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# The digital divide is a multi-dimensional complex

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There have always been social divides predicated upon, for example, poverty, education, gender and status. Such divides have been challenged sometimes by governments, sometimes by radical politicians and sometimes by socially responsible individuals. Such divides have often been diminished by pragmatic people driven by justice and philanthropy. These people include Angela Burdett-Coutts, George Cadbury, Andrew Carnegie, George Peabody, Joseph Rowntree, Titus Salt and Louisa Twining. All of them had the desire and drive to make a positive difference to the lives of ordinary people.

With increasing technological global dependency, the digital divide has become one of the most significant social divides of our time. Technological advance continues to accelerate and so the digital divide is likely to become more acute with every passing day. The recent COVID-19 pandemic is an extreme example of the acceleration of this divide and in this situation may well have indirectly resulted in fatality. This is because information empowers those who have it, but it also disenfranchises those who do not. During the pandemic, digital outcasts, who are not informed in a timely manner, might be put in grave danger. Furthermore, with physical social networks destroyed, the digital outcast suffers emotionally and mentally.

However, the digital divide is more than simply information as a product. It is broad in its meaning, referring to unequal access to information and communication technology based on social, economic, cultural and political factors. It is multi-dimensional, encompassing a variety of diverse perspectives and dynamic changes over time as technology evolves. It is commonplace for single dimensions, such as location, gender, age and education, of the digital divide to be considered in isolation. This seems to be problematic, as the digital divide occurs through a very complex interrelationship of factors which need to be considered in total. It is this which makes the digital divide one of the greatest challenges of today.

Since the advent of accessible online computing, the digital divide existed, it exists today and it will exist tomorrow. It means that almost every aspect of life will be affected, particularly for those who are most vulnerable for whatever reason. It is important that research-informed action addresses this unacceptable state. In this special issue, a number of perspectives are taken to consider different aspects of the digital divide. In total, they illustrate the synergistic value of crossing disciplinary boundaries and adopting a plethora of research methods and philosophies. Thus, the guest editors and authors of this special issue have created a notable contribution to the fight against the digital divide.

[Note: This editorial is based upon: Rogerson, S. (2020) Is the digital divide of the past, present or future? News and Blogs, Emerald Publishing 17 March.]

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