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DIGITAL EQUALITY-THE URGE OF TIME

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ABSTRACT

Like democratic equality where everyone has the right to participate and exercise freedom to enjoy the resources of the nation, digital equality is the urge of modern times to acquaint the prospective nationals to enjoy the internet services at ease and access. There are a lot of bottlenecks on the way of obtaining an approach by every person to the benefits of internet. These are due several economic, social, gender based, demographic, psychological or personal reasons for being unable to achieve digital equality. For example, disabled persons have insufficient scope for use and possession of internet services. Intelligent Communities promote digital equity because it is the moral thing to do. They also do it for eminently practical reasons. The use of ICT is the need of hour for coming at par with the international challenges of progress and standards and more important is its use by every person of a nation. World is facing digital divide at the very outset ever since the world has witnessed the digital progress and advancement. This digital divide has to be shortened to minimum by employing necessary efforts to bring together the haves and have nots.

KEYWORDS: Digital Equality, ICT, Digital Inclusion, Digital Divide

INTRODUCTION

Digital Equality: All individuals have equal opportunity for connecting independently to the social and economic benefits that the Internet offers. This tenet means:

- Affordable access to vital technology and Internet service connection
- Equal right to training in order to use technology for daily functions and to gain benefit
- Digital equality is based on Digital Inclusion: participation in the economic, social, political, and institutional processes that technology facilitates.

The goal of digital equality is to create a consistent computing experience for all users regardless of device, time, or location. Digital equality provides:

- Equal access to applications, computing power, and data from any device, while maintaining security and IT control.
- Students don't have to install an application on their endpoint device; it's already installed on their virtual desktop.
- Intuitive, consistent user interface across all devices. This consistency streamlines IT operations and support.
- Support for new personal mobile devices, including laptops, tablets, and smartphones. In the last four years, the averagenumber of Internet-capable devices accessing institutional networks hasjumped from one to more than

three per student.

- Support for legacy personal computing devices. Delivering the same user experience for people using older desktops and laptops is essential to enabling digital equality.
- Access to computing resources during off hours. Enabling students to access applications or high-powered computer lab workstations anywhere and at anytime through desktop virtualization is a win-win for both the student as well as the computer lab, which doesn't have to stay open as long.

Digital equality is based on a the simple principle that everyone in the community deserves access to broadband technologies and the skills to use them. Like most principles, it is easier to understand than it is to live.

The explosive advancement of the broadband economy has worsened the exclusion of people who already play a peripheral role in the economy and society, whether due to poverty, lack of education, prejudice, age, disability, or simply where they live. It has disrupted industries from manufacturing to retail services, enlarging the number of people for whom the digital revolution is a burden rather than a blessing.

Intelligent Communities promote digital equity because it is the moral thing to do. They also do it for eminently practical reasons. People who are excluded from the economy and society cost enormous amounts of money for social services, criminal justice and acute healthcare. Like equality itself, digital equality is an ideal that will never be reached. But every should be interested in policies and programs that make the excluded population as small as humanly possible.

Promoting Digital Equality

In surveys, the digitally excluded cite cost as their most common reason for being offline, and the lack of anything relevant as their second. Intelligent Communities work to reduce cost barriers and acquaint residents with the knowledge, opportunity and entertainment available online.

- **Access**. Without a computer, laptop or tablet, access is impossible. Intelligent Communities work on access by refurbishing used computers and providing them to households in need, as well as providing free computers and broadband access at public facilities like libraries, schools and government offices.
- **Affordability**. For households with their own computers, the cost of broadband can represent a challenge in many parts of the world. Intelligent Communities introduce subsidy programs for digital equipment and broadband connections to ease adoption.
- **Skills**. A computer and broadband connection are useless without the right skills, ranging from basic literacy to keyboarding, PC literacy and facility with the Web. Communities respond to a skills gap with training programs for every age group in schools, libraries, community centers and special purpose facilities.

Challenges to Digital Equality

Every community that has addressed digital equality promotes the same set of achievements. So many public-access computers installed at libraries, municipal buildings, community centers and convenience stores, new classes on technology in primary and secondary schools. But successful Intelligent Communities go deeper. In crafting digital equality programs, they go beyond the basics to focus on fundamental change in the dynamics of digital exclusion. The benefits of ICTs, however, have not been evenly distributed among individuals with different socio-economic status.

Access to and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are considered important for improving health outcomes for different socio-economic groups in the developing world. While new ICTs like mobile phones and the Internet are increasingly more available worldwide (Orbicom 2007), benefits of ICT have not been evenly distributed within and between countries and certain socio-economic groups and individuals, such as people who are illiterate, the disabled, and indigenous peoples; have fewer prospects of benefiting from ICTs (DAW 2005). Women constitute a majority across these groups (Hafkin&Huyer 2002).

Young people with disabilities had restricted participation in computer use in educational activities, in comparison to young people in general. During leisure time young people with disabilities had a leading position compared to the reference group with respect to internet use in a variety of activities. Beneficial environmental conditions at home (and the reverse in schools) are discussed as parts of the explanation for the differing engagement levels at home and in school, and among young people with disabilities and young people in general.

Schools need to prioritise use of ICT by young people with disabilities.

Gender and Digital Equality

Over a decade ago the development of technologies was hailed as the great leveler or equalizer. It would open opportunities for all and reduce the gap across a whole range of inequalities in society.

In an article in The Sunday Times, Martha Lane Fox challenges this. ‘THE digital revolution has turned back the clock for women working in the technology sector, according to Martha Lane Fox, the entrepreneur who co-founded lastminute.com. Bemoaning the lack of women in the IT industry, Lane Fox, now a crossbench peer, said that when she began her career in the late 1990s, she expected technology to be a levelling tool.“But when I look at Silicon Valley over the years right up to now, it is one bunch of very rich white men transferring their wealth to another bunch of very rich white men. It is as if we women are absent. We are going back in time,” she told the festival.

In the 90s, the dominant narrative was that of "the digital divide"—a binary classification that separates the haves from the have-nots. Since then, new research on the topic has helped broaden this framing into one of digital inequality, a more nuanced metric based on a number of important factors such as age, race, and socioeconomic status. Information technologies have not successfully democratized American society; rather, they have exacerbated existing inequalities by "increasing the opportunities available to the already privileged while leading to the growing marginalization of the disadvantaged." (EszterHargittai) Much of the debate about the Digital Divide to date has been around whether it exists, does it really matter and who is in it.

The internet is certainly not the great equalizer that we imagine it to be. Far from it: the ever-widening gaps in adoption rate between different income brackets and education levels show that digital inequality has only gotten worse. Studies have shown that digital access is statistically correlated with positive life outcomes, moreover, information dissemination and civic participation is increasingly being mediated through the internet—thus, it is seen that this disparity is the basis of a vicious cycle. In order to better understand and illustrate the problem at hand, the class set out to develop visual models of universal digital access.

Demonstrations of the benefits of ICT should focus on the interests of potential newusers, to provide an initial hook. Useful information, such as how to access government services on line, can also appeal to the needs of new users, but should not be prioritised initially, over generating enthusiasm for more trivial communications.

A significant fraction of the population insist they are not interested in the Internet, the approaches described above, which introduce ICT by stealth or find the hook are therefore key. It is important to understand what is behind their assertions it is likely that people associate the Internet with computers, boffins and technical speak (not helped by the PC retailers. marketing campaigns). This group have generally had bad experiences of education and of being made to feel stupid. They are not likely to approach situations in which they think they will have a similar experience.

Ensure Leadership on Digital Inclusion

Strong leadership is needed to deliver on digital inclusion at all levels. A co-ordinating, cross-cutting department is required, which builds on the work of the e-Envoy.s office and supports leadership across government, regionally and locally.

New opportunities exist for the ICT sector by seeking to tackle social issues using ICT. The innovative thinkers in business should work with those tackling social problems in government and the third sector. This is often called corporate social innovation and in the field of ICT and Society there are opportunities on a plethora of social issues, involving all forms of information and communication technologies.

Business should also collaborate in the digital inclusion aspects of its community investment programmes, in order to enhance impact and use its leadership to create rational, joined-up programmes. An alliance representing industry is needed to maintain an overview perspective, strategise on new collaborative programmes and share good practice.

Digital exclusion maps well to social exclusion; promoting digital inclusion is often about solving social exclusion issues. The following factors cause social exclusion:

Social and Individual

- Lack of or inadequate food, shelter or clothing.
- Disabled people
- Financial problems and related stress.
- Poor health
- Difficult family environment or onerous family responsibilities.
- Low self-esteem.
- Literacy, English language, ICT and numeracy problems.
- Low level of formal education and qualifications.
- Lack skills and qualifications needed for employment and social involvement.
- Negative experience of education.
- Psycho-social problems.
- Drug or alcohol abuse.
- Disenfranchisement from democratic processes.

- Disaffection for or alienation from the democratic system.
- Geographic
- Rural isolation.
- Disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods with inter-generational unemployment.
- Lack of local access to training and education opportunities.

Community

- Lack of cohesive local approaches to enabling the transition to employment.
- Lack of social capital networks with those in employment.
- Information deficits relating to training and employment opportunities.

Cultural

- Language barriers experienced by immigrants and refugees.
- Cultural differences experienced by immigrants and refugees.
- Experience of racism on the part of ethnic minorities.
- Experience of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, class, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, family status.

Economic

- Few or no jobs available.
- Lack of childcare provision to allow those with children to work.
- Disincentives to work arising from the welfare/tax system (poverty trap).
- Political and structural.
- Lack of state provision for social and services and infrastructure.
- Government policies restricting eligibility to training programmes.
- Constraints on entitlement to work for asylum seekers.
- Lack of accessible information on citizenship rights and issues.

Organisational

- Training organisations and employers using restrictive recruitment practices.
- Training organisations having restrictive eligibility criteria, training approaches, venues and structures.
- Training organisations lacking social supports for trainees.
- Training programmes and employers lacking engagement with the clientGroup

Driven by the need to satisfy current students and recruit new ones, institutions are asked to eliminate the barriers they had formerly put in the paths of their students. They are staying focused on digital equality, using desktop virtualization, and future-proofing their technology. In doing so, higher education is providing invaluable educational opportunities for today, and setting the stage for even greater advancements in the future.

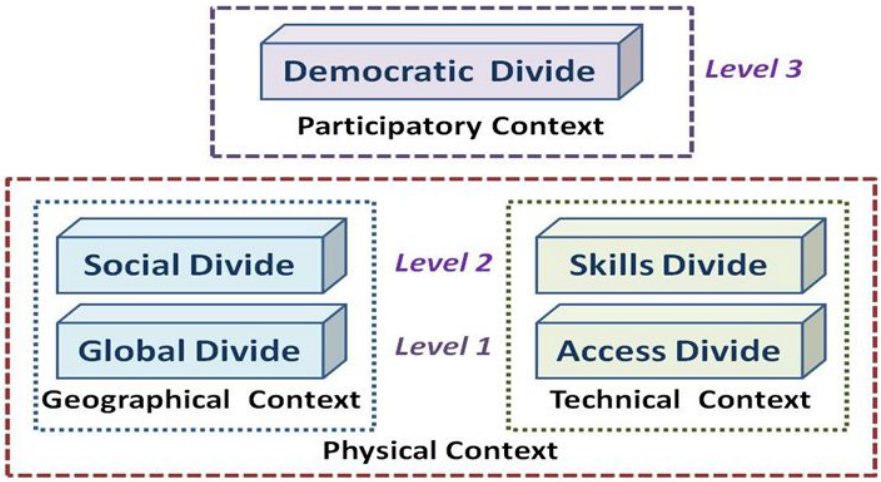
Following are Several Implications for Digital Inclusion:

- A new entitlement to free learning for those without a good foundation of employability skills.
- The safe guarding of learning provision for wider personal fulfilment, including those, such as pensioners, who may not be seeking employment.
- A better choice of opportunities to encourage adults back into learning.
- The acknowledgement of ICT skills as the basic skill and its inclusion in the *Skills for Life* programme should be there.
- Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action should be developed.
- A will to maintain learning opportunities for older people.
- A need to build learning communities, where the aspirations of communities are raised
- Information Literacy - the ability to seek, find, retrieve and evaluate information resources. • Technology-related Literacies - these are the practical skills necessary to use ICT equipment and networks for the purpose for which they have been designed and developed.
- ICT Literacy - the ability to use the ever expanding range of relevant technologies effectively. This changes overtime as the hardware and software change.
- Net/Web Literacy - the ability to use online tools and work with the values developed by the communities on the Internet and Web. This includes using appropriate Netiquette(etiquette to use internet) and understanding web-site structures and navigation.
- Composite Literacies - are the goal-oriented literacies which combine the skills and understanding of to engage with and solve real world problems.
- E-Learning Literacy - the ability to use the technologies relevant to learning in an appropriate way. Typically this includes accessing resources, identifying sources of support, working collaboratively and building on-line communities.
- E-citizenship Literacy - the ability to use the technologies relevant to citizenship in an appropriate way to meet social goals. It is similar to e- Learning but additionally requires an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of being an active citizen and the ability to act in the real world.

The issue of social inequality in e-democracy involves two contexts. First, equality in opportunities to have an easy access to the Internet and to acquire relevant skills is a basic condition necessary for digital equality. As such, the digital divide comprises an access divide and a skills divide. Hargittainamed the two phases as the first-level and the secondlevel divide, respectively. In addition, van Dijksubdivided the access divide into two sequential stages: material

access and motivational access. In the second context, further development of e-democracy requires equalization in actual usages and online involvement

beyond equality in access and skills. A divide is salient in political participation and engagement mediated via the Internet. Improvement in individuals' adoption of ICTs does not necessarily guarantee an increase in the level of actual engagement in online politics



Source: Hargittai 2002; Norris 2001; van Dijk 2006.

Figure 1: Building Blocks of the Digital Divide

On the other hand, Norris' categorization of adigital divide captures the stratified world. Her three dimensions sketch different types of a digital divide interms of a spatial context and the concept of equality. From a worldwide perspective, the divergence of Internet access between industrialized and developing countries makes a *global divide* . In a domestic context, a *social divide* in each country refers to a gap between the information rich and poor. The generally used definition of a digital divide corresponds to thesocial divide. The third dimension (a *democraticdivide*), distinctly from the two concepts constructed on a geographical context, highlights a divergence "between people who do and do not use digital

resources to engage, mobilize and participate in public life." Therefore, the first context of digital inequality matches a global or social divide while a democratic divide occurs at its second context. Next level beyond an access and skills divide falls in a third-leveldivide and a usage divide. This study, focusing on participatory equality in online politics, limits broad conceptual latitude inherent in a general usage divide to political uses of the Internet. The divide in political usages is not independent of a technical divide in the first and second level. In an immature stage of ICTs, the participatory divide chiefly emerges from an access and skills divide. Demographic disparities in access and skills drive to amplification of voices by the affluent and well-educated, marginalization of the underprivileged, and unequal distribution of technological resources. Opportunities for online political participation benefit elites with ICT resources and motivation to take advantage of the resources so that the poor and less-educated are left farther behind.

Digital Equality by Social Media

The latest piece of communication by Facebook's corporate machinery is to have people support the digital equality movement. For example in India facebook has facilitated that by clicking on a button, an email is sent on behalf of

the user to TRAI expressing consent for a free package that prioritises the way the infrastructure processes applications and traffic accessed by that user. In simple turns, Now clearly that's a bone of contention for users and activists alike.

The email that is drafted by Facebook on your behalf reads:

To the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, I support digital equality for India. Free Basics provides free access to essential Internet services, such as communication, education, healthcare, employment, farming information and more. It helps those who can't afford to pay for data, or who need a little help with getting started online. And it's open to all people, developers and mobile networks. With 1 billion Indian people not yet connected, shutting down Free Basics would hurt our country's most vulnerable people. I support Free Basics and digital equality for India. Thank you.

Today, broadband technology underpins much of our society and supports many of our interactions, personal as well as commercial. Given the foundational importance of broadband, the need for digital equality is becoming a necessity.

Access to quality Internet services, the right connectivity, devices and applications are necessary tools for educational, professional and economic advancement in this day and age. For underserved and low-income communities, broadband technology creates opportunities that were not available just a few years ago. It can improve the quality of life for communities across the country. In many ways, access to this technology unleashes a community's potential in the 21st century.

People use broadband technology to close education and health care gaps. Online learning can do much to eliminate what Jonathan Kozol famously labeled the "savage inequalities" in education.

Beyond education and health care, broadband facilitates global connectivity and can open doors and tear down boundaries for all of us. Broadband can help many to dream again -- to dream of being a business owner, of finishing school, of pursuing non-traditional career paths.

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