

**WEEK 10**

**CIVICS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

# Digitization, Information & Society, Digital Citizenship

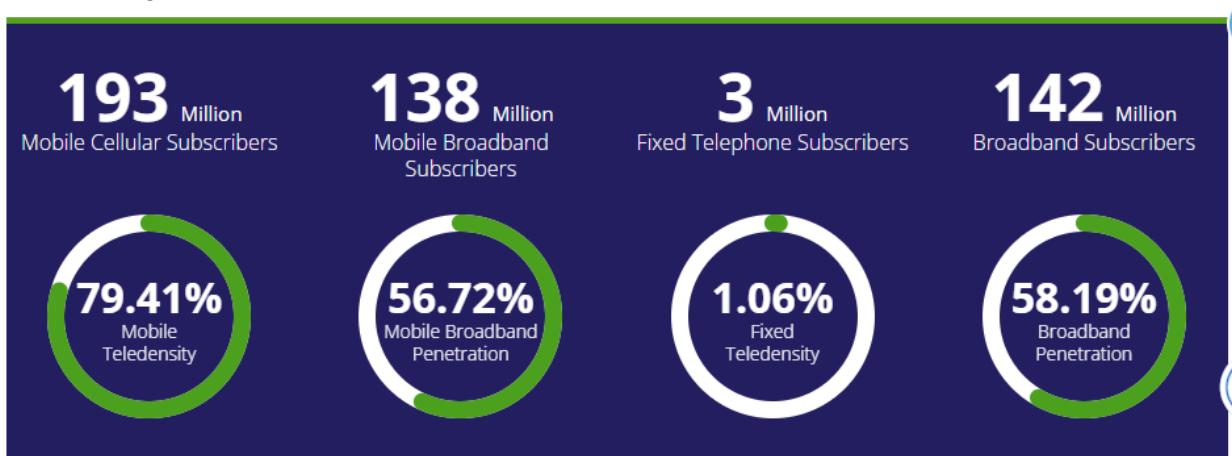
This reading is divided into two thematic areas:

- I. Digital Divides & Disparities
- II. Social Media and Community Mobilization

## I. Digital Divides & Disparities

Internet connectivity is vital to economic growth. Around the world, millions of people rely on digital devices every day to complete their jobs, study for exams, and communicate with loved ones. Digital technologies can open a world of opportunities, but not everyone has equal access to the internet—or any access at all.

Pakistan's Digital Stats PTA



According to the World Bank 33% of the population in Pakistan has internet.

What Is the Digital Divide?

There's a major gap between people who can access and use digital technology and those who can't. This is called the digital divide, and it's getting worse as 3.7 billion people across the globe remain unconnected. But what causes the digital divide, and how can we stop it?

Technology is developing faster than ever, and it's increasingly necessary for different aspects of life, from work and school to pharmaceuticals and healthcare. Areas of the world without the right infrastructure and people who can't afford, or don't know how to use, technology are at a disadvantage. To avoid economic fallout and promote digital equity and digital inclusion, institutions must address and try to close the digital divide.

## Three Levels of Digital Divide

### Three Levels of Digital Divide

Level of Digital Divide	Definition	Causes	Impact	Example
1. Access Divide	Inequality in access to digital technologies like the internet and devices.	Socioeconomic factors, geographic location, infrastructure availability.	People without access are excluded from opportunities in education, work, healthcare, and information.	A rural village with no broadband access, preventing students from attending online classes.
2. Usage Divide	Gap in digital skills and ability to use technology effectively.	Educational background, age, experience with technology, language barriers.	Individuals may have access but cannot fully benefit from digital tools, limiting productivity and learning.	An elderly person with a smartphone uses it only for calls and texts, while a young professional uses it for work and banking.
3. Quality of Use/Empowerment Divide	Difference in how people leverage technology to improve their lives.	Differences in how technology is used for personal development, economic advancement, civic participation.	Limits potential for economic growth, education, and civic engagement.	A business using digital marketing and e-commerce to expand globally, while another uses technology only for basic communication.

### Aspects of the Digital Divide

As technology develops faster, it also becomes essential for more aspects of daily life, including school and healthcare. As a result, the digital divide is worsening as those with technology get ahead faster, and those without technology are left behind.

#### Technology Is Developing Faster

Computers and cellphones aren't the only kinds of technology developing at exponential rates.

Although these areas are changing quickly, especially with the rollout of 5G, the digital divide is widening as technology advances and becomes crucial for many different elements of daily life.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues around the world, many aspects of life that previously took place in person have moved online, such as education. According to a Harvard Business Review article by Bhaskar

Chakravorti, fifty-five million students in the U.S. alone switched to remote learning during the pandemic. However, one in five teens reported being unable to do their homework “often” or “sometimes” because of unreliable internet access. Twelve million U.S. children lacked internet access altogether. Around the globe, students without access to the internet risk losing out on education entirely.

## **Technology Is Essential for More Aspects of Daily Life**

This isn’t only happening in schools. Many aspects of medicine and healthcare went virtual after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Telemedicine, virtual healthcare consultations, and video mental health appointments are all a staple of post-pandemic life. Technology is becoming crucial for the everyday medicine we’re used to, but it’s also changing the scope of healthcare altogether.

## **Causes of the Digital Divide**

The digital divide is partly caused by a lack of infrastructure. But it’s also a matter of digital literacy and how institutions support technology.

### **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is a huge concern when it comes to the digital divide. Accessing a website requires a computer and an internet connection. This means broadband or fiber-optic connectivity. Or, a user needs a smartphone with data. In the United States, 5.6 percent of the population has no access to broadband internet. Students are worse off: fifteen to sixteen million (30 percent) lack broadband internet access.

### **Digital Literacy**

Digital literacy can mean a lot of things. It includes knowing what information is safe to share online, how to spot disinformation on the internet, and how digital skills can be used to improve one’s life. This information needs to be taught, which is why closing the digital gap isn’t only a matter of building infrastructure. It requires closing the knowledge gap by educating people on digital literacy.

### **Institutions**

A lack of support from institutions such as national, state, or local governments contributes to the digital divide. Governments should fund or subsidize access to broadband internet. Institutions must prioritize educating individuals about technology, use, and safety. In places where this is not the case, people are likely to land on the wrong side of the digital divide.

### **Examples of Bridging the Digital Divide**

Luckily, there are many countries, institutions, and industries working to bridge the digital divide. The European Union, the Republic of Korea, and Estonia are just three locations that are building infrastructure, prioritizing digital education, and promoting public-private partnerships to close the digital divide.

### **European Union**

In 2010, the European Union (EU) launched the Digital Agenda for Europe, which sought to address the EU’s digital divide by 2020. Achievements reached during the decade include lower prices for electronic communication, the creation of a broadband fund to support digital infrastructure, and the passage of

legislation protecting consumers' digital privacy. This prioritization of technology infrastructure by governing bodies is an important step in closing the digital divide. The Republic of Korea has done similar work.

## **Republic of Korea**

After the Korean War ended in the 1950s, [the Republic of Korea](#) (ROK) had one of the poorest economies in the world. Now, it's one of the most developed countries in the region and has one of the world's most innovative economies thanks to government intervention and investment in ICT access.

The country has also prioritized technology in education. By integrating technology into every aspect of education, the ROK promotes digital literacy from an early age to help close the digital divide.

## **Digital Divide & Impact on Women**

### **Case in Point: Pakistan**

While digital literacy refers to an individual's ability to find, evaluate, and compose clear information through writing and other mediums on various digital platforms, it also implies access to technology including digital devices such as mobile telephones or computers with an Internet connection. According to the Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020, mobile ownership provides critical life-saving tools such as safety, access to important information, and pivotal support for work and study. Yet global trends indicate that women have lesser access to mobile devices and mobile Internet use than men and the gender gap remains a serious hurdle to equitable development.

In LMICs (lower middle-income countries) this gap is particularly prevalent where "women are still eight per cent less likely than men to own a mobile phone, and 20 per cent less likely to use the internet on a mobile." There is nevertheless an improvement—47% of women in LMICs used mobile internet in 2017, this number is now 57%. Pakistan, however, still struggles with one of the highest gender gaps in the world when it comes to mobile phone ownership (38%). Similarly, with respect to mobile Internet usage, 37% of Pakistani men have access to mobile Internet while this number was only 19 % for women. Likewise, considering access to broadband Internet, only 28.14% of the entire Pakistani population has access, indicating an already dire situation.

Accessibility is even worse, in rural areas where 55% of the population resides; according to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, the usage of Internet in these areas is less than 8%. It is not surprising that these statistics remain consistent even in the ambit of financial inclusion where while about 12% of men have been found making online transactions, only 3.3% of the females were following suit<sup>80</sup>. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that less than 5% of the female population has access to bank accounts which gives a fair idea about women's financial inclusion.

Access to technology can help narrow this gender gap. However, that requires reducing barriers to ICT infrastructure and digital skills.

## **II. Social Media, Community Mobilization & Shaping Public Discourse**

We can't deny that in today's dynamic digital landscape, social media has emerged as an indispensable instrument in shaping political discourse and swaying public opinion. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become integral components of political campaigns and initiatives, as politicians and advocacy groups have deftly leveraged their power to disseminate messages and mobilise support for their causes. Social media has provided politicians with an expanded reach, allowing them to engage in real-time conversations with their constituents.

### **Social Media as a New Medium for Political Communication**

- o Social media provides a new channel for established political institutions and actors to engage with young citizens.
- o It allows political actors to communicate with the younger generation in a more direct and accessible manner

### **Redefining Political Engagement through Social Media**

- o Young citizens are using social media to redefine political engagement.
- o They find new ways to express political preferences outside traditional political activities like voting or joining a political party.

#### ***Examples of Social Media's Role in Political Movements***

Supporters of this argument highlight the prominent use of social media in protests and political movements:

- **Arab Spring**
- **Occupy Wall Street Movement**

### **Political Potential of Social Media**

- Social media is often seen as a highly effective tool for organizing and mobilizing protest activities.
- It plays a significant role in amplifying voices and coordinating political actions beyond traditional structures.

### **The Power of Confirmation Bias**

One of the hidden forces that operates on social media is confirmation bias. This is especially powerful when it comes to controversial topics, including politics. If you're like most people, the majority of your friends and followers on social media probably share your outlook. This means that the vast majority of tweets, Facebook posts, pins or other content you read on these sites tend to express the same point of view, one that you already hold.

It's natural for people to surround themselves with others of like mind. This is true both online and offline. On social media sites, this can create the illusion that "everybody" thinks the same way. If you have a few hundred friends on Facebook, for example, and 90 percent of them agree on most political issues, the information you get will be filtered through this bias. People will post links to stories that confirm your existing bias. They'll repeat opinions you already hold.

For this reason, social media may reinforce our opinions and make it more difficult to entertain alternative points of view. In politics, it can help to make people more opinionated and less tolerant of others. On the other hand, if you make an effort to connect with an assortment of people with diverse viewpoints, you can overcome confirmation bias and use social media to make you more open-minded.

### **Social Media and the Future of Politics**

Because social media is relatively new, we're just starting to see its impact on society. There are sure to be many political changes that come about due to social media. There are now proposals for internet voting, which could lead to more people participating in elections. This could make social media even more influential, as people could literally vote moments after reading the latest comments or links they found on Facebook or Twitter.

Other advancements will also change politics. Polling techniques on social media will become more common and, hopefully, more accurate. More virtual political rallies and town halls will take place. As social media becomes ever more popular, its impact on politics will only increase over time. It will be interesting to observe how this plays out.

### **Rumors, Fake News and Conspiracies**

Political campaigns are now influenced by every story, whether true or not, that gets spread around social media. It's getting more and more difficult to separate actual news from fake news online. Social media makes this distinction especially confusing. The constant stream of memes, links and rumors about political leaders and candidates is a mixture of truth, lies, satire and speculation.

There are now quite a few fake or satirical "news" sites that often post stories that sound authentic. Some fake news sites are not even amusing but simply exist to post clickbait stories or to troll readers who don't do their own research.

There are also sites with political biases or those peddling various unsubstantiated conspiracy theories. It's easy to be influenced by misinformation posted by your friends and followers, even if they don't intend to mislead you. It's therefore necessary to use a great deal of discernment before believing anything.

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