

Value of Internet, Digital Divide

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Abstract- Usually, the value of a certain commodity is measured in terms of its monetary worth (Varian, 2013). For example, the value of a television can be measured by the amount of money the person is willing to pay to acquire it. However, there are some commodities whose value is much more difficult to measure. An example is the Internet. The Internet is defined as a large network of networks which connects millions of computers across the world (Beal, 2010). It is a medium by which people can connect and can access information. Let us say that tomorrow, the Internet will suddenly disappear and will be gone forever. For sure, the lives of many people who are used to the Internet will never be the same. From that scenario only, it is safe to say that Internet is so valuable. Nevertheless, there were days that the Internet was not invented yet. The origins of the Internet can be dated just in August of 1962. The concept of computer networking was just developing at that time. In fact, it was only on October 24, 1995 that the term "Internet" was invented ((Leiner et. al., 2015). From that time, the Internet has changed much. Some people may even remember what was it like to live without the Internet. For example, to look for answers to questions, one had to look for volumes of books or encyclopedias. Questions regarding weather or direction required a lot of work and effort. There was no Facebook, Youtube or any media by which people can interact with each other regardless of geographical location. With the widespread use of the Internet however, there are still people or locations today that do not have any access to the Internet. This causes a term called "digital divide." Digital divide is defined as the gap between people or places that have access to the Internet or modern information and communication technology and those that do not have access (Rouse, 2014). In the U.S alone, digital divide is indeed a reality. According to Rouse (2014), the June 2013 U.S. White House broadband report showed that 71% of the American household have adopted a broadband while the remaining 29% have not. Some people argue that the digital divide must be lessened, if not closed, because they believe that an access to the Internet can increase economic growth and social mobility among other areas. On the contrary, others have argued that reliance to the Internet increases laziness and limits real social interaction. This paper discusses the value of the internet in different fields. This will also show some issues such as the growing digital divide and some future trends.

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Introduction

Usually, the value of a certain commodity is measured in terms of its monetary worth (Varian, 2013). For example, the value of a television can be measured by the amount of money the person is willing to pay to acquire it. However, there are some commodities whose value is much more difficult to measure. An example is the Internet. The Internet is defined as a large network of networks which connects millions of computers across the world (Beal, 2010). It is a medium by which people can connect and can access information. Let us say that tomorrow, the Internet will suddenly disappear and will be gone forever. For sure, the lives of many people who are used to the Internet will never be the same. From that scenario only, it is safe to say that Internet is so valuable.

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Value of the Internet

The Internet is a great tool and resource. It is a great facility that can help a lot of people in completing several tasks. It is also useful in different fields. It provides various services to make people's lives more convenient. Some of the benefits of having Internet access are outlined below.

Information

The Internet is a massive storage of information. Answers from basic to difficult questions are just a click away. There are also numerous theses, dissertations and research papers available online. The Internet can be a great source of learning especially for students. In fact, several schools use the Internet as a teaching methodology. They use the

Internet to provide modules, examinations, quizzes, among others. Moreover, the Internet is a useful tool in conducting research (Deore, 2012). Several universities offer online library systems to make research more convenient, easier and faster.

Communications

Communications between people has been easier because of the presence of the Internet. People now are not restricted by geographical conditions to interact with each other. Sending messages through electronic mail is easy, fast and free. The presence of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and the like has made connection and interaction faster. Video conferencing is especially useful for organizations that need to conduct urgent meetings but are restricted by geography. On the contrary, for those who do not have access to the Internet, communication can be in a form of telephone or snail mail. This may require a lot of time and expense.

Shopping

People can avoid all the hassle of shopping with the presence of the Internet. With just a few clicks, people can buy almost anything, anywhere! Moreover, it is usually cheaper to buy online and it is easier to compare the prices of goods between retailers.

Entertainment

The Internet has been a platform now to download games, music, videos and a lot of smartphone or tablet applications. If you missed an episode of your favorite television show, you can just easily watch it in the Internet.

Employment

Those who have been seeking jobs can now seek them online with the presence of the Internet. A lot of people were hired through the access of various employment websites available.

Banking

The Internet has made the banking system easier and convenient for the people. People can log in to their respective accounts online and pay their bills, send money or even just to know their remaining balance. This allows the people to avoid all the hassle of standing in lines and waiting for the teller to call them if it is their turn. Moreover, people need not worry of the opening or closing time because they can make transactions anytime and anywhere as long as there is the Internet. Without the internet, people have to do the traditional way of paying their bills and sending money.

Internet of Things (IoT)

The term "Internet of Things" is defined as the interconnection of specific devices within the Internet (ZoneAlarm, 2014). To put it simply, it is where several devices are connected through the Internet to perform specific tasks. Examples of IoT's are smart refrigerators, thermostats, door locks and some medical devices. For example, in case you are in a grocery store and you are not sure if you have enough eggs in the refrigerator for tomorrow's breakfast, by means of a smartphone application, you can track of what you have in your refrigerator. This can then remind you of the things that you need to buy.

Factors Contributing to the Digital Divide:

Figure 1 shows the percentage of American households with Internet from 1997 to 2009 (DOC, 2009). We can see here that Internet access continues to increase through the years yet interestingly, the digital divide continues to grow. This is because to several factors as what will be discussed here.

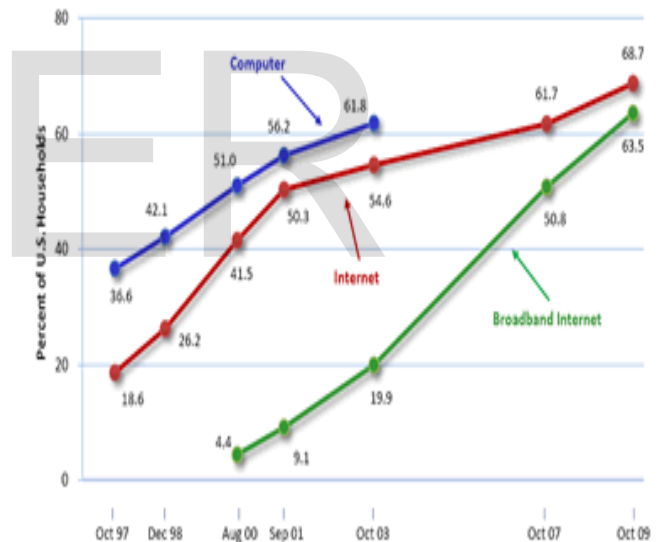


Figure 1. Percent of U.S. Households with Computers and Internet (1997-2009)

Education

According to the study conducted by Stanford University (1997), U.S. households who have higher levels of education are likely to use the internet than those who have lower levels of education. This was backed up by an NTIA study (1998) that showed that those who have college degrees are 10 times more likely to have internet access than those who only finished high school.

Income

Not surprisingly, Figure 2 shows that there is a direct relationship between internet access and family income (DOC, 2009). In 2009, the digital divide between the highest and lowest earning incomes was 59.5%. The higher-income families are more likely to have Internet access than the lower-income families. Moreover, due to lower-income levels, poor neighbourhoods lack the infrastructure to have access in the Internet as compared to the higher-income neighborhoods. In short, poverty increases more the digital divide.

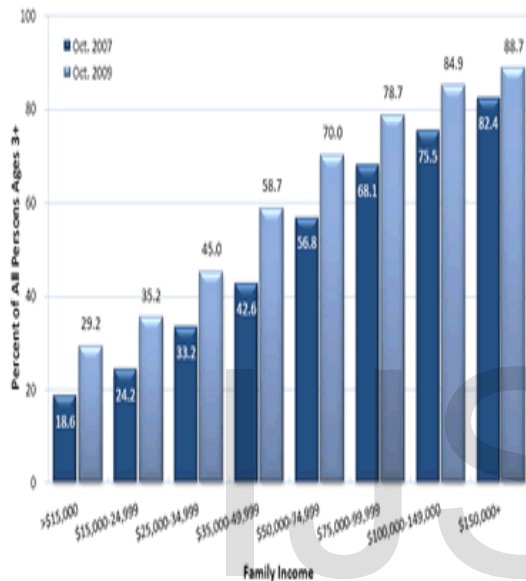


Figure 2. Percent of U.S. Households who Have Internet at Home by Family Income

Race

Figure 3 shows the percentage of American households using the Internet at home in the years 2007 and 2009 (DOC, 2009). In 2007, the digital divide between White Non-Hispanic and Black Non-Hispanic were 20.1%. This decreased a bit in 2009 when the gap reduces to 19.8%. The figure also shows that there is a relatively large gap, in terms of internet usage, between the Whites and the American Indians. It also shows that the Asian Non-Hispanic uses Internet the most. In terms of Internet access, the Blacks, American Indians and the Hispanics are lagging behind. In a cultural study conducted by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (2010), it was observed that for the Hispanic community, computers were seen as a luxury rather than a need. They believe that computers (and the Internet) takes away their time with their families and isolates them from the real world. On the other hand, African-Americans had a negative experience with technology. On the contrary,

Asian-Americans have a great emphasis on education and thus emphasize the need for technological advancements.

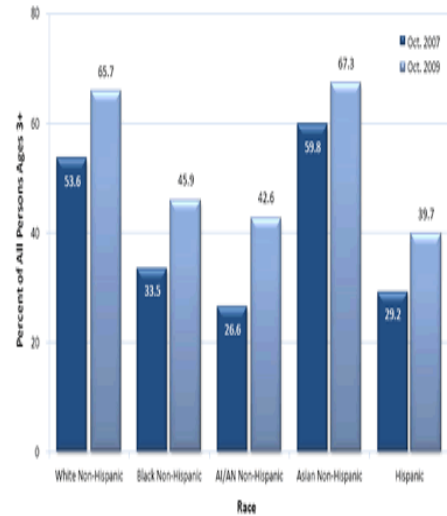


Figure 3. Percent of U.S. Households who Have Internet at Home by Race

Figure 4 shows the main reasons why some households would prefer not to have Internet Access in their homes (DOC, 2009). Majority of the respondents said that they do not need or they are not interested in having an Internet access. The next major reasons are that having an internet connection is too expensive or they do not have computers.

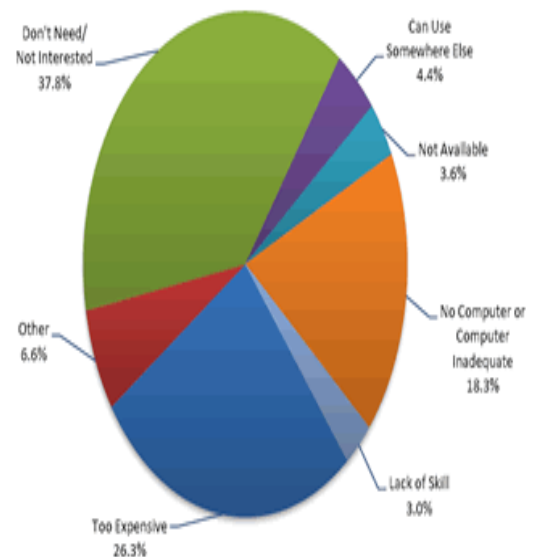


Figure 4. Main Reasons for Having No Internet at Home

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The Internet has been proven to be very useful in a lot of industries and sectors. In this age of information, the Internet serves as a great tool to obtain information in the easiest way possible – within a click of a mouse. Communications between people became easier as well. E-mails, online chats, video chats and conferencing made connection between people or groups not a matter of geography. Transactions can also be made online thus avoiding a lot of hassle. Indeed, Internet access allows anyone to be immersed in the different socio-economic aspects of the world today. Nevertheless, there has been a growing divide between those who can and those who cannot access the Internet. This is due to several factors that must be taken into consideration.

The government must recognize the significance of having Internet access especially this day and age. Knowing the factors that contribute to the digital divide, they must make policies that should narrow down the divide. For example, policies that will certainly increase the competition between the manufacturers of computers and Internet service providers will reduce the costs of computer and the Internet. This will equip better the lower-income families to avail such services. The government must subsidize internet access for lower-income households. There should not be discrimination with regards to the installation of Internet infrastructures whether it be in a rich or a poor neighborhood.

As a matter of fact, the government already made some initiatives to narrow down the digital divide. These are through the community access centers (CAC's). These centers are important resources for those who do not have Internet access in their school or workplace. However, these centers need more funding to be expanded more and strengthened. Common CAC users are observed to be those of the unemployed and the lower-income groups.

Moreover, the society must change its attitude towards technology. In this time and age, the

Internet is proven to be necessity and not a luxury. It has of course its disadvantages just like anything else in this world. Disregarding the Internet because of its disadvantages will only lead to more disadvantages. For example, a college student who did not choose to have Internet to avoid pornography also avoided himself of the benefits of easy and fast research.

In reality, computers and the Internet are not enough. Various institutions such as communities and schools should train staff to promote the best application of resources. These staff should be able to impart their skills and talents to others.

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