



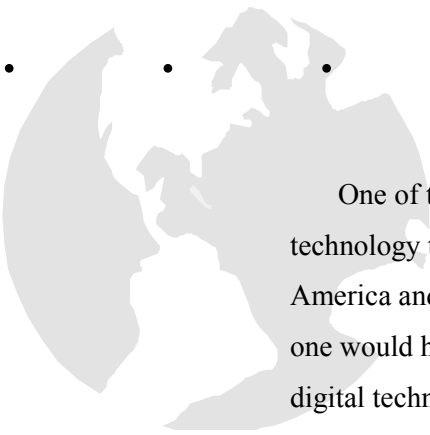
The Digital Divide: The Strong Influence of Personal Cultural Values on the Use of Technology



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The Digital Divide: The Strong Influence of Personal Cultural Values on the Use of Technology



One of the strongest influences in a person's ability and desire to use new technology to enhance productivity in their lives are personal cultural values. In America and most parts of the world, the economic and educational obstacles that one would have had to grapple with twenty-five years ago if they wanted to utilize digital technology today are very small or non-existent. Personal cultural values are the chief determinants towards whether or not people will make a constructive use of digital technology, a deconstructive use of the digital technology, or no use of technology at all despite it being available.

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Ex. 1 – Mouse Potato (CartoonStock.com)

Over the past 10 years the media has often erroneously described the “Digital Divide” issue as a possibly unstabilizing phenomenon in our country and our world. They perceive that the advent of new technologies such as personal computers and the Internet tend to give ulterior productivity advantages to select thus groups of people thus exacerbating the gaps between the various socio-economic classes. They confuse lack of parity in new technology use with lack of opportunity for new technology use and ascribe the former as a societal problem as opposed to a matter of individual responsibility.

"And so, for many, it is easy to accept euphoric claims - like those of Vice President Al Gore - that the Internet is also bringing about a brave new world replete with an "electronic agora" and "online democracy". It's not. More than 80% of people in the world have never even heard a dial tone, let alone surfed the Web. And the gap between the information haves and have-nots is widening." (BBC)

For the past two-hundred the world has seen an unheralded stream of technological innovation. Although these innovations have undoubtedly changed human lifestyle they have not changed human nature especially in how some people react to new technologies. At times, the advent of new innovations spur exaggerated claims: Optimists like Al Gore may seem to have envisioned the Internet as the dawn of a new utopian society, whereas according to the article written by the BBC above innovation can lead to bigger problems and thus threaten societal stability.

We have seen that with each past innovation whether it was the TV, the Internet, or personal computers that they are little more than tools that can potentially enhance our lives or degrade them depending on an individual's level of personal responsibility.

An example of the dual positive and negative impact of the Internet vis-à-vis productivity are employers who have enhanced their productivity by enabling their employees to access the Internet for accomplishing professional related tasks. However, now Employers need to be very vigilant in ensuring that their employees do not waste their work time accomplishing personal tasks via the Internet that ten years ago could have been only accomplished away from the workplace. A more stark contrast is represented by the cutting edge tabulation business machines that IBM sold to American corporations and the German government during the 1920's. The former used them to enhance productivity across many industries thus indirectly befitting the common good. The latter used them as a vital tool to assure logistical accuracy in the extermination of six to ten million Jews and other enemies of the German Third Reich during World War II.

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**"Emily, have you been shopping
online during class?"**

Ex. 1 – Shopping During Class (CartoonStock.com)

"Almost 32 million people became Internet users during the 20 months between December 1998 and August 2000. As Figure II-2 shows, Internet use increased across the age distribution. More people at all ages were using the Internet. This figure, however, also illustrates that although Internet use increased across the board, Internet use rates are not equal across all age groups. A person's age as well as factors such as household income, race/ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, and labor force participation matter in the Internet use equation." (NTIA)

I do not disagree with the statement above but I do not agree that it is relevant if it were to be used in an argument proposing policies that were designed to bring greater parity in the use of digital technology.

I do not think that the "Digital Divide" is a problem in the United States. In America, the economic and educational obstacles that one would have had to grapple with twenty-five years ago if they wanted to utilize digital technology today are very

small or non-existent. Children are introduced and have access to computers at an early age via the public school system. Most kids already have a personal computer in their home. Today one can buy a very good personal computer for as little as \$300. These already low costs are set to diminish in time as productivity and market competition to sell these products and services rise.

I do not think that the “Digital Divide” is a problem in the World. In most parts of the world, the economic and educational obstacles that one would have had to grapple with twenty-five years ago if they wanted to utilize digital technology today are very small or non-existent. With the exception of a portion of third world villages that are struggling with famine and the lack of basic human survival amenities children are introduced and have access to computers at an early age via the public school system for those who do not already have them in their home. Although digital technology due to import tariffs, exchange rates, and local government taxation is usually more expensive throughout the world than in America, these costs are set to diminish in time as productivity and market competition to sell these products and services rise.

One could argue that the portion of third world villages that are struggling with famine and the lack of basic human survival amenities constitute the basis for a digital divide. I find it illogical to expect parity in computer usage when throughout human history there has never been parity among the human race in terms of freedom from threats to survival, human suffering, or access to basic living amenities.

Although I do not believe in the “Digital Divide” as described by the BBC I would see policies in our educational system designed to foster cultural values that inspire productive use of digital technology would be positive for the common good. Values such as innovation, personal responsibility, independence, willingness to do one’s best, competition, self-learning, grounded practical thinking, as well as seeing how these values have contributed towards making the United States the world’s most competitive most opportunity rich economy in the world, are useful in understanding how innovative tools can bring success in economic affairs if used properly.

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To reinforce these concepts organizations and companies must strive to be as competitive as possible without overstepping ethical boundaries. Organizational cultures that emphasize technology as means to achieve productivity, instead of a utopian escape from the harsh reality of the financial world as experienced during the “New Economy” years of the late nineties, can cross pollinate outside the professional realm. In so doing, they will automatically help assimilate efficient and practical uses of new technologies into our socio-economical culture.

Information technology professionals as well as information technology companies must innovate and refine new technology practices so that a proper balance can be found between experimentation and productivity.

One of the strongest influences in a person’s ability and desire to use new technology to enhance productivity in their lives are personal cultural values. In America and most parts of the world, the economic and educational obstacles that one would have had to grapple with twenty-five years ago if they wanted to utilize digital technology today are very small or non existent. Personal cultural values are the chief determinants towards whether or not people will make a constructive use of digital technology, a deconstructive use of the digital technology, or no use of technology at all despite it being available.

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