INFORMATIONAL OPULENCE, DIGITAL DIVIDE AND POVERTY

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Abstract
The term "digital divide" commonly refers to the difference in accessing new information technologies between rich and poor countries. That is, the unequal distribution of digital technologies that currently govern the planetary processes of formation, archiving and dissemination of knowledge. The expression "digital divide" also refers to the uneven dissemination of the skills necessary to use IT tools to their full potential. On the other hand, *Informational Opulence* would seem a positive phenomenon, alternative to the more ancient and hateful scarcity. However, those who use such expression normally tend to stigmatize the huge amount of information that reaches us every day, depleting our attention resources and consequently damaging our cognitive processes. Digital divide and Informational Opulence seem therefore to be different sides of the same coin. Having too much information is like having no information – plus the illusion of being aware of what's happening in the world and taking conscious decisions. Developing such premises, this paper aims at analyzing two different kinds of poverty, in order to investigate digital divide as a welfare and a cultural phenomenon.

Keywords
Digital Divide. Informational Overload. Fake News. World Wide Web. Social Networks.

Summary

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0. INTRODUCTION. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

The first SMS in history was sent via a computer on 3.12.1992 by the British engineer Neil Papworth. That message, effectively "auroral", consisted of only two words: "MERRY CHRISTMAS". In the following thirty years our relationship with information has changed radically and, to say the least, revolutionary, to the point that today we consider it "natural" to send and receive a huge amount of multimedia messages every day, remaining connected to a boundless universe of semi-unknown users. Discussing with them, in real time, the most disparate topics. The dense network of information that has enveloped the world has become our habitat and our daily horizon of meaning, we are no longer able to think and act independently of it.

Information today travels at the speed of light. They represent the greatest wealth, the prime mover, the *deus ex machina* that allows citizens to orient themselves and survive in an ever smaller, chaotic and (inter)connected (meta)verse. For this reason, the expression "informational opulence" perfectly describes a fundamental trait of the world in which we live. Using this expression, in fact, we refer to the overabundance of information to which we nowadays have access.

Digital natives, who have never had to travel hundreds of kilometers to find data or information and are unaccustomed to grueling and often fruitless searches in the library, tend to consider books as a mass consumer good – available anywhere, from highway restaurants to news kiosks, to supermarkets. Digital natives have no idea what it means to live in a world characterized by the scarcity of information. On the other hand, who for personal, biographical and professional reasons, have crossed the information desert unscathed, surviving an era in which there were no satellite televisions or mobile phones – let alone social networks – realize

more easily how big and deep it is the ocean of information in which society is currently immersed.

The development of the world wide web – evolved into web 2.0, internet of things and finally metaverse – has taken on a very special role and meaning. Thanks to the spread and success achieved by smartphones. Mobile phones have in fact supplanted computers, becoming, over the years, the main and most important accelerators of this prodigious process of production and consumption of information.

Assuming similar premises as a fact, this essay intends to provocatively focus on the relationship that binds the wealth of information to the apparently opposite theme of the digital divide. That is the bind between informational opulence and the digital divide that dramatically separates rich countries from third and fourth world countries. The thesis that I intend to defend here is that the digital divide is not exclusively and mainly a problem of means, of tools to be possessed. It is also and above all a cultural problem. That is to say, the digital divide does not only separate rich countries from poor countries, but more precisely divides a few experts, savy and aware users, from oceanic masses of dangerously naive and equally inexperienced cybernauts.

Presenting the digital divide from this specific perspective does not mean implying that the possession of means and tools – or even better the access to the network – are completely irrelevant (far from it, as we will consider later, these are pre-conditions for a full and effective enjoyment of human rights). On the contrary, it means that the digital divide must not be thought of as a hiatus with clear and well-defined outlines. It rather represents a jaggedness that crosses the world in a transversal way, adding many and problematic *nuances* to the have / not have binary code.

1. THE 21Th CENTURY GOLD

Years ago, Daniel Bell predicted that in the future "control over communication services" would become an important "source of power".

While access to communication would become an essential "condition of freedom"[2]. Such observations were taken up and deepened by Jean-François Lyotard who identified the possibility of being informed as a question of fundamental importance for the "new post-modern world". The fact is that, nowadays, information has truly become all we need. First, they are a source of wealth. By this I refer to distinct and yet connected phenomena. First, I am referring to virtual currencies, or the fact that over the years, money has increasingly become a conceptual abstraction, reaching, in our age, a very high degree of volatility and dematerialization. The process of de-regulation and de-materialization of capital, which began in the 1970s with the violation of the Bretton Woods agreements, has now reached its completion thanks to the advent and increasing success of bit coins[3].

Virtual currency sales and trading platforms proliferate and are becoming increasingly successful. Once born as a simple experiment, virtual currencies have been discredited by experts, governments and markets for many years. However, they recently abandoned the underground world of the web to set out and conquer the "real world". With increasing frequency, companies that deal with virtual currencies buy traditional companies, sponsor events or football teams. In short, they are leaving the network and starting to link their ecosystem, relatively closed until a few years ago, to that of the traditional economy – happy of taking advantage of their great liquidity. Many believe that virtual currencies are nothing more than a gigantic speculative bubble, a bet completely without guarantees, if not even a scam based on increasingly elaborate and complex Ponzi schemes. It may be so, but when a lie is repeated by billions of people it ends up becoming true. The day we understand how

[2] BELL, 1980, pp. 43, 51; LYOTARD, 1997, p. 31. For a comment, RIFKIN, 2013, pp. 290 and ss.

[3] See BALLESTEROS, 2020.

virtual currencies have taken the place of the real economy, it will probably be too late to save the States and their battered sovereignty.

Information is richness in a second and less innovative sense: the global interconnection of markets allows operators to act in real time, finding ever more rapidly unexplored areas to exploit and new bets to play. Nothing like the stock market offers a plastic image of the most famous metaphor on complexity – the famous flap of butterfly wings in Beijing which could cause an earthquake in New York. The flapping of the wings of the butterfly is the whisper, the news that has not yet been spread by the news agencies, the whistleblowing that has not yet caused a scandal. Those who know before the others what is happening in the world – a natural cataclysm, the fall of a regime, the discovery of a new vaccine ... – gain an immense competitive advantage and can legitimately hope to turn their information in to real cash – whether real or virtual.

Information is also health. Social Networks are fruitful breeding and a great dissemination ground for prevention campaigns and fundraising in favor of medical research. Being informed and aware –of the risks associated with the consumption of alcohol and smoking, of the dangers inherent in an unregulated sex life or more simply of the damages that a high-calorie diet causes for those who lead a sedentary life – can really make the difference between life and death. Even more, even medicine, like the economy, is increasingly linked to IT tools: most clinical centers allow online booking of visits and exams, as well as the consultation of reports online – with many obvious benefits in terms of collection and storage of documents. Moreover, the recent covid pandemic has given great impetus to the sector of online medical consultations, a practice that is not appropriate for every pathology and specialization, but which is nevertheless proving to be quite fruitful in some specific sectors, such as, for example, the dermatological or psychoanalytic one. Either in terms of a *first approach*, a prelude to a traditional visit, perhaps supported by the reports of instrumental investigations, or as an elective area of the entire therapy.

Finally, information is power, as politicians know very well. That is why they have always had very close links with publishers. Suffice it to say that the most important politician of the last thirty years in Italy was also the most powerful publisher in the country – at the head of a company that dealt in various capacities and among other things, with television channels, radio, newspapers and cinema. The link between information and power is quite clear and evident. Because governing, ultimately, means being able to control information. There is no democratic institution or political party that cannot be lethally damaged by the publication of uncomfortable news. Even this ancestral link has been profoundly upset by the advent of the network and of the information technologies related to it. Until about ten years ago, political power could have the illusion of protecting democracy – or more prosaically themself– by keeping under control the news and the main newspapers – it is again paradigmatic Italy, because of the clear occupation and party subdivision of the statal networks or the perverse mechanism of public funds bestow to newspapers. But nowadays information can no longer be spread through the ancient channels and controlled with the old methods. The advent of social networks has allowed each citizen to express their own point of view, spreading photographs, producing videos or commenting in real time events of which they have been witnessed. All this has resulted in a profound – architectural and structural – change in the intrinsic mechanics of power. It is no coincidence that all the dictatorships in the world fear the web – and in particular social networks – like the plague. As they do everything to limit or control citizen access to the web.

The world wide web allows the active participation of citizens in the management of public affairs, makes it possible to control political parties, unmask their lies, allowing a democratic critic of their actions.

However, the democratic reach of the new means of communication for the masses does not end in their peculiar ability in favoring the spread of news and information – reversing the old scheme into a new, and more democratic, bottom-up one. In the future, they could also represent an irreplaceable instrument of direct democracy. As they could allow "anyone

to contribute permanently to elaborate and refine common problems, to inaugurate new discussions, to forge arguments, to enunciate and adopt autonomous positions on a great variety of themes. Citizens could draw together a political landscape as qualitatively varied as they want, not predefined by the large molar separations between parties. The political identity of citizens would be defined by them as contributing to the construction of a perpetually moving political landscape. By their engagement in problems (which they consider priority), positions (to which they adhere), arguments (which they adopt in turn)" [4].

2. MANY DIGITAL DIVIDES

The term "Digital Divide" commonly refers to the difference between rich and poor countries in accessing new information technologies. That is, the unequal distribution of digital technologies that currently govern the planetary processes of formation, archiving and dissemination of knowledge. However, this gap does not only concern the inequality between rich and poor countries from the point of view of the production and sale of personal computers and other comparable tools – such as, for example, smartphones, smartwatches, and tablets – but also and above all the difference that separates these countries with regard to the world wide web. The expression "digital divide" also refers to the uneven

[4] Pierre, LÉVY, writes that, as direct consequence, each citizen would have an absolutely unique identity and an unique political role. The new means would also guarantee the possibility of agreeing with those who, on a certain theme or another, at any given moment, have close or complementary positions. Of course, all necessary precautions would be taken to guarantee the anonymity of political identities. One would no longer participate in the life of society by making numbers, increasing the weight of a party, or giving greater legitimacy to a spokesperson, but by animating collective thinking, contributing to find a solution for common problems, (LÉVY, 2015, p.79 e ss.).

dissemination of the skills necessary to use IT tools to their full potential[5] – avoiding the many traps that crowd the web: from phishing to grooming to the most common viruses[6].

Therefore, the digital divide has also a national dimension, representing the borderline that, passing within the same State, divides citizens between aware and non-aware users of the same means and services. Finally, some authors use the term "digital divide" to investigate the difference that separates males and females, disabled from the rest of the population, the young and the old, workers and the unemployed. For this reason, over the last twenty years we have gone from the fight against the digital divide to the more complete and complicated analysis of the digital divide[7].

Regarding their genesis and their development, all of the mentioned digital divides would seem to be connected to one of the most dangerous trends of the global economic system: the attitude of pushing those who already stand on the margins of society towards the abyss. And reward those who are already on the top with increasing generosity.

In other words, globalization seems capable of simultaneously increasing wealth and poverty, interconnections and marginalization. The problem is that endless growth only affects wealthier classes. While degrowth only affects the poor. This hateful polarization, the exploitation of oceanic masses of weak subjects by an increasingly narrow oligarchy of wealthy

[5] See SARACENI, 2020.

[6] On this point, I would like to refer to AMATO MANGIAMELI, SARACENI, 2019.

[7] To go beyond the simple binary distinction between those *who own* and those who *do not own* certain objects or services – the so-called have and have nots – it is appropriate to consider: 1) the quality of the technical means available; 2) the digital competence; 3) the support of social networks, or the possibility of being able to ask for help and information from relatives or friends about the use of new technologies; 4) autonomy of use, i.e. the spot of access and the possibility of using the web for one's own personal interests; 5) the range of activities undertaken on the Internet (SARTORI, 2006, p. 40).

people, is not an exclusive feature of our age[8]. Yet, the arrogance of capitalism seems to have reached its peak – so much so that some authors believe they can glimpse its imminent end[9]. Paradoxically, the internet is considered by many as one of the most powerful tools at the service of financial liberalism. By others, as the main means by which it will be definitively defeated and overcome.

In other words, some authors argue that "the difference between those who have the internet and those who do not" adds "another crucial rift to the sources of inequality and social exclusion, in a complex interaction that seems to widen the gap between the promise of the information age and its hopeless reality for many people in the world"[10]. In support of such thesis, Manuel Castells proposed eight arguments very difficult to refute: 1) The logic of networking and the global reach of the new economy favors the extreme irregularity of economic and social development; 2) Education, information, science and technology are critical sources of value creation; 3) Global economy is structurally exposed to the whirlwinds of financial flows that cause sudden periods of crisis, which, in turn, push the weakest towards the margins of society, allowing the richest to increase their assets; 4) The new information technologies devalue the land, eliminating traditional agriculture – they are therefore determining a rural exodus of colossal dimensions; 5) National governments have gradually lost power due to global flows of capital and information which,

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[8] With his usual insight, Jesús BALLESTEROS underlines how, for a very long historical period, which goes from the industrial revolution to the present day, the most hateful form of violence has been represented by the "radically unjust distribution of wealth". Taking up a well-known weberian thesis, the Author points out that the absence of any moral hesitation in the accumulation of wealth – and in the consequent exploitation of the poor – is closely connected with the spread of the Calvinist principle that success in the workplace represents a proof of divine predilection (BALLESTEROS, 2005, pp. 20 et seq.).

[9] RIFKIN, 2015.

[10] CASTELLS, 2001, 231 e ss.

in turn, govern supranational institutions; 6) The global criminal economy exploits new technologies to assert itself and destabilize society; 7) Governments suffer from a widespread crisis of legitimacy; 8) The phenomena listed so far lead to civil wars and large-scale banditry.

In all these cases, the birth of the networked society, which Castells himself celebrated in a book that soon became a classic, seems to represent something negative. An element that collaborates, together with other and equally deleterious phenomena, to the egoistic fragmentation of society. Favoring its disintegration.

The thesis, according to which the spread of the internet, together with the digital divide that it implies and supposes, would amplify existing inequalities within an already highly polarized society is normally identified as "the stratification thesis". Taking its cue from the so-called "St. Matthew effect"[11] it assumes that only some citizens, living in a higher cultural and economic condition than the rest of the population, would be able to further improve their condition, capitalizing and fully exploiting the opportunities offered by the network. That is why, the digital divide would end up increasing the distance that separates the most advantaged from the weakest sections of the population.

On the contrary, Jeremy Rifkin argues that both capitalism and socialism are necessarily destined to decline, thanks to the collaborationist paradigm

[11] The expression refers to Matthew 13,12 and 25,29 – "For whoever has, will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them" – seems proven by the science of networks studied by Albert-Láslzó Barabàsi and in particular by the rule that the author identifies and describes as "power law" (BARABÁSI, 2003). In other words, there is a kind of *virtuous circle* that favors those who already occupy an high positions in the social structure, favoring a widening of the disparities in the individual endowment of cultural capital [...] When in fact the diffusion of the Internet takes place among those who already hold higher social positions and resources, there will be a greater chance that the less privileged are still excluded from access to better resources (SARTORI, 2006, pp. 43-44).

spread by the Internet. In particular, thanks to the advent of the *commons*[12]. In support of this second theory, it would be possible to cite many and important studies that sociologists, philosophers and computer scientists have dedicated to sharing – as a structural paradigm of the network. The *peer to peer*[13] protocol, *open source* software[14] and the end-to-end architecture itself would seem to represent excellent alternatives to the competitive egoism typical of capitalism.

Rifkin's ideas are correctly supported by the theories of "normalization". According to this interpretative line, access to the Internet – and to new information technologies – will necessarily follow the same "S-curve" that

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[12] As Jeremy RIFKIN writes: market capitalism is based on self-interest and dominated by material gain. On the other hand, the social Commons society is animated by collaborative interests and a deep desire to connect with each other. The first promotes property rights, the caveat emptor and the search for autonomy. The second promotes open source innovation, transparency, aggregation. What gives the Commons greater prominence today than at any other time in history is that we are now building a high-tech global technology platform, whose essential features are potentially capable of optimizing the values and operational principles which animate ancient institution. (RIFKIN, 2015, p. 28).

[13] Lawrence LESSIG defines peer-to-peer as a network in which the content is not provided by a single central server, but by equivalent or "peer" machines connected through the network. Underlining that this was the architecture of the original Internet computer. As a matter of fact, in the beginning there was no set of central servers to which the machines were connected; instead there was a series of e2e protocols that allowed data to be shared (LESSIG, Milano, 2006 p. 138.)

[14] In this regard, Chris CARLSSON writes that Internet reveals an unlimited abundance that stimulates sharing and cooperation for one's own benefit. Moreover, digital commons strengthen human interconnectedness and interdependence. According to this author, in a world of overwhelming barbarism and alienating isolation, the powerful appeal of communication inspires passionate commitment and a substantial investment of time in millions of people. He asserts that participatory commons nourish all human relationships, from banal buying and selling to the unbridled sharing of poetry, art and music. That is why he prefigures a post-capitalist life based on generalized abundance. (CARLSSON, 2009, p. 104).

normally characterizes the diffusion of each new technology: over the years, IT will be less and less expensive, more and more user friendly. And safe. It is by no means certain that the spread of the Internet will eventually amplify social differences and inequalities. Indeed, we could hypothesize that soon "even the slowest groups in adopting the Internet, due to scarce economic, cultural or social resources, will have the opportunity to recover the lost ground"[15]. In turn, this technological leveling will produce others – working as an extraordinary factor of democracy and equality.

In fact, Internet users can share many important cultural resources – such as, for example, movies, books or songs. They can also exploit the potential of shared computing to create a gigantic computer with variable morphology capable of solving, in a completely free and structurally copyright-free way, problems so complicated that they could not even be set by a single research group, a single computer, a single company or a single State[16].

Furthermore, the increasingly diffusion of open-source programs implies that one of the main evolutionary resources of our time (software) is frequently distributed on the web with an "open" source license and code – that is, without any copyright, impediment or block. So that anyone could study its algorithm, change it, possibly improve it and spread a new version. Considering that in ninety-nine percent of cases, open-source software is shared on the network with a CC0 license, and especially

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[15] SARTORI, 2006, p. 32.

[16] For an example, let's think of the Seti project. Seti (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) analyzes radio waves looking for evidence of intelligent life in space. It does this by recording the radio spectrum noise we receive on our planet; and then analyze it looking for telltale signs of something unexplained. Renting computers fort the same task would involve increasingly prohibitive costs. But the researchers of the University of Berkley had a great idea: to facilitate the distribution of portions of these recorded data to machines on the Net. Allowing these same machines to carry out the necessary computation. (LESSIG, 2006, p. 139).

considering that it normally works better than the so-called "proprietary" software, we understand how the genesis and development of the networked society can contribute to fighting the worst distortions of world capitalism – favoring the free sharing of knowledge at the expense of the old selfish and competitive paradigm[17].

In conclusion, the reduction of the digital divide seems to represent a necessary and essential condition for the social inequalities to gradually level out. As a final and further proof, just think of what Information Technologies can do for people with disabilities: not only does the Internet allow people with reduced mobility to actively participate in social life, not only do the *smartmobs*[18] help people with speech difficulties to communicate in many ways once not remotely imaginable, but new information technologies allow people with disabilities to get in touch, form innovative communities of mutual help and create critical mass – to spread culture and awareness about their condition and politically affect choices of the community to which they belong[19].

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[17] In this sense, Pekka, HIMANEN states that the radicalism of hacking consists in proposing an alternative spirit to the network society – a spirit that finally questions the dominant Protestant ethic. And this is the only time hackers truly become crackers: because they are trying to crack "the lock of the iron cage". According to the author this is not a quick process, because the Protestant ethic will not suddenly be replaced by something else. It will take time, as with all major cultural changes. The Protestant ethic is so deeply ingrained in our consciousness today that it is often seen simply as human nature. (HIMANEN, 2001, p.79).

[18] Howard RHEINGOLD has been one of the first authors in identifying this new phenomena (RHEINGOLD, 2003).

[19] "Currently, some Internet technologies are a significant benefit to people with specific types of disabilities, while other Internet technologies offer potential opportunities to all persons with disabilities [...] People who may never encounter someone with a similar disability in their physical environment can now interact directly with people with similar conditions worldwide [...] New online communities foster social interactions between

For all these reasons, the lack of digital tools, access to the web and IT skills can be considered to all intents and purposes as a particularly serious form of poverty. Those who do not have access to the networks are nowadays irremediably damaged in the enjoyment of their fundamental rights. Being excluded from the web – or not knowing how to use it – means living on the margins of society, without being able in any way to improve one's economic and existential condition.

3. INFORMATIONAL OPULENCE AND OVERLOAD

Prima facie, information opulence would seem a positive phenomenon, alternative to the more ancient and hateful scarcity. However, those who use such expression normally tend to stigmatize the large number of information that reaches us every day, in any place and time, regardless of a voluntary and conscious research, invalidating the attention resources we have and consequently damaging our cognitive processes[20]. Let's try to elaborate a taxonomy of these inputs, in order to clarify what we are talking about, exactly, when referring to the theme of informational opulence and of the overload that derives from it.

Every day we are continuously reached by messages of various kinds and nature. These are information that we have searched for and in which we are interested; information that we were not looking for, but in which we are still interested (such as when, for example, we receive a text message from one of our telephone contacts); information that we were not

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different groups invested in disability issues, ad not only do they allow persons with disabilities to discuss emotional and physical experiences of disability, but they also enable their parents, spouses, and friends to find information and support" (JAEGER, 2012, pp.6 -7).

[20] CARR, 2011.

looking for and in which we are not interested in any way (often, advertisements by which we are literally *bombarded* at any time of the day). Such inputs reach us anywhere and anytime. People peek at their mobile phones during Mass; respond to messages while driving on the freeway; brazenly hide behind a phone screen when dine in a restaurant with their friends.

Furthermore, the information we receive – anywhere and at any time – comes from heterogeneous sources (a friend; a relative; a contact on Facebook; the telephone operator ...), have a heterogeneous form (a text message; an image; a video or audio file) – if not multimedia – and varied content.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the information we receive require a response in real time. It implies that the user, in order to decipher the meaning of the messages he receives, must constantly change vocabulary, hermeneutic code and expected horizon – with great expenditure of mental energy and the risk of misunderstandings. Riva notes that the psychological consequences of this phenomenon are essentially two: a paradoxical increase in anxiety due to lack of information; addiction, disinterest or refusal for information[21].

Let's try to consider how this affects our intellectual abilities. According to cognitive sciences, there are three different types of attention: the first is

[21] In a more specific way, Giuseppe Riva asserts that users feel anxiety due to lack of sufficient information: the difficulty in finding significant news within the flow of information can lead individuals to try to further expand their information sources. A typical behavior associated with this type of anxiety is that of the subject who checks his profile every few minutes, manifesting an anxious behavior in case of lack of messages. On the other hand, it could happen that users feel disinterest or refusal of information. The bombardment of excessive and too conflicting information leads users to lose interest in the information flow. The result is that the progressive increase in the production of information corresponds to a progressive decrease in the quality of use. This forces information providers to use increasingly "noisy" tools to attract interest in their own content (RIVA, 2016).

"sustained attention", or the ability to maintain focus (mental concentration) active on a given task for as long as it takes to perform it; the second is the so-called "selective attention" and consists in the ability to select only relevant stimuli for the performance of a given task, relegating all the other inputs that our brain perceives to mere background noise[22]; the third is, finally, "divided attention", it is the ability to perform multiple tasks at the same time by switching attention from one to another[23].

A study carried out by Alyson Gausby in 2015 for Microsoft showed that sustained attention of digital natives is significantly lower than that of previous generations[24]. This same study demonstrates that results obtained by digital natives are comparable to those obtained by non-natives who, however, make a constant and intensive use of new information technologies – as if to say: a real genetic mutation has not occurred: a boy who does not intensive use of new technologies would keep his attentional resources unaltered.

The study also shows that sustained attention loss is offset by an increase in the ability to multitask. And yet the growth of divided attention – associated with a decrease in sustained attention – would negatively affect selective attention. All this seems to indicate that the success of fake news[25] depends (also) on the lack of attention – or on its wavering

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[22] In this regard, psychologists study the "cocktail effect", referring to the ability of listening and understanding what two persons talking to each other says during a party, although the conversation takes place in a sea of confusion due to the simultaneous presence of many other participants.

[23] See RIVA, 2018, 92.

[24] GAUSBY, 2015.

[25] According to a research of the *Pew Research Center*, two-thirds of American citizens learn most of the news on social networks on a daily basis. This same research shows that 75% of adults are unable to understand if a piece of news is true or false. Both the mentioned factors have significantly contributed to the achievement of what scholars have defined "The epicenter of fake news", represented, without a shadow of a doubt, by the

weakness – which the user experiences because of a huge mass of information. We would therefore be faced with a phenomenon that feeds on users laziness, their real lack of reasoning, rather than on their lack of evaluation – as Pennycook and Rand affirm in a very significant study titled: *Lazy, not biased: Susceptibility to partisan fake news is better explained by lack of reasoning than by motivated reasoning*[26].

We therefore understand how informational opulence presents also a negative and deleterious aspect. To the extent that it overcomes the structural limits of our cognitive abilities, producing in native users – or in any case in regular users – a clear psychological change. We cannot afford to underestimate the phenomenon. Because what happens in the virtual, non-centric and de-territorialized world of social networks determines important repercussions on political elections, affects national security and public health, favors the birth of new parties or protest movements. The fact that digital information is too much and too fast to be analyzed, and therefore to be interpreted correctly, ends up completely invalidating the potential advantages of an interconnected world.

To this we add that too often people confuse information and culture, which are profoundly distinct things. Having millions of information at your disposal, without knowing how to interpret them, equals to not having any information. With the added illusion of knowledge. For this reason, millions of Internet users in the world, after having misunderstood the documents found on the net, delude themselves of being able to formulate alternative and revolutionary theories compared to what is stated by official science. They imagine foiling conspiracies organized by

presidential elections of 2016, strongly influenced, in their final outcome, by the massive diffusion of fake news on social networks (WEIDNER, BEUKM, BAL, 2019, 3).

[26] PENNYCOOK, RAND, 2019.

the world elites, propose innovative treatment protocols to cure naturally and expose "the lies of the pharmaceutical industry"[27].

4. CONCLUSIONS

As we have been able to consider, nowadays it is impossible to live without being interconnected: any aspect of our life – from health, to work, to friends and politics – depends on the quality and quantity of the information we have, on the quantity and quality of access points to the world wide web we can count on.

That is why the digital divide(s) are a big problem and Government's should do their best to remove them. If they don't, the web will turn to a great lost occasion for spreading equality and human rights. Moreover, it will turn in a mechanism of exclusion and segregation, an instrument which contributes in increasing the already high polarization of wealth – as some important studies on its structure seem to suggest.

On the other hand, we cannot consider the digital divide as a mere problem of having or not having digital means. As a matter of fact, a large part of the world population has nowadays access to the web – which can count on almost 4.66 billion active users every day – without being educated to the use of IT. This means that we also have to fight against a more underhand kind of divide: informational opulence and informational overload. Web users are having too much information without being able to handle them correctly. This expose them to several kind of manipulation, as it turns out to be a danger for the survival of democracy.

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