

Chapter 15

South Korean Digital Information Divide: Present and Future

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ABSTRACT

Due to the large-scale application and spread of mobile Internet and its deep integration with PC wired internet, the divide between the vulnerable groups and the general public in terms of hardware device ownership has been greatly reduced. This means the traditional digital divide has been effectively improved, but not means that the problems facing the vulnerable groups have been completely solved. Instead, they are currently caught in another kind of divide, which is the digital information divide. Most of the existing literature only pays attention to the phenomenon of digital divide, but lacks in-depth exploration of the digital information divide between vulnerable groups and the general public. Based on a South Korean survey report-the Survey of Digital Information Divide, this paper gives a detailed explanation of the concept of digital information divide, and analyses the digital information divide of the South Korean vulnerable groups mentioned in the report. Based on the current situation of the digital information divide between the vulnerable groups and the general public in South Korea, this paper puts forward the countermeasures to narrow the digital information divide.

INTRODUCTION

The recent decades have witnessed a rapid growth of mobile internet, and the convergence of wired PC internet and mobile internet is accelerating. This new trend should be brought to the forefront by researchers, because it will inevitably lead to new social phenomena and problems. For example, the social divide

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caused by the application of ICTs in the past will take on new forms. Because the cost of accessing the mobile internet is lower than that of wired network and the mobile internet is more convenient, mobile internet devices represented by smart phones have proliferated rapidly in the past few years. Therefore, if we measure the level of digitalization of different groups through concepts, indexes and models of digital divide which use equipment and technology applications as the main indicators, we may find that the gap between the ordinary and vulnerable groups does not seem to be significant, but this is apparently inaccurate. In addition to hardware equipment, what can more accurately reflect the gap between different groups now is the divide of the ability to acquire and utilize information through digital technology, because the effective search and use of information actually reflects the ability of different groups to obtain resources. Obviously, this ability is crucial to everyone in the era of the internet, especially in the era of mobile internet, and the divide of information acquiring and utilizing between vulnerable and general public caused by different capabilities is a key symbol of digital information divide.

Although some literatures have noted the trend of widening information divide between different groups (Lee & Park, 2009), and emphasized the disadvantaged position of vulnerable groups in information access (Yoon & Shin, 2009), these literatures still describe it as a certain kind of digital divide. However, according to the classic definition of the digital divide made by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), “the term digital divide refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socioeconomic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access ICTs and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities”, the description of these literatures is inaccurate because the access to ICTs is stressed and the information divide is not mentioned in this definition by OECD. Therefore, we need a new concept to describe the digital information divide between vulnerable groups and general public in order to understand the real plight of vulnerable groups. According to the Statistical Information Report from the Ministry of Science, Technology, Information and Communication of South Korea, namely, the Survey of Digital Information Divide (2021), this paper will examine the concept of digital information divide, and systematically describe the digital information divide between vulnerable groups and general public in South Korea, so as to provide some basis for subsequent empirical research in this field.

DIGITAL INFORMATION DIVIDE

The Definition of Digital Information Divide

As mentioned above, between the vulnerable groups and the general public, the divide of digitalization based on applications of PC and other equipment is gradually narrowing, while divide of utilization of digital information based on wireless Internet is rapidly expanding, which leads to the formation and expansion of new digital information divide.

Vulnerable groups lack the ability to acquire and absorb digital information and the way to exchange digital information with the outside world. The “divide” in the digital information divide is because the vulnerable groups are deprived of their digital information ability, and the “digital information” is not limited to knowledge, but also involves science and technology, information network and so on. The economic development of a digital society is inseparable from “digital information”, so their lack of access to and application of digital information will result in them becoming digital refugees and becoming marginalized.

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