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Research on the Digital Divide and Digital Literacy

While interviewing family and friends from a wide spectrum of ages and backgrounds the results showed that the digital divide has affected all of them in some way. Some are on the side that does not access the Internet while others are on the side that accesses the Internet. No matter what side they are on digital literacy and the digital divide which is the difference between people who have access to the internet and digital technology vs. people that do not have access to these technologies, plays a role in their everyday lives. Digital literacy and the digital divide, affects people in terms of their use of technology, their social lives and their understanding of the digital divide.

The level of the use of technology by the interviewees was dependent of their digital literacy and somewhat of their age. The interviewees were at the ages, 15, 18, 35, 61 and 76 and all had different uses for technology within their lives. The interviewee at the age of 15 uses a cell phone, iPod, Kindle, and a desktop computer for entertainment and educational purposes. Also the interviewee that was 76 uses and iPad, a kindle, and a cell phone for social media purposes.While the 61 year old interviewee uses a desktop computer to keep track of the stock market. This gap between these interviewees had a little to do with age but more to do with digital literacy, which is the skill and knowledge needed to successfully use digital technologies. The 15 year old grew up around these technologies and has strived to access them and learn how to use them. However, the 61 year old grew up in a time where these technologies were not around and never acquired the want or need to learn how to use them. According to PEW Internet “78% of teens now have a cell phone, 37% own smart phones, 23% of teens have a tablet or computer, and 95% of teens use the internet.” (Madden et al 2013). These statistics show that teens have a large access to technology and information on how to use and utilize these technologies.

Technology has evolved to be a medium in which we communicate, whether through social media such as Facebook, Twitter or text messaging with cell phones, the reliance on technology to communicate has grown. “Our digital networks are biased toward social connections- toward contact” (Rushkoff 93). People that do not have access or do not want access to this technology have a very different social situation. The 61 year old who only uses computers to keep track of the stock market said “technology is becoming way over emphasized and causing people to withdraw from the world instead of engage with the world. It reduces people’s interaction with the world to a small screen that they hold in their lap.” However the 76 year old, who did not grow up with access to these technologies and is now using cell phones and Facebook, said “it makes it easier to communicate.” The way people use technology and view the use of technology alters their social interaction. According to the PEW Internet site “Internet users under 50 are particularly likely to use a social networking site of any kind.” (Duggan and Brenner 2013). People that do not use these sites do not have the same interactions as people that use them do, however, some argue that a “face to face” method of communicating is better.

Due to the differences of use of technology, social interactions with technology and level of digital literacy each of the interviewees had a different standing on the digital divide. The interviewees that were ages 15, 18, 35 and 76 all had access and skills to use technology that place them on the side of the digital divide that is considered to have access to the Internet and its resources. However, the 61 year old did not have nor want to have access to this technology except for one aspect of his life therefore placing himself on the side of the digital divide that includes people that do not have access to the Internet and its resources. While the 76 year old has made an effort to make technology a part of her life, placing her on the side of the digital divide that includes people that have access to technology. These two interviewees also provide a good example of the “want and want not’s.” People that fall into the category of the “wants” are the people that want to have access to technology and use it in their lives while people that are in the category of the “want not’s” are people that have no desire to add technology into their lives. Though the digital divide has a different impact of the interviewees they all had the same understanding that there was a digital divide. One interviewee said “a person that doesn’t have it and a person that does are completely different.” They way that technology divides us is very evident. Those that do not have access to it therefore do not have access to its informational and educational resources as well as its social resources. Due to the fact that they do not have this access they are missing out on the ability to have easy access to information on the Internet and its educational resources. Also people that lack access to the Internet have to find other ways to communicate with people because they do not have the access to communicate through Facebook or Twitter. Those that do have access to it are greatly affected by its resources and social networking abilities. For those of us that do have access we are able to search and learn about anything that peaks our interest giving us access to the educational resources provided by the Internet. Also we are able to communicate more quickly with people through Facebook and Twitter. This interaction online also gives us a way to easily interact with people that are long distances away.

Technology will continue to progress and the digital divide will become greater in size. Those that do not have access will fall farther behind in understanding technologies and how they work in society. While most of the interviewees fell on the side of the digital divide that has access, the one that didn’t will have an even harder time understanding technologies in the future. The digital divide either lends people access to information and resources or leaves in people in the dark. The age of the interviewees had a large part to do with their level of digital literacy but another large part of their digital literacy was due to the want and the need to have access and understanding of technology.

Bibliography

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