

Digital Divide / Digital Inequality

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Today people must deal with the digital world in many parts of daily life. Areas such as healthcare, school, banks, government, and libraries are using ICT (information- and communication technology), which thus becomes a necessary instrument for citizens to use the respective services. In order to do this they must know how e.g., to use and access internet browsing, emails, blogs, or social networks. Even many companies are using various forms of ICT, which turns ICT knowledge into a precondition to acquiring a new job. However, not everyone has this knowledge. That is how the Digital Divide or digital gap appears. (Cruz-Jesus, Vicente, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2015, S. 73)

The Digital Divide can be defined as:

“...the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access ICT and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities.” (Cruz-Jesus, Vicente, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2015, S. 72)

With this definition the authors claim that there is not only digital inequality between individuals but also between countries, which is important to keep in mind when discussing the digital gap. Another definition comes from the NTIA (US Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration) and describes the digital divide as:

“...the divide between those with access to new technologies and those without”. (Cruz-Jesus, Vicente, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2015, S. 73)

Another way of defining the Digital Divide would be to highlight, that people with a low socio-economic status often participate less often in the digitalised world and therefore benefit less from it. Within this definition there is a special focus on socio-economic status. Using healthcare as an example, some scholars see the Digital Divide as a barrier to accessing digital health supply (Müller, Wachtler, & Lampert, 2020).

Zillien (2009) also focuses on socio-economic status in regards to the Digital Divide. Here she describes the “knowledge-gap-hypothesis” in the context of digitalisation. People with a better socio-economic status use digital media to widen their knowledge and to gain information. This doesn't mean that people with low socio-economic status don't gain knowledge via the digital, but they often lack competence to cope with the complexity of information. This leads to higher

inequality regarding the use of digital media (Zillien, 2009, S. 70-72). Zillien also refers to the definition provided by Pippa Norris, who separates the digital divide into three areas: the global divide, the social divide, and the democratic divide. The global divide explains the divergence of internet access between societies. The social divide explains the gap between the information- rich and information- poor within a society. The democratic divide concerns the differences between those who use digital resources and those who don't use it (Zillien, 2009, S. 90-92). This doesn't explain developments in rather 'wealthy' countries, or cultures where research often finds a certain level of hesitation in adopting technological innovations (cf. Fischer 2012).

The use of digital technology can be divided into "first level" or "first order digital divide" and in "second level" or "second order digital divide". The former refers to the access gap, in terms of general usage of the internet or the usage frequency. The latter refers to the use, skills, and literacy with regard to internet-related technology (Friemel, 2016), (Cruz-Jesus, Vicente, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2015). Müller, Wachtler and Lampert (2020) also refer to these two levels, but also add a third one. They explain the differences in using digital technology to improve individual health (Müller, Wachtler, & Lampert, 2020, S. 186).

The aim of digitalisation should imply, that everyone is able to create, access, utilize and share information via digital means. Through the years the understanding of new technologies has evolved from owning a computer to internet access and using a broadband connection. Today it refers primarily to the usage of online media (Cruz-Jesus, Vicente, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2015). Research has shown that a gap exists between European countries regarding the aim of digitalisation. In Romania, for example, only 45% of the population uses the internet regularly, while in Luxembourg 93% are regular users. The reason is, among others, the socio-economic imbalance, which can be seen in the differences regarding income, age, and education. Education has a tremendous impact on ICT usage. People with higher education tend to use ICT more in professional and personal areas, and also tend to have fewer problems with the complexity of the technology (Cruz-Jesus, Vicente, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2015, S. 72-73).

Besides one's educational status there is also a difference between age groups. Whereas the educational status is an important factor for the younger generation, another impact appears when talking about the 65+ generation. Within this setting the social environment has a greater impact on the digital inclusion or exclusion of this generation, as previous communication research shows (Fulk et al., 1990). Within this context the literature also speaks of the "grey divide" (digital age gap). Older people tend to use digital services more if they are being motivated by family and friends (Friemel, 2016, S. 313-314), and can be seen in terms of social

capital. It is even more important in this age group than economic capital. Friemel (2016) showed that social capital not only has an influence on internet usage but is also the main factor in this regard.

Literature:

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