Research

Digitalization: An Amplifier or Divider of Societal Equity

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Abstract

PM gives the formula,

IT+IT = IT (Information Technology+ Indian Talent= INDIA TOMORROW)

India is the world's largest experiment in digitalization. Digitalization has transformed various aspects of society offering huge opportunities for economic growth. There are around 73,000,000 digital jobs globally that can be transformed remotely. This number is expected to increase around 92,000,000 by 2030 (World Economic Forum). But, its ill effects can also be felt as it is creating inequality. The gap between society is increasing in terms of techno-savvy population and technologically illiterate population.

Digitalization means integration of digital technologies into everyday life. While it holds the potential to bridge gaps and promote inclusivity, it can also expand existing inequalities, serving as both amplifier and divider of social equity. This article studies how digitalization has made itself an indispensable part of modern education health system, employment, finance i.e Each and every field. It also explains how it has devised equity and how it has increased social gap.

Keywords: Digitalization, Digital equity, Amplifier cyber security, Digital literacy.

Introduction

Adaptation of a system or process to be operated with use of computer and Internet is digitalization. It is the process of using digital technologies to transform business model operations and customer experience. In terms of health and medicine, it is integration of technology with healthcare system to offer better patient care, enable faster diagnosis and drive efficiency. So, in any field, it is the combination of technology with that particular field.

There are majorly 6 dominant technologies that is making the world digitalised. These include –

1. Internet of Things (IOT)
2. Robotics
3. Biometrics
4. Persuasive technology
5. Virtual augmented reality
6. Digital platforms

Digital societal equity

Digital society equity means a situation where each and every person of the society has access to information, technology and means to participate in the democratic system fully.

Literature review

1. "Societal and Ethical Issues of Digitalization" by (Royakkers et al., 2018) -

It describes societal and ethical issues emerging with digitalization of society on the basis of 6 recurring themes revealing from their analysis of dominant technologies – privacy, autonomy, security, human dignity, justice and balance of power.

The Issues' related to privacy are data protection, mental privacy, persuasive monitoring etc. Autonomy issues include freedom of expression, controlling influences, etc. Safety and security issues express identity fraud, physical and psychological safety. Issues to human dignity are dehumanization, desocialization, etc.

2. The paper examined the impact of digitalization on expanding consumer to financial services. For people outside the formal financial sector, digital financial services and financial inclusion are intended to provide more affordable financial instruments (Grishanova et al., 2022).

   It emphasises the potential of digital tools to provide access to financial services for marginalised groups, fostering greater economic equity. It focuses on financial inclusion and how is it helpful in developing economies. Mobile banking, digital payments, blockchain technology and fintech innovations help to pave way for societal financial equity.

3. The rapid digital transformation of health care make contribute to increased inequity. Health interventions often lead to intervention generated inequalities as they are typically adopted unevenly with much population lagging behind (Richardson et al., 2022).

   Digital literacy, digital self efficacy, technology access, healthcare infrastructure, patient tech clinician relationship are the levels of influence. The changes brought by digital technology in the field of health and medicine will be inevitable in near future. These changes are good for commoners and ensure that it would benefit everyone in near future.

4. "Digital inclusion: Social inclusion in the digital age"- Digital technologies can be either facilitator or divider of social inclusion in the information society. They promote social inclusion by allowing for the delivery of real time services that can enable individuals to learn, work and live without being subject to physical and social barriers (Nguyen, 2022).

5. Digital divide is a human right and social justice issue: One that social workers should be actively working to close Policy advocacy work. Variety of factors contribute to such divide including computer ownership, high speed internet access and adoption and digital literacy. Educating and training both individuals and library and information (LI) professionals are crucial components in the digital divide in order to provide information congruent with ever-changing technology and points of access (Sanders and Scanlon, 2021).

   According to National Telecommunications and Information Administration Data, the digital divide varies by family income. Families that denote have home computers or subscribe to the internet is because they cannot afford it(Reidout & Katz 2016). People who fall over on the economic ladder are more likely to be people without access or unable to adopt Internet resulting in further falling behind and widening the digital divide

Objectives

The article likely explores how digitalization impacts societal equity, analyzing whether it serves as an equalizer or exacerbates existing inequalities.

Result and discussion

As an Amplifier

Accommodating technology into everyday life by digitising everything is called digitalization. Digitalization when implemented thoughtfully has the capability to

Increase social equality to a great extent. The key elements to be considered for this include-

1. **Access to Information and Education**-Digital platforms offer educational resources to people in remote or underserved areas, reducing the gap of education. Online courses, e-books and educational videos can help individuals to acquire new skills and knowledge. Digital platforms like Unacademy, Open Learning, Treehouse, Khan Academy, etc. provide information and education widely and quickly.

2. **Healthcare** - Telemedicine and health information system can improve access to healthcare services commerce specially in rural areas thereby stimulating a better and equitable healthcare services. The key technologies that have contributed to advancement are CT scan, MRI, ultrasound, etc. Adoption of electronic health records, live chats with doctors and consultants make it Easier for individuals to receive medical advice and treatment.

3. **Economic opportunities** –E-commerce provides D2C business stores and by this entrepreneurs can reach a global market, promoting economic growth and reducing economic disparities. Digital marketplace help to reduce various cost of channels. Less investment inputs are required for this. Moreover, many employment opportunities are provided by digital platforms. Remote work and online gig platforms can offer job opportunities to people who face barriers to traditional employment such as those with disabilities or living in underserved areas.

4. **Government services**- To access social benefits, legal documentation and other essential services are provided by digitalization. This can reduce bureaucratic hurdles and ensure more people receive support they need. Some of these platforms include Umang, M Passport Seva, My Gov, BHIM etc.

As a Divider

1. **Digital Divider**- This is defined as the difference between those who are in the know of digital technologies and those who lack.

2. **Digital Illiteracy/ Skill Gap**- Digital literacy is a must in today's era. All from head to toe of nearby environment has been digitalised. Those people with higher level of education and access to technology tend to have better digital skills while others may struggle to use digital platforms effectively. This leads to disparities in job opportunities and access to services. People from marginalised groups lack competency to compete in digital job market and career advancement.

3. **Job Displacement**- Automation and digitalization has led to loss of jobs particularly in the sector like manufacturing and retails. Workers without the skill to transit to new roles may face long term unemployment or underemployment. Low skilled workers that earned their livelihood from industries relying on manual labour have lost their jobs due to technological advancements. This widens the income gap between the rich and the poor.

4. **Algorithm Bias**- Artificial intelligence and machine learning systems is perpetual and increase existing biasness, if they are trained on biased data. This often leads to discrimination in hiring, lending, law enforcement disproportionately affecting marginal communities.

Ways to mitigate Digital Divide

1. **Improve infrastructure** – Expanding broadband networks to underserved areas and promoting public private partnerships to invest in technological infrastructure.

2. **Affordable Access**- In order to reduce the cost of Internet and digital devices, programs and policies should be implemented. One way can be subsidising Internet to low income families.

3. **Education & Literacy**- To leverage digitalization, digital literacy programs should be incorporated in schools, libraries and community services. Training should be provided to adults to enhance digital skills.

4. **Government Policies**- National strategies and laws should be incorporated to encourage digital divide and support digital equity.

Conclusion and Limitations

Digitalization has the potential to be a powerful amplifier of societal equity. It can democratise access to information, enhance educational opportunities, improve healthcare delivery, specially for marginalised communities. However, digitalization also posses the risk of deepening existing inequalities if not managed carefully. The digital divide, characterised by unequal access to technology and internet, can exacerbate social and economic disparities. Those without access to digital tools and skills are at risk of being left further behind, widening the gap between digitally included and excluded.

Efforts must be made to address the digital divide. Investing in infrastructure, making technology affordable, enhancing digital literacy and creating inclusive digital policies are some of these. By prioritising these actions, society can harness the benefits of digitalization to promote greater equity and inclusion.

Shri Narendra Modi quotes –

"I dream of Digital India where knowledge is strength and empowers the people.".

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