

Chapter 14

Innovations in Closing the Digital Gap: Lessons From Around the World

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ABSTRACT

In today's advancing technological era, bridging the digital gap is crucial for societal progress. This chapter examines innovations in closing the gap, focusing on challenges faced by diverse populations like people with disabilities, elderly, and indigenous communities. Through literature review, case studies, and interviews, common trends are identified. Findings show greater barriers for people with disabilities and socio-economic influences. Integration of AI, IoT, and 5G enhances digital inclusion, offering practical recommendations for targeted interventions and strategic technology use. These insights support global efforts in promoting equitable opportunities in our increasingly digital world.

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INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly digitized world, access to digital technologies has become synonymous with access to opportunities and resources essential for social, economic, and educational development. However, this access is far from universal, leading to what is commonly known as the “digital divide” – the gap between those who have access to and can effectively use digital technologies and those who do not. This divide perpetuates inequalities, hindering the ability of individuals and communities to thrive in the modern era (Van Dijk, 2020).

In response to this challenge, countries around the globe have implemented various strategies and initiatives aimed at closing the digital gap and promoting digital inclusion. From infrastructure development to policy interventions and community-driven programs, innovative approaches have emerged to address the multifaceted nature of this issue (OECD, 2021).

This chapter seeks to explore and analyze the innovations in closing the digital gap, drawing insights from successful initiatives implemented in different parts of the world. By examining these diverse strategies, we aim to extract valuable lessons and best practices that can inform future efforts to promote digital inclusion on a global scale (World Bank, 2022).

The digital divide refers to the gap between individuals, communities, or geographic areas that have access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and those that do not. This gap encompasses disparities in access to hardware (such as computers and smartphones), software (including applications and digital content), internet connectivity (broadband access), and digital literacy (the ability to effectively use and navigate digital technologies) (ITU, 2019).

The digital divide can manifest along various dimensions, including socio-economic status, geography, age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and disability status. Those on the disadvantaged side of the digital divide may face barriers to accessing educational resources, job opportunities, healthcare services, government services, and social connections available through digital technologies (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001).

Efforts to bridge the digital divide often involve policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at improving access to ICT infrastructure, promoting digital literacy and skills development, reducing costs associated with technology access, and addressing socio-economic inequalities that contribute to disparities in digital inclusion. Closing the digital divide is considered crucial for promoting equitable opportunities, economic development, and social inclusion in the digital age (UNESCO, 2020).

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