

Digital Inclusion Program AcessaSP and the development of digital literacies among elderly population: a case study

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Abstract:

Contemporary society has built a techno - hybridism centrality that covers all dimensions of life. Being connected is part of digital inclusion public policies in almost every country. In Brazil São Paulo state government has developed, in partnership with School of the Future Research Laboratory at the University of São Paulo a digital inclusion program named AcessaSP that is now 14 years old, dedicated to poor population throughout the state. This paper presents and discusses some results regarding elderly populations uses and practices as users of AcessaSP telecenters. The study was carried out as a comparative survey with statistical data collected in 2008, 2009 and 2012 based on a SPSS database originally developed to provide AcessaSP program with statistical data. Main results so far indicate that behavior, uses, and digital literacies among the elderly population at AcessaSP are increasing, as well as connectivity and digital communication practices. The exponential participation in social networks such as Facebook and the posting of videos on YouTube show a growing and significant appropriation of Web 2.0 tools. The use of chat programs and the creation and updating of blogs, Twitter and other sites are also highly relevant. All the above-mentioned literacies help develop non-linear narratives that are typical of cyberspace, representing the interests and habits of elderly networked actors in Brazil.

Key Words: digital inclusion program AcessaSP – Brazil; Elderly population – digital inclusion; media literacies ; digital literacies; digital literacies among elderly population – São Paulo; digital inclusion public policy in São Paulo - Brazil; School of the Future Research Laboratory at University of São Paulo – Brazil

a. INTRODUCTION

The Research Center for New Communications Technologies Applied to Education “School of the Future – USP” began its activities in 1989. In January 1993, it was instituted as a Research Center. In its first decade, its mission was to improve education in Brazil through the introduction of ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies) and multimedia in formal and non-formal learning and teaching environments. From the late nineties on, its research projects have focused on the Internet world and social networks. In 2007, Dr. Brasilina Passarelli, the new Scientific Coordinator founded the Digital Culture Observatory, to research the Internet both as an environment where cyberculture is created and reconstructed and as a product of a technology-driven culture. The Digital Culture Observatory aims to understand attitudes and behaviors of a networked population, how individuals interact and rebuild digital data, and also their participation patterns in social networks. They approach the concept of literacy as a set of social practices, as proposed by different researchers such as Warschauer (2003) and they are also interested in the use of ethnographic methods such as netnography (KOZINETS) and virtual ethnography (HINE) to develop surveys and qualitative approaches to better understand how connected actors behave.

b. AcessaSP Digital Inclusion Program Overview

Aiming to bridge the digital divide School of the Future – USP in association with São Paulo State Government under the direction of PRODESP - São Paulo State Data Processing Company, is responsible for the development and maintenance of digital environments, interactive digital contents and mediation strategies of digital inclusion program AcessaSP <http://acessasp.sp.gov.br>. It is also our responsibility the design and implementing of blended learning environments devoted to training local tutors to run AcessaSP.

Instituted in 2000 AcessaSP digital inclusion program is devoted to provide free, unlimited and democratic access to the Internet. Its main indicators are: 14 years of operational history, 70.000.000 people impacted, 2,068,282 registered users, 705 AcessaSP infocenters currently operating, 125 infocenters being implemented, 611 counties served and 1,200 monitors trained per year. AcessaSP is responsible for the implementation and maintenance of public spaces (called infocenters and/or telecenters), that are generally located in county libraries in the state of São Paulo. Public Internet Access Infocenters have also been implemented in public services centers, community restaurants, bus terminals, train and subway stations, and State Government offices.

AcessaSP Digital Inclusion Program has won distinguished national and international awards. In August 2013, after competing with 300 digital programs from 56 countries, AcessaSP received the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation award, which is considered the “Nobel prize” for digital inclusion programs.

b. 1 AcessaSP Research Tool: PONLINE On-line Survey

Since 2002, AcessaSP implemented PONLINE - a SPSS data manager that employs a free software online questionnaire *Limesurvey*, to develop monthly surveys. PONLINE has a friendly and accessible online interface and allows searches with the use of different filters such as gender, socioeconomic status, education level, etc. It is possible to create relationships among posts and view and compare different audiences and regional standards in the form of graphs and tables. Reports can be edited both online and printed.

c. Attitudes and Behaviors of AcessaSP Elderly Participants: A Comparative Study (2008, 2009 and 2012)

According to the last Brazilian census conducted by IBGE (Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics - 2010), the population of ages 65 and above amounts to 14.9 million (representing 7.4% of the Brazilian population). To better understand the behavior of elderly people in digital environments, this study aims to map and identify their participation based on PONLINE comparative data (years 2008, 2009 and 2012).

A set of questions concerning attitudes and behaviors of elderly people users of AcessaSP infocenters were developed with PONLINE. Main results so far indicate that behavior, uses, and digital literacies among the elderly population at AcessaSP are increasing, as well as connectivity and digital communication practices. The exponential participation in social networks such as Facebook and the posting of videos on YouTube show a growing and significant appropriation of Web 2.0 tools. The use of chat programs and the creation and updating of blogs, Twitter and other sites are also highly relevant. All the above-mentioned literacies help develop non-linear narratives that are typical of cyberspace, representing the interests and habits of elderly networked actors in Brazil.

d. Considerations

We can identify two major “waves” in the last two decades of networked society. The first one relates to the development and implementation of digital divide government policies to offer free and unlimited access to the Internet to low-income populations. Brazil as a whole and, in particular, the state government of São Paulo developed the most extensive digital inclusion program. As in other initiatives, the first stages of AcessaSP digital inclusion program focused on providing connection infrastructure and teaching participants how to browse the net. These early days were very important to help develop a sense of social and digital inclusion to low income population. The second wave began to emerge in 2006, after we reached a sustainable rate of digital inclusion. Researchers at School of the Future – USP consider that the mapping and understanding of emerging digital literacies among connected population, as shown in this paper, contribute to illuminate scenarios of contemporary society.

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