

Chapter XXVII

Precisions about the Broadband Divide in Chile

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to quantify more exactly the adoption of broadband at the household level in Chile by assessing its impact on three types of digital divide: between users and nonusers of the Internet, between usage at home and elsewhere, and between home broadband users and modem home users. This was done by a statistical analysis of WIP-Chile surveys of 2003 and 2006. At least in Chile, the main digital gap is still between users and non users of the Internet, both in terms of age and education level. Income mainly affects the probability of having broadband access at home. Since broadband has rapidly expanded among all socioeconomic segments, it is becoming less relevant as a predictor of access and Web usage. Other factors are also weak predictors of both residential use of the Internet and broadband connections at home. New data and surveys are required to clarify the point.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines different aspects affecting three levels or types of digital divide in Chile: between users and nonusers of the Internet in the first place; between home users and users elsewhere in the second place, and between home users with broadband vis-à-vis those who have a modem connection. The evidence examined is taken from surveys made by the local team of the World Internet Project (WIP).¹ WIP is a longitudinal,

internationally comparable study about Internet usage in everyday life.²

According to the Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), the digital divide refers to the gap in terms of both access and usage of information technologies (IT) among persons, households, firms, and geographical areas of different socioeconomic levels (OECD, 2001). That inequality exists even among individuals who have Internet access. Indeed, countries attached to WIP, such as Chile, have found that the place of access and speed of connection are increasingly

among the most important differentiators of Web usage (Center for the Digital Future, 2007; WIP-Chile, 2006).

Household connections, for instance, and in contrast to workplace, school, or cybercafés, generally allow longer times of usage as well as a wider repertoire of online activities. Among Web users at home, speed of connection is especially important—thus broadband users perform more online activities (Di Maggio & Hargittai, 2001, p. 79; Dwivedi & Choudrie, 2003; Fox, 2005; Husing & Selhofer, 2004). It is important to point out these differentiating aspects of Web access, since they imply different social, participatory, and empowering consequences (Norris, 2001).

This chapter aims to quantify more exactly the adoption of broadband at the household level in Chile, assuming its potentialities are not completely fulfilled when access is elsewhere—autonomy and time of usage are limited at school, work, or cibercafés, therefore restricting how individuals can take advantage of the technology. We will therefore go beyond average broadband penetration in the country. We will distinguish in detail between those who have dial-up (modem) connections at home and those who have broadband, and what that implies. Our objectives are the following:

1. Determine the magnitude of the three types of digital divide mentioned before, that is: (i) between users and nonusers of the Internet, (ii) between usage at home and elsewhere, and (iii) between usage at home through broadband and dial-up connections
2. Study the factors affecting these divides, determine their influence, and assess whether these factors are common to all the gaps or not
3. Delve into the impact of broadband on daily activities, that is, on interpersonal communications and “off-line” activities, notably the traditional mass media

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter is based on logistic regressions and ratios calculated from our WIP-Chile database, taken from surveys conducted in 2003, 2004, and 2006 among Web users and nonusers.³ We focused our analysis on data from Santiago, Chile’s capital, which concentrates 40% of the national population of almost 16 million.⁴ The WIP-Chile surveys consist of a panel of 1000 face-to-face, random-sampled individuals aged 12 to 60 years. The questionnaire is shared by all countries participating in the project, yet each team adds some extra questions if required. The WIP questionnaire tries to determine who is online, how, for how long, and why; and the technological, social, and political attitudes of both users and nonusers of the Web, as well as their patterns of media usage, e-commerce, and other subjects. Web users are asked about their online behavior both online and off-line, the place where they access the Internet, and the connection they enjoy at home. In this context, an Internet user is someone who has personally used the Internet at least once in the last three months. Usage is understood as sending e-mails and/or Web browsing, at least.

INTERNET AND BROADBAND IN CHILE

According to the United Nations, Chile had 28% of Internet users in 2003 using as a base the population above six years of age. The figure was 18% in 2000 (United Nations, 2003). According to WIP-Chile’s estimates, Web users grew from 33% in 2004 to 40% of the total population in 2006. These percentages are the highest in Latin America (see Figure 1), although lower than those of developed nations (WIP-Chile, 2006).

Yet despite these favorable figures, the digital divide has also increased in some relevant aspects—in particular, the richest and best educated groups are those who most increased their access to the Internet at home. At the same time, the age divide remains high in Chile because the youngest have access at school, regardless of their socioeco-

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