theoretical background for my thesis.<sup>14</sup> The strength of this theory is that it considers information to be a good than can be consumed and formulates the probability that a particular piece of information is indeed consumed. It's pretty straight-forward and written in English, so I suggest that you get a copy of it if you are actually interested in it. But I won't describe it in this abstract.

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<sup>14</sup> Sepstrup, Preben (1977): „Consumption of Mass Communication - construction of a model on information consumption behaviour“ Institut for Marketsøkonomi. Århus

## 7. USUS

As mentioned in the preface, this thesis' survey was conducted at the german site of „USUS - The Usually Useful Internet Guide for journalists.“<sup>15</sup> USUS was build by Magnus Hultgren (Sweden), Mille Bjerre-Petersen (Denmark), Virginia Melián (Uruguay), Jens Pabst (Germany), Florence Le Bihan (France), Domenico Conti (Italy) and Timo Lüge (Germany) while attending the course „Global Electronic Journalism“<sup>16</sup> at the university of Sweden in 1998.<sup>17</sup> „It was created for those who want to have a better understanding of the Internet and its potential as a journalistic research tool.“<sup>18</sup>

USUS consists of three sections:

- „Elements of the Net“, which explains the basics of the internet
- „Research Techniques“, which aims to give some more concrete help in solving particular resarch-problems through the use of the internet
- „Links“, a selection of links which we found useful.

Graph2 shows the structure of USUS with all publicly accessibly webpages.

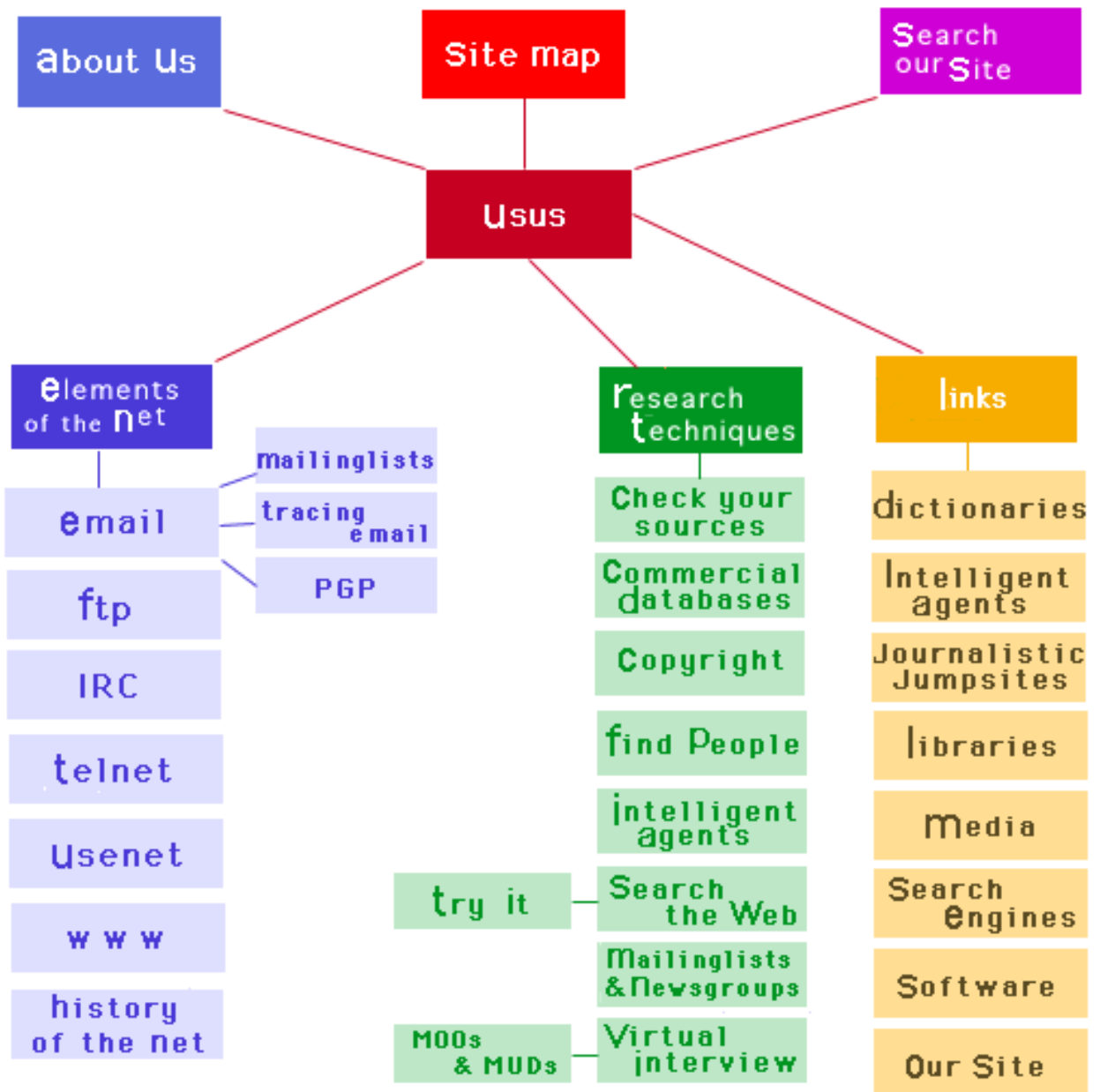
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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ifkw.de/usus/> at the time of this writing, USUS is also available from a US-server via <http://www.usus.org>. In the long run the latter domain will probably be alive longer than the german mirror.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.jmk.su.se/global/global98/>

<sup>17</sup> About us: <http://www.usus.org/aboutus.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.usus.org/index.htm>



Graph 2 USUS-Sitemap.

Source: <http://www.usus.org/sitemap.htm>

## 8. The sample

The sample was drawn as follows:

- 138 E-Mails to print, tv and radio-newsrooms that were drawn randomly from „Yahoo!“<sup>19</sup> Germany.
- E-Mails to three mailinglists that deal with journalism.
- Messages to the six journalis-related newsgroups:
- Submission of the USUS URL to search-engines and catalogs.

This turned out to be more difficult than I thought, since it took much longer to get listed that I had reckoned with. While AltaVista listed USUS within three days, Lycos and Yahoo still hadn't listed it after five months!

Since the USUS-survey was a publicly available online-survey, it was a self-selected survey. Since the number of people, that were reached by my request to fill out the survey, is unknown, as is the number of journalists online, it is not possible to establish a return-rate or say anything about whether this survey is representative. This means that for all practical purposes this survey has to be considered to be not representative. This does not mean that the data is worthless. Even though the data is not *exact* it can nevertheless show trends and give an idea

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.yahoo.de>

## 9. The results

The USUS-survey was publicly available for two months. During this period USUS was accessed from 1002 different IP-Addresses, which for all practical reasons means that there were 1002 different visitors (see also Table 1).

Lable	Value	Explanation
PageViews	6411	Number of contacts
Visits	1621	A new visit was counted whenever there were more than ten minutes between the same IP-address making a request.
PageViews per Visit	3,95	
Vistors	1002	Number of different visitors (i.e. IP-adresses)
Visits per Visitor	1,62	

**Table 1:** USUS-Besucherstatistik vom 23.10. 14:18 Uhr bis 23.12.1998 14:05 Uhr.

During those two months 213 valid questionnaires were entered into the database.<sup>20</sup>

The respondents live in 17 different countries. Most of them (52,6 %) live in Germany, 18,3 % live in the USA, 8,9 % in Sweden, 6,6 % in Finland and 3,3 % in Austria.

Based on these answers I have singled out three geographical areas for closer inspection where appropriate. These were Germany, the USA and the Nordic Countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland)<sup>21</sup>.

The original questionnaire can be found at <http://www.ifkw.de/usus/survey/results/>

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<sup>20</sup> Empty entries, doubles, those with three or less answers and those which were sent to the database daily to make sure that the server is still working, were removed.

<sup>21</sup> There were no answers from Norway, even though the server-logs show that USUS had six visitors from Norway.

## 9.1 Demographic structure

## 9.1.1 Gender, age and time online

	USUS total	GVU total	USUS Germany	ARD online Germany	USUS U.S.A.	GVU U.S.A	USUS Nordic
<b>Gender</b>							
<b>male</b>	70,5	61,3	72,3	72	62,2	58,8	67,6
<b>female</b>	29,5	38,7	27,2	28	37,8	41,2	32,4
<b>Age in years</b>							
<b>up to 25</b>	23	28,2	23,2	40	23,1	26	30,6
<b>25-30</b>	19,7	15,7	20,5		15,4	14,6	19,4
<b>30-40</b>	33,8	21,7	37,5	34	23,1	21,8	27,8
<b>40-50</b>	18,3	19	16,1	17	25,6	20,4	19,4
<b>50-65</b>	5,2	5,5	2,7	9	12,8	13,7	2,8
<b>&gt; 65</b>	-,	2	-,		-,	3,5	-,
<b>Time online</b>							
<b>up to 1 year</b>	5,2	18,4	7,2	18	7,7	18,9	-,
<b>1 to 2 years</b>	19,8	45	27	29	10,3	44,6	16,7
<b>2 to 3 years</b>	29,2		26,1	53	25,6		44,4
<b>3+ years</b>	45,8	36,6	39,6		56,4	36,5	38,9

All numbers are percentages

- Eimeren, van, Birgit et al.: ARD/ZDF-Online-Studie 1998 <http://www.das-erste.de/studie/ardonl.pdf> (18. Jan 99)

- GVU's Ninth WWW User Survey [http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user\\_surveys/survey-1998-04/](http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-04/) (26 Jan 99)

Table 2 Comparison between the demographic data collected for USUS with demographics from other studies.

Table 2 shows the sociodemographic data of the respondents in comparison to other internet studies that were made for the whole population of that region. It is striking, how similar the USUS-sample is to the German internet-users as a whole, as was established by the „ARD Online“ study. An exception is the timespan the respondents are already online. The journalists have been online for a longer time that the average online-user. A similar trend can be seen for the whole sample. Most of the respondents seem to have been early adopters of online-meida. As far as gender is concerned, it is clear that the majority of both the USUS-users and the internet-population as a whole, is predominately male. The US-sample has the highest number of female respondents. US-users have also been online longest, which is hardly surprising considering that the internet is a US-invention. A look at the Nordic sample reveals that this fraction of the respondents has the youngest age-structure..

### 9.1.2 Job-description and timespan online

More than half of the respondents are employed by a media-company, a third are freelance and roughly a fifth are journalists who are still undergoing some sort of journalistic training, but who have already done some field work.<sup>22</sup>

	Frequency	Percent
Employee	106	50,5
Freelance	67	31,9
Trainee/Student	37	17,6
Total	210	100,0

**Table 3** Position of respondents. N=210

Correlating their position with the timespan the respondents are already online, shows no significant advantage for freelancers or employees (see table 4). In this my results are different from those of Claudia Mast who wrote in 1996, that freelancers went online sooner than employees.<sup>23</sup>

One possible explanation for this difference could be, that a lot of journalists, who were freelance in

<sup>22</sup> Having already worked as a journalist was one of the necessary conditions to qualify for the survey.

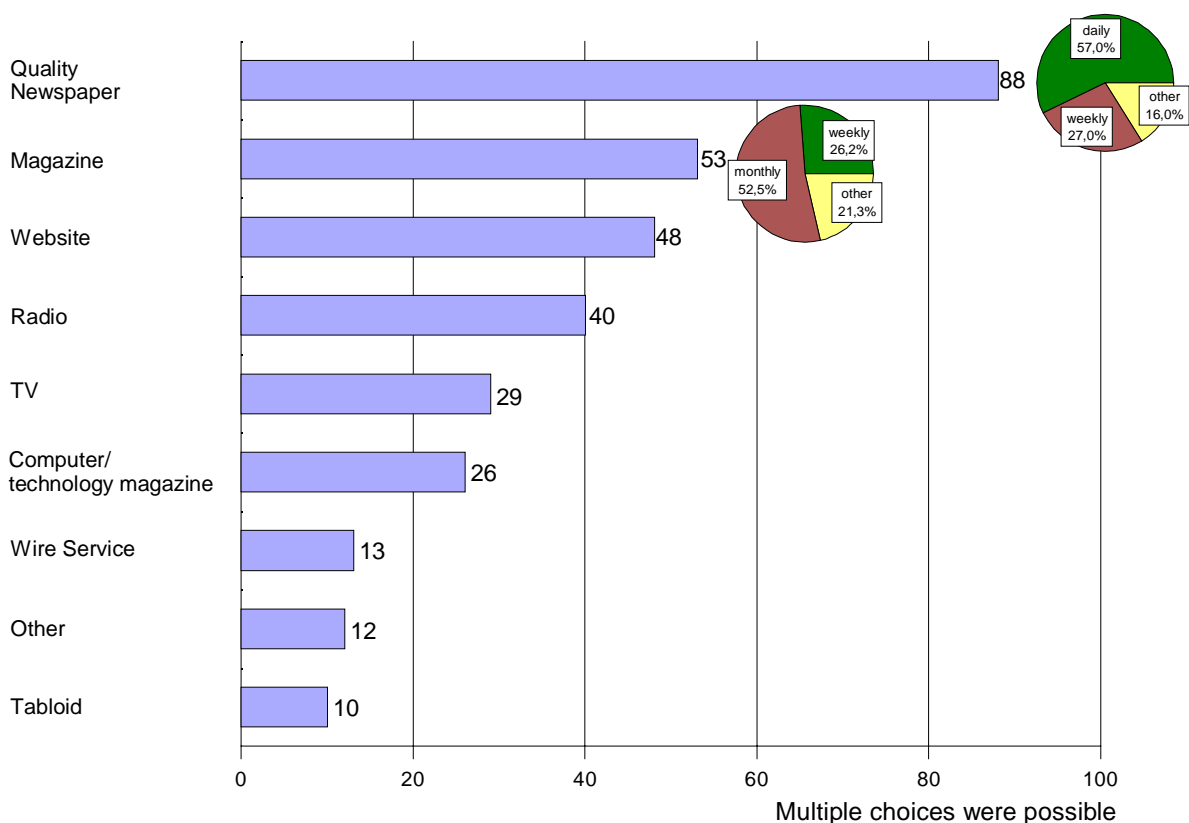
<sup>23</sup> Mast, Claudia et.al. (1997): p. 147

	Position		
	Employees	Freelances	
Time online	Up to 1 year	3,8%	7,5%
	1-2 years	16,2%	22,4%
	2-3 years	28,6%	19,4%
	3+ years	51,4%	50,7%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	

**Table 4** Crosstable between „Job“ and „Time Online“. N=212

1996 are now employed, since the job-market for journalists with internet-skills has been very good during the last years.

### 9.2 Media and beats of respondents



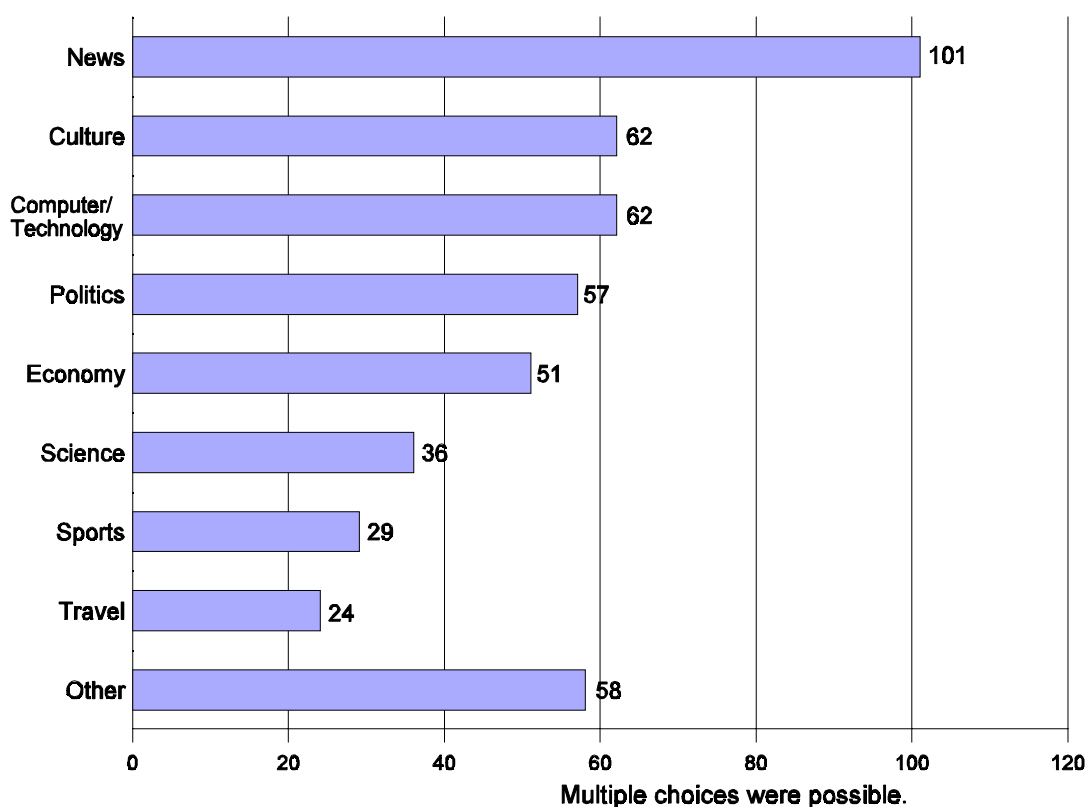
**Graph 3** What type of medium do you work for?

The majority of the respondents work for quality-newspapers, followed by magazines and websites. (Graph 3). Computer- and technology-magazines only show up on position six.

Most respondents work for media with a rather large audience:

50 % work for a medium with audience larger than 100 000, with 10 % reaching more than 830 000 people. This fits an observation made by Bruce Garrison in 1997 who's come to the conclusion that large newspapers are more likely to use online-media than small newspapers.<sup>24</sup>

Graph 4 displays the sections the respondents work for. It emphasises that the Internet is not mainly a source for computer and technology-journalists, but is being used frequently by journalists from all beats, though IT-journalists have a larger proportion than they probably have on the overall number of journalists. It is interesting, that „politics“ and „economy“ have a lower rating then „culture“.



**Graph 4** Beats of the respondents

<sup>24</sup> Garrison, Bruce: „Newspaper Size as a Factor in Use of Computer-Assisted Reporting“ AEJMC Conference Paper 1028

Petersen/Stadthoewer have come to similar results in their study for dpa. They suggest that this might be due to the fact that in economy and politics the communication-channels are very formalized, so that it is harder, for an alternative informationsource, to establish itself.<sup>25</sup>

### 9.3 Internet literacy

Asked about how they would rate their own internet-literacy, most respondents said, that they have good or very good internet-skills (table 5). Again, there is no signifacnt difference between the employees and freelances. It is interesting, though that none of the trainees consider themselves Pros or Beginners.

	Frequency	Percent
Beginner	4	1,9
Moderate	75	35,9
Advanced	86	41,1
Pro	44	21,1
Total	209	100,0

**Table 5** Q6: „How would you rate your own internet literacy?“. N=209

	Position			Total	
	Employee	Freelance	Trainee		
Internet literacy					
	Beginner	2,9%	1,5%	1,9%	
	Moderate	28,2%	37,3%	54,1%	35,7%
	Advanced	43,7%	34,3%	45,9%	41,1%
	Pro	25,2%	26,9%		21,3%
Total		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

**Tabelle 6** Selbsteinschätzung der Internetkenntnisse nach Berufsgruppe. N=209

79,3 % stated, that they did not receive internet training form their employer (N=179).

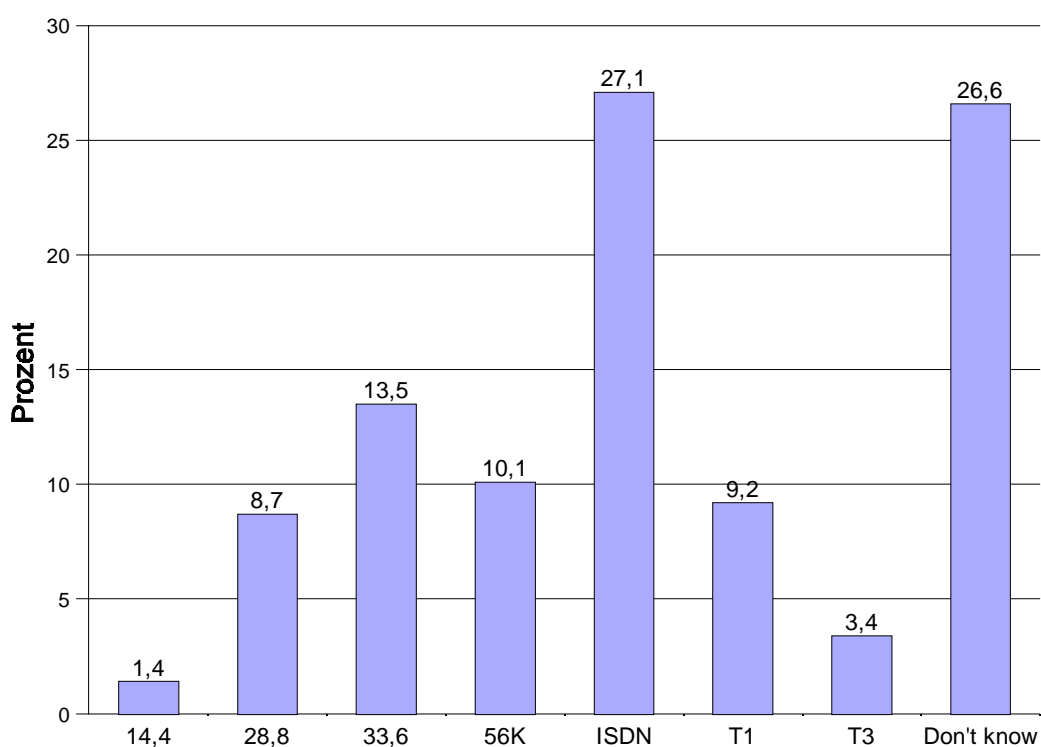
85,6 % said that they consider internet-literacy to be a competitive advantage. Only 7 % don't think that internet-literacy is a competitive advantage, 7,5 % didn't know

<sup>25</sup> Petersen/Stadthoewer (1997): p. 10

## 9.4 Internet access

Most of the respondents have a fast connection to the internet (Graph 5). The high percentage of ISDN-connections is primarily a result of the high percentage of german journalists in the sample.: 41,7 % of the german respondents access the internet via an ISDN-connection. The highest rate of T1 or T3 connection can be seen in the USA, where 20,5 % have highspeed-access.

While 67,5 % have online-access both at home and at work (N=203), they use the internet more frequently at work (64 %) than at home.



**Graph 5** Q 18: „At what speed do you access the net most of the time?“ (N=207)

### 9.5 Private and company homepages

Private homepages are seemingly quite popular with journalists. 28,4 % (N=194) said that they have a private homepage. Freelance journalists use this possibility more often (38,5 %), than employees (24,5 %) or trainees (21,9 %). Unfortunately I don't have any data about how popular homepages are for ordinary internet users. But it seems to me that these percentages have to be considerably higher than for the internet-population as a whole.

### 9.6 Visibility of email

57,2 % of the respondents (N=201) said that their email was visible to their readers. Almost all of them (98,3 %) consider this to be a valuable and good thing. Most of them emphasized the benefits of an increased feedback by the readers/viewers, that they can draw on the expertise of their audience and get ideas for stories that way. A selection of answers:<sup>26</sup>

„Often I get reactions on articles, and that brings me closer to the reader. Furthermore it often spins off new stories“

*Employee at a danish tabloid-paper*

„It gives readers a better chance to give feedback to the paper and the paper a better chance to understand how their readers feel. Interaction between readers and the media is necessary if the media are to have a good rapport (and consequently credibility).“

*Trainee at an US weekly paper*

„It provides an easy method for readers to 1) bring errors of omission or commission to your attention; 2) make reporter aware of expert observers or commentators whose views might be sought for future articles; and 3) provide information or tips.“

*US Employee*

„Because it's very useful for my work to get in direct contact with the audience. They often write what they think about our work. They won't call in, they'll send an email.“

*German radio employee*

While most journalists whose email is visible said, that this was beneficial, the picture was quite different when asking the journalists whose email is not visible about the reasons for their address not

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<sup>26</sup> I did not edit any of the answers. I.e.: I left all the typos ect. as they were.

being visible. 20 of the 42 journalists who fit in that category and answered the open question said that they didn't want to receive spam or junk mail from their readers. But only three of the journalists with a visible email-address said, that the amount of emails is a problem for them. And none of them said that this outweighs the benefits. Thus it looks like the fear, that a visible email-address would result in a huge load of mails, is unfounded. According to the respondents a visible email-address is of benefit to the journalists. This observation is also in line with a survey the American communication-scientist Tanjev Schultz conducted in 1998 at the „New York Times“<sup>27</sup>

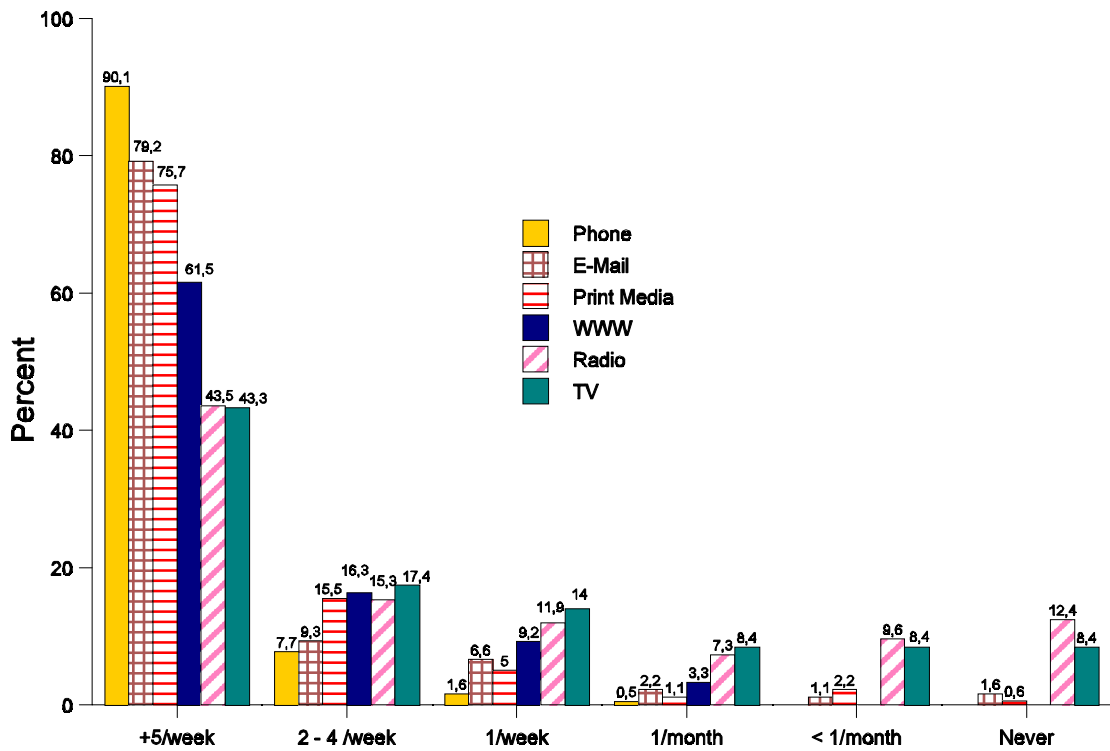
### 9.7 Usage

But how important is the internet for the journalists for their work? I've tried to establish the importance of the internet in relation to other sources of information as seen on next page. Graph 6 and 7 show how often Journalists use media for their job.

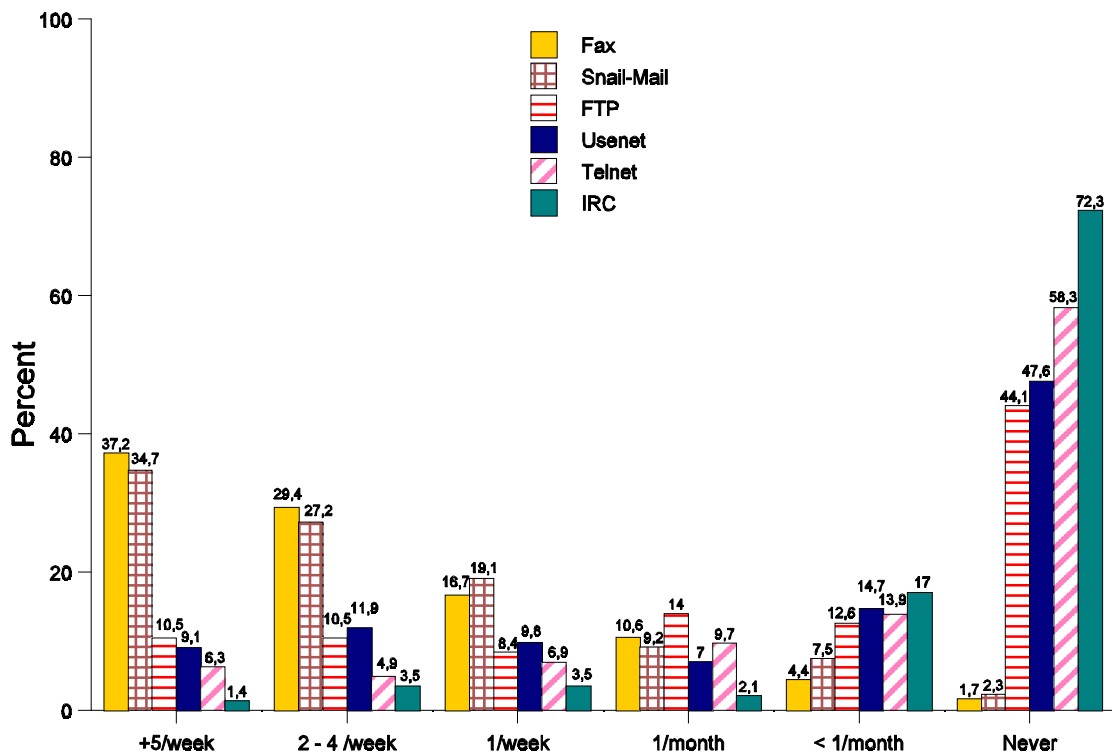
Not surprisingly, the telephone is still the most popular tool from the item. 90,1 % use it at least five times a week. But E-Mail is already on the second position (79,2 %), having an almost equal rating as print-media (75,7). The WWW hold position four (61,5 %) far ahead of radio and tv (both 43 %). Fax and regular mail are still being used frequently by journalists but only a third of them uses them daily. The lesser known internet-applications (FTP, Usenet, Telnet and IRC) are at the bottom end of the scale.

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<sup>27</sup> Schultz, Tanjev: „Mass Media and the Concept of Interactivity: An Exploratory Study of Online Forums and Reader E-Mail“ AEJMC Conference Paper 1009



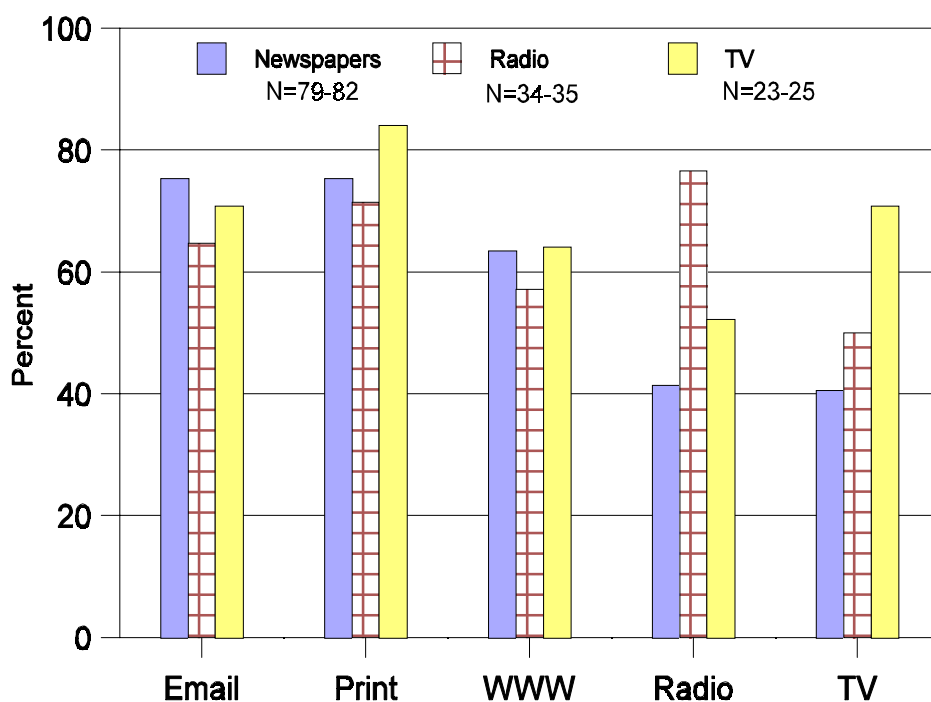
Graph 7 How often do you use the following for your job? N>177



Graph 6 How often do you use the following for your job? N>141

Graph 6 and 7 show the frequency of use for all journalists from the USUS-sample. Since that sample is dominated by print-journalists I decided to take a look at how the picture looks like if the sample is split by newspaper-, radio- and tv-journalists.

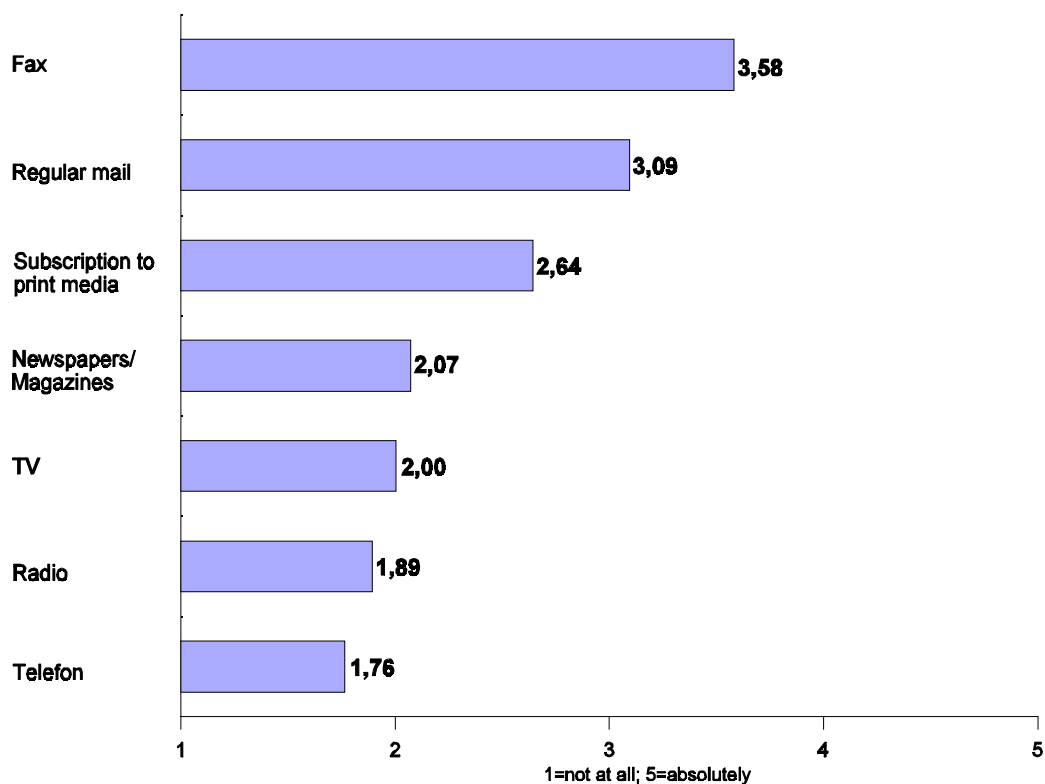
Graph 8 shows that while journalists do favour their own medium, there are no big differences in the use of email and WWW. Though it looks like radio-journalists use these internet-applications slightly less than their colleagues who are working for newspapers or radio. This assumption is supported by other factors which will be discussed later.



**Graph 8** Percent of journalists from newspapers, radios and TV use these media five or more times per week.

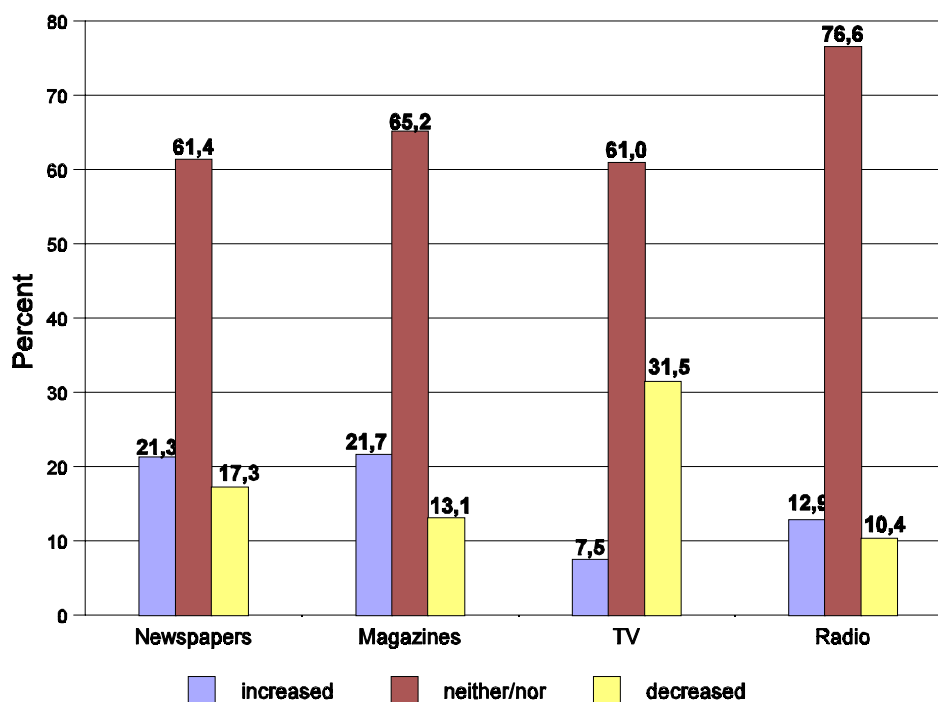
At this point we can say, that the internet is obviously a medium that is of high value to journalists, regardless of the medium, beat or position they work in.

The assumption that it is mainly the fax and regular mail that become less popular because of the use of the internet is further supported by the answers on the question which technologies could become obsolete through the use of the internet (Graph9).



**Graph 9** Q 36: „Do you think that internet technology will be able to replace one or more of the following at your workplace in the future.“ N<sub>≥</sub> 177

When asked whether their use of traditional media<sup>28</sup> has increased or decreased, most journalists answered that there was no change in their usage-pattern. The only medium that has notably „suffered“ is TV, while print-media have actually slightly gained. This result is similar to the findings of the german communication-scientist Lutz M. Hagen<sup>29</sup> and the ARD-online study.<sup>30</sup>



**Graph 10** Change in use of traditional media since using the internet.

<sup>28</sup> „Traditional media“ refers to print and broadcast media

<sup>29</sup> Vgl u.a.: Hagen, Lutz M. (1998a): „Online-Nutzung und Nutzung von Massenmedien“ S. 121 in: Rössler, Patrick (1998): „Online-Kommunikation“ Opladen. Westdeutscher Verlag.

<sup>30</sup> Eimeren, Birgit van, et. al: „Die ARD/ZDF-Online-Studie 1998“ <http://www.das-erste.de/studie/ardonl.pdf> (18. Jan 99)

To find out how intensively journalists use the internet, the respondents were asked to state how many hours they are online per week. Unfortunately this question was seemingly harder to answer than I had thought. Especially for journalists with a direct connection to the internet it is difficult to say, how many hours they are online. After all, they are online all the time. Therefore it would have been better to ask how many hours the journalists *actively* use the internet. However, the difficulties journalists had to answer this question does illustrate how much of an integral part of their work the internet has become.

Petersen and Stadthower found in their study that younger journalists are more drawn towards the use online-media than older journalists.<sup>31</sup> To compare this assumption with the USUS-sample I took the employed journalists and looked at how many hours they are online per week. The decision to use only employees was based on the fact that they do not have to pay for their internet use, so that it can be assumed, that factors like income don't play a limiting role in their decision to use the net or not. Taking into consideration the difficulties with this question mentioned before, it is nonetheless visible that younger journalists spend more time online than their older counterparts.

Age	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard-deviaton
under 25	9	2	25	10,11	9,62
25-30	19	3	40	18,26	13,54
30-40	37	1	65	13,27	13,37
40-50	19	1	30	9,68	8,23
50-65	8	3	40	14,75	11,78

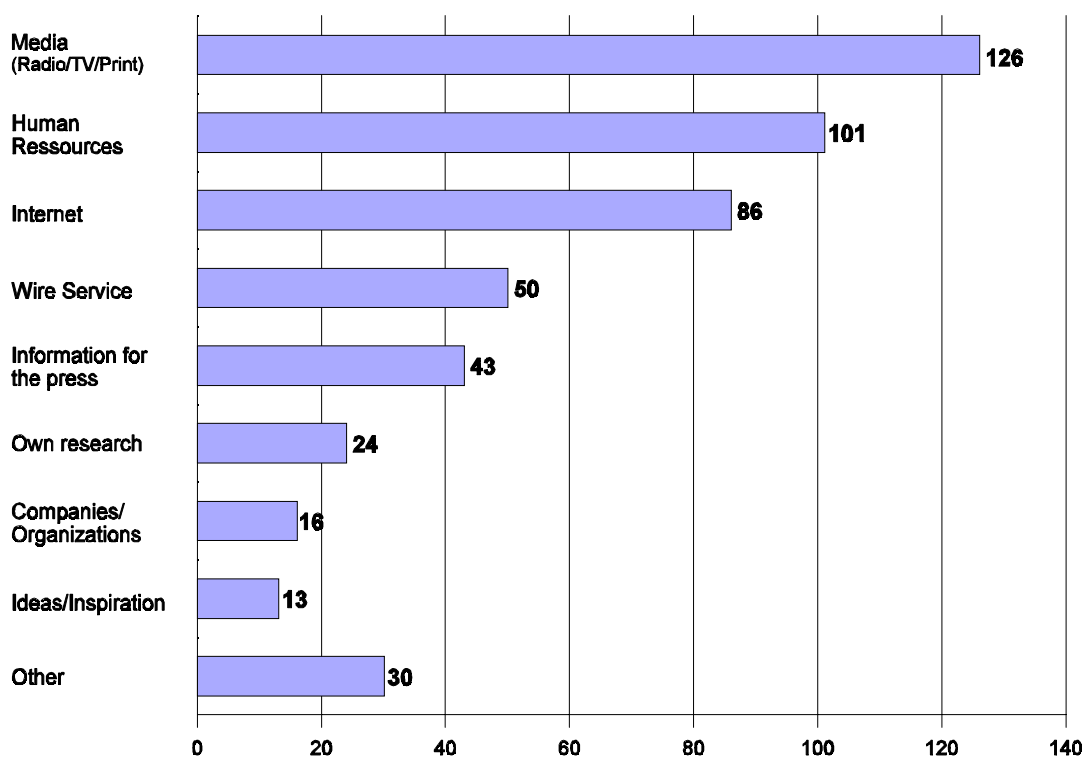
**Table 7** Comparison by age of the time (in hours) employed journalists spend online per week.(N=92).

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<sup>31</sup> Petersen/Stadthoewer (1997): p. 12

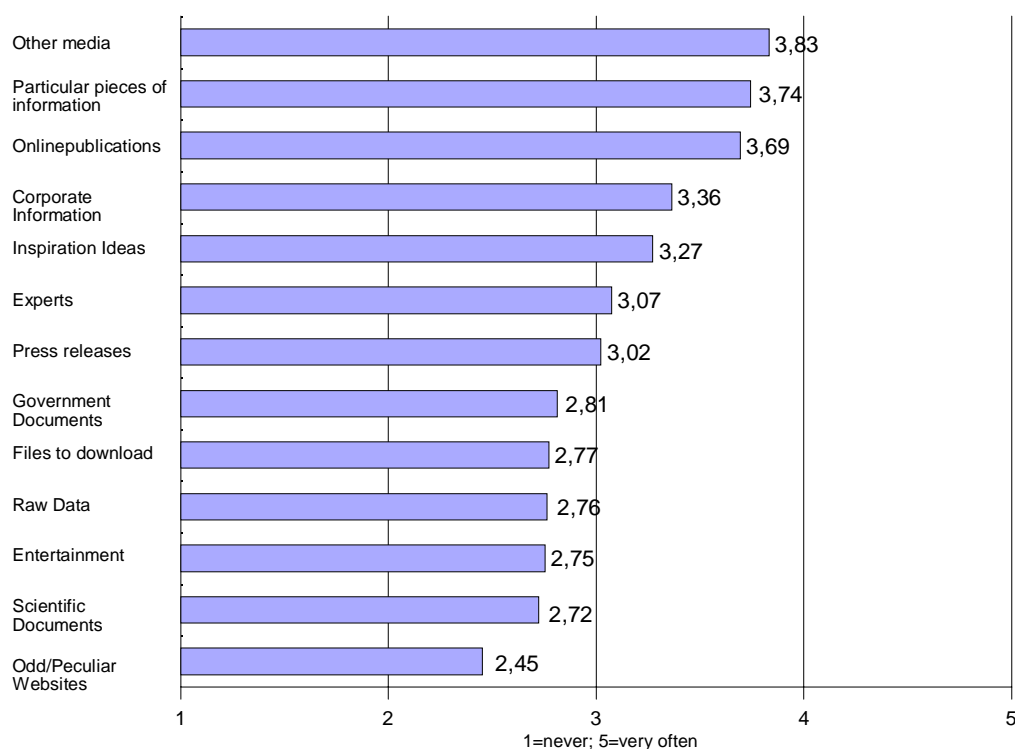
## 9.8 Sources of the journalists

The data presented so far suggests that the internet is a very important medium for the journalists. Graph 11 shows how the internet is doing as a source in comparison to other media. Please notice that this was not a multiple-choice question, but that journalists were asked to write their three main sources into a text-field. It is possible though, that the internet has a slightly higher position than it would have if this survey had been postal and had not conducted online. But even assuming that this might be so, the graphic shows that the Internet is indeed an important source for stories. It also emphasises that the internet will probably not replace traditional research, but exists alongside the traditional sources.



**Graph 11** Q 10: „Please name your three main sources for news-stories“

After graph 11 showed us to what extend journalists use the internet for research in relation to other ressources, graph 12 tells us for what sort of research the journalists use the internet for. According to the answers, the most frequent use is to observe other media. This result is also supported by the reseach of Schulz and Leidner.<sup>32</sup> Particular pieces of information are also often looked for as is corporate information. Scientific and government-documents, on the other hand, are not as often looked for.



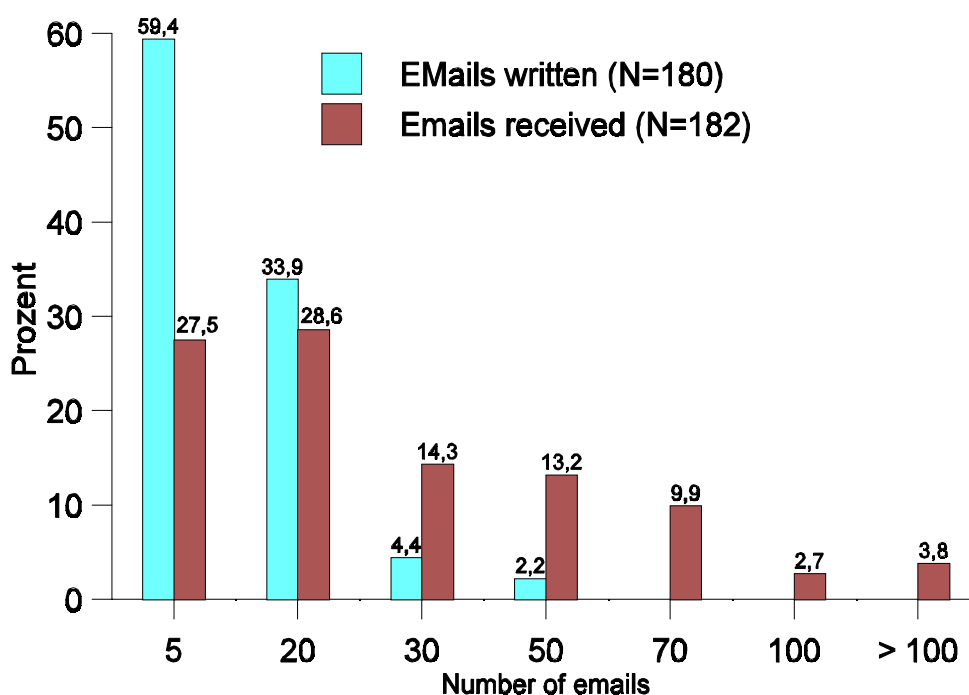
**Graph 12** Q35: „Please indicate how often you search for the follwing categories when using the World Wide Web.“

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<sup>32</sup> Schulz/Leidner (1998): p. 182

## 9.9 Email as a journalistic tool

Graph 13 shows how many emails the respondents write and receive per day. This is excluding spam, but including mailinglists<sup>33</sup> and newsletters. According to this, the majority gets up to 20 emails per day and writes only up to five. The processing of email costs the respondents an average of 46 minutes per day.



**Graph 13** Q 26 & 27: Number of emails written and received per day.

As far as security of email-transmissions is concerned, a lot of journalists are aware of the ease with which email can be intercepted. Asked how easy they think it is, to intercept someones email, the average of the answers was 2,31 (N=181) where „1" was „very easy“ and „5" was „very hard“. They are not very concerned though, that their own email could be read. Here, the average was 2,61

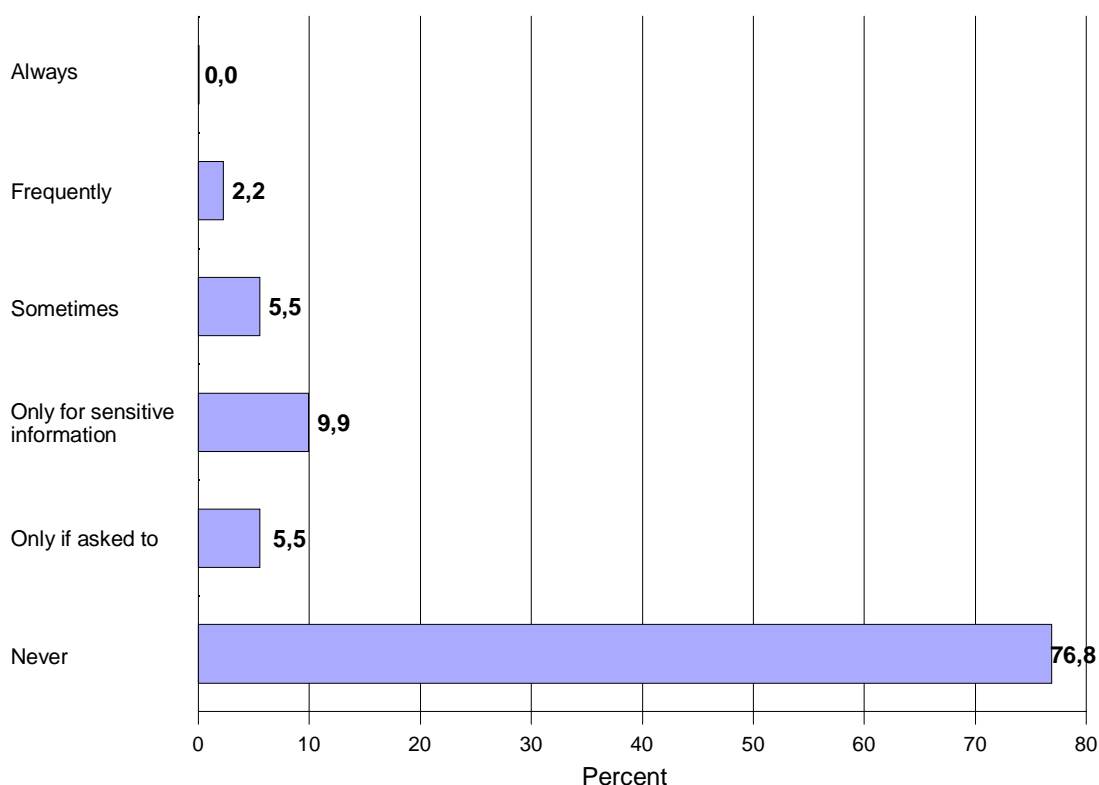
<sup>33</sup> 153 respondents said they have subscribed to at least one mailinglists. 17,6 % of those have subscribed to one, 37,9 % to up to three, 28,1 % to up to five, 9,2 % to up to ten and 7,2 % to ten or more.

where „1" was „not concerned at all“ and „5" was „very concerned“.

A working-paper that was written for the european commission shows that the danger, that someones email is beeing intercepted is in fact quite real:

„Within Europe, all email, telephone and fax communications are routinely intercepted by the United States National Security Agency, transferring all target information from the European mainland via the strategic hub of London then by Satellite to Fort Meade in Maryland via the crucial hub at Menwith Hill in the North York Moors of the UK“<sup>34</sup>

From this point of view it is positive that 23,2 % of the respondents have used PGP or other encryption software at least once (graph 14) and thus know how to protect their sources.



**Graph 14** Q 32: „Do you use PGP or other encryption software to encrypt your mail?“

<sup>34</sup> European Parliament - Directorate General for Research - Directorate B -The STOA Programme (ed.): „An appraisal of technologies for political control“ 6. Januar 1998. PE 166 499. p. 19

### 9.10 Importance for the job

Most of the respondents said that they consider the internet to be a very useful resource for their research. The average was here 4,36 (N=177)<sup>35</sup>. They also said that the internet has already heavily influenced their job (4,0; N=176). For the future they expect that the importance of the internet for their job will increase further (4,61; N=176) and 90,9 % said, that a journalist will need to have access to the internet to do his job properly. Considering this extremely high percentage, it would be interesting to find out, whether journalists who have internet-access consider themselves to be better journalists even today.

The respondents were further asked to state how the internet has changed their work. In their answers they stressed that now there is more information available to them, that they can do research independently from opening hours and that the information is available to them quicker than before. Again they stressed the role of email. A selection of answers:

„I used to drive 45 miles to Notre Dame's library to do research for a project or an article; now I sit here in my cozy office, never having to shovel my car out of the snow or dodge raindrops, and gather the same information from my home computer.“

- *US-Freelance*

„E-mail in particular has enabled me to work more efficiently. I spend less time on the phone and opening envelopes. It's just easier to write somebody an email and get a response.“

- *US-employee working for a magazine*

„E-mails eased communication through time zones, made editing easier (see manuscrypt attached, if okay, beam it back). Good for researching in countries far off good news cover, like Seychelles or Oman or China.“

- *German employee of a monthly magazine*

„Made it possible to acquire copies of court decisions without having to wait many weeks for a clerk to photocopy and mail them.“

- *US-journalist*

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<sup>35</sup> Higher is more on a scale from 1 to 5.

„It gives me colleagues to bounce ideas off who do not compete directly with me“

*US-journalist working for a daily paper*

„it has increased the depth of background in my articles, it has increased the possibility to write a lot more stories than I would have done before“

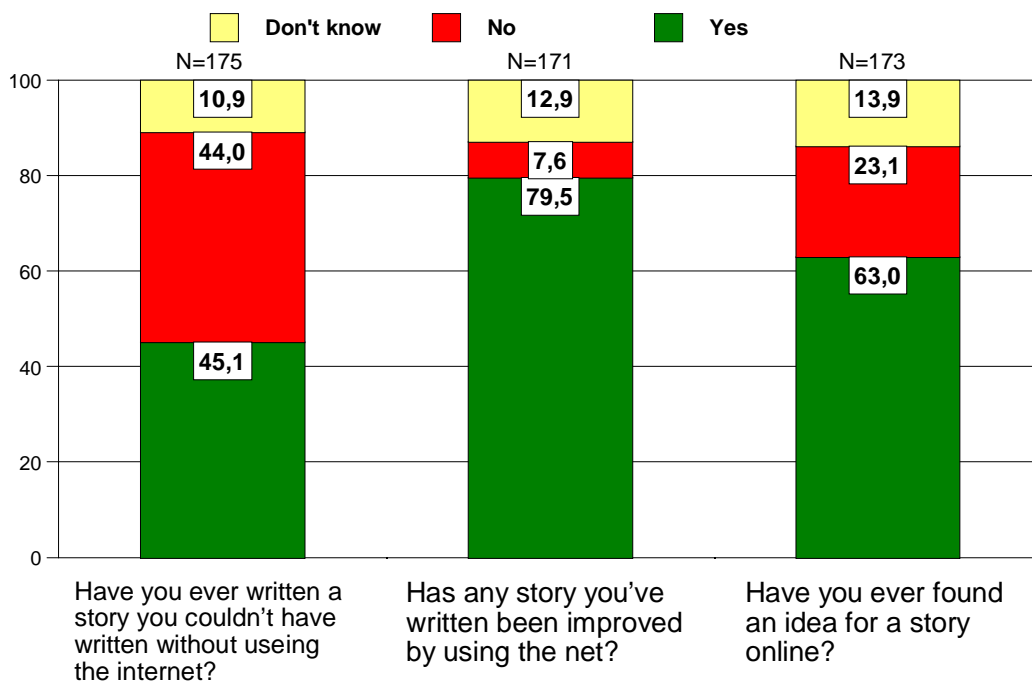
*- German employee working for a newswire*

„1- Talking to someone in other countries by email is cheaper and sometimes easier, because of the time zone.

2- I have already interviewed a HIV positive by email and private chat. He felt more comfortable to talk to me.“

*- Brazilian journalist*

Since it is comparatively easy to say in an abstract way, that the internet is useful to you, I asked what concrete use the journalists had from using the internet (Graph 15). 79,5 % (N=171) said, that stories of them have been improved through the use of the internet. But the graph shows also, that the internet is only *one* source for ideas and information among others . The value of 45,1 % percent, who said that they have already written a story they couldn't have written without the internet, shows however that the internet is a very important source.



**Graph 15** Q 45, 47 & 49: Concrete use of the internet for stories (not counting stories that are about the internet).

Table 8 shows how the concrete use of the internet differs by media. Aside from journalists who are working for websites, the picture is not conclusive. From the data it cannot be said that print-journalists had a larger use of the internet than broadcast journalists. If any trend can be seen at all, than it is radio-journalists seem to have the least use of the internet. This correlates with results of Chapter 9.6.

Q 45: „Have you ever written a story you couldn't have written without using the internet (except for stories about the internet)?“

	<b>Newspaper N=77</b>	<b>Magazine N=44</b>	<b>Wire N=11</b>	<b>Radio N=33</b>	<b>TV N=24</b>	<b>Website N=40</b>
<b>Yes</b>	48,1	38,6	63,6	30,3	33,3	55
<b>No</b>	40,3	47,7	9,1	51,5	50	35
<b>Don't know</b>	11,7	13,6	27,3	18,2	16,7	10

Q 47: Has any story you've written been improved by using the net?“

	<b>Newspaper N=74</b>	<b>Magazine N=43</b>	<b>Wire N=11</b>	<b>Radio N=34</b>	<b>TV N=24</b>	<b>Website N=37</b>
<b>Yes</b>	77	79,1	81,8	67,6	83,3	89,2
<b>No</b>	9,5	7	18,2	17,6	16,7	2,7
<b>Don't know</b>	13,5	14	-,-	14,7	-,-	8,1

Q 49: „Have you ever found an idea for a story online?“

	<b>Newspaper N=76</b>	<b>Magazine N=44</b>	<b>Wire N=11</b>	<b>Radio N=34</b>	<b>TV N=23</b>	<b>Website N=39</b>
<b>Yes</b>	50,5	56,8	54,5	50	69,6	79,5
<b>No</b>	14,7	29,5	18,2	29,4	21,7	10,3
<b>Don't know</b>	14,7	13,5	27,3	20,6	8,7	10,3

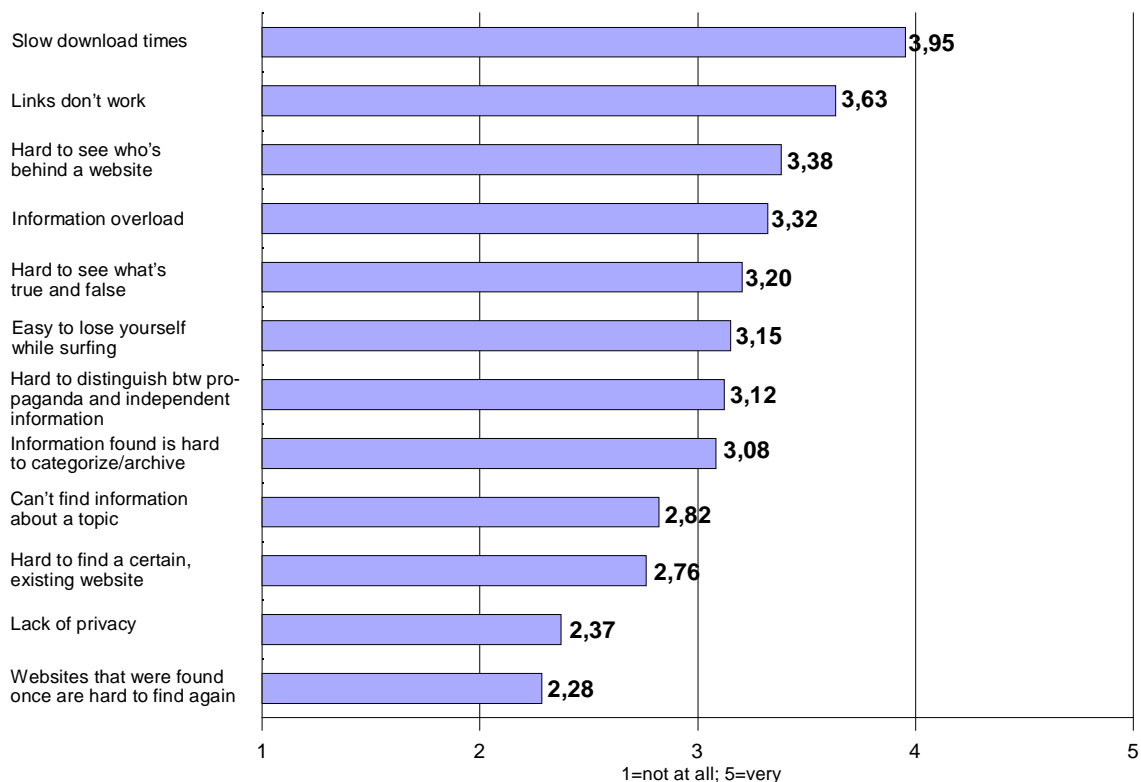
**Tabelle 8** Concrete use of the internet split by media (in percent).

**Annotation:** The category „Magazine“ does not include computer- technology-magazines

### 9.11 Problems using the WWW

The last few chapters have mainly dealt with the positive sides of using the internet. This picture wouldn't be complete, though, without the problems journalists are faced with, when using the internet. Graph 16 shows, how relevant some problems are for the journalists. It is worth noting, that even though most journalists have a fast or very fast connection to the internet (see chapter 9.4), download times are still the most relevant problem for journalists; dead links are on second place.

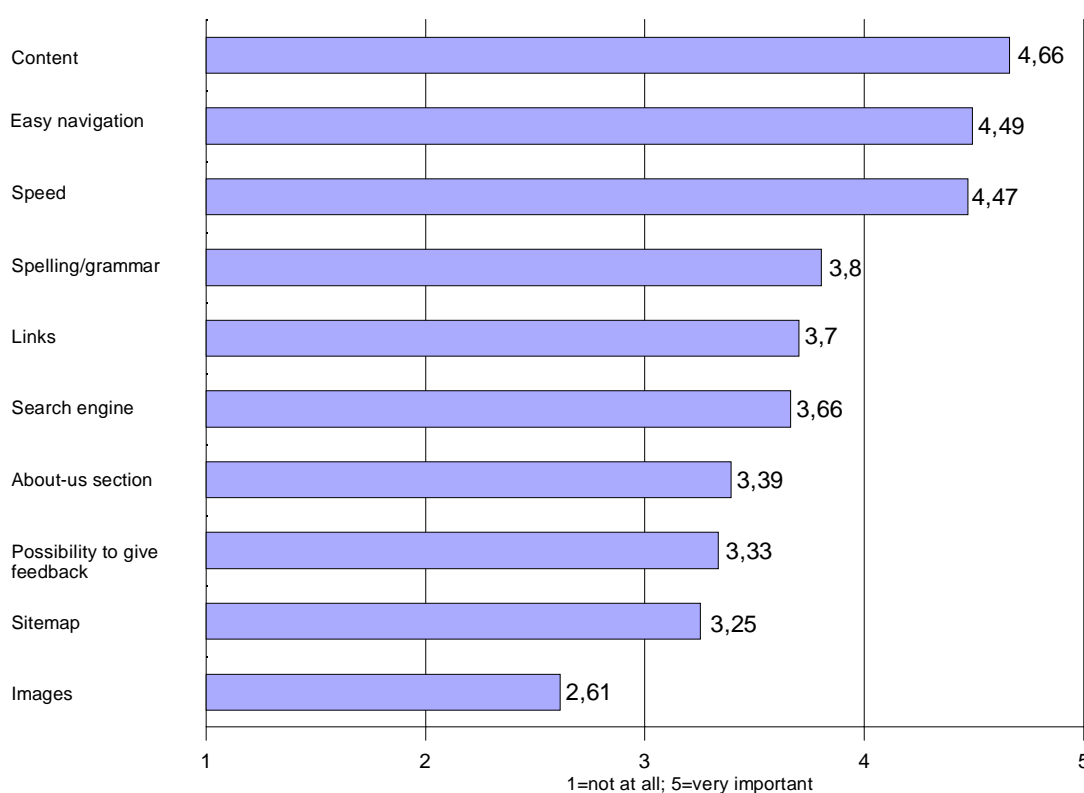
Next to these two technical problems, there are also a number of problems concerning the content of the websites. The most relevant problem here is that on the internet is often hard to see who is behind a website and whether information is bipartisan or not. This aspect has also been raised by 55 % of the journalists (N=131) who answered open question 40 about what danger they see for journalism through the use of the internet. Some have mentioned, though, that this is actually not a problem that is created by the internet, but by a lack of thoroughness on the journalists part.



**Graph 16 Q 54:** "How relevant are the following problems for you?"

In line with this problem are the answers, on whether the journalists ever fell for an „urban legend“ on the internet. 15,7 % (N=178) said that this has happened to them. Five journalists admitted to having published the hoax unknowingly. The real number is certainly higher, since it's plausible that a number of journalists don't know that they fell for an urban legend.

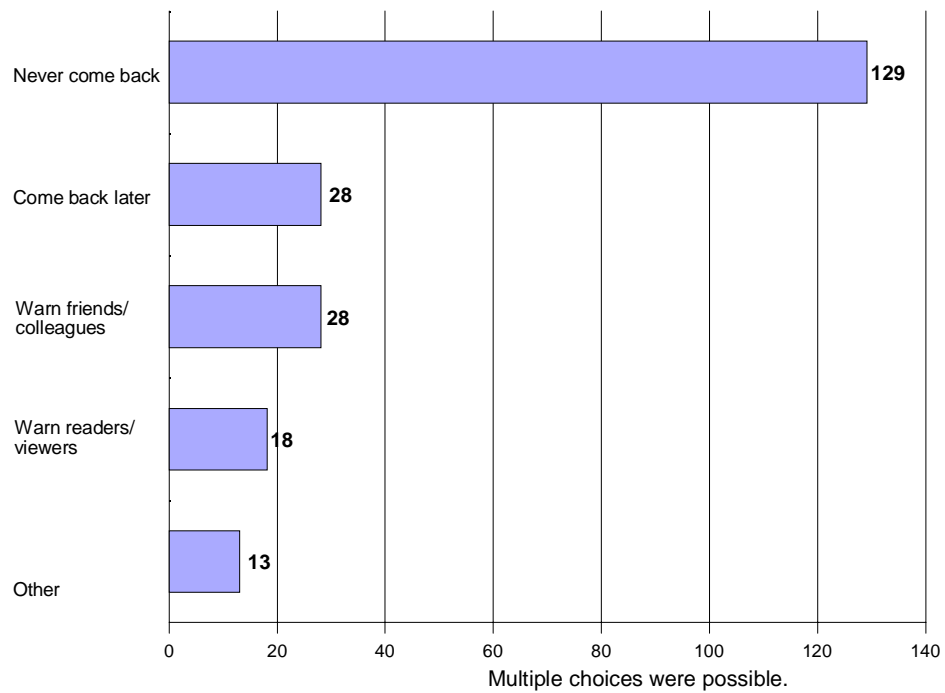
In line with these problems are the expectations journalists have towards websites they visit. Graph 17 shows what journalists want: Sites that are well structured, put more weight on content than on pictures and let the journalist see who is behind a website.



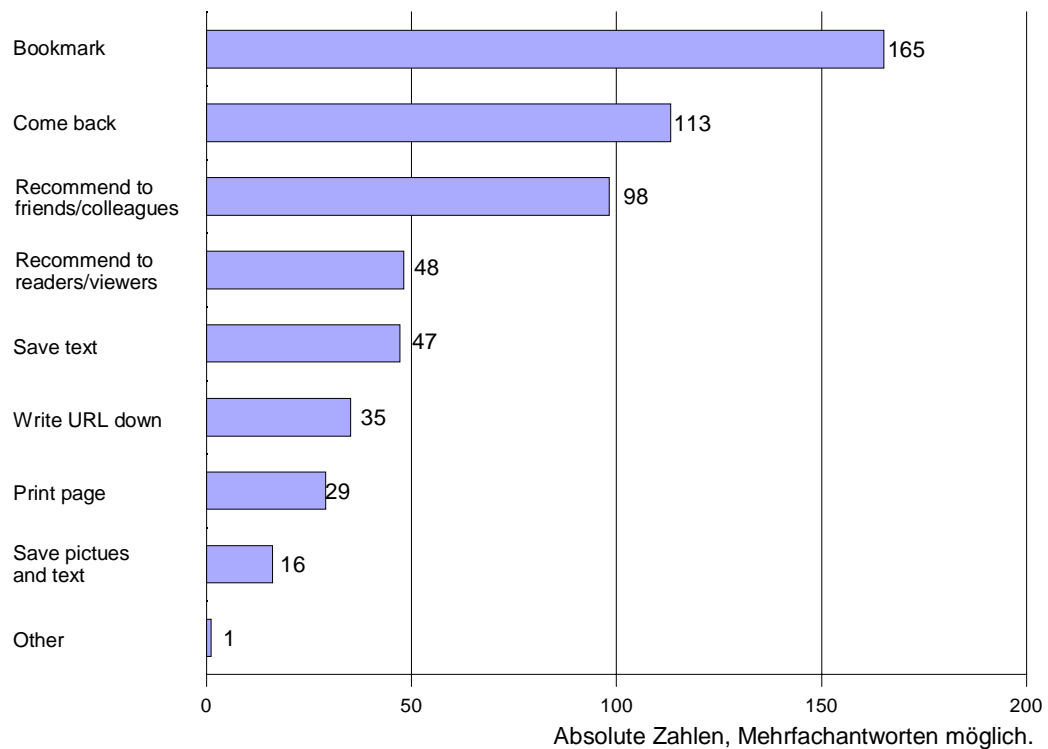
**Graph 17** Q37: „When visiting a website, how important are the following things to you?“

These expectations seem reasonable enough, but the problems, the respondents complained about, show clearly that a lot of websites don't pay attention to these wishes. That is not only a problem for the journalists, but also one for the site-builders. Asked what they do with sites they don't like, most of them said, that they never come back to a site they dislike (Graph 18). The good news is that they are not likely to tell their audience about their bad experience. On the other hand, they are

quite likely to recommend good sites to their audience (Graph 19)



**Graph 18 Q 56:** „What do you do with websites you don't like“



**Graph 19 Q 55:** „What do you do with websites you like“

## 10. Conclusion

The collected data shows that the internet is not a tool for a fringe group of journalists any longer, but an everyday-tool for journalist from all media and all beats. The journalists consider the quality of the information they find to be good and benefit from the amount of information that is available, the speed at which that information is available and the additional contacts they made through the intern. But they also have big problems seperating the good from the bad information. The inability to distinguish between these two kinds of information has probably two reasons: On the one side are the website designers who should make the information and the origin of that information more transparent. But the on the other side, the media should train their journalists properly in how to use the internet and how to verify information with the tools that are available on the internet. Unfortunately, though most of the media do not seem to train their employees properly in this field.

In addition to research for stories, the journalists use the internet mainly to keep an eye on other media and to communicate. Particularly email is of great use for journalists to keep in touch with their colleagues and audience. Fears of being flooded with „useless“ mail seem to be unfounded.

Over all, the data collected here and in the other studies mentioned, suggest very strongly that the role of the internet will become increasingly important and it will be necessary for most journalists to be competent in the use of online-media. But the data also shows, that the internet will not replace other sources of information, but will only act as a substitute to them.

As far as the expectaions of the journalists towards sites they visit are concerned, the want sites that are well structured, put more weigh on content than on nice pictures and let the journalist see who is behind a website.

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1028 Garrison, Bruce: „Newspaper Size as a Factor in Use of Computer-Assisted Reporting" AEJMC Conference Paper

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