

Arts and Culture

Digital Participation in Scotland: A Review of the Evidence

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In March 2011 the Scottish Government published its Digital Strategy: *Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland*. To support the digital participation strand of work on the Digital Strategy, the Culture Analytical Team undertook two main pieces of research, a review of data sources on digital participation and a review of evidence on the barriers to participation.

Main findings

- There are five main sources of data on digital participation in Scotland: Ofcom Communications Market Survey, the Scottish Household Survey, the Labour Force Survey, Opinions Survey and Oxford Internet Survey.
- Taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of each of the data sources for measuring digital participation, the Scottish Household Survey was found to be the most robust data source. The one disadvantage of this is that no directly comparable UK data is available.
- Analysis of the Scottish Household Survey found that 67% of households have access to the internet and 71% of adults use the internet for personal use.
- The data suggests there are different typologies of non-user who have different reasons for not using the internet. In general, younger people were more likely than others to cite cost as their reason for not using the internet while older people and those who do not want to use the internet were more likely to mention reasons relating to lack of need or not knowing how to use a computer.
- There are real challenges in encouraging non-users to use the internet. The SHS found that 38% of non-users said they would like to use the internet one day, while the majority (62%) said they would not.
- Qualitative research has led to some suggestions for encouraging non-users online; mainly around communicating relevant benefits and providing reassurance that the internet is for them. It appears as though the barriers that remain to getting the non-users online are not going to be overcome through strategies that address material aspects of non-use (e.g. providing low cost computers). Strategies that address the multitude of factors influencing older people's internet use such as poor confidence, lack of motivation, low income and disability are needed.

Introduction

Digital participation describes people's ability to gain access to digital technology, and understand how to use it creatively. Increased digital participation can improve people's quality of life, boost economic growth and allow more effective delivery of public services.

Scotland has a lower rate of digital participation compared with the rest of the UK. For example, the Ofcom Communications Market survey in 2011 found that 61% of adults in Scotland had a broadband connection at home, compared to a UK average of 74%.

In October 2010 the Scottish Government set out its Digital Ambition for Scotland. The ambition relating to digital participation is:

That the rate of broadband uptake by people in Scotland should be at or above the UK average by 2013, and should be highest among the UK nations by 2015.

This was followed in March 2011 by Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland, which sets out in more detail how these ambitions will be achieved. This Digital Strategy undertakes to annually review whether its ambitions and objectives are still appropriate. The evidence reviewed in this report is to support the digital participation strand of work on the Digital Strategy and contribute to the review of ambitions and objectives. In developing the evidence base in this area, the Culture Analytical Team undertook two main pieces of research, both of which are presented in this report:

A review of data sources on digital participation. We identified and evaluated all data collected on digital participation in Scotland. The purpose of this was to feed into a review of the best way in which to measure progress on the Digital Ambition relating to digital participation.

A review of the evidence on barriers to digital participation in Scotland. This was a review of literature and secondary analysis of data on digital participation to attempt to determine what barriers prevent people from using the internet and why Scotland has a particularly low rate of digital participation compared to the rest of the UK. The results will inform recommendations for how to encourage non-users online.

Review of data sources on digital participation

Through our existing knowledge, searching the Survey Question Bank and searching the internet more generally, we found five main sources of data in Scotland:

Ofcom: Communications Market Report – an annual survey on the take-up and use of communications services across the UK. Questions are asked on broadband take-up and use of the internet.

Scottish Household Survey – a continuous survey which collects reliable and up-to-date information on the composition, characteristics and behaviour of Scottish Households. There are two sections of questions on the internet in the SHS. The first of these are asked about the household and cover home internet access and whether the home has a broadband connection. A more detailed series of questions are asked of an individual adult within the household, including questions on personal internet use, how the internet is accessed, where the internet is accessed and reasons for not using the internet, among others. This range of questions gives a fairly detailed picture of internet use and non-use in Scotland.

Oxford Internet Survey – this biennial survey is designed to offer detailed insights into the influence of the internet on everyday life in Britain. It collects a wealth of information from those who use the internet, non-users and ex-users. Small sample size in Scotland.

Labour Force Survey – this survey includes a single question on internet use which focuses on whether someone has ever used the internet.

Opinions Survey – a regular multi-purpose survey carried out monthly with a report on internet use published annually. This survey collects data on the breadth and reach of internet use. Small sample size in Scotland.

Taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of each of the data sources for measuring progress on the Scottish Government's ambition, the Scottish Household Survey was found to be the most robust data source. The one disadvantage of this is that no directly comparable UK data is available.

The main gaps in data on digital participation in Scotland are mainly around depth of use. Data is collected on depth of use through the OxlS survey but the small Scottish sample size means that this data cannot be considered reliable. Arguably, it is important to collect data on this measure as this reveals more about the confidence of people's use, the extent and the full benefits that internet participation can offer.

Evidence on the barriers to participation

One of the actions of the Digital Strategy is an awareness raising campaign around the benefits of digital technology. We have conducted a review of literature and secondary analysis of data to identify those who do not use the internet in Scotland, why people do not use the internet and what can be done to encourage people online. The findings are used to provide recommendations to inform the awareness raising campaign.

Analysis of the Scottish Household Survey data from 2009/2010 provides information on internet access and use among different demographic groups. Main findings of the analysis were:

- Age: older people were far less likely than younger people to have home internet access or to personally use the internet.
- Income: those with a higher income were more likely to have access and use the internet than those on lower incomes
- Educational qualifications: those with higher levels of qualifications were more likely to have access and use the internet.
- Working status: internet access and use was higher among those who were working compared with those who were not working
- Disability: internet access and use was higher among those who do not report having a disability or long-standing illness.
- Deprivation: internet access and use was lower among those living in the most deprived areas.
- The SHS shows little difference between urban and rural areas.

Although there is no comparable data from the rest of the UK, we can provide some information from the other data sources which give an indication of how things differ in the other UK nations. Ofcom (2011) discuss how, even though broadband take-up is low in the rest of the UK among lower income homes, DE socio-economic groups and older age groups, it is particularly low in Scotland. Ofcom argue that the low broadband take-up in Scotland can be almost entirely explained by particularly low take-up by these groups.

The Consumer Framework for Digital Participation developed by the Communications Consumer Panel (2010) brings together all the different reasons people give for not being online and aims to provide a mechanism to enable policy makers and service deliverers to consider digital participation from the perspective of the consumer. The Framework identifies what people need to get online and get the most from the internet:

- To get interested
- To get online
- To make it work
- To enjoy the benefits
- To manage the risks

The Scottish Household Survey includes a question for those who do not use the internet on the reasons why they do not. The responses can be grouped into three main types of reason people give for not using the internet:

- Lack of need or desire to use the internet
- Lack of knowledge of the internet or computers and/or feeling it would be too difficult to learn
- Cost of using the internet

In general, younger people were more likely than others to cite cost as their reason for not using the internet while older people were more likely to mention reasons relating to lack of need or not knowing how to use a computer. Those who would not like to use the internet were generally more likely

to mention reasons relating to a lack of need or desire to use the internet. Issues of cost were more likely to prevent people who want to use the internet compared with those who do not. This data suggests there are different typologies of non-user who have different reasons for not using the internet. Therefore, it is important to consider the groups of non-user an awareness raising campaign would target and pitch messages accordingly.

There are real challenges in encouraging non-users to use the internet. The SHS found that 38% of non-users said they would like to use the internet one day, while the majority (62%) said they would not. Three in ten (29%) thought it was likely that they would ever use the internet with 72% thinking it was unlikely. The demographic make-up of the group who do not use the internet and do not want to use it appears to be mainly older people, who have a low household income and are not working.

There have been a couple of qualitative studies (e.g. Essential Research and Ipsos MORI, 2009; Ipsos MORI, 2009) which have probed further into the reasons why people don't use the internet to fully understand what may encourage people to go online. Discussions during the focus groups suggested that it may be possible to engage non-rejecters by:

- Communicating relevant benefits, and being specific about what these benefits are.
- Providing reassurance that the internet is for them. Commonly held perceptions that may need to be challenged are that the internet is time consuming and detracts from everyday life. More positive messages could be that the internet is fun, keeps your mind active and can save money.

The think tank Demos conducted a series of focus groups with older people to further examine this group's use or non-use with the internet (Hannon and Bradwell, 2008). They concluded that the barriers that remain to getting the non-users online are not going to be successfully overcome through strategies that address material aspects of non-use (e.g. providing low cost computers). They argue it will involve a more complex approach that needs to address the multitude of factors influencing older people's internet use such as poor confidence, lack of motivation, low income and disability.

Based on the findings of the secondary analysis and the literature review, we make the following recommendations for how to encourage non-users online.

- Target non-users who do not want to use the internet
- Focus on messages of the specific benefits of the internet
- Show the internet as something that is easy to use and appropriate for everyone

There are various possible explanations for Scotland's relatively low participation rate. These include:

Lack of knowledge of computers or the internet among Scottish people – in Ofcom's Communications Market survey, those in Scotland were more likely to choose this as a reason why they did not have a broadband connection compared with those in the rest of the UK. However, this difference has not been found in other surveys.

Geography and Infrastructure – Scotland's high proportion of rural areas may mean that fewer households have the potential to access the internet. However, SHS data shows little difference in home internet access between rural and urban areas and Ofcom/BT data shows almost all of Scotland has the potential to receive broadband.

Demographic composition – if Scotland had a greater proportion of those groups who are unlikely to use the internet (i.e. older people, those with a low income etc) then this would impact on rates of internet usage. However, analysis of demographic data shows this not to be the case. That said, Scotland's participation rate compares favourably to other regions within England and it is possible that the rest of the UK's estimate of digital participation is being positively influenced by particularly high rates in the more affluent areas of south England. Therefore, demography may play a small part.

Future research

Areas for possible future research include:

- An annual updating of the information included in this evidence pack to enable trends in data to be picked up, analysis of the composition of non-users to be tracked and any recent literature to be examined and summarised.
- Investigation of why Scotland has lower levels of participation compared with the UK
- Qualitative research in Scotland to examine strategies to encourage people online.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or on 0131-244 7560.

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