

Digital Divide in Libraries and Information Centers in India: An Overview

Ganesh Kumar Soni

Librarian, Govt. Sen. Sec. School, Malsar, Sardar Shahar (Churu Raj.)

Abstract: *The digital divide is a hot topic in this present era. Digital divide refers to the gap between those who use to digital and information technology, and those who have not. In this article the digital divide is not considered as a global problem, but has been discussed as a challenge and it has been shown that how the digital divide has a negative impact on the educational system and libraries and information centers. And also discussed that what action had taken by the indian government to bridge the gap and what is the future planning for this. The Libraries and Information centres have a special role in providing information, to reduce the digital gap between those who have the facilities to access digital technologies and those who have not.*

Keywords: Digital divide, information divide, Role of Libraries and Information centres, Bridge the digital divide, Digital divide in India

1. Introduction

Term 'Digital Divide' was introduced by Larry Irving from the National Telecommunications and Infrastructure Administration (NTIA) of United States Department of Commerce in a series of reports entitled "Falling through the Net" in mid 1990's. In order to focus public attention on the existing gap in access to information services between those who can afford to purchase the computer hardware and software necessary to participate in the global information Network and low income families and communities who cannot. Some expert's and scholars have define as an inequality in access, distribution and use of newest information communication technologies between two and more peoples.

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 higher price connection (narrowband or dial up connection) difficulty of obtaining technical assistance and lower access to subscription based contents. The divide exist between economic classes, between those living in urban and those living in rural areas and between those who are educated and those who are not.

2. Digital divide and Information technology

Various developing countries could not utilize the full Potentialities of their people because of literacy. Libraries must gear up to play an important role in importing information literacy to empower information user communities. Digital divide's even witnessed among professionals who are working in the digital environment. Beside the rapid spread of the internet the gap is growing wider as the technological standards grew even faster networks, high level machines and many software and more capable professionals are also required.

The digital divide is not only concern for developing countries but also for developed countries. Where some peoples in this technological world use this technology, there are some communities that are still untouched by this

technology. From the perspective of digital users, there are other related term that we try to discuss here.

Digital Immigrants - Under the digital Immigran there is community that was not born in this digital world but has adopt this technological world. These communities use digital technologies in the right way and make their work easier.

Digital Natives - Under this community, there are such peoples, childrens who are born in this digital world and so addicted to this digital technology that they can not accomplish any work without using it. They use digital technology in their daily lives in such a way that it is not possible to live without it.

The digital Immigrants are have slowly adopted to web surfing, emailing and the social media world and on demand entertainment. It also connect with traditional world. They prefer to talk and focus on one task at a time. But the digital Natives always live in digital environment and they multitasking and multimedia oriented.

3. Effect of Digital divides on Library and Information centres

As the world and its technology advances everyday. The digital divide becomes more and more of problems, setting those on the disconnected side of an even larger disadvantage.

Digital technology is not a problem of any particular country or region but it is a universal issue and it has also effected the library and information centers. There are many such libraries who are unable to use digital technology. Due to this absence the development and expansion of library and information centers has decreased. Today the image of libraries remains only as a traditional knowledge. if the libraries and Information centres are inter connected, if they capable of using digital technology, then the day is not so far when the readers will be come to the information centers to get the information and to solve her problems and then the libraries will back their own domination.

Libraries and Information centres are unable to satisfy the readers in the absence of new skills and digital technology, and the available information are also not used in time due to the unaware from digital technology and inefficient labour power and the readers are fleeing from libraries and Information centres due to lack of information.

If we study deeply, we find that the libraries and Information centres may have the following points showing the barriers to bridging the digital divide. In other words, these points can prove to be obstructive in adopting digital technologies in library and information centers-

- 1) **Financial position** - Mainly libraries of the world cannot afford to fund for technology. Some libraries and Information centres have access to certain technologies while others do not, and even if using technology, that too is done by old, out dated technologies. The budget given to the libraries is only nominal. If we study the schools of rajasthan, we find that there is a rule regarding the write-off the reading materials more than the amount of the annual budget, which is a matter of concern. In the absence of sufficient library finance, the library can only see dream in this technological world.
- 2) **Policy and rules** - there are no concrete rules in the context of development of libraries and Information centres Which can be used to develop and extend the libraries. The public library act has been passed in 19 states in india but it has often been seen that the status of libraries was not exactly as expected. It is not possible to develop libraries only by passing the library act, for this it is necessary to strictly enforce effective policies and regulations.
- 3) **Technical Skills** - The lack of training programs, Seminars, Workshops, Orientation course, Refresher course etc. for the working staff in libraries and Information centres. In this technological world, a trained librarian is needed to satisfy users. Mostly untrained librarians are working in the libraries. In order to keep yourself up to date in this changing era, to provide the information to the users as per his requirement. In the absence, the use of libraries is constantly decreasing and the readers are getting away from library and Information centres. In order to awaken the interest of the readers, the librarian should constantly develop the skills themselves.
- 4) **Fear of technology** - Due to lack of confidence a fear has envolved among the libraries and library professionals, so they are afraid to use technology. They lack of experience in using the technology because they are scared of using new technology and failing to use a piece of technology, a digital divide is opened up ultimately causing segregation between the newest and oldest libraries.

Newest and recently opened libraries have a wide selection of technologies which they can use, whereas other libraries are unable to make newer technologies function well without trained personnels.

4. How to bridge the digital divide

As popular as library computer are with patrons and libraries an original goal of the investment in libraries was to help

"bridge" to computers is not enough to bridge the digital divide. The skills and knowledge to use information technology effectively are equally important.

Many libraries are now provide education program, literacy classes, training programs. All these resources offer wonderful opportunities for union and libraries to form partnership for bridging the digital and Information divide. Librarians can also help working people to get online to use the web through access for those without computers training an encouragement to help them get over fears to using new technology.

Just as the Indian government has started service project in the name E - Mitra to connect the rural areas with the internet, In the same way initiatives should be taken to add educational institutions, libraries to the Village, Urban, District, State, National and International level. Many library or computer users have other place to access computers and the internet, and do not depend on the information centers to access. The main reason is the lack of E - Resources in the libraries and Information centres. the following steps should be taken to bridge the digital divide.

- 1) **Universal Access** - All the libraries and Information centres should be connected to National and International level through the internet in such a way that any one user can get information from remote access anywhere.
- 2) **Additional, well trained staff** - Computer and other technologies alone are not enough. Libraries and Information centres are must trained and preserve additional and more qualified staff, alone side new technologies to promote the best application of resources.
- 3) **Change the attitude regarding technology** - As the same time, much of the information centers needs to change its attitude concerning technology. Rather than receiving computers and the internet as a superfluous luxury, the library and Information centres should view them as crucial necessities. The libraries must come to realize the incredible power of new technologies and embrace them as tools for their future.

5. Initiatives of Digital divide in India

- 1) **Library Networks** - The libraries and Information centres should go for an effective resource sharing network for connected to libraries and Information centres to regional and National level such as DELNET, CALIBNET, PUNENET, BONET etc. And various networks for special purpose like INFLIBNET for linking libraries and information centres in universities, deemed to be universities, colleges, UGC information centres, institutions of national importance and R & D institutions. ERNET India is the National Research and Education Network dedicated to support the needs of the research and education community within the country. This will be more helpful to their users in having access to information, communication and technologies which can ultimately results in bridging digital divide.
- 2) **Muktabodha Digital library** - Muktabodha Digital library project intends to preserve rare Sanskrit manuscripts and texts in multiple digital formats which are internet accessible through website worldwide. Bringing the tacit knowledge into global access has been a reality through

this project. The huge catalogued repository of digitized Vedic manuscripts is made searchable through online public access catalogue (OPAC).

- 3) Public Libraries - Many of the public libraries in India lack of proper infrastructure in terms of skilled manpower and technology. The government should take up necessary steps for providing proper infrastructure and needs to strengthen the libraries in modernization. In this context, the National Digital Library of India has special significance. Which has been done to integrate several national and international level digital libraries simultaneously on the single web portal. The National Digital Library of India provides free access to many books in english and 14 other languages in just one click.
- 4) In addition to this, the following sources provides freely information to users.
 - a) World e-Book library - it is an academic research database of portable ebooks. It is considered as a largest collection of books and articles in electronic format founded in 1996 and access to the complete holdings of the world library foundation is open to the general public for personal use.
 - b) South Asia Archives - The South Asia Archives is a fully searchable digital archive which provides an extensive resource for students and scholars. It provides millions of pages of valuable research and training materials. Providing online access to documents ranging online from the mid-18th to present.
 - c) World Digital Library - the WDL is a project of the Library of Congress, carried out with the support of the UNESCO and in co-operation with libraries, archives, museums, educational institutions and international organisations from around the world.

The WDL makes available on the internet, free of charge and in multi-lingual format, significant primary materials from all countries and cultures.

- 5) Digital Library project- Different types of digital library projects are being run in India, whose main purpose is to access all the contents through digital technology. INFLIBNET through its shodhganga are collecting all the thesis submitted to the Indian university and are trying to provide free access to the literature which is again a sincere efforts towards bridging the digital divide.

Vidya Vahini is a pilot project for transporting education implemented by ERNET. Its focus on providing ICT infrastructure to educational institutions, providing different learning resources which include educational tools, course curriculum and other learning material.

SHRUTI is a computerized Braille transcription system developed by IIT kharagpur for disabled citizens.

The National Mission on Libraries was launched on 3 feb 2014 and the objectives of establishing a National Virtual Library of India, setting up of Model Libraries, Quantitative and Qualitative survey of libraries and capacity building. Under the scheme, 6 Libraries under the ministry of culture, 35 central libraries in states and 35 district libraries are to be developed as Model libraries, with emphasis on developing these libraries in economically backward districts. Further

629 district libraries across the states would be provided network connectivity.

All of these and many more projects are motive to bridge the digital and Information divide and try to information provide everyone.

6. Conclusion

Libraries and Information centres have played a key role in providing public access to computers and the internet for the digitally disadvantaged. Free public access to digital technologies has helped to bridge the digital divide.

The use of digital technology has become the need of today's era and libraries also include in this. Efforts are being made to bridge the digital divide even in developing countries like India and not only the Government of India but also the Library Associations, Library and Information centres are playing the same role. Libraries and Information centres are succeeded to bridge the digital divide by making easy access to digital technology for the public.

Libraries currently go beyond access by providing training, using new technologies but many libraries and Information centres are not able to provide these services at high level due to lack of e-Resources. In technical disparities, libraries must continue their efforts to achieve success.

7. Contributor

Ganesh Kumar Soni
Librarian, GSSS Malsar, Sardar Shahar (Churu Raj.)

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