**Course Name: Contemporary Mass Media**

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**Digital Divide Media and Internet**

**The Digital Divide, ICT, and Broadband Internet**

The Digital Divide, or the digital split, is a social issue referring to the differing amount of information between those who have access to the Internet (specially broadband access) and those who do not have access. The term became popular among concerned parties, such as scholars, policy makers, and advocacy groups, in the late 1990s.

**Dimensions of the Divide**
Broadly speaking, the difference is not necessarily determined by the access to the Internet, but by access to ICT (Information and Communications Technologies) and to Media that the different segments of society can use. With regards to the Internet, the access is only one aspect, other factors such as the quality of connection and related services should be considered. Today the most discussed issue is the availability of the access at an affordable cost and quality.

The problem is often discussed in an international context, indicating certain countries are far more equipped than other developing countries to exploit the benefits from the rapidly expanding Internet. Here is the latest [**State of the Internet Report**](https://www.akamai.com/stateoftheinternet/) from Akamai, showing average and maximum connection speeds, Internet Penetration and Broadband adaption, Mobile usage, as well as trends in this data over time.

The digital divide is not indeed a clear single gap which divides a society into two groups. Researchers report that disadvantage can take such forms as lower-performance computers, lower-quality or high price connections (i.e. narrowband or dialup connection), difficulty of obtaining technical assistance, and lower access to subscription-based contents.

**Bridging the Gap**
The idea that some information and communication technologies are vital to quality civic life is not new. Some suggest that the Internet and other ICTs are somehow transforming society, improving our mutual understanding, eliminating power differentials, realizing a truly free and democratic world society, and other benefits.

In many countries, access to the telephone system is considered such a vital element that governments implement various policies to offer affordable telephone service. Unfortunately some countries lack sufficient telephone lines.

**Literacy** is arguably another such element, although it is not related to any new technologies or latest technological devices. It is a very widely shared view in many societies that being literate is essential to one's career, to self-guided learning, to political participation, and to Internet usage.

Unfortunately, in the world there are still 757 million adults including 115 million youths who cannot read or write a simple sentence. Explore the interactive literacy data to see which countries are [**most affected**](http://www.uis.unesco.org/).

There are a variety of arguments regarding why closing the digital divide is important. The major arguments are the following:

**1. Economic equality**Some think that the access to the Internet is a basic component of civil life that some developed countries aim to guarantee for their citizens. Telephone is often considered important for security reasons. Health, criminal, and other types of emergencies might indeed be handled better if the person in trouble has an access to the telephone. Another important fact seems to be that much vital information for people's career, civic life, safety, etc. are increasingly provided via the Internet. Even social welfare services are sometimes administered and offered electronically.

**2. Social mobility**Some believe that computer and computer networks play an increasingly important role in their learning and career, so that education should include that of computing and use of the Internet. Without such offerings, the existing digital divide works unfairly to the children in the lower socioeconomic status. In order to provide equal opportunities, governments might offer some form of support.

**3. Democracy**Some think that the use of the Internet would lead to a healthier democracy in one way or another. Among the most ambitious visions are that of increased public participation in elections and decision making processes.

**4. Economic growth**Some think that the development of information infrastructure and active use of it would be a shortcut to economic growth for less developed nations. Information technologies in general tend to be associated with productivity improvements. The exploitation of the latest technologies may give industries of certain countries a competitive advantage.

**Rural areas access**The accessibility of rural areas to the Internet is a test of the digital divide. But nowadays there are different ways to eliminate the digital divide in rural areas. Use of Power lines (PLT and PLC) and satellite communications offer new possibilities of universal access to the Internet, and lack of telephone lines will not limit access. Lower access prices are required to bridge the ICT divide.

**Disabilities**
Disabilities of potential Internet users constitute another type of divide and care should be taken to avoid that persons with disabilities be left out of Internet access.