Chapter 62

Digital Inclusion and Electronic Government:
Looking for Convergence in the Decade 1997–2008

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the results of the search carried out in the Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) database, with the aim of shedding light on the status of the connection between digital inclusion and electronic government. The theme is the leitmotif of the authors' research projects. The method of search is detailed, and the strategies used are presented. The search took place at two different times: in August 2006 and in October 2008. The results of each survey are presented separately, with the purpose of comparison and to emphasize the differences between one and the other. Two aspects were the focus of the analysis of the retrieved items: the process of information retrieval and the objective and questions of research. In the 2006 survey, the points that stand out are: that researchers need to be competent in information retrieval from bibliographic databases; the new role of public libraries and librarians, with respect to electronic government; and the importance of formulating national policy on information and electronic government. The second study highlighted again: the need for informational competence on the part of researchers for the retrieval of information; the concept of Information Asymmetry, as a new component in the relationship between digital inclusion and electronic government; the importance of the architecture of information in government Web sites and the role of professional information; and electronic citizenship or cyber-citizenship. This study showed that "digital inclusion" and "electronic government" is a "kaleidoscopic" topic because it reveals many other facets, according to the evolution of the use and non-use of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), particularly access to and use of information on the Internet. However, one idea seems central and permeates all considerations of

this relationship: that the implementation of electronic government and its success go far beyond technology deployment. The effectiveness of electronic government depends on many more issues involving the participation of citizens. This participation depends on issues related to the provision of information and care with the architecture of information for government Web sites, in addition to training information for citizens.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the search carried out in the Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) database with the aim of shedding light on the status of the connection between digital inclusion and electronic government. The questions and objective addressed by this research on "digital inclusion and electronic government" were outlined by the Information Policies and Digital Inclusion Studies Group (Grupo de Estudos em Políticas de Informação e Inclusão Digital - Gepindi), of the Institute of Information Science at the Federal University of Bahia (ICI/UFBA), Brazil, and the Communication and Information in New Technologically Mediated Contexts Group, at the Research Unit CETAC.MEDIA, Centre of Studies in Technologies and Science Communication at the University of Aveiro, Portugal.

The considerations underpinning the formulation of the research questions are outlined in the first section, entitled Background. The review of literature is the research itself and this is described in the section: "Main Focus of the Chapter", where the "Method" of bibliographical research and the "Discovery" are presented. The "Discovery" took place at two separate moments, through the analysis of papers located in the Library and Information Science Abstracts Database (LISA). The section "Future Trends" discusses possibilities for future research and is followed by the "Conclusion".

BACKGROUND

Since 2003, the theme of digital inclusion has been studied by Gepindi under the INFOINCLUSION Studies Program. The underlying rationale behind this work is the concept of digital inclusion, with access to information on the Internet being the central issue. This condition is a question of ethics and citizenship in the XXI century. The ethical issue involves the recognition of everyone's right to access e-information while citizenship comprises "electronic" citizens, exercising their rights and respecting their duties through the services provided by remote access.

Access to e-government information is associated to this condition. Increasingly, governments around the world are becoming e-governments. They communicate their information and services through digital means and advocate the promotion of digital inclusion. Visibility and deployment occur through the means of portals, which enable the State to reach citizens and to be understood by them. In this way, they should be intelligible and easily incorporated into the daily transactions that take place between citizens and government.

Searching for information on government portals, even if they are user-friendly and logical, can be complex, or even impossible, for those who are not information literate. Therefore, it is necessary to instruct people towards information literacy education. However, not everyone, in the short to mid-term, will succeed in obtaining the necessary skills to interact virtually with governments, search for information or use information systems. In this situation, the role of intermediaries is fundamental in order to help citizens that may not otherwise reach an adequate level of information literacy.

In short, digital inclusion does not exist unless a citizen has access to the information available on networks and is able to use it in their lives, as

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