

Exploring the Digital Divide: A Case of Russia and Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Information and communication technology (ICT) is accepted as one of the foundations of modern society. ICTs have become an important part of the modern culture and almost all aspects of life. The information revolution started in the developed countries and mainly these countries have benefitted from these technologies. There are significant differences between developed and developing countries regarding accessing and using ICTs. This can be defined as the global digital divide. There are also different types of the digital divide within a country, such as the gender divide, the age divide, and the income divide. In this paper, the authors explore the digital divide within and between Russia and Turkey.

Keywords: *Developed Countries, Developing Countries, Digital Divide, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Information Revolution*

1. INTRODUCTION

ICTs have dramatically transformed the societies and the economies around the world over the past few decades. With advanced ICTs, especially the Internet, today, the world has become a global village. However, globalized markets are not equally accessible to all people and nations (Wijers, 2010). Although developed countries enjoy the benefits of ICTs in almost all areas of life, developing countries do not benefit enough from these technologies. Emerging economies cannot afford to meet the western levels of ICTs that are required to participate in a global market as conditions of entry are often too high (Wijers, 2010). While

the ICTs in general, the Internet and the World Wide Web in particular, have made life easier by facilitating easy communication with virtually everyone, and easy access to information located virtually anywhere in the world, these technologies have also widened the gap between the rich and the poor, the 'have' and the 'have nots' (Chowdhury, 2002, p. 379). In the information age that we are live in those who are either unable to access the Internet and the World Wide Web through the application of ICTs are increasingly disadvantaged in their access to information (Cullen, 2001).

The inequality in the availability of information technology infrastructure between industrialized countries and the developing countries has always been recognized by various agencies, like the World Bank and United

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Nations Development Programme (Ogunsola & Okusaga, 2006). As a result of advances in information technology, the knowledge gaps between the information-rich and the information-poor have deepened over time and that has caused excluding certain parts of the world from enjoying the fruits of the global village (Iskandarani, 2008). Then the world has begun to notice the phenomenon named the digital divide. New technologies, while improving our life in many ways have created the digital divide (Chowdhury, 2002, p. 379).

Today information technology is more accessible and affordable than even before. While the telecommunications infrastructure has grown and ICT has become less expensive and more accessible, today more than ever, the invisible line that separates rich from poor, men from women and the educated from the illiterate also separates the connected from the disconnected (Zaidi, 2003). The unequal access to and utilization of ICTs has accepted as one of the prevalent issues of our times (Sciadas, 2005). Almost every indicator shows that there is a significant difference between developed and developing countries in terms of accessing and using ICTs. For example, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), while approximately 72% of the population is Internet users in developed countries, this ratio is 21% in developing countries. The number of fixed telephone lines per 100 inhabitants in developed countries is estimated about 41, but it is 12 in developing countries (ITU, 2010). It can be challenging to access up-to-date knowledge and information in developing countries (Suchak & Eisengrein, 2008). There is a marked difference between developed and developing countries in terms of their take up and ability to use the ICTs (Genus & Nor, 2007).

The main aim of this paper is to explore the digital divide within and between Russia and Turkey. For this reason the authors examine the differences within and between these countries in terms of ICT usage basing on different statistic data.

2. DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide has become a convenient phrase to describe the perceived disadvantage of those who either are unable or do not choose to make use of the ICTs in their daily life (Cullen, 2001). The digital divide can be defined as “the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access ICTs and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities” (OECD, 2001, p. 5). The term “digital divide” was introduced by Larry Irving, Jr., the former US Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Telecommunication and Communication in the mid-1990s in order to focus public attention on the existing gap in access to information services between those who can afford to purchase the computer hardware and software necessary to participate in the global information network, and low income families and communities who cannot (Boje & Dragulanescu, 2003). The global digital divide refers to differences between countries in terms of the access to ICTs. The global digital divide is generally defined as the inequality in use and ownership of ICTs, computers and the Internet in particular, across and within nations (Wijers, 2010). This is important as the digital divide seems to limit developing countries in fully using the potential of the ICTs for poverty eradication and economic growth (Wijers, 2010).

The term digital divide has been applied to the gap that exists in most countries between those with ready access to the tools of ICTs, and the knowledge that they provide access to, and those without such access or skills (Cullen, 2001). Lack of access may be the result of socioeconomic factors, geographical factors, educational, attitudinal and generational factors, or it may be through physical disabilities (Cullen, 2001).

Norris (2001, p. 4) sees the digital divide as “any and every disparity within the online community” and accepts it as a multidimen-

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