**Naga Teja Guttikonda (1104370)**

**Date: 18/06/2020**

**Can ethics bridge the gap known as Digital divide?**

Digital divide is a broad term that encompasses a lot of things. But primarily, it refers to the gap between the people who have access to digital media and the people who don’t. This issue is widely discussed in political, social and technological debates. It is because this divide is so staggering, that it has a profound impact in many sectors of a nation such as economy, education, and employment. And it mainly damages the fairness or justice approach under ethical framework which states that the ethical actions should treat all the human beings equally or if unequally then fairly based on some standard that is defensible.

Now, in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, Digital divide is in the spot light again. With many countries shutting down institutions of education as well as workplaces, people on the wrong end of the divide are suffering the consequences. Because poor people may not afford to buy the required gadgets to connect to virtual platforms which is an ethical issue. It might lead the people to feel emotional under human design worksheet since it can cause lot of stress about their access to required sources.

The article, Coronavirus has exposed the digital divide like never before, reflects upon the current state of the world and how the pandemic has forced most of the population to go online when most of them don’t even have access to the internet or have limited access. Developed countries have better connectivity than developing countries, which in turn have better connectivity than the under-developed ones. This shows that if the digital divide is properly addressed, we can aid more people in coping up with a crisis of a global scale like the Covid-19 by educating them, while also help the government deal with it more efficiently[1].

Even in Canada, the new internet performance data released by CIRA (Canadian Internet Registration Authority) has revealed how internet speeds in rural areas are nearly 12 times slower than their urban counterparts. This highlights the ethical notion attached to digital divide. The coronavirus impacted the internet services all across the country. Yet, while the urban internet speeds climbed back to normal or sometimes even higher than before, rural connections have been neglected and the gap has only widened. It is a reflection of the tech companies prioritizing the urban tech centers over the rural ones because it is only the logical thing to do from a business standpoint and ethics are only in the way of profit [2].

The digital divide has always been an issue where one group had access to more information at a shorter notice than other groups. The Covid-19 has merely cleared the clutter and shows the issue in a better light. This is true for rural areas in a developed country, most developing countries and underdeveloped countries. Some underdeveloped countries have expensive data, mostly because their per capita income is also so low. This is where discussions and debates on the ethical aspects of digital divide come to play.

In her TED talk, Cynthia Owyoung states that the definition of Digital Divide needs to be expanded to define it as the gap between people who can fully benefit from technology versus people who cannot. She describes the tech industry’s failure to address the diversity problem and describes more inclusive practices that could bridge the digital divide. She goes on to talk about how most tech companies aren’t motivated to bring more digital access and train people to code in middle-America. Usually, they also neither hire outside of their coastal tech-hubs nor do they open up offices in the more remote areas. She recounts how a tech company she spoke to wanted to hire more diverse talent in Engineering but wanted them to be co-located in Santa Clara [4].

The key-points she stressed on for tech companies to address the diversity problem and heal the new digital divide are:

1. Develop more empathy and get to know the marginalized communities [4].

2 Conceive support organizations that provides technology access and training to underserved communities, both urban and rural [4].

3 Investment in non-tech hubs [4]

The marketplace tech blog describes the discussion between their host Molly and Ajit Pai, the chairman of the US Federal Communication Commission (FCC) under President Trump on the subject of digital divide. He says removing barriers and offering tax incentives might not be enough to make companies deploy more broadbands [3]. He highlights digital redlining by companies as the main issue, where they don’t deploy in particular areas simply because they don’t see them getting a return on their investment. He feels that diversity of the United States, geographical as well as the demographics of income and population density is a challenge to building a better internet infrastructure. He hopes that by creating a free market in the sector would encourage more competition and that would solve the issue of Digital divide, bringing more accessibility to the underserved parts of US which are mostly the rural areas. He ends the discussion by sharing the tragedy of a woman in a reservation in Mission, South Dakota. She died because she could not reach 911 owing to a lack of wireless coverage in the area [3].

The issue of Digital Divide can be closely addressed by associating ethics of the tech industry. It shows that companies are willing to invest in an area only if there is a monetary benefit to them in return. This is the main concern as people in rural and disconnected areas will only be able to cross the gap to the other side of digital divide if those companies look at investment in digital technology from perspectives other than money and it requires attention under human design worksheet.

References:

1)Douglas Broom, “Coronavirus has exposed the digital divide like never before”,2020,<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-digital-divide-internet-data-broadband-mobbile/>

2)” New internet performance data shows the staggering scale of Canada’s urban-rural digital divide”, 2020,<https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/05/08/2030417/0/en/New-internet-performance-data-shows-the-staggering-scale-of-Canada-s-urban-rural-digital-divide.html>

3)Molly Wood, “Can a free market solve the digital divide?”,2017, <https://www.marketplace.org/2017/09/12/tech/can-free-market-solve-digital-divide-ajit-pai/>

4)CynthiaOwyoung,”Healing the Digital Divide”, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fy1a-ttizxU&t=23s>