**DIGITIAL DIVIDE**

Digital divide is a term that refers to the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern [information and communications technology](https://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/ICT-information-and-communications-technology-or-technologies), and those that don't or have restricted access. This technology can include the telephone, television, [personal computers](https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/personal-computer-PC) and the [Internet](https://searchwindevelopment.techtarget.com/definition/Internet).

Well before the late 20th century, *digital divide* referred chiefly to the division between those with and without telephone access; after the late 1990s the term began to be used mainly to describe the split between those with and without Internet access, particularly [broadband](https://searchtelecom.techtarget.com/definition/broadband).

The [digital](https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/digital) divide typically exists between those in cities and those in rural areas; between the educated and the uneducated; between socioeconomic groups; and, globally, between the more and less industrially developed nations. Even among populations with some access to technology, the digital divide can be evident in the form of lower-performance computers, lower-speed [wireless](https://searchmobilecomputing.techtarget.com/definition/wireless) connections, lower-priced connections such as [dial-up](https://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/definition/dial-up), and limited access to subscription-based content.

The reality of a separate-access marketplace is problematic because of the rise of services such as [video on demand](https://searchtelecom.techtarget.com/definition/video-on-demand), [video conferencing](https://searchunifiedcommunications.techtarget.com/definition/video-conference) and [virtual classrooms](https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/virtual-classroom), which require access to high-speed, high-quality connections that those on the less-served side of the digital divide cannot access and/or afford. And while adoption of [smartphones](https://searchmobilecomputing.techtarget.com/definition/smartphone) is growing, even among lower-income and minority groups, the rising costs of data plans and the difficulty of performing tasks and transactions on smartphones continue to inhibit the closing of the gap.

According to recent studies and reports, the digital divide is still very much a reality today. A June 2013 U.S. White House broadband report, for example, showed that only 71% of American homes have adopted broadband, a figure lower than in other countries with comparable gross domestic product.

Proponents for closing the digital divide include those who argue it would improve literacy, democracy, social mobility, economic equality and economic growth.

**Factors affecting Digital Divide**

**Poverty & Poor Infrastructure**

Poverty is the core factor in the digital divide (Tiene, n.d.).  In a world where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, the developing countries certainly are not able to acquire sufficient funding to purchase the telecommunication infrastructure and equipment.  Instead, they are more concerned with health care and the other social infrastructure such as water and electricity.  Subsequently, the underdeveloped telecommunication infrastructure has limited their ICT availability and thus information-deprived.

**Corruption & Bureaucracy**

According to a survey carried out by the Global Information Infrastructure Commission on individuals around the world from private sector, it shows that an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy can impede and deviate away much needed funds for bridging digital divide.  Lack of government regulations and proper surveillance are so discouraging that they can be deterrence to potential funders and investors.  These combined circumstances make the telecommunications environments so restrictive and stagnant that reformation is difficult to be materialized (Tiene, n.d.).

**Educational Exposure & Technical Support**

Providing education in ICT is a big hindrance because ICT is expensive and fund-exhausting.  With the infrastructure already in a poor state, surges in electrical lines can damage hardware and or low bandwidth connection limits the Internet access very much.  Usually, school budgets are overall quite restraining and getting funding for instructional technology is challenging.  Thus, they usually purchase used equipment or rely on donated hardware that have low functionality.

In addition, lack of technical support to install the systems and repair the equipment can be problematic and troublesome.  Especially with the deficiency of technical expertise, school teachers are often without guidance and little experience with technology as to how to utilize the existing equipment and integrate into the curriculum.  Therefore, students are not able to receive sufficient technological skills.

**Poor planning**

In many cases, the efforts to institute instructional technologies to the developing countries have adversely failed.  Such unsuccessful efforts have put the poor country further indebted with the considerable sunk cost of technology-based projects.  One of the common mistakes usually made is overambitious and too optimistic on the projects.  Some projects which lack detailed findings whether local community can adapt to their approach usually only raise even more problems.  Teachers were indisposed to those approaches and the students soon lost interest.  Without the support of the key participants, these efforts eventually became obsolete (Tiene, n.d.).

**Other factors**

Household or individual income has been identified as an important determinant of the presence of computers and the internet penetration in homes.  Income distribution is particularly vital in the diffusion of new technology; with higher income groups acquire ICTs earlier (OECD, 2001).

Rurality

As urban centres are progressively building high-speed broadband networks, many rural and remote areas are neglected because the cost and difficulty associated with wiring the rural locations are often expensive and prohibitive.

Illiteracy

Able to access to technology and content are insufficient. With ability to access to internet, the individual need to know minimally

                  1)How to apply the technology

                  2)How to search and retrieve relevant information via the Web

                  3)Process the information in order to answer their information problem

In short, individuals should not only have the accessibility to the Internet, but the knowledge to utilize the Internet (Bertot, 2003).  For example, literacy problem in Bangladesh has brought crisis of skilled computer user. They do not have the adequate knowledge to employ the information in the net which is designed in advance technology.  In addition, the less educated community are not very computer friendly (Akbar, n.d.).

Language barriers & lack of local cultural diversity contents

Most of the websites available are dominated by English while websites with local languages are scarce.  Some people especially those who's English is not their native language may feel discouraged and unable to participate fully using the English language (Akbar, n.d.). Moreover, low availability of local and social issues and web contents that are sufficiently enriched with cultural diversity also contributed to the digital divide. Local users are deprived from accessing local information and services as required

**Top Five Digital Divide Solutions**

The interaction between people and computers has increased in the past two decades as technology advances. The ability to access computers and internet has become crucial for society. Unfortunately, people still lacks access to modern technology and the internet.

## **What are the solutions to the digital divide?**

First, are there any possible solutions to the digital divide? Well, yes there are. To decrease the digital divide gap, we must tackle the problems of poverty, low education levels, and poor infrastructure. Below are solutions that can help narrow the digital divide gap.

### **1) Increase affordability**

One of the chief internet adoption barriers in both developed and developing countries in the world is affordability. A large group of people cannot access the internet because of the high costs involved. The cost of smartphones and laptop computers are expensive, despite technology being a basic need. Taxes, patent fees and electricity are contributors to the high prices of technology. To help this, we can offer financing to help lower income earners afford new technology. Governments can give tariff subsidies to encourage them to buy these digital tools.

### **2) Empowering users**

To see the full potential of the internet and its impact on the world, we must take advantage of it’s capabilities. Most of the people who use the internet have a limited understanding of some of its use cases . For instance, Google helps people find information that they would not have access to. An issue that broadens the digital divide is ‘participation inequality’ where users lack the skills to use it.

Since user data is used in decision-making, the data collected may not be suitable enough for proper decision making hence leading to poor decisions that may lead to huge consequences. To avoid this, the public needs to be educated on the benefits and value of utilizing the internet and the various resources within it to achieve economic and social growth. Furthermore, the public should be encouraged to share opinions and any other relevant user data online to aid the government and other organizations make informed decisions that serve the people’s needs better.

### **3) Improve the relevance of online content**

According to research, the top barrier to internet penetration in developing countries is relevance. This is because, in most cases, people cannot find content, online services or web and mobile applications in their primary language. Moreover, most people in rural areas lack the necessary prerequisite education to understand a lot of online content.

To encourage internet adoption in such places, local content and applications need to be developed in local languages that can be understood by the local populace. Besides to this, privacy, trust, and data security issues that tend to scare away many potential users need to be addressed by formulating policy frameworks that ensure online websites protect their users’ data and online activity .

### **4) Internet infrastructure development**

The internet relies on infrastructure to relay information between two or more computers located in different parts of the world. Lack of proper internet infrastructure, which is the case in many 3rd world countries, means either poor internet connection or no internet connection at all in those parts of the world.

With the inception of the broadband internet which is much faster and reliable than the traditional dial-up connection, this challenge has become even more pronounced especially in rural areas. This is because of the costly nature of the systems and technologies that relay broadband internet making it uneconomical to establish in rural areas. Luckily, large-scale cost-effective solutions that are suited for rural environments have been developed such as the use of satellite broadband technologies, drones, and earth-orbiting balloons.

### **5) Address gender gap in internet access**

Statistics on internet usage carried out in 2016 showed that there are 250 million fewer women online than men. The majority of these women live in Africa and the Arab states. This means that in order to overcome the digital divide, a special focus has to be placed on women to bring their usage closer to or at par with that of men.

The fact that in low and middle-income countries there are more women without mobile phones than men further exacerbates the problem. The effort to close this gender gap lies squarely on both government and non-governmental organizations which must partner up and work together. Addressing the issues of poverty, relevance and public awareness will also considerably address the plight of women without access to the internet.