

Chapter 13

Exploring Relationships Between the Consumption of Digital Books and Digital Divide

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ABSTRACT

Determining how notions of digital divide influence decision making for organizations is problematic, not least because the concept of digital divide itself is amorphous, evolving, and rooted in consumer and organizational awareness and their level of technological adoption. Although a considerable amount of research in information and communication technology (ICT) has been done to conceptualize how the emerging technologies reduce or complicate digital divide, no parallel research has been conducted on the impact of digital books on digital divide. Drawing on a social constructivist paradigmatic perspective, this chapter examines the dynamics of value propositions in digital books. The chapter concludes by calling for a greater and deeper understanding of digital divide, as well as further research on quantitative approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of ICT, and the internet in particular, has led to the implementation of a whole range of new services that have completely changed the way individuals and firms interact and communicate, do business, pursue economic growth, and education (Cruz-Jesus et al, 2016; Gonclaves, 2018).

The digital economy, also referred to as a knowledge economy, has brought about a world in which wealth and power increasingly depend on information technology, intellectual property, and control over information flows (Shapiro and Varian, 1999; Carr, 2010; Simmons, 2008; Davenport and Beck, 2001; Salehan, et al., 2018).

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In one sense, such an economy provides further democratisation in the spread of ideas and resources; in another, it contributes to a 'digital divide' between those with wide access to the internet and those without (Epstein, Nisbet and Gillespie, 2011; DiMaggio, et al., 2004; Cuervo and Menendez, 2006; Page, et al., 2010; Bolt and Crawford, 2000). The concept of digital divide is normatively charged. Its usual formulation appears to confound prescription and description. Friemel (2014) reports:

'Due to the pervasiveness of the Internet, an increasing number of public and private services are re-designed as online solutions, and new proprietary applications are emerging. The combination of this increase of online services relevant for the economic, political, cultural and private life and the disparity of their use leads to inequalities on the level of individuals, social groups and nations.' (p. 314). Friemel argues that additional distinctions have been introduced in the realm of digital divide research which include the differentiation of adoption, access, usage patterns and skills. In this context, the existence of the digital inequalities both between and within countries, poses a major threat to the fulfilment of ICT potential. The digital divide has been defined as the gap between individuals, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access ICT and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities. (OECD, 2011; Goncalves, 2018; Belloc, 2018). In her study on Italian voters' behaviour, Belloc (2018) noted that the larger spectrum of choices made available by digital television has made it easier for citizens to find their preferred content on programmes offered by TV channels and to finely personalise their consumption baskets.

Determining how notions of digital divide influence decision making for organisations is problematic, not least because the concept of digital divide itself is amorphous, evolving, and rooted in consumer and organisational awareness and their level of technological adoption. The concept represents a complex phenomenon that is at one and the same ubiquitous yet elusive, completely prosaic yet vague, easy to conceptualise, but frustratingly prone to misperceptions. Researchers have defined digital divide in a variety of ways, but with no conceptual framework to link different types of computer-mediated environments or indicate their interaction in influencing effective online marketing strategy. The potential of new media tools, used in an appropriate combination, and a strategy to manage each of these, can create the basis of a sound marketing strategy that integrates offline and online modalities. No study of computer-mediated marketing environments (CMMEs) and its effect on marketing can begin without an accurate (or close) explanation of what the concept of the 'digital divide' implies. While experts and lay people alike have a feel for what it may mean, the term itself appears to defy a very close description to others. This chapter contributes to extant knowledge on digital divide, particularly the impact of digital divide in the bookstores industry and also reinforces academic behaviour related to issues wider than publication, e.g. understanding consumer behaviour in the development of innovative business models in the industry, particularly marketing communications programme to target those segments that are digitally disaffected. A two-stage research design is presented to solicit perspectives on the online marketing challenges confronting marketing executives in the bookstore industry.

CONTEXTUALISING DIGITAL DIVIDE AND DIGITAL BOOKS

There is a debate in expert circles about the definition of the digital divide itself, and in this debate lies the key to the conceptual framework for this research. Popular perception seems to point to at least this one common understanding of the digital divide on socio-economic differences (James, 2008). In their ecological study on gender and digital divide in Latin America, Gray, Gainous and Wagner (2017)

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