

Technological Tribulations: The Need for Accessible Internet to Close the Digital Divide

Position Paper – Digital Divide

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There is a great need in today's world to have accessible internet to all people, especially in recent years. Without this access, the digital divide will continue to grow, and people will be negatively affected by their lack of connection or lack of ability to use internet. The internet has become essential as its intertwined itself into the daily lives of millions. Not only has it become commonplace, but the internet has become an absolute necessity throughout the COVID-pandemic. Without access to internet, children are at risk of falling behind academically due to not have the same resources while developing as their peers. The internet should be considered a public utility, and the United States needs to incorporate access to its citizens to close the digital divide.

In 2021, internet should be viewed as a basic necessity for everyone. There is still a large chunk of Americans who do not have this extremely valued internet access at home, and it is time to take action and help. According to Mashable, the "White House broadband report concluded the divide is still very much present in the U.S. Though the report found that 91% of Americans had access to high-speed Internet service of at least 10 Mbps downstream, only 71% of Americans actually subscribed to broadband at home..." (Goodman, 2013). 29% of Americans do not have access to internet in their house, which highlights the digital divide that America is suffering from. Whether this be from poverty or simply living in a rural area, Americans have a right to internet – just like they have a right to any other public utility. Some people may choose to not use the internet even if they have access to it, but it is essential to make sure that everybody can close their own personal digital divide if they choose to do so.

When one thinks of equality, their mind may not instantly think of technological access being included in the definition. Nevertheless, though, digital inclusion is a part of equality that America needs to strive for. The North Carolina Department of Information Technology defines “digital inclusion is a term that refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies” (NCDIT, n.d.). America needs to fight for the equality of each and every American; providing the access to internet for all would be a huge step in reaching this gigantic goal. It is easy nowadays to overlook such inequality with blatant acts of racism, homophobia, sexism, etc., but digital inclusion is just as important. Our book makes an important note considering how smartphones play into the digital divide, too. The authors state that “although not a perfect substitute for a home broadband connection, smartphones are helping narrow the digital divide. The mobile phone industry forecasts that smartphone use in the United States will increase from 78 percent in 2016 to 81 percent by 2020...” (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2019, p. 56). While phones certainly may help, American citizens should be able to access internet within their homes, rather than simply having a 4G connection.

Many Americans heavily relied on internet during the coronavirus pandemic. According to the Pew Research Center, a “survey conducted in early April finds that roughly half of U.S. adults (53%) say the internet has been essential for them personally during the pandemic” despite over half of Americans believing that the government does not need to provide internet (Vogels et. Al, 2021). Nevertheless, this survey illustrates how many Americans found an internet connection to be crucial throughout the pandemic. Many uses could come of the internet through the pandemic, such as scheduling a vaccine, garnering more information regarding the outbreak, work (if moved to remote, as many jobs were), and more. These are just a few examples of how

the pandemic shifted our needs regarding the internet. Children who did not have access to internet during the pandemic were also at a disadvantage to the rest of the peers. If America would have had access as any other public utility, the devastating effects of the pandemic could have been lessened on the side of technology.

While some may not feel that internet benefits children, it has been shown to have a positive effect on kids academically. The American Psychological Association has set out to show the importance of internet and how children in poorer areas will be disproportionately affected. The APA reports that “children who used the Internet more showed greater gains in GPA and reading test scores... Latent linear growth curve analysis supported the conclusion that Internet use leads to improvements in academic performance” (Jackson, von Eye, & Biocca, 2003). While this project and study from the APA is a bit older, it is still relevant to show that access to internet gives children an advantage in school. Children that do not have access to internet for most of their childhood would be exponentially affected, and these negative outcomes that the APA found would only be compounded over multiple years. These children should not have to be punished for circumstances outside of their control. Children do not have control over their parents’ ability to get internet services, so having public access to internet would inevitably benefit children across America.

The digital divide needs to be conquered in America by having internet be considered a public utility. It is essential for people to have access to internet, yet many households do not have internet service; this digital inequality can put lower-income households at a disadvantage to everyone else. In times like a pandemic, people’s safety can be endangered if they do not have access to important information disseminated online. Lastly, the American Psychological Association illustrates how the internet can benefit students, as children with access to internet

outperformed their peers. Without easily accessible internet, people's live can be drastically affected in a disadvantageous way. The times of digital divide should be over; America needs to make internet a public utility to its citizens.

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