

Internet access in the world 18664



INTERNET ACCESS IN THE WORLD

-----When we look at the development of the Internet all around the world, we see that it is like a horse carriage. The single horse of this carriage is running at an incredible speed and is constantly pulling the carriage. Wherever the horse turns the carriage is following it because it has no other chance. In the case of the Internet, the horse is the United States. The US is constantly advancing by developing new software, creating the best infrastructure for computer mediated communications and giving opportunities that do not end for the users. The government is trying to do everything to make it easy for the citizens to use the net. And as a result of the opportunities created in this country, the net has become really global only within the US. The rest of the world ambitiously is trying to follow the path so that they can keep up with the competition and the development- as the carriage following the horse - that the US is taking. According to Mr. Vietsch of the Trans-European association, institutions in Europe are generally two years behind those in the US in the development of their Internet connections (Bollag, p. 2). The United States is wired by high-speed electronic communications networks and telecommunications is liberalized so the telecommunications companies are willing to devote more in the development of the electronic communication infrastructure. The competition created in this sense, allows the computer mediated communications in the US to advance at its incredible pace at a low cost. And since using the net does not create a financial burden for people in the US, worldwide, about half of all internet users in the world are in the United States, 25 percent are in Europe and the rest are scattered throughout different countries (Noble, p. 1). Everyday we

hear that the ultimate goal of the Internet is the globalization of the world. Unfortunately, this goal has not been achieved yet, in fact there's much work to be done before all people have access to the net. In the course of this paper we will be looking at the three areas which have contributed to either the rise or stagnation of networking plans. The three areas are: telecommunications infrastructure, political barriers, and cultural acceptance. In closer examination of specific geographic regions' situations regarding Internet program implementation, one will see that it is the government's unwillingness to allow the privatization and liberalization of telephone services which inhibits applied technological growth. Additionally, some cultures maintain their traditional ways which do not allow for support of technology. Five specific regions have been analyzed in this project and will be presented in the following order: the Middle East (Israel and the Arab World), Asia, Europe, and Australia. Each of these regions possess some aspect of on-line community. On-line communities for which we have found evidence are news groups, on-line bulletin boards, interactive web pages, chat rooms, Cyber Cafes and free-nets. Also, we have found the evidence that the governments in these regions use web pages, e-mail and conference systems as a tool to their own political technologies and affiliations.

INTERNET IN THE MIDDLE EAST It is for sure that political affiliations affect the netizens - as cyberspace citizens are known. When looked at it from this aspect, the Middle-East and especially the Arab World is really interesting. In the whole region Israel is accounting sixty percent of all of the internet traffic, and Iran is the second largest web user. The reason for Israel being more dominant in the region is mainly because of its political, economical and infrastructural advantages when compared to the other Middle Eastern

countries. The main advantage is Israel's democratic status which allows the Israeli netizens to get hold of any information that they want to. Also, Israel is really advanced in producing its own technology thus it has a very well working telecommunications infrastructure that increases its connection speed to the rest of the world. As a result of these positive consequences, Israel is really advanced in forming its own virtual communities. It is one of the few countries that has formed freenets. The main goal of the Israeli freenet, the Ramat-Negev Freenet, is global outreach and education. According to this freenet, the aims are : to allow each resident to connect to the Internet at a minimal cost, to provide information regarding all of the activities of the Ramat Negev Regional Council (which now administers the Freenet), to provide regional information to offer interactive services, to foster interaction with students and teachers from around the world, to set up contact among Jewish communities from around the world via the Internet and to serve as a model for other potential freenets in other communities in Israel. This freenet is sponsored by the National Committee for Information Technologies, a branch of the Israeli Ministry of Science and the Arts. Initial planning and set-up of the freenet was coordinated by the SPL World Group of Israel which has branches in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. SPL, one of Israel's leading software houses, was formed in 1977. The Ramat Negev Regional Council is in the process of setting up a Wide Area Network which will connect all of the residents, institutions, and regional council offices in the area and allow direct access to the Internet at a minimal cost. In time the Council would like to see the factories connected to the Internet. The Internet server has been set up in the Council building. Also, a modem network which allows residents of the area to access their Internet account

for the mere cost of a local telephone call, has been set up. Schools and other institutions will connect to the Internet through what is called a "frame relay connection". This will enable all users of this internal network to communicate with the Internet at the same time. In addition to setting up the Networks, the Council is undertaking the ambitious feat of setting up WEB pages for each of the institutions and settlements. The Ramat-Negev Freenet emphasizes globality by providing information in both Hebrew and English (the language of most Internet users). Additionally, Israeli stories do not the focus on just local news, but on happenings from around the world. Among services provided, the Ramat-Negev Freenet holds a cultural program that leads viewers on a tour of some of the land's geography, and provides information on education, tourism, industry, and research. The freenet is also being used to propel Israeli schools forward in technology and globalization. During this 1996-97 school year, the Meshabim School, a regional elementary school, was hooked up to the Wide Area Network for technology to serve as a means of learning for the pupil and teacher. As of June 1996 technology began to prevail at the high school level as well. The High School for Environmental Studies in Negev, Israel, is taking part in a 21st Century Schoolhouse, an inter-disciplinary environmental project with five other schools from around the world which are all dedicated to finding solutions to critical environmental problems. Following a year of collaboration via the Internet, students representatives will congregate in Salem, Oregon to take part in a summit where students will create global legislation in regards to selected environmental issues. The aim of project planners is for these six schools to maintain a life long working relationship and that other schools around the world will adopt a similar concept. As stated above in the Israeli

freenet example, the Internet in Israel is highly advanced and free and thus it's a leading model especially for the Arab countries in the Middle East. The Arab states of the Middle East are speedily trying to follow the rest of the world. However, they still have a long way to go. In today's circumstances, it is for sure that not all Arab states want an information or cultural revolution. However, with contradiction most view the Internet with suspicion for the challenge it will present to their traditional hold on information and culture. There are also people who view it as another attempt to foist western culture on their people and many fear the pornography that's freely available on the net which contradicts their traditional roles (Evans, p. 2). Even though they fear these consequences, not all Arab states are strangers to the internet. Iran as the second largest web user in the Middle East is in the dilemma of how much it should extend its links with the outside world. It is willing to propagate its fundamentalist government and become a source of Islamic law, whereas the government still fears that the western pornography and imperialism will be spread in the country by the Internet (MacFraquhar, p. 1). The situation in Egypt is a little different than the other Arab states. According to the paper written by Tarek Kemal (Internet in Egypt, PhD) Egypt has a central role in the central Arab subregion due to several reasons such as the availability of satisfactory data communication infrastructure, it's central geographic location as well as the availability of well established full internet services. Even though Egypt has a low income level, the interest of the Egyptians to the internet is amazing. About 10, 000 Egyptians are estimated to be using the net right now and this number is known to be increasing everyday. One of the reasons that makes the Egyptian net different from the one in Iran is that there aren't any limits of access or

censorship by the government to the internet in Egypt. The Egyptian netizens can have access to anything they want in the world, including pornography. Jordan is another Arab country that allows public access to the internet without many restrictions. According to the information we got from Arabia, the Jordanian government has agreed to participate in a forum on nets, a local on-line service, making the effort to be seen more responsive. Local residents in Jordan are now allowed to discuss policy with senior officials through the on-line forum. The interesting thing about the internet in Jordan is that even though Jordan appears to have the most progressive public dialogue, their on-line forum is in English which limits the public participation (Albrecht, p. 1). In most of the Arab states where the government has control over the net, the public access to the world wide web is still very restricted, and in some it requires an international phone connection either to another Arab country or to Europe and the US. Other than Iran, Egypt and Jordan the internet is available in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The problem in the Arab states is that because of the low demand, prices are really high for those willing to use the net and in many places the telecommunications infrastructure is not good and fast enough to enable the use of the net (Evans, p. 2). The infrastructure in the region is very diversified on the transmission and connectivity level, and the communication facilities do not cover a wide region. Another thing that is thought to hold back the development of the Arabic internet is the low rate of computer ownership and the lack of technical skills. Also, language is creating a problem since most of the stuff on the net is not in Arabic (Evans, p. 2). The fact about the Arabic language not having a very accepted code in the region creates difficulties in the development of the standard bilingual

internet applications (Arabic vs. Latin). Another concern that slows down the development of the internet in the Middle East is the fear from the Big Brother. Big Brother - which in this case is the government - is constantly watching the netizens so that they don't do something against the theocratic laws. The Iranian government is trying to centralize all access through the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications so that they can block all of the world wide web sites that are known to be "not healthy". In contradiction however, the ministry is signing up more subscribers to the net and the Parliament is planning to discuss the issue of the combination of scientists and clerics seeking access, plus the upgrading process of the telephone lines. The Iranian government is also keeping prices really high, treating internet use like long-distance phone calls. Netizens are required to pay from \$50 to \$130 for three to four hours of internet usage per week. Prices are kept high so that less people are willing to connect to the net. There are very few domestic private internet servers in Iran, one is Irnet and another is PersiaNet, which are still trying to seek better international access (MacFarquhar, p. 1). The question about the price of the net in Egypt is again different from that in Iran, since the Egyptian government is a lot more liberal and less theocratic than the Iranian government. In Egypt, the internet services provided by the government are free and university services are quite affordable. One of the commercial providers has a monthly charge of \$40, plus a user charge of \$3 per hour - which is still really expensive. Despite the local internet providers, the price of the internet in the Middle East remains in the hands of the theocratic governments and in the competition created by foreign companies that are supposed to decrease the standard prices. The question that arises is if a theocratic government

like Iran is frightened by the open environment of the net why is it so eager to get connected to the net. The Islamic religion is the answer again. Iran wants the world to have access to resources like the Center for Islamic Jurisprudence in Qum. Already about 2000 texts about both Shiite and Sunni law have been computerized by researchers and their aim is to expand it to 5000 (MacFarquhar, p. 1). All of these texts are either provided by the government server or the Iranian university servers. Apart from the university web pages and an Iranian newspaper - the Hamshahri Newspaper , there aren't any virtual communities formed in Iran since it is banned by the government. Egypt is again a step forward from the other Arab states since it has formed its own virtual communities , news groups and mailing lists. Egyptian societies on the net . One of the main Egyptian Usenet groups is ' soc. culture. egyptian' where Egyptian related topics are discussed. Another newsgroup called ' eg. environment' is dedicated to discussing Egyptian environmental matters. There are many other Egyptian mailing lists, most of which are thoughtful and offer good opportunities for constructive discussions and debates. Finally we can say that the internet in the Middle East is developing at a fast pace. Other than the ones in Israel, there are some virtual communities formed in the Arab World , but most of the virtual communities about the Arab states are formed by the Arabic people who don't live in the Middle East. Even though, the internet in the Arab world is not yet as developed as it is in most developed countries, it is advancing at and probably will even break some theocratic political barriers in the future.

INTERNET USAGE IN ASIA The situation in Asia is somewhat similar to what's happening in the Arab World because the Asian governments also tend to control Internet usage. But still, Internet usage in

Asia is increasing very fast . Most of the Asian countries vary in their Internet usage, but Japan, China, Singapore and Hong Kong seem to be the leading countries in the region. The Asian governments perceive the Internet as a cheap and effective communication tool beneficial for businesses and educational institutions. However, they are still trying to control the access to the Internet because of its pornographic, religious, and political content and its “ corrupting” influence on the Asian youth. Asian governments fear of political attacks against their current governments. The governmental barriers along with the poor telecommunication infrastructure in the region seem to be the major reasons why Asia is behind in its usage of the Net, compared to the US and the European countries. Asian countries are among the developing countries in terms of their usage of the Internet. They differ in their usage depending on their economic wealth and their telecommunication infrastructure. Japan, China, Singapore and Hong Kong are far advanced compared to Burma, Laos, North Korea, and Cambodia, poor countries with primitive communications infrastructure. According to a study done in March 1996, there are now an estimated 2 million personal computers in China and about 100, 000 can reach the Net. Access in China occurs through the government-run ChinaNet or outfits like 1Net that runs CompuNet and a sister site on the Web. ChinaNet is the country’s public version of the Net. It has about 700-800 subscribers, mostly academic or commercial institutions. CompuNet, being the first commercial on-line service in China, is among the few companies that offer access to the Internet. In China, people usually use the Net to exchange e-mail or to access electronic bulletin boards for announcements, debates, or essays (Invasion > From Cyberspace, p. 1). Compared to China, Singapore is more “

advanced” in its usage of the Net. Internet access in Singapore occurs through three service providers. According to a study done in September 1996, 150, 000 people out of 3 million have Internet accounts which is only 5% of the population (Net Nanny States, p. 1). Hong Kong, a city currently under the British rule, is among the developing Asian cities. It was the first Asian city that got connected to the Internet back in 1993. At the time, only 1000 people were using the Net through the two service providers available; today, 50, 000 people have access to the Net through more than 60 providers. As shown, China, Singapore, and Hong Kong are among countries that are developing in their use of the Net. Contrary to this, there are some countries in Asia, such as Burma, Laos, North Korea, and Cambodia, that have no service providers. Consequently, their access to the Net is very limited (Campbell, p. 1). Government regulations are one of the major reasons why Asia is behind in its usage of the Net. Although Asian governments recognize Internet’s potential as an effective communication tool, they still want to control it because of its political, religious, and pornographic content. Asian governments see the flow of these “objectionable materials” as a threat to their traditional values (Campbell, p. 2). They are concerned about these materials’ negative effect on the Asian youth. Most importantly, they fear the political attacks that can occur against their current communist governmental regimes. Singapore is among the countries that share this point of view. In an interview in September 1996, Goh Liang Kwang, the chief executive officer of Singapore Broadcasting Authority, told the reporters about Singapore’s fear from the effect of “objectionable materials” on the Net. He said “ we must take a pro-active approach to put some rules in place so that our young children will not be

affected by objectionable material” (Campbell, p. 2). As expressed, Singapore is thinking of taking effective measures to control the content of the Net, as other countries in the region. So far, it has regulated the transmission of pornography and religious views. It is also considering to limit the political content in newsgroups. China is also among the countries concerned about the content of the Net. Up till now, it has prohibited the publication of political secrets and pornographic contents. This September, Chinese officials blocked access to 100 sites in the multi media section of the World Wide Web (WWW). The prohibition included American newspapers, Tibetan exiles, the Taiwanese government, Playboy and the Economist. This suggests that besides political and pornographic issues the Chinese government is also concerned about economic issues and ideas that would be detrimental to the Chinese citizens. In February 1997, it is considering to pass a law that would require every Internet user to register with the police. This way, it is hoping to control the access to undesirable materials (Net Nanny States, p. 1). As illustrated, Asian governments are trying to regulate the transmission of undesirable economic, political, religious, and pornographic content on the Internet. So far, they have come up with two ways to fight the flow of “detrimental” materials. They either make the service providers install software or make the content providers, such as political parties or religious groups register with the authorities. Singapore is among the countries that have decided to take both of these measures. All access providers in Singapore have to install filtering software, such as Surfwatch, Cyberpatrol or NetNanny that filter out offensive material. Content providers to Cyber Cafes and organizations have to register with the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (Net Nanny States, p. 1). Regulation in

China, only covers the registration of all Internet users and providers with the authorities. Vietnam, takes a more conservative view on the subject, providing only e-mail services and prohibiting the access on the Web. As opposed to these countries trying to take preventative measures, countries like Indonesia and Thailand prefer not to regulate anything at all. That suggests that Asian countries vary in their forms of regulation. In early September, Singapore and six members of the Association of South Asian Nations met in Singapore to find solutions for regulations. But they could come up with solutions that cover the concerns of all Asian countries as they vary in their usage of the Net (Vatikiotis, p. 1). As demonstrated, Asian countries except, Indonesia and Thailand, are trying to take preventative measures against undesirable contents that are mostly provided in newsgroups. But it is really hard to limit access to a newsgroup as one can always access it through one's own country as well as through access overseas. Usually, one has to subscribe to a service provider in one's own country to access a certain newsgroup. Still, it is always possible to register with a service provider overseas and then access the same newsgroup with a local telephone call if the government restricts subscription in one's own country. Governments can make service providers prevent certain groups from publishing on the Web, but they can still post information through service providers in other countries. Consequently, citizens of countries, such as China and Vietnam, where the governments censor a lot of information, can read uncensored news about their own countries through Web sites of foreign media. As a result, the governments might try to regulate the usage of the Net but they cannot completely control the material users access(Campbell, p. 2). Some governments realizing this impossibility take

measures the Internet way. They create their own home pages and try to give “ accurate” information about their own country. Indonesia and Thailand are among these countries. Indonesian armed forces has its own web page and Thailand’s largest access provider has opened up a forum to fight the “ Don’t Buy Thai” campaign by foreign activists. Malaysian government has its own home page, too (Campbell, p. 3). Poor telecommunication infrastructure is the second reason why Asia is behind in its usage of the Net. Efforts are made to increase the Internet connections in this region. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore are relatively well connected to the Internet compared to Burma, Laos, North Korea, and Cambodia, poor countries with primitive telecommunication infrastructures. The private sector and government agencies are trying to increase the capacity of the Internet connections between the countries of the “ West Pacific rim.” But some critics think that this is an early measure to take as many countries in the region have undeveloped infrastructures. Asia Internet Holding Company Ltd., a joint venture between companies in Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore is planning to put additional links to the high capacity Internet link between Japan and Hong Kong to create an “ Asian backbone” connecting Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Observers think that many Asian countries are not ready for such a development and that they first have to have proper communication lines (Bollag, p. 1). Despite the limitations, such as governmental restrictions and poor telecommunication infrastructure, Internet has emerged as a powerful tool for communication in the Asian region. Human rights activists, political dissidents, educational and business institutions are among those who find the Net beneficial for reaching the public. Human rights activists put postings on the Web criticizing the attitude

of the Asian governments that argue that “ Western-style human rights don’t belong to Asia.” An Asian, who is curious about his government’s standard of human rights compared to the Western world, can check out the Human Rights Page on the Web. In Hong Kong, a human rights group called “ Refugee Concern” is trying to improve the condition of the Vietnamese refugees. The group coordinates with its members around the world through e-mail and exchanges ideas and information on refugee issues. In Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, journalists have started to use the Net for reporting as access in these countries is relatively inexpensive compared to other countries in the region (Campbell, p. 3). Overall, Internet has gained acceptance in most Asian countries as an effective communication tool for cultural, economic and political events. Asia On-line , a service provider for Asia, has its conference rooms where one can find about the recent cultural events, job opportunities, and entertainment in Asia. Readers can also discuss new technological advances, economic and political issues of the time in chat rooms. Asian Studies WWW Virtual Library is also among the institutions that provide electronic forums about issues in Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Thailand, Hmong, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Philippines. After subscribing to any of the listservs provided on the library’s home page, one can discuss issues of importance to each country, learn about their cultures, practice their language, and chat with native speakers. Educational and business institutions that have seen Internet’s potential in reaching the public have started to create their own home pages for advertising and marketing purposes. Japan, is among the countries where Internet has gained wide cultural acceptance. A lot of businesses and educational institutions, primarily high schools, have their own Web pages.

Art galleries, hotels, musical groups and religious organizations have also started to create their own home pages. This overall view to Asia suggests that Asian countries are still among the developing countries in terms of their usage of the Internet. Japan, China, Singapore and Hong Kong are the leaders in the region but they are still behind compared to the US and the European countries. Undeveloped telecommunication infrastructure and government restrictions are the two reasons why Asia is not at the same level with US and Europe. The Asian governments see Internet's effectiveness as a powerful communication tool. However, they want to control access to the Internet because of its political, religious, and pornographic content. They view Internet as a threat to their traditional values and are concerned about its negative effect on the Asian youth. Despite all the limitations, Asians are aware of the Internet and want to integrate it into their cultural and political life.

INTERNET IN EUROPE

Europe is an interesting region because it has a very large potential to be a model leader in the Internet industry and it is the United States' biggest competitor. Worldwide about 25% of all Internet users are in Europe. Although the use of computer technology in the European Union is years behind the industry's penetration in the US it is starting to catch up. Roughly 45.3 million European households and offices have personal computers, compared to 71 million in the United States. But, European governments and media is fascinated by information super highway. Cities like Berlin and Paris have already several internet providers which indicate that Internet usage is growing at a fast pace. However, like the rest of the world there is an unbalanced distribution of Internet usage in Europe. According to on-line research firm Jupiter Communications, there are 150,000 homes connected

<https://assignbuster.com/internet-access-in-the-world-18664/>

to Internet in Sweden, 90, 000 in Finland, 70, 000 in Norway and 60, 000 in Denmark. These Scandinavian countries along with the U. K have the greatest number of Internet users per capita in the European market. After the US Sweden has the most Internet users per capita in the world. And the main reason Sweden has so many Internet users is that its phone market is really competitive as it is in the US

In contrast to the Scandinavian countries and the U. K, Eastern Europe is really behind in the Internet usage per capita. Yet, recently, the Internet has been growing very quickly in Eastern Europe as well. The reason that Eastern Europe fell behind the other countries in Europe, is the former communist regime in these countries. But now that the iron curtain is broken and there are no more government regulations, Eastern Europe is catching up with the rest of Europe. The expansion of the Internet has been a positive effect on higher education and institutions in Eastern Europe. Eastern countries view the Internet as a way to raise their education and technology levels. However, eastern countries are having trouble with limited finances, and poor telecommunications in their countries. Today the government regulations are no longer an issue in Eastern Europe. Yet, the Internet expansion is hampered by the lack of a well supported infrastructure, namely a decent telephone system. In Eastern Europe, the art of telephone system is non existent. Even in major cities in major technical universities, connections are limited to the speeds available to an average home in the US. In Eastern European countries, usually it is extremely difficult to make long distance phone calls. " The phone charges are so expensive in these countries that it really limits one's ability to communicate." , says Peter Honak of Budapest

University (Woodward, p. 1). Ironically, the shortcomings of telecommunication systems made e-mail the preferred method of communication in Eastern Europe. For instance, Hungary has the most highly developed computer systems in the region. It has an estimated 25, 000 regular users in its publicly supported network for universities and other state institutions. Still, Hungary is really behind compared to 150, 000 homes connected to the net in Sweden. In Hungary, it costs about \$2. 3 million a year to operate the Internet, where each user spends \$100. According to Lajos Balint, a leader member of the infrastructure development program, for the price of a single technical textbook, they can provide access to all possibilities of the internet. In Hungary, e-mail has become really popular because when the cost of e-mail is compared to sending a fax or mailing air-mail letters, it is a lot cheaper (Woodward, p. 1). At present, the shortcomings of the telecommunications in the region have made the Internet more important than it is in the West. Also, Internet is crucial for scholars in this region because it simply helps to equalize Eastern European scientists who are geographically and technologically disadvantaged. It increases their opportunities to participate in their discipline. Therefore, in general in Eastern Europe, there are National infrastructure development programs that are working on improving communication lines in order to provide more access. Some US organizations have also been helping Eastern European countries. For instance, The International Research & Exchange Board has been installing communication lines and public e-mail sites in former Soviet Republics and Russia. Also a US philanthropy called Pew Charitable Trusts is supporting a project which is aiming to build a network of regional universities in order to expose scholars to what's going on in their

disciplines in other countries (Woodward, p. 1). As a result, as communication lines and phone systems are improved in this region, more Internet access can be expected. Other than Eastern European countries, Europe in general lags far behind the US. One reason for this is that, in the past the development of the Internet was prevented by national politics mandating Open System Interconnect (OSI) Protocols, regarding Internet as a cultural threat similar to EuroDisney. In the past, outside of Scandinavia, political parties prevented the development of large scale internet infrastructure. Finally, in 1989 RIPE began the operation of Internet in Europe and as a result of this, today 25% of all hosts are located in Europe. Recently, authorities in Europe have been arguing that Europe's phone systems have been impeding Internet growth (Stalter, p. 1). For this reason the European Union (EU) passed a telecommunications deregulation which should be implemented by the EU countries by 1998. The deregulation will help to make the European phone market more competitive. With this new deregulation, the telecommunications industries have started to provide quicker and better Internet access. Today, there is a big competition between European companies vs. American companies like Netcom that is trying to get into the business in Europe. As a result of this competition the speed of Internet access is increasing and making Europe a promising new frontier. The Dataquest forecasts that, the number of on-line users in Europe will grow 12.4% this year to 9.1 million users. Although per capita Europe has fewer internet users than does the US., European countries are fascinated by cyberspace and are already searching for new ways of using computer technology to enhance their communities. For instance, European political parties are quite advanced in their use of cyberspace when

compared to the American political parties (Noble, p. 1). In Britain, the labor party has been using the Internet since 1994. The party conference is on the Internet and it allows some interactions between politicians and the public. The labor party leader Tony Blair said that their goal is to make every home wired up in the New Britain. Sweden has also been a pioneer in cyberspace. In Sweden most parties have at least a web site, but social democrats are the most advanced; the former prime minister, personally responds to dozens of e-mail messages every week. In Italy, there are only a few hundred thousand Internet users. Yet the political leaders such as Romano Prodi understand the potential of the Internet extensively and have sponsored several home pages. In Holland, The Dutch Labor Party is another on line pioneer. The party itself is an Internet provider. Also, in Europe in general, the Party of European Socialists, which is the umbrella of labor parties throughout Europe, has been working to develop a comprehensive internet strategy (Noble, p. 1). In addition to the political activities, European countries are using computer technology to enhance their educational and intellectual life. In England there are a few organizations that are working to bring the Internet to communities that would otherwise be left information poor. One of these communities is the chain of Cyber Cafes which are commercial organizations aiming to bring people to the Internet while allowing them to socialize in a 'cafe' atmosphere. While you sip your coffee at the Cyber Cafes, you explore the world of the Internet. This is a real suitable way for people who don't know a lot about computers and for those who can't afford individual access to the internet. The Cafe workers at the Cyber Cafe help you to get connected to the net and help you look for the information you need (Klein, p. 1). The problem with the Cyber Cafes is that

they still don't reach the needs of the real public - the public who doesn't have the money to spend at a cafe. Another community in England, the Women's Internet Group, was formed by the Learning for Life with Technology (LIFT) organization in England - an organization working on bringing technology into communities both in England and the rest of the world. The Women's Internet Group consists of women from diversified professions and backgrounds who want to learn to use the net for professional and personal reasons. Some people in this group learn to use the net for e-mail whereas some want to catch up with the information revolution going on in the world. In London, the London Borough of Southwark has started the construction of a ' Mediatec' which is a library-cum-theater-cum-production studio. In Mediatec there is an Internet clubroom similar to Cyber Cafes where people that live in the neighborhood can come and use the Internet. Also, the black community in London holds Internet access sessions once a month, also providing free information, advice and networking services with the help of other black computer experts (Klein, p. 1). In addition to these intellectual aspects of the Internet, there are lots of ongoing educational programs about the Internet . Twelve institutions in Scandinavia are exploring how they might use the Internet and video conferencing systems to share classes, collaborate on research and administer joint degree programs. The project is called " Virtual Sound University" and it is the portion of an overall effort aiming to increase academic collaboration. The universities want to pool their sources together by using computer technology to offer students better opportunities. Their goal is to create an interactive multimedia environment for the whole region. The European Union is trying hard to aid this process by funding the

University of Copenhagen which is to develop better video conferencing systems. Other than the aspects listed above, some European countries are doing community networking through freenets. Their goal is to promote free exchange of ideas and a sense of community. The countries that have freenets in Europe are, England, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Ukraine. The countries which have the most number of freenet servers are Sweden and Finland followed by Germany and the only Eastern European country that has a freenet is Ukraine which is a former Soviet Republic. The Kyviv freenet in Ukraine is one year old and it is the first Internet community that is accessed by the public, east of the Elbe. And the interesting thing about the Kyviv Freenet is that it is supported by the United Nations (UN) office in Ukraine and is operated by the UN Internet Project. As illustrated, Europe is behind the US in terms of Internet access and communication technology. To sum up it can be said that Internet usage varies in European countries. The Scandinavian countries are the pioneers in the European cyberspace and they are followed by the U. K and Germany. The countries that have the least Internet access are the Eastern European Countries. There are two main reasons for them being behind. The first is the poor telecommunications infrastructure in the region and the second is the effects of the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Since there are no longer the communist regimes, Eastern European countries are catching up with the rest of Europe. At present, there are National Infrastructure Development Programs and also and the US is helping these countries. Overall, in Europe Internet has gained a lot of cultural acceptance and is already integrated into cultural and intellectual life. In general, Europe is a promising region in the world where a large amount of Internet access

growth is expected in the future. INTERNET IN AUSTRALIA The situation of the Internet in Australia is pretty similar to the situation in Europe. Internet usage in Australia is increasing very fast. In fact, Australia seems to be one of the advanced countries in the world in terms of its usage of the Internet. There are no apparent government limitations in the region and the telecommunication infrastructure appears to be more developed when compared to Asia and the Middle East. Australia has one of the most information rich experimental freenets established so far, when compared to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The Australian Department of Social Security has sponsored an experimental free-net since May 1995 and will continue to do so through early next year. During the course of these months the many users of this service will be surveyed. Results will help the Department of Social Security identify to what extent this communications resource empowers community groups and individuals on low incomes. In attempts to bring community groups to the attention of the public, the Community Information Network possesses a "Community Organizations' room" among its many other chat rooms. Here groups use the Networks as a means of communicating their existence and purpose to the public. In this "space", home pages can be published, organizations may be added to a directory, and discussions are held regarding topics pertaining to the community sector. Other rooms exist on this network which provide a forum for individuals who may otherwise be inadvertently isolated by society. One such room is the "Disability Room" which the Department of Social Security is putting forth every effort to make accessible to all the disabled—including the blind. The Department is working with new HTML coding to create a text based version of this site for blind people. Additionally in a paradoxical

manner, the Department has created a room for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in which information by and about this group can be discussed. Other groups for whom chat rooms have been dedicated in this system are seniors, women, and youth. The last category of rooms is comprised of general service providers. The Australian Department of Social Security created a service-window room where network users have access to Social Security payment eligibility, rates, and a plethora of Department of Social Security publications. As a subsection of this room, the Prime Minister's home page provides users with access to speeches and media releases. Another room provides a listing of job vacancies. There is even a " Learning Room" where information about courses, vocational education, and training is accessible. The " Family and Children's Room" is a forum where parenting / family relationships, family health, education, and family entertainment are discussed. Visitors to this room are provided with tips to assist parents in helping their kids with reading, writing, and math among other subjects. Poverty is another topic for which a chat room is dedicated. The United Nations has declared this year the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, and the Community Information Network has helped concentrate attention to this issue. Other chat rooms in this Network which have not been discussed are the Government Information Room, the Health Room, the Internet Room, Local Information room, and the Rural room (for those living in rural and inaccessible geographic locations). As of June 27, 1996, increased efficiency in Australian Internet networks became more likely. According to the July 15, 1996 article by Kristi Essick found in InfoWorld, Optus Communications Pty. Ltd, an Australian company launched a " commercial cable system capable of transmitting television, telephone,

<https://assignbuster.com/internet-access-in-the-world-18664/>

and high-speed data through a single wire"-the first of its kind in the entire world. This new service will provide Australians with telephone calls for 20% less than the government owned Telstra Corp.-a break for many including Internet users. Along this same mode of development, high-speed cable modems for Internet access are anticipated later in the year. According to Patrick Southern, a spokesman for Optus, company plans are to have an installed base of 2.3 million homes by the end of 1996. An additional move to more efficient Internet access was made by publishing Company Digital Corporation which has plans to set up Alta Vista search sites in Australia and Sweden to establish "mirror sites" worldwide. These mirror sites, according to another InfoWorld article, will provide users in countries with these sites with quicker response times to their Internet search queries (Infoworld v18 n35, 52). Additionally between each pair of mirror sites, "local partners" will help translate pages into the native languages of the land. Overall, Australia seems to be one of the more developed countries in terms of its usage of the Internet. There are apparently no government regulations in this region as we could not come up with publications and articles about government restrictions in our research. The telecommunication infrastructure appears to be more developed compared to other countries we examined, as we only found projects for further enhancement of the communication network, such as plans for the installment of high speed cable modems or of commercial cable systems that make the transformation of several data available. In addition, Australia seems to be experimenting one of the information richest freenets created so far. With its rooms for disabilities and children, this freenet appears to be more culturally involving than the freenets we looked into in other parts of the world.

Today, there are many people in developed countries who are very enthusiastic about the Internet being global. The developed countries see the Internet as the information revolution that brings no barriers of communication and information access from anywhere in the world. However, in most parts of Africa, in south and south-east Asia and in Central and Latin America, the people's main concern is getting some food and water, fighting diseases, poverty, wars and political pressure. These people unfortunately don't and cannot for the time being think about the internet as long as they have concerns about their own lives. Even in the developed countries, there still is a huge information gap when we look at the people who can afford the net and the ones who can't afford it (Klein, p. 1). Besides fighting their ultimate life problems, the poor developing countries are also trying hard to take some further steps in the information revolution because it is a cheaper way of communication and it gives access to a huge amount of information, (No phone - so what?) However it is only a small elite in poor developing countries who have the money and knowledge to be involved in the information revolution. Unfortunately the Internet is a lot more easily accessible to the rich than the poor. Another key thing that disables the use of the Internet in developing countries is the lack of high standard education which means that since people don't learn how to use a computer in school, they are always a step behind in the information revolution. In his paper titled ' No phone - so what?' Juhani Artto argues that a hungry person will never buy a computer, but that a great many low-income but educated people in developing countries can become Internet users any time, provided that more equipment and more connections become available in educational institutions and workplaces. The problem in developing countries is that

there are more hungry people than educated people so most of the public in these countries do not care about the Internet. The American feminist Dale Spender explains this situation in her book called ' Nattering on the Net' as follows : " The real people in the real world are being divided up into the information-rich and poor : the ' master minds' and those who are ' kept in the dark'. The possibility of the global village where everyone can have a say, is yet a long way off" (Klein, p. 1). Unfortunately some countries as mentioned before are ' kept in the dark' by the will and power of their governments. However, when looked at the situation from a more optimistic point of view, it is seen that even in the poorest countries there are people trying to catch up with the information revolution. For example, one of the poorest countries of the world, Mozambique, had 26 hosts last July, which is more than many richer developing countries. As a result it can be said that in today's circumstances there's is an information gap between the rich and the poor, but one should not forget the fact that there are poor people who are very enthusiastic about closing this gap and that the gap is getting smaller and smaller every day. CONCLUSION As it has been mentioned in the introduction, the development of the Internet all around the world is like a rushing horse carriage. The United States which is the horse pulling the carriage, is the leading country in the usage of the Internet, followed by Europe, Australia, Asia and the Middle East. Worldwide, 50% of all Internet users are in the US, 25% are in Europe and the rest is scattered around the world. Internet usage in Europe varies according to different regions, with Scandinavian countries - especially Sweden - and the UK leading the race and the Eastern European countries coming last. Australia is pretty advanced in its Internet usage like Europe when compared to Asia and the Middle East.

The Asian and Middle Eastern countries are behind in their Internet usage when compared to the rest of the world. In the Asian region, Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Singapore are the leading countries. In the Middle East, Israel takes the lead followed by Iran. The important point that should be kept in mind however is that, the US is constantly advancing its usage of the Internet and the rest of the world is trying to keep up with the competition. The major reasons why countries differ in their usage of the Internet are their varying telecommunications infrastructures and government regulations. The countries are divided into "haves" and "have nots" in terms of their communication infrastructures. Those that are ahead in the race have developed telecommunication infrastructures including high speed communication networks and inexpensive high capacity computers. Those that are behind in the race lack decent telephone systems and well established Internet services. In addition, government restrictions play a major role for countries to be left behind in the race. The communist governments in Asia and the fundamentalist governments in the Middle East have a skeptical view on the Internet because of its pornographic, religious, and political content. They fear the political attacks against their current regimes. Most important, they are bothered by western imperialism and the flow of "detrimental" ideas into their region with the access of the Internet. Overall, they see the Internet as a threat to their traditional values even if they are aware of its effectiveness as a powerful tool for communication. As opposed to all the government limitations in Asia and the Middle East, government regulations are no longer an issue in Europe, particularly since the fall of the iron curtain. European countries, especially those in the European Union, support the growth of the Internet. The telecommunication

deregulation law that is to be effective in 1998, is a good example for their support to the Internet. The only thing that creates problems in Europe is the bureaucracy to pass new telecommunication laws to provide better telecommunications infrastructure. Despite the limitations, Internet has gained worldwide cultural acceptance. All sorts of on-line communities have started to develop in different parts of the world. Newsgroups, on-line bulletin boards, interactive Web pages, chat rooms, Cyber Cafes, and freenets are the examples of different types of communities that have been established so far. European countries are among the countries where Internet has been integrated into cultural and intellectual life. Most European political parties have their own Web sites on the Internet and provide forums for discussion of current political events. Europeans have also created several freenets for the exchange of ideas. England, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Ukraine have their own freenets. Australia is another region where Internet has been integrated into the cultural life. Australia has one of the most developed experimental freenets in the world. This freenet aims to provide recognition for community organizations and a forum for discussion. It has a variety of rooms ranging from Community Organization Room, Disability Room, General Service Providers Room, Family and Children's Room to rooms for job listings and poverty. In Asia, Internet is newly starting to be part of the cultural life. So far, human rights activists, political dissidents, educational and business institutions have created their own Web pages. They use the Internet for campaigning, advertising and marketing purposes. In addition, newsgroups and chat rooms provide spaces for intellectual and political discussion in Asia. However, Asian countries still do not have their own freenets. The

Middle East, with the exception of Israel, is a region where Internet has gained low cultural acceptance. Egypt is the only country in the Arab region that has its own virtual communities, news groups and mailing lists. Most of the virtual communities about the Middle East are formed by the Middle Easterners living outside of the Middle East as opposed to other countries that build their communities with the help of their actual residents. Overall, there is still some aspect of community in each of these regions. Finally, we think that there are two types of measures to be taken in order to make the Internet more global. The first category is the type of measures that can be taken by the governments themselves. During our research we have noticed that all the countries that have high Internet usage per capita, have competitive phone markets. So, for more Internet growth, the governments should pass deregulations such as the ones done by the European Union. If governments change the laws and liberate the telecommunications systems in their countries, the foreign companies that have the means can invest in starting new network systems. Also governments can promote national development programs such as the ones in Eastern Europe. The second measure that can be taken is that International Unions and Organizations can develop programs in order to promote Internet both in their regions and the rest of the world especially in the Third World countries. At present, there are a few good examples of how effective and influencing unions like United Nations (UN) and the European Union can be. For instance, the European Union has started a program called " the Fifth Framework Program where the goal is to promote scientific research and to develop Europe's technology in order to be able to compete with the United States' technology and Internet markets. Another example is that the UN has been helping former Soviet

Republics and Eastern European Countries to install networks and Internet projects such as the one in Ukraine. This means that foreign aid by powerful organizations should also be encouraged for more internet growth. On the other hand, if no measures are taken in the near future, the gap between the information rich and the information poor countries will get larger and the globalization of the Internet will rest simply as a mere "Utopia".

REFERENCES Albrecht, Kirk. "Cybersurfers of Arabia." *Business Week* (1996): 108. Bogert, Carroll. "Chat rooms and chadors." *Newsweek* 126 (1995): 36. Bollag, Burton. "Better Internet Access Sought for Researchers Around the World : Industrialized Nations Push for Faster Connections and Uniform Regulations." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* v42 n42 (June 28, 1996) : pA14-17. Burton, Bollag. "In Western Europe, 12 Institutions see the Internet and videoconferences as keys to virtual university" *The Chronicle Of Higher Education* (Sep. 27, 1996) : A35-37. Campbell, Larry. "Screening out the files." *Nieman Reports* 50 (1996): 59-61. Das, Malabika. "Free Nets." *Network Notes #29*. Information Technology Services. National Library of Canada. April 30, 1996. Evans, Kathy. "Wising up to the Web : Telecommunications Update." *The Middle East* (October 1995) : p24-28 Essick, Kristi. "Smart Cable Service Launched Overseas." *Infoworld* (July 15, 1996) Johnstone, Bob. "Culture clash in Cyberspace." *New Scientist* 145 (1995): 38-41. Kalin, Sari. "Global Mirror Search Sites Reflect 'Net Growth." *Infoworld* (Aug. 26, 1996) Klein, Reva. "Outside the Net : Those Who Cannot Afford Access." *Times Educational Supplement* n4160 (March 22, 1996) : pC28. Kranzt, Michael. "China, Wired." *Time* 147 (1996): 73. MacFarquhar, Neil. "With Mixed Feelings, Iran Tiptoes to the Internet." *The New York Times* v145 (Oct. 8, 1996) : pA4(N) pA4(L) col 1 (20 col in). National Public

Telecomputing Network. "Community Computing and the National Public Telecomputing Network." Cleveland, Ohio. E-mail: "Net Nanny States." *The Economist* 340 (1996): p34(1) Noble, Phil. "International Cyberspace : Use of The Internet Worldwide." *Campaigns & Elections* v17 n7 (July, 1996) : p29. "Not Too Modern Please." *The Economist* 338 (1996): 1-2 Schuman, Joseph. "New Era in Euro Cyberspace" *Variety* (April 10, 1995): 39-40. Stalter, Katherine. "Scandi wired for growth: northern territories leading digital media market expansion." *Variety* 364 (1996): 64. Swinbanks, David. "Internet struggles around to connect around the Asia-Pacific rim." *Nature* 379 (1996): 382. Vatikitokis, Michael. "Net police: ASEAN seeks to control cyberspace." *Far Eastern Economic Review* 159 (1996): 22. Woodward, Colin. "Information Technology" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 9, 1995) : A21. —