

Digital Age Gap

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Comparing age gaps in digitalization differs through the world and even within Europe. For example, research showed that elderly Europeans use the internet less often than their American counterparts. Similarly, there is a difference between western and northern Europe compared to eastern and southern Europe with the latter using digital services less often. Each country should enact laws and regulations that favour the spread of information and communication technologies and allow citizens the right to information no matter where they are. As a social aspect of overcoming digital inequality, awareness should be raised of the need to acquire skills in the use of new technologies and encourage vulnerable groups such as the elderly on the use of new technology.

For this reason, more and more research dealing with digital technologies is being done to try and understand the demographic picture of users, i.e. their age, gender, place of residence, level of education, and income are taken into account. It is believed that all these categories affect the digital divide i.e. inequalities.

One of the key factors influencing digital inequality is whether one possesses skills to use new technologies. Schaarschmidt et al. (2012), did focus on age differences and its meaning for acquiring a certain innovative digital culture as well as related educational activity of mostly younger people. Author Van Dijk emphasizes the most important skills: operational, formal, informational, communication, creative and strategic skills, and defines digital inequality as the difference in possession of the before mentioned skills. Furthermore, in his text Dijk mentions several levels of digital inequality: access to digital technologies, skills of using digital technologies, and the independent use of the technologies. (Van Dijk, 2014, S. 140).

If we consider the matter as being a young vs. old relationship, we oversimplify it. The use of digital tools is influenced by several factors: gender, socio-economic environment, level of education, and location (rural-urban). The availability of networks, connectivity, and computers is also important, as well as the creation of the environment, sensitization of the population, and incentives, i.e. motivation to use. Therefore, non-formal learning and teaching the elderly (through courses and seminars) are common practices. An example would be offering free computer use courses organized by associations or other institutions (Zadar City Library is one possible example).

Many elderly, lacking the latest digital knowledge, are at risk of being left behind. There are some examples, especially during COVID-19 such as: A woman, who had not set up mobile

payment, and was left alone in the service centre at a loss. In another case, an elderly Chinese man without a phone, was asked to get off the bus after failing to show the driver his health-status code via the app used at all public places. These incidents are stark reminders of the widening digital gap for the elderly (<https://bigthink.com/the-present/digital-divide-age-gap>). Given the aging population, in Europe, China, and the developed world, the digital gap is a pronounced problem. Given the development of digitalization around the world, it is not fair or desirable to say that someone is “too old” for technology or that technology is only “for the young”. Globally, tech companies are trying to educate the elderly, giving them in-store support on how to make digital payments. Advanced technologies are being specifically adapted with the elderly in mind, with the goal of improving their quality of life, for example The Davos Agenda 2021.

According to Dimić-Vrkić (2014), we must be aware of the need for continuous investment in the education of young people as new technologies change and complement very quickly, while on the other hand we must raise awareness of the need for greater intergenerational solidarity to reduce all these divisions (Dimić-Vrkić, 2014, S. 421).

The generation gap in using digital services exists because younger generations are more open to using new technology but is also connected to one's education and cultural capital. When digital inequality is decreased, then social inequality is also decreased. (Krištofić, 2007).

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