

Part V.

The International Dimension of Information Technology



Chapter XVI

The Information Age: Apartheid, Cultural Imperialism, or Global Village?

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This chapter¹ examines implications of the information revolution for the global inequalities between North and South. A multidimensional empirical taxonomy of information technology is provided to chart its diffusion throughout the world. Two major conclusions ensue from this analysis: 1) the information revolution is still very much in its beginning stages; and 2) it is limited primarily to the developed nations of the North. Based on past practice, the technical operating features of the Internet, and a content analysis of one Internet discussion group, three possible development scenarios are offered. Although no firm conclusions are possible, analysis of the Internet does reveal that technologically and empirically greater opportunity exists now for the previously excluded (i.e., the South) to participate. However, the question remains as to whether this is sufficient to redress the gross imbalance between North and South.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of development does not have a long history. It dates back to the industrial revolution which first produced global differences among the peoples of the world in terms of socioeconomic development. The most profound result of this revolution was the huge gain in human productivity, which in turn significantly raised individual income (Hedley, 1992, pp. 63-97). Between 1801 and 1901, total national income in Britain increased more than 600% (Mitchell, 1962, p. 366). By 1870, workers in industrial nations earned 11 times more than their counterparts in nonindustrial countries. Moreover, the advantages of industrialization have been cumulative: today, as we embark upon the so-called information revolution, per capita income is 52 times greater in developed than less developed countries

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