Bridging the Digital Divide in Nigerian Information Landscape: The Role of the Library

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ABSTRACT

In the global economy, the use of ICTs in everyday activities enables individual or communities to reduce the social divide and also enable them benefit from the internet and other information and communication technologies (ICTs), thereby competing effectively in the global economy. This study examines the concept of digital divide, types and manifestations globally and in the Nigerian context and the role of the library in bridging the persistent gap. The chapter further highlights previous attempts to bridge the digital gap in Nigeria and concludes with a range of recommendations.

KEYWORDS


INTRODUCTION

The use of ICT for human development has brought, in its wake, both opportunities and challenges. One major challenge is the unequal access and ability to use ICTs. This is the digital divide, creating a “frightening gap” between the information haves and the have-nots. Bridging the digital divide has therefore become an important feature and a key factor in sustainable development. Many people the world over, especially adults, and in developing countries, still lack the fundamental digital skills that are necessary for life and work. Except the digital divide is bridged, more adults will still be left behind as a result of digital exclusion. Internet World Stats (2019) assert that the term became popular among concerned parties, such as scholars, policy makers, and advocacy groups, in the late 1990s. Research has however concluded over the years that the “Digital Divide” is a global phenomenon with far-reaching effects and broad definitions (Tammi, 2004). Pimienta (2009) views the digital divide as nothing other than the reflection of the social divide in the digital world, and according to Tammi (2004) it is “the mainstream buzzword for technology inequality”, the exclusion of people from the digital world.

In the global economy, the use of ICTs in everyday activities such as education, economic activities, entertainment, travel and communication, offers opportunities to reduce the social divide for
individual beings or communities and enables them to benefit from the Internet and other Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in order to improve literacy, democracy, social mobility, economic equality and growth. However, there are a lot of obstacles to overcome in order to bring the opportunities closer to the disadvantaged people and groups. The most common and prominent of these obstacles happen to be the lack of relevant education, literacy and an infrastructure for connectivity i.e. ICTs.

Sadly however, access to ICTs does not automatically provide access to opportunities for human development. According to the Information Society Commission (ISC) the digital divide is much more complex than physical access to Internet-linked computers. Education, ethics and participation have been identified as key players to bridging the digital factor, more specifically a digital and information literacy as pointed out by Dunn (2013), with telecommunication systems, computer hardware and software being predictable prerequisites. OECD (2001) corroborates this mentioning that people, education and learning are at the heart of bridging the digital divide.

Unless these issues are sufficiently paid the necessary attention, the digital divide will only get wider with developing countries suffering most from this inequality. Access to ICTs varies from country to country. While some countries have about 90 percent access, others have little or none at all. Many developing countries are not advancing at the expected speed and those technologies are yet to be fully integrated into their social and economic lives. Majority of these countries, like Nigeria, are faced with insufficient funds, inadequate ICT facilities for the teeming population of over 150 million people, lack of, or poor and inadequate infrastructural support like erratic electricity supply and especially network infrastructure such as poor internet services, poor maintenance of ICT facilities, low bandwidth. Hence, Nigeria faces a massive digital divide.

ICTs have become a vital engine of any economy, an essential feature for survival in the global information economy. Arikpo, Ososisan, and Usoro (2009) see it as an essential infrastructure that can promote development in other sectors like agriculture, education, defense, health, industry, banking, transportation and tourism. Digital divide has been identified as affecting access to a broad range of public services including education, health and other social services (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2012). The global nature of ICTs therefore enables developing countries, like Nigeria, to compete in a global economy, where information is currency and wallets are digital (Bulls, 2016). According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) as reported by Intel (2007), Nigeria in 2004 had just seven PCs per 1,000 inhabitants, internet connectivity was, and is still in short supply, the street price of a new PC is well beyond most Nigerians’ reach, and consumer financing is limited, civil service resources to design, implement and administer a digital inclusion program are limited. Similarly, Tayo, Thompson and Thompson (2016) assert that Nigeria has ICT facilities that are limited to urban areas at exorbitant rates, only affordable by the middle and upper classes of society, thus making many of the rural and suburban areas unable to fully participate in the emerging information economy.

Consequently, people lack the knowledge and skills to use ICT facilities, where available, and therefore need the necessary ICT literacy in order to measure up. Intel (2007) stated also that Nigeria needs to extend technology access, expand connectivity, shore up its struggling education system, otherwise bridging the digital divide will remain an illusion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work builds on Pimienta’s (2009) Information Communication for Development (ICT4D) model as presented in Figure 1.

In this model Pimienta (2009) postulates that it takes a holistic approach to effectively address the digital divide in any given environment. According to this model, it will take a combination of infrastructure, ‘infrastructure’ and infoculture to surmount the obstacle of digital divide. He sees “Infrastructure” (of ICT) as the devices that permit the signal to be transmitted (such as lines,
Use of the Internet by Medical Practitioners in Private Hospitals in Warri, Delta State, Nigeria
[www.igi-global.com/article/use-internet-medical-practitioners-private/62838?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/use-internet-medical-practitioners-private/62838?camid=4v1a)

Integration of Educational Games in Synchronous Virtual Classroom: A Case Study
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