SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 2 | February 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

DIGITAL DIVIDE AMONG THE YOUTH IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Samujjal Ray
PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Mumbai, Mumbai

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra20182
DOI No: 10.36713/epra20182

ABSTRACT
The digital divide is one of the major issues affecting various people worldwide. Despite the rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in recent decades, the digital divide, which encompasses the disparity in access to the Internet and other digital devices, has been impacting various segments of society. In this aspect, youth worldwide are mostly affected. This article attempts to highlight the issue of the digital divide among the youth in India. First, this article examines the concept of the digital divide and youth. Second, it highlights the various issues and challenges that impact youth access to the Internet. Third, this article provides a concluding remark and suggests some policy measures.
KEYWORDS: *Digital divide, youth, India, ICTs, caste, class, gender, rural-urban divide*

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have evolved into a regular feature of life in the twenty-first century. From cellphones to cloud computing, these technologies shape our communication, employment, learning, and daily life. ICTs have revolutionised almost every industry, enhancing efficiency, access, and convenience through their wide-ranging use (Castells, 2010). However, with the rise of ICTs over the past decades, one issue affecting people worldwide is the digital divide. This issue primarily impacts youth worldwide. Reflecting differences in accessing various technologies and the internet, the digital divide among the young people in India is a major issue.

Although it is often linked to internet access, this gap covers a lot more ground, including device availability, digital literacy, and cost. There is a risk that the digital gap may exacerbate preexisting inequalities in social, economic, and educational opportunities, given the pervasiveness of technology in many facets of society (Van Dijk, 2020). This difference influences many aspects of healthcare, education and employment possibilities, and social involvement, therefore limiting the potential of many young people—especially in rural and underdeveloped regions.

This article thus seeks to examine the issue of the digital divide among the youth in India. First, this article examines the concept of the digital divide and youth. Second, it highlights the various issues and challenges that impact youth access to the Internet. Third, this article provides a concluding remark and suggests some policy measures.

YOUTH AND DIGITAL DIVIDE

Currently, India has the highest population worldwide. Comprising a significant share of India's population, the young people there are lively and varied. With about half of India's population under the age of 25, the country boasts one of the highest young populations in the world by 2025 (Mouli, 2024). In this aspect, youth in contemporary India play an important role and are some of the frequent users of the Internet. When digitally literate, young people can access information, participate in conversations, and interact with their communities and governments (Rohlinger, 2018).

According to the Internet in India Report 2024, Internet users in India will cross 900 million by 2025 (Indian Express, 2025). Such a report highlights the penetration of Internet users across various populations in India. However, with the use of the Internet comes the issue of the digital divide. Digital divide is the gap between those having access to the Internet and those who do not have access (Van Dijk, 2005). Thus, such disparity in access to the Internet between different sections of people is known as the digital divide. Although Internet users have grown in India, many youth, mostly from marginalised sections, are mostly affected by the issue of the digital divide. During the pandemic, the most important concerns for online education were digital literacy and the digital divide. Similarly, lack of digital skills and Internet connectivity remained one of the major issues during the pandemic. In terms of knowledge, education, economic choices, and social engagement, this divergence may lead to disparities. The disparity concerns not just technological availability but also the knowledge required to make effective use of it (Van Dijk, 2020). There are many issues and challenges that affect youth access to the Internet in India. Some of the issues and challenges are discussed below:

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 2 | February 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Caste

As is well known, caste is a form of social stratification in India that affects various people. Rajam et al. (2021) note that marginalised groups in India suffer from widespread caste-based inequality, with wealth and education serving as the primary markers of this inequality. Additionally, his research shows that underprivileged and marginalised communities still face a digital gap at both the primary and secondary levels. Furthermore, Kamal and Roluahpuia (2024), in their recent study on online learning inequalities in eastern Uttar Pradesh, show that students' digital learning abilities are impacted by their caste position. Instead of just being between urban and rural areas, the digital divide should also be considered in relation to our society's social hierarchies. Therefore, caste is a significant element that influences young people's ability to use the Internet. Different castes' classification influences their Internet use.

Class

Another factor influencing how different young people access and use the Internet is class. According to the India Inequality Report 2022: Digital Divide by Oxfam, the percentage of low-income families with access to computers is 2.7%, and internet facilities are 8.9% (Indian Development Review, 2023). Thus, the newest computers or cellphones are vital for digital learning and participation in the digital economy, yet many lower-income households cannot afford them.

Gender

There are also gender gaps within the digital divide. In certain rural communities, cultural conventions or lack of support provide further obstacles for girls and young women accessing various technology. The ASER 2023 report shows the prevalence of gender differences in access to digital technologies. The report shows that compared to 72.9% of males, only 62.0% of females can perform digital tasks (ASER Centre, 2024). As Bhattacharjea (2024) points out, males tend to have greater access to, ownership of, and flexibility in using cellphones than women do. This is in line with the pattern of cultural and family influence over youths of both sexes, particularly after puberty. Because of this patriarchal system's enduring influence on Indian society, gender inequity persists. Thus, such an issue may widen the digital gap and restrict women from their economic and educational prospects even further.

Rural and urban divides

Young people usually have easier access to cellphones, computers, and fast internet in metropolitan environments. Still, many kids and young people in remote regions lack personal devices or internet connectivity, therefore restricting their access to other digital resources, including online learning. According to the recent National Statistics Office's (NSO) survey entitled 'Household Social Consumption on Education,' just 4% of rural citizens are accessible to computers compared with 23% of urban pupils beyond the age of 5 (Kharbanda, 2020). Thus, many young people, especially in rural areas, lack basic computer literacy. Even if they own gadgets, they may not know how to best use them for studying, developing their skills, or even online job applications.

CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the issue of the digital divide among the youth in India. The digital divide is one of the important issues that affects the world. In this context, the most affected group is the youth. As discussed above, youth in the contemporary period are the most frequent users of the Internet. In this aspect, access to better Internet and various technologies is crucial. As well as access to technology, the digital divide is about who can use it to improve their lives, find opportunities, and fully participate in the digital world. Furthermore, various factors impact how youth access the Internet. Though attempts are being made to bridge India's digital gap, major obstacles still exist.

Dealing with this problem calls for multidisciplinary perspectives, including infrastructure development, digital literacy enhancement, lowering of socio-economic obstacles, and guarantees of fair access to technology in all spheres of life. Also, policies should address various measures such as digital skills improvement programs, low-cost Internet services, and high-speed Internet for the youth. Furthermore, the Government of India should give importance to digital skills and digital literacy by focusing on vernacular languages other than English, which initiates various e-learning platforms.

REFERENCES

1. *ASER Centre (2024). Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2023: Beyond Basic. ASER Centre, New Delhi. https://asercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ASER-2023-Report-1.pdf.*
2. *Bhattacharjea, S. (2024, March 6). What ASER 2023 reveals about the gender gap in confidence. Ideas for India. https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/human-development/what-aser-2023-reveals-about-the-gender-gap-in-confidence.html*
3. *Castells, M. (2010). The information age: Economy, society and culture (2nd ed.). Vol. 2: The power of identity. Blackwell Publishers.*
4. *Dijk, J. van. (2005). The deepening divide: Inequality in the information society. Sage.*
5. *Dijk, J. van. (2020). The digital divide. Polity.*
6. *Indian Development Review. (2023, February 16). The digital divide in India: From bad to worse? Retrieved from https://idronline.org/article/inequality/indias-digital-divide-from-bad-to-worse/*

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 2 | February 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

7. *Indian Express. (2025, January 17). India's internet users to surpass 900 million in 2025, regional content driving growth: IAMAI-Kantar report. Retrieved from https://indianexpress.com/article/technology/tech-news-technology/indias-internet-users-to-surpass-900-million-in-2025-regional-content-driving-growth-iamai-kantar-report-9781881/*
8. *Kamal, U., & Roluahpuia. (2024). Digital Capital and Segregated Schooling: Addressing Educational Inequality. Economic and Political Weekly, 59 (11), 10-13.*
9. *Kharbanda, B. (2020, September 11). Glaring digital divide in education in India: Covid-19 gives opportunity for digital inclusion. India Today. Retrieved fromhttps://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/glaring-digital-divide-in-education-in-india-covid-19-digital-inclusion-1720817-2020-09-11*
10. *Mouli, K.V.C. (2024, September 16). Youthful population, geriatric leaders. Deccan Herald. Retrieved from https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/youthful-population-geriatric-leaders-3192047*
11. *Rajam, V., Reddy, A. B., & Banerjee, S. (2021). Explaining Caste-Based Digital Divide in India. Telematics and Informatics, 65 (101719). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2021.101719*
12. *Rohlinger, D. A. (2018). New media and society. New York University Press.*