LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY

**Topic: Effect of Digital Divide in India and Government initiatives to mitigate it.**

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**Abstract**

The term ‘digital divide’ was introduced in the mid-1990s and has become popular as an area of interdisciplinary concern. The term has received much attention from many researchers and policy makers. However, it remains an important object of public policy debate that encompasses social, economic and political issues which affects humanity and the universe at large. ‘Digital divide’ may result in ‘knowledge divide’ or ‘information divide’.

Lack of such knowledge and information may also have specific implications for the social-economic development in different communities. The different views of the digital divide are influenced by a number of factors such as the researcher’s field of study, how the researcher understands the concept digital divide, and problems, which the researcher intends to solve.

This paper attempts to discuss all those problems, which are face in term of ‘Digital divide’ in India.

**Introduction**

The term digital divide refers to the difference in terms of access to and usage of information and communication technology.

Digital divide creates a knowledge gap when one group of people have more access to digital resources like the internet, computers, smartphones so on, better informed and more educated about new developments and inventions compare to another group of people who have neither access to these things or have limited access.

Digital divide arises inequality in a society. It can happen between those who are living in cities and those living in rural areas, between different economic classes and those countries which are developed and under developing countries on a global scale.

**Digital Divide in India**

As time passes, new media technology like the computer, television, radio and especially the Internet have been advancing rapidly. Society has benefited due to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resulting in people’s lives being made more convenient. Communication has been made easier and information has become faster to access. However, there are countries that are not able to keep up with current day technology causing a digital divide, India being one of them.

The life of a typical citizen residing in the rural parts of India consists of farming and doing handicraft jobs. The people there often do not have any access to any form of technology. While most people in the world have Internet access privileges, some do not even have computers and hence, developments stagnate. Though India is the country which has the second highest number of Facebook users in the world, Internet penetration across the entire population is still below 10 percent according to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). In fact, about 70 percent of Indians live in rural areas, where 65 percent of the working population are farmers. As a result, there have been attempts to resolve the technical issue in rural India and bridging the digital divide.

The main problem is that these 70 percents have an extremely difficult time obtaining electricity in villages. Without electricity, there is no internet. However, the main issue here is the internet. It is being seen as something that can help raise their standard of living “especially for education, commerce, and participatory democracy” (Lancaster, 2003) over the last decade. As education and technology are practically a necessity in the world today, several solutions were suggested to address the main issue.

The Silicon Valley of India in Bangalore, India is thus one of the Information Technology hubs attempting to bridge the digital divide. A Hennur resident in North Bangalore had attended technological workshops organized by the Internet Society’s (ISOC) Bangalore Chapter and gained benefits from it, such as learning how to send email attachments and using the Internet to source for new designs and find out sales routes like eBay. With this, tailors, glass cutters, cotton weavers, are also being taught basic technology including instant messaging, emailing, downloading of new media, using social media platforms as marketing tools and certain software like Microsoft Excel and Word.

A wireless communications engineer from Bangalore is hoping that a registered company, known as Cognitive Radio Assisted Mobile Network (Cramnet) will be able to help the Indians keep up with technology closing the digital divide. Intending to provide free wireless internet to India’s digitally disenfranchised by an unused spectrum, he wishes that it can improve the people’s lives by letting them pay bills online, farmers checking crops’ costs and mothers knowing the vaccinations to give their children.

Electricity has also been known to be a problem as part of the digital divide in rural India. As mentioned previously, technology and other electronic gadgets will not be able to function without electricity, making it a serious concern. In addition, supplying nodes which are solar-enabled are being taken care of (Manzar, 2014). Other than catering to work, education is important as well. Most tribal children in India are not able to obtain education due to finances and the problem within the digital divide

**Challenges and Barriers to Bridging the Digital Divide**

* **Infrastructural barriers:** India still lacks a robust telecommunication infrastructure with sufficient reliable bandwidth for Internet connection.
* **Literacy and skill barriers:** Education in information literacy will play an important role in keeping the society from fragmenting into a population of information haves and have-nots. The lack of skill in using computer and communication technology also prevents people from accessing digital information.
* **Economic barriers:** Poor access to computer and communication technology also causes a digital divide. In India, the ability to purchase or rent the tool for access to digital information is less among the masses.
* **Content barriers:** To solve the digital divide, steps should be taken by the government to ensure that all citizens are able to receive diverse content relevant to their lives as well as to produce their own content for their communities and for the Internet.
* **Language barriers:** Having a multicultural and multilingual population, today a large percentage of information content on the Internet is in English, which is a barrier for the people whose primary language is not English.

**Suggestions**

* **Literacy** – Steps should be taken towards making people digitally literate. Example – ‘One library per village’ program.
* **Training** – Making rural population familiar with the use of computer and basic functions. Example – National Science Digital Library: provides cheaper access to science and technology books.
* **Accessibility** – Making the internet accessible to all. Example – National Optical Fiber Network: to ensure broadband connectivity.
* **Affordability** – Reducing phone prices and internet service prices.
* Push and motivate citizens to make use of information and communication technology (ICT) mechanisms.
* Reducing the trust deficit that people have with respect to IT enabled services – One come across individuals who would not use ATM but rather visit a bank branch and withdraw money.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, in order for the citizens living in the rural part of India to be able to keep up with the latest technology, technological workshops are organized to help the Indian workers and their families to make their lives easier. Electricity too plays the most vital role. In addition, wireless mesh networks are also being implemented for tribal children to obtain education. The internet is becoming a necessity throughout the world, and no longer a privilege.

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