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Digital Inequalities : Its Impact on Quality of Life among the Young Generation

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Abstract

In this digital era, the internet's growth has not been uniformed, either at global or at individual levels. The different ways of experiencing digital life gives rise to digital inequality which is the result of social inequality prevailing in the society. Already existing inequalities paved way for another sort of inequality that is digital inequality. Internet affects individual or society on various dimensions such as social interactions, psychological, health issues and various other in both positive and negative aspects. Whereas, quality of life is referred to the time or ability that one enjoy doing. This paper focuses on the prevailing barriers for internet usage and the impact on quality of life (QOL) among young people. It has been shown that the excessive use of internet and social networks can exaggerate stress, anxiety, depression and other health aspects. The association between internet and QOL is linked with various aspects due to wide range of positive and negative effects. Findings suggest that excessive access or usage of the internet is a major health concern and incorporated in health studies.

Keywords

Digital life, Internet, Inequality, Stratification, Quality of life.

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1. Introduction

In this digital era, the use of internet has grown drastically and had become a vital part of everyday life. The availability of smart phones and other sources had given surge rise to the use of Internet. Nowadays, youngsters are entirely dependent upon internet for their studies, entertainment and other purposes. Internet diffusion has created an extensive impact on young generation all across the globe. Inequality is one the major challenges facing the world, and there are significant concerns about the contribution of digital technology to inequality (UN, 2020). The already existing social inequalities associated with the digital capital tend to reproduce new form of inequality that is digital inequality. Social inequalities are basically described as the unequal distribution of rewards or resources.

Every society tends to exhibit inequalities among individuals and groups which produce stratification. Society is made up of layers arranged hierarchically, where the privileged and the unprivileged are in top-down relationship (Giddens, 2006). Digital access and inequalities experienced is determined by factors associated with social stratification such as economic resources, age, gender, etc. Social and digital inequality share an interwind relationship, they both mutually influence each other. Digital inequality therefore refers to the disparities in knowledge and ability to use digital and information technology based on different demographics, socio-economic backgrounds and information technology experiences. It is the exclusion of individuals or groups from the benefits of digital realm. The dominant lens for understanding the relationship between digital and inequality has to date been that of the digital divide: of nations, regions, groups, individuals, etc.; absolutely or relatively excluded from the benefits of digital technology (Van Dijk, 2020).

Digital inequalities can be categorized into three levels first is the division in access, second is in term of the skills that people have to engage with digital technologies and the third level is inequalities in outcomes that people from different background of the world achieve from engaging with technologies. Even after the access there were differences existing how they get the most out of technology. In the developing nations, like India the first digital divide (the gap between those who have and do not have access to internet) had initiated a second form of divide that is in terms of usage and skills. The United States Development Of Labour (SCANS) report states that in 1992 that at least 80% of all jobs in the next two decades would require workers to be technologically fluent (Swain & Edyburn, 2007). The people with low levels of usage skills will ultimately lag behind in a world where being digital is a vital. These people are now at risk of becoming further socially and economically disadvantaged (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2011).

The internet affects various dimensions of lifestyle, social interaction, psychological, social problems, mental-health in both positive and negative arenas. Digital inequalities can significantly impact quality of life by minimizing access to essential services, job opportunities, educational resources and social life. Individuals with digital disparity may face difficulties in accessing online information regarding government policies and healthcare, education, etc. leading to reduced quality of life compared to those who have better access and skills. Closing these digital gaps is important for an equitable society.

There are various factors because of which this inequality exist at their core; the factors are following-

- ▶ Socio-economic factors- People with better economic sources have better access to computer and internet as compared to those who lack good source of income. Those who have better educational qualification tend to have better usage skills.
- ▶ Geographical factors- Geographical features of a place or location tends to affect the penetration of internet. Urban areas are likely to have better internet coverage as compared to rural.
- ▶ Cultural and Linguistic factors- Language can also act as a barrier in accessing internet, example people who are fluent with Hindi and don't understand English can face difficulty

while using computers or while browsing. In terms of culture, people from remote areas or people from various other backgrounds are not keen to adapt the new technology at such a pace as compared to others.

Quality of life is a highly subjective measure of happiness that is an essential component of many financial decisions. Factors that play a role in the quality of life vary according to personal preferences, but they often include financial security, job satisfaction, family life, health and safety. Quality of life can be directly related to satisfaction an individual feels in his life. Some common factors of QOL includes leisure time, communication, harmonious relationships and other to live a content life. Whereas quality of life depends on various factors such as good healthcare, clean and safe house, healthy food, and a satisfactory job, friendly atmosphere. Internet will ultimately contribute to these factors in one way or the other to improve one's quality of life. Using of internet (second level) imprints social inequalities that tends to affect quality of life and the educational & job opportunities of the young people who are engaged in such activities. Various uses of the internet that are linked in one way of the other to improve one's quality of life such as job placements, purchases, access to healthcare, socializing, political engagement, learning, leisure time, paying bills, online bookings. Individuals lagging behind in this digital era will ultimately face hinderance to improve ones' quality of life

2. Methodology

This paper is based on secondary sources of data. This article is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The paper is a review regarding how digital inequality affects the quality of life. The articles are reviewed on the basis of title, abstracts, full-texts, reports and findings that met the inclusion criteria were included in the study.

3. Objectives

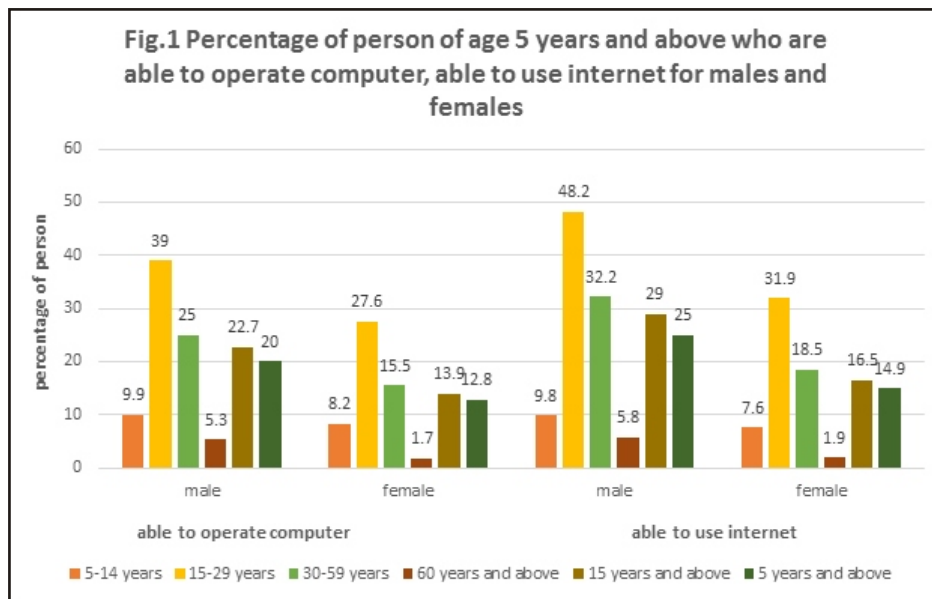
The objectives of this study are two-fold :

1. To investigate the relation between digital inequality and its impact on quality on life on young generation.
2. To find out the access and usage of internet pattern among the young people.

4. Findings

In India, the age group between 12 to 34 years dominated in use of internet from 2013-19 with about 65percent of total population, which is predicted to change by the end of 2025. And it is estimated that by 2025, the age group of 35years and above will make up 66% of internet usage population.

The internet penetration rate in India got just doubled in a decade from 12.6percent in 2012 to 48.7percent. In the population of 1.37 billion almost half of them had internet access. Therefore, India is ranked second in the world in terms of active internet users that is 692million as of February 2023.



According to the above Fig. 1, about 4 percent in rural household and 23 percent households possess computers. And about 24 percent have internet access (2017-18). In the young generation of age 15-29, nearly 25 percent in rural and 58 percent in urban use internet by NSS in its 75th round conducted survey on Household Social Consumption : Education in India. It is categorized on the access, ability to use computer and ability to use internet within the age group of 15-29 years - 23.7 percent in rural and 56 percent in urban can operate a computer like working on spreadsheet, can move files folders and some other criteria. Whereas, 30.4 percent in rural and 63.2 percent in urban can use internet for browsing, send emails, social networking and for other purposes.

The number also varies in terms of gender male tend to possess and use more internet as compared to that of women. Only one third of women's population i.e. 33 percent have ever used internet as compared to men i.e. 57 percent (NFHS-5 data).

Various studies have been done in this field and found that internet usage pattern among young generation have an addictive pattern. Addicts to internet have poor mental and physical health score by using Duke's health profile. They have high anxiety and depression score.

5. Conclusion

Although internet provide valuable opportunities in communicative, scientific, economic aspects in life of individuals, still it is a serious threat to the health and well-being for the people, mostly for young people. Its use is an integral part of daily life of young age especially for both work and leisure. Excessive use of internet and social networks can exaggerate stress, anxiety, depression and other health aspects. The association between internet and quality of life is accompanied by several uncertainties due to wide range of positive and negative effects. The positive aspect of internet includes social interaction, lifestyle, enhancement can help to solve daily life problems, engagement in online relations, carry out economic/commercial activities and an endless list. Negative effects reported as decrease in real life communications. Although various studies conclude that internet negatively effects quality of life, both psychologically and physically. Findings suggest that excessive access or usage of the internet is a major health concern and incorporated in health studies.

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