Digital readiness assessment of "Gav Ha'har" settlements in Samaria

/ Simcha Djuraev

Abstract:

This is a digital readiness assessment of four settlements in Samaria - Itamar, Elon-More, Yitzhar and Har-Bracha (hence on, the studied communities). **The purposes of this research** were to assess the level of digital readiness in these communities and to examine the factors connected to the level of digital readiness of the residents.

"Digital readiness" was defined as "the extent of ability and willingness to make use of a local site as a tool for community development". Practically, the digital readiness of the studied communities was defined as a variable which is composed of the digital readiness of the residents and that of their governing councils.

In the age of the information and knowledge society, digital readiness has become one of the foundations of economy and development. Any country that whishes to maintain its competitiveness capacity aspires to elevate the level of national digital readiness and to reduce digital gaps between different sectors. Digital readiness assessment, based on methodical measurement, is essential for the forming and monitoring of an efficient public policy for the achievement of these goals. This research may contribute to the fulfillment of our society's goals and to the reduction of digital gaps in Israel by providing information about a section of the population which was never before explored in the aspect of digital readiness. In addition, the assessment conducted in this research was designed to serve as a leverage for community development through ICT. In that, this research may promote the achievement of digital readiness and/or community development goals which were set by the local and national authorities.

The population studied includes the mature residents of the four settlements in the Samaria and the representatives of their governing councils. As planned, 200 respondents of the four Yishuvim participated in the research, forming a representative sample of the population.

The research included two parts:

1. Closed questionnaires to the residents. The questionnaires examined six measures of the digital readiness of the residents: (1) domestic computer and internet infrastructure (2) extent of internet use (3) level of

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internet proficiency (4) perception of the importance of the internet (5) inhibitions to use the internet (6) level of interest in community internet. Of these six measures, a digital readiness index measure was assembled. In addition, the following demographic features were examined: residence, sex, age, status, number of family members, level of religiousness, occupation, income, education, handicap and ethnic group. The answers were analyzed using SPSS.

2. Open questionnaires to the representatives of the governing councils of the studied communities. The questionnaires examined two measures of the digital readiness of the governing councils: (1) activity and infrastructure for community development through the internet (2) the internet as a community development tool according to the representative. The answers from the open questionnaires were analyzed with qualitative tools.

The **significant findings** were:

1. Har-Bracha was found at the highest level of digital readiness, followed by Elon-More, Yitzhar and Itamar. מרחק

2. About 60% of the respondents reported having a domestic internet connection. This rate is 10-20 percents lower than the average at the Jewish sector in 2009. Two explanations were offered. First, the remoteness of these communities from the center and the rural nature of the settlements. Second, the unique religious character of the residents - 97% of the respondents are religious ("datiyim"), ultra-religious ("datiyim-toraniyim") and ultra-orthodox ("haredim"), unlike the general Jewish sector. It is possible that a combination of these two factors, which are known in the research literature as deterrents of technological progress, has led to a slower penetration of the internet in these communities.

3. The demographic features (apart from residence) which were found connected to at least three measures of digital readiness of the residents were: age group, income, education and level of religiousness.

Age group: as expected according to previous surveys, the members of the older age groups (40 and up) have made less uses of the internet, estimated themselves as less proficient in the internet and attributed less importance to the internet then members of the younger age groups (19-29 and 30-39). These findings indicate that despite the high distribution of internet in Israel, there still exists a gap In the ability and willingness to use the internet between the older and the younger generations in Israel.

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Income and education: here as well, like in previous surveys, respondents with the higher income (above 8000 NIS) and highest education (Rabbinic or academic) were found at the highest level of digital readiness in the following measures: number of internet uses, perception of the importance of the internet and digital readiness index. These findings demonstrate the continuing connection between income, education and digital gaps which still exist in Israel.

Level of religiousness: unlike expected according to previous surveys, the findings of our research do not indicate a continuous negative connection between level of religiousness and digital readiness. However, respondents who defined themselves as ultra-orthodox were found at the lowest level of digital readiness. This interesting finding may be attributed to the relatively better adaptation of the "dati-leumy" society to the internet, unlike the ultra-orthodox society.

4. The demographic features in which there were significant differences between studied communities and were also significantly connected to the extent of internet use and to digital readiness measures connected to the extent of internet use in which there were significant differences between yishuvim were level of religiousness and income. These features were also found connected to the digital readiness index, about which there were also found significant differences between the communities.

Level of religiousness was found to be connected both to the extent of internet use and to religious inhibition to use the internet which was connected to the number of internet uses. Ultra-religious respondents make more uses of the internet than religious or ultra-orthodox do. Also, the amount of respondent lacking religious inhibition to use the internet is 63% of the ultra-religious, 58% of the religious and 32% of the ultra-orthodox. There was found no unequivocal proof of a negative connection between level of religiousness and extent of internet use within the religious, ultra-religious and ultra-orthodox population.

Income was found to be connected to both the extent of internet use and perception of the importance of the internet which was connected to the number of internet uses. Respondents with an income above 8000 NIS make more uses of the internet than those with an income of 8000 NIS and distribute more importance to the internet than those with an income of 8000 NIS or less.

We may assume that the significant differences in the extent of internet use which were found between the studied communities were apparently connected to differences in the income and religiousness features. In light of the surprising findings about the connection between level of religiousness, extent of internet use and

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religious inhibition to use the internet, a further study within the "daty-leumi" and "haredi" sectors is recommended, in order to examine the connection between level of religiousness, approaches to the internet and habits of surfing. Such a research may help to formulate a policy for reducing the digital gap between the ultra-orthodox and the general population.

In regard of the practical aspect of community development, we may conclude that the best suited settlement for developing a community internet project is Har-Bracha, as it is leading in the digital readiness measures of the residents and the representative of its governing council and also already has a community site.

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