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#### DIGITAL DIVIDE: CONSEQUENCES AND REMEDIAL MEASURES

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#### ABSTRACT

"Digital Divide" is a term that has been around for too long now. It is actually a segregation that discriminates between those who have access to the latest technological tools and those who do not. This divide exists between the developed and underdeveloped countries. But it also exists within different section of Indian society. This divide in India is even more severe. Various strategies for reducing this divide are explored. Libraries are now operating digitally, and their digital services open up a new channel to the universe of knowledge and information connecting cultures across geographical and social boundaries. This paper discusses all about digital divide and possible measures to minimize this discrimination.

#### **KEYWORDS**

ICT, ISP, digital divide.

#### INTRODUCTION

to ICT (information communication technology) and those who do not. Norris (2001) categories this divide into its three constituent elements: the global divide between advanced industrialized countries and developing countries, the social divide between information rich and information poor within advanced industrialized countries, and the democratic divide between those within the online community who do and do not use digital resources to engage, mobilize and participate in public life. The divide is primarily discussed in terms of access to ICTs, rather than in terms of the information and knowledge which is of value in the context of the information society and in terms of the social capabilities for such learning.

'Digital divide' is one of the greatest impediments to development......and it is growing exponentially. Several influential and comprehensive studies of the global digital divide point to a significant positive relationship between levels of economic development and the global digital divide. Economic analyses potray ICT as a significant factor of growth in the context of modern competitive economies consequently the lack of ICT is an inhibiting factor for economic development.

Relatively less attention has been given to non-economic indicators of digital divide, although they can potentially reveal important facets of the link between ICT and development.

India, renowned for its pre-eminence in software programming and for producing and providing the world with skilled IT professionals is still rated and ranked very low in the list of countries with highly networked communities, though poverty can be a reason.

#### DIGITAL DIVIDE AS A PROBLEM OF ACCESS

Among policy makers, the debate surrounding ICTs and the digital divide is typically founded upon a fundamentally technocratic optimism. The technology is simply taken as a mantra for development. Digital divide seen as an intra-alia for international development and focused on expansion of the technology from the 'haves' and 'have nots'.

So individuals having access to the most powerful computers, the best telephone service and fastest internet services with skill to use these services and the individuals lacking some or even all these facilities reflect the 'digital divide'.

#### DIGITAL DIVIDE AS A DISPARITY OF SKILLS

Material access to computers and networks infrastructure has long been dominant framework for international and national policy makers addressing the digital divide. Yet as the results on the ground proved unsatisfactory, the focus on access has come under increasing scrutiny, particularly in the interaction between policy makers and other actors, including representatives of the technology industries civil society and most notably the academic research community.

Most of the scholarly debate that emerged around this research focused on identifying the digital divide's component dimensions. Much of the recent work on the digital divide has been an increasingly pointed critique of the "access" view of the digital divide and the simple "haves" and "have nots" dichotomy it implies. An attempt has been made to link the digital divide to the larger forces that perpetuate resource disparities: some see the digital divide as an element of broader waves of political and economic development (Norris 2001). Many –a-times skill and the social resources that provide it is been overlooked. Access to technology can be solved by installing necessary equipments but providing a household with an Internet facility does not mean they are adequately prepared to use it, or to use it in a meaningful enough way to reap its benefits. So, ICT literacy is more important that actually going for it without ability to use it, In 2002 the UN conference on Trade and Development introduced measures of information literacy as part of their index of ICT development.

Muir and Oppenheim (2002) state that the opportunity for people to participate in economic, political and cultural life depends on their ability to access and use communication and information services. Individuals need skills and tools to locate the communication pathways, information and audience in timely fashion and in an appropriate form.

#### POLICY FOR ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES IN BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Despite India taking significant steps towards acquiring competence in information and technology, the country is increasingly getting divided between people who have access to technology and those who do not. India has around half a million software developers and is second to the US, but 300, 000 Indian villages do not have a phone connection, 70% of Indian population lies below poverty line and 35% illiterate. There are only 5 PCs per 1100 people, 9 mobile lines per 1000 and 37 fixed lines of Internet.

#### MEASURES FOR ADDRESSING THE DIVIDE

There is, however, light at the end of the tunnel. It is possible to close the gap and cross the divide. Some of these initiatives will be successful, some might fail and yet some may prove counter-productive. One example of successful initiatives is the current infusion of small businesses that are trying to both educate and enable those on the wrongside of the divide. Internet connectivity and broadband and speeds are an invaluable asset. It is this speed that has changed the markets and help ICT literate make purchases online (Flipkart, Snapdealetc). technological advancement in manufacturing industry has made the smartphones affordable. Help on the usage of these devices is also provided.

Grameen phone demonstrates that private businesses can provide necessary services, enable the poor to reduce costs, improve their lives and financial status. Community computer centre connected to govt. offices through Internet need to be set up.

Another initiative that is a tremendous example of how innovative uses of both new technologies and broadband communications technology are helping the poor is being promoted by the partnership between Aravind Eye Clinics in India and UC Berkeley. By utilizing new software, building wi-fi network available for

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free to poor rural communities and installing communication stations that include digital cameras and video conferencing, the Aravind Eye Clinics are able to reach thousands of customers located in poor rural communities.

However, defining the digital divide in terms of each person's capacity to use information technology effectively may suggest that responsibility lies in the hands of individuals and educational institutions, those who could help pursue the necessary "digital literacy". There is an important reminder that responsibility may not be a singular assignment among static players: discursive framing may itself change the degree to which different actors are opposed or pair in their efforts. People of both lower and higher socioeconomic status tended to attribute the responsibility for bridging the digital divide to individuals rather than to government or other institutions whether it was described in terms of skills or physical access.

The government has done half to bridge the divide by way of introducing schemes like "Kissan Call Centres", "Life Line India", "Mygovernance", "Grievance Cells" etc, but half remains undone where ICT literacy of the citizen is important as ICT literate alone can reap the benefits of such schemes. The result of educational institutions here, becomes very important.

#### **ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN BRIDGING THE DIVIDE**

Most of the libraries are very rich in ICT infrastructure and human resource that can help public, who lack this facility at their homes or at their work place, to reach public officials for registering their demands.

Library professionals can help working people get more comfortable and skilled with using computers and surfing the net.

Govt. should take up necessary steps for providing proper infrastructure and human resource wherever it is required.

#### CONCLUSION

The understanding and presentation of digital divide deserves scholarly debates as its consequences appear to have not been taken so seriously by our society. Developed countries, though have migrated from digital divide to 'digital opportunity' or 'digital inclusion', they are reluctant to share the benefits of ICT diffusion or dissemination with the developing or underdeveloped countries.

Responsibility of bridging the divide lies not only on the govt. for providing the society with basic and necessary infrastructure but also lies on the individuals for attaining the required skills.

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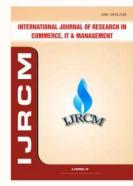
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In this age of Commerce, Economics, Computer, I.T. & Management and cut throat competition, a group of intellectuals felt the need to have some platform, where young and budding managers and academicians could express their views and discuss the problems among their peers. This journal was conceived with this noble intention in view. This journal has been introduced to give an opportunity for expressing refined and innovative ideas in this field. It is our humble endeavour to provide a springboard to the upcoming specialists and give a chance to know about the latest in the sphere of research and knowledge. We have taken a small step and we hope that with the active cooperation of like-minded scholars, we shall be able to serve the society with our humble efforts.

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