

The Third Level Digital Divide: Millennials and Post-Millennials Online Activities in South Africa

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Abstract : The study aimed to assess the third level of the digital divide among the millennials and post-millennials in South Africa. The millennials are people born from 1981-to 1996, that is, people between the ages of 25-40 years old and post-millennials are people born from 1997 to date. For the study, only post-millennials born between 1997-2003 were included as they were old enough to consent to participation in the study. Data was collected as part of the Ph.D. project that focuses on the relationship between income inequality, the digital divide, and social cohesion in South Africa. The digital divide has three main levels, namely the first, second and third. The first and second focus on access and usage, respectively. The third-level digital divide can be defined as the differences in the benefits associated with being online. The current paper focuses on the third level: the benefits derived by being online using four domains: economic, educational, social, and personal benefits. The economic benefits include income, employment and finance-related activities; the social benefits include socializing belonging, identity, and informal networks. The personal benefits include personal wellbeing and self-actualization. A total of 763 participants completed the survey, and 61.3% were post-millennials between the ages of 18-24 and 38.6 % were millennials between 25 and 40. The majority of the respondents were female (62%), male (34%) and nonbinary (1%), respectively. Most of the respondents were black, followed by whites, Indians and colored, respectively. Thus, they represented the status of the demographics of the country. Most of the respondents had access to the internet and smartphone. Most expressed that they use laptops (68%) or mobile (71%) to access the internet and 54 % access the internet using wireless/Wi-Fi. There were no differences between the millennial and post-millennial economic and educational benefits of being online. However, the post-millennials were more inclined to use the internet for social and personal benefits than the millennials. This could be attributed to many factors, such as age. The post-millennials are still discovering themselves and therefore would derive social and personal benefits associated with being online. The findings confirm studies that argue that younger generations derive more benefits from being online than the older generation. Based on the findings, it is evident that the post-millennials are not using the internet or online activities for social networks and socializing but can derive economic benefits such as job looking and education benefits from being online. It can be inferred that there are no significant differences between the two groups, and it seems like the third-level digital divide is not evident among the two groups as they both have been able to derive meaningful benefits from being online. Further studies should focus on the third-level divide between the baby boomers and Generation X.

Keywords : third-level digital divide, millennials, post-millennials, online activities

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