

GLOBALISATION, INTERNET AND DIGITAL DIVIDE

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Abstract: *Globalization and innovation in the technological area are modern world processes that are in tight interdependency. As part of the technological revolution, the Internet represents one of the most dynamic factors of global communication; in fact it represents the communicational and technological support of globalization. This article is intended to make a longitudinal analysis upon Internet access evolution and highlight the existent inequalities from different countries and geographical regions of the world. In our perspective research in analyzing the digital divide we looked only in the global digital divide which resides in the Internet access among different regions and countries in the world. Also, a research approach and some preliminary results are shown. Finally, some conclusions and perspectives are presented.*

Key words: *globalization, internet, inequality, accessibility*

1. INTRODUCTION

In a world in continuous change, when we are moving from a production based economy towards an information based one, the end of the last century is marked by the launching of the Internet, which among other achievements in the science and IT area, transformed the world into an “agora”, a place where ideas and new concepts are created and changed, where contracts between people from any corner of the world are not only possible, but they become reality.

With a fast evolution, a great number of applications and almost global accessibility, the Internet is nowadays used to find information in all areas of interest, for commercial transactions, for social networks, for communication or entertainment. Although at a global level we have over 1 billion registered users, there are some illegalities regarding access and usage of the Internet between continents and also within the same continent.

The term digital “divide” mainly refers to the gap there is between those that have regular and efficient access to digital technologies and those who do not, and it became more and more relevant where the conditions in the developed countries became more dependent on digital technology in the democratic and economic process. According to some authors, digital divide represents “the underuse of computers and the Internet by those with a disadvantaged socio-economical background, who, for different reasons, are not connected to technological resources. These digital divides can be noticed all through the educational level of race and ethnics, gender, age and even the geographical component.” (Cuneo, 2002: 4)

For other authors, “digital divide represents the inequalities in accessing the Internet, the measure of using it, knowing the strategies of information research, the quality of technical connections and the social support, the ability to assess the quality of information and last but not least, the diversity of usage.” (DiMaggio, 2001: 310)

So, digital divide results from the socio-economical differences among communities and mainly describes their unequal access to digital information, although it is not exclusively related to the Internet.

Digital division implies fewer chances to take part in the new economy based on information, and also, there are fewer chances to be part of the educational opportunities, formation, shopping, entertainment and communication. Now, that a larger part of mankind uses the Internet regularly, in order to complete daily business, the ones that lack access to these instruments are in a greater disadvantage.

The expression “digital divide” is used to describe these inequalities, but some authors consider that this should also refer to the accessibility degree to Information Technology and Communications (ITC), to the media and the way the different segments of society can use them. Regarding the Internet, access represents only one aspect, and other parameters, like connection quality, additional services and their costs are determiners for describing digital division. That’s why the increase of digital access through the increase in the number of those using the technological instruments of this digital era is an extremely important purpose.

„All this is ending with the electronics era, its means replacing the principle of each thing done in its time, with the principle of simultaneity. Sending and receiving information at almost light speed has become the greatest industry of the world. Information consumption has the greatest consumption function worldwide. The entire globe has become an educational community on one hand and on the other hand, considering all the mutual relationships, it has been transformed to a tiny village.” (McLuhan, 97:176)

2. OBJECTIVES AND METODOLOGY

Our research aims to find out if there are some inequalities in accessing internet at the global level and analyze the existent inequalities from different countries and geographical regions of the world. Our objectives are:

O1. Determining Internet penetration ratio at a global level and for the main regions of the world between 2000 and 2009

O2. Identifying inequalities regarding Internet access among the different regions of the world

Methodologically, the two objectives have been reached by statistical data analysis regarding the population of the researched areas and also the number of Internet users and through longitudinal and comparative analysis of Internet access evolution.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Considered to be the new engine of history, the Internet has transformed the feeling of place, time and belonging, making room for a new society like no other before. Besides the undeniable advantages offered for the economic field, the Internet can also be appreciated for its ability to go beyond national borders, making time and space irrelevant. As we know, the Internet has a revolutionary nature as a social impact, and also as a force without precedent regarding development, spreading and final result.

In order to illustrate the evolution of the Internet, we analyze some statistical data regarding the number of Internet users on a global level and put in the table below some results regarding the increasing rate between 2000 and 2009 and the penetration ratio throughout the population.

World Regions	Internet Penetration Ratio 2009	Internet Penetration Ratio 2000	Growth 2000-2009
Africa	8,7	0,6	1564,9
Asia	20,5	3,2	641,4
Europe	53,0	14,4	367,3
North America	76,3	34,3	222,5
Latin America/ Caribbean	31,9	3,5	923,3
Oceania / Australia	62,1	24,6	252,6
TOTAL	26,6	5,9	449,2

Tab. 1. Internet Penetration Ratio at a global level

The number of users has exploded at a global level, from 16 million in 1995 to almost 360 million at the end of the year 2000 – the figure represented 5.9% of the global population – presently we register over one billion users (Internet World Stats). In spite this rapid spread, the number only represents 26.6% of the global population.

Regarding digital division, we can see clear inequalities in using the Internet between the different regions of the world. Thus, the greatest Internet penetration ratio was in 2009, in North America (76.3%), then Oceania / Australia (62.1%) and Europe (53%). The lowest Internet penetration ratio is noted for the African continent with 8.7% for the whole population. On the other hand, the growth rate between 2000 and 2009 reaches the highest rates in the areas where the penetration ratio was lower before this period of time. There are areas that adapt their growth rhythm to the one with the greatest Internet penetration ratio. Thus, the growth ratio in Africa is 1564.9%, in Latin America it is 923.3%, followed by Asia with 641.4%. (Table 1)

If we look at the year 2000, for the Internet penetration ratio at a global level of 5.9%, there are 3 regions: Africa (0.6%), Asia (3.2%) and Latin America / Caribbean (3.5%). The situation is the same in 2009 for Africa and Asia which remain under the global average of Internet penetration ratio (26.6%), in spite the fact that these regions register spectacular growth. Over the global average, both in 2000 and 2009 are regions like North America, Europe, Oceania / Australia.

The most pronounced digital divide is registered in North America and Africa. If in the year 2000, the proportion of Internet penetration ratio between the two regions is 57.16%, in the year 2009, this proportion decreases to 8.76%. The spectacular Internet penetration ratio growth registered in the last decade on the African continent explains the gap reduction between the two compared regions. The regions that have a solid economical development are much above the global average beating 2 or 3 times this value.

Issues and discrepancies of Internet usage can be noticed at an international level. According to the above data, we can see that the number of Internet users has increased a lot lately, and we can notice an impressive growth in certain areas, much faster than in previous other media technologies. We can clearly see that North America, Australia and Europe are the continents with the greatest number of Internet users. Although these discrepancies could be overlooked, the fact that there are huge differences between the above mentioned nations and continents, they cannot remain unobserved. For example, in Asia, countries like Japan, with an Internet penetration ratio of 75.5% for its population in 2009, Hong Kong (69.2%, 2009) are

next to countries like Uzbekistan (8,9%), Tajikistan (8,2%) or even Bangladesh which for a population of over 100 million people, only has 556,000 Internet users (0,4%).

We will have a much clearer image of the global Internet access if we compare a selective number of countries from the whole world. (Table 2)

Country	Date	Internet Users	% of population
Albania	December 2009	750000	20,6
Algeria	December 2009	4 100 000	12
Australia	December 2009	20 970 490	60,4
Bangladesh	December 2009	556000	0,4
Brasil	December 2009	72 027 000	14,1
Denmark	December 2009	4 629 600	84,2.
Germany	December 2009	61 973 100	75,3
India	December 2009	81,000,000	7
New Zealand	December 2009	3,200,000	76,3
South Africa	December 2009	5300 000	10,8
United States	December 2009	259 561 000	76,2

Tab. 2. Internet access in particular countries

Digital divide, associated with the globalization phenomenon, describes a redistribution of privileges and favors “of wealth and poverty, opportunities and lack of perspectives, force and lack of strength, freedom and captivity.” (Beck, 2003:82).

4. CONCLUSION

The digital divide concept surprises different forms of social inequalities, and one method of limiting this would be promoting certain policies of social development at a global level which could generate e-inclusion. The strategies for e-inclusion generate both economical development and the reduction of social digital divide. Other perspectives of the analysis, the social and demographical ones are the object of subsequent studies.

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