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Ermakovich E., Levitskaya M.

Internet Access in Developing Countries: Africa

Belarusian National Technical University
Minsk, Belarus

The average person spends nearly six hours a day on the Internet. In contrast, over 4 billion people are without internet access. In most cases these people are concentrated in developing countries [1].

Almost all African countries now have their own Internet connection. In 1995 only seven countries were connected to the Internet (Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Tunisia). But only around 70000 people in 47 countries use the Internet, 15000 of them in Kenya.

Currently, the average cost of using the Internet for 5 hours a month in Africa is about \$ 60 per month. These contrasts with the following fact: 20 hours of Internet in the USA costs \$ 29, including phone and provider fees. There are huge differences between the costs of using the Internet. The cheapest access is in Botswana — \$ 11 per month, and the most expensive in Angola — \$ 145 per month [2].

In addition to the high costs, the poor telecommunication infrastructure prevents the Internet from becoming more widespread. Africa has the least developed infrastructure in the world: only 2% of the world's telephones.

«The lag in communications technology is not only because of financial or technical factors. The average cost of installing a telephone connection in Africa is still around four times higher than in the rest of the world» [2].

However, some African countries pay a lot of attention to expanding telecommunication infrastructure and installing

the latest technologies. For example, in Botswana and Rwanda, all main lines are digital. But most countries have outdated analog lines, which are extremely unreliable, especially during the rainy season.

However, for the World Wide Web (WWW), stable and fast connections are essential. Good international connections are also required for this. But the international bandwidths are also still very poor on the African continent.

A stable power supply is one of the basic requirements for connecting a computer and access to the Internet. However, around 70% of Africans in rural areas live without electricity.

In addition, politics in many countries hinders the growth of the Internet. Political restrictions are common in many countries.

One way to give more people access to the Internet is to set up Internet cafes and telecenters. Since May 1996 Peru has been pioneering the use of such “cabinas publicas”, which were mainly set up in universities, schools, public buildings and in private companies [3].

In addition to the technical factors, the human factors also play a major role in the spread of the Internet. There are two terms for extensive Internet use: literacy; knowledge of English language.

The illiteracy rate in most sub-Saharan countries is over 50%. Only about 8% of all Africans speak English. In addition, there is a lack of computer skills. Attempts are made to overcome these barriers through new software developments.

The developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa do not have the finances to drive the expansion of the Internet. Companies such as AT&T, MCI, France Telecom and Deutsche Telekom are investing billions in the construction of the telephone network [3].

The Internet could bring the underdeveloped regions back into the world economy and narrow the gap between the

rich north and the poor south. The spread of networking in Africa can improve the quality of life of significant numbers of average Africans.

The main argument for the spread of the Internet is the connection to the global economy and the creation of new workplaces. In addition, there is the possibility of marketing agricultural products.

One way of creating workplaces in the third world is certainly the outsourcing of jobs, especially in the field of software development. If new workplaces are created in Africa, it can help with the following problem: the brain drain, which is so dangerous for Africa.

In addition to the unequal access to information, the unequal global information order is particularly criticized. The international structure of the flow of information is still based on information channels from the colonial era.

Internet access can enhance intra-regional collaboration among African organizations. Moreover, anyone with Internet access can put their own information online and thus participate directly in the dissemination of information.

The problem, however, is that the African states do not have the necessary financial resources to drive the expansion of the telecommunications infrastructure on their own. There is also the risk of cultural imperialism.

Can the Internet serve as a tool for education and science? In the scientific field, the Internet gives Africans access to information. The Internet can also bring enormous progress in the field of medical care. A good example of this is the databases of the World Health Organization (WHO) or the HealthNet, which is based on a different technology, the Fidonet which could also work via the Internet [3].

Healthnet helps clinics, medical schools, and ministries of health in many parts of Africa establish electronic mail communications. Access to Healthnet enables health care

workers to participate in discussions with prominent scientists and doctors in neighboring countries and around the world.

So we can conclude that it is guaranteed that everyone with access to the Internet can participate in the dissemination of information. The Internet can bring a modernization to Africa without an inevitable adjustment of cultures to Western values. On the other hand, African culture can also influence Western culture.

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