



Digital Divide Myth

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I hear the term "digital divide" used all the time, but it has this vague, elusive definition that just doesn't sit well with me. In fact, I believe a "digital divide" doesn't exist.

The term is often used to define the gap in technical knowledge and usage between middle- to upper-class Americans and poorer -- often minority -- Americans. On one hand, it has also been used to define one of the evils that have come of our embrace of technology while, on the other, some argue that using technology could help bridge that gap.

These views are not only wrong, they are dangerous. If there is a digital divide, then there is also a banking and investing divide, an expensive pets and watches divide and an aviation hobbyist divide. There are of course huge gaps in the afore-mentioned subjects, but they are not gaps created or fueled by the subjects themselves. The gap is much like the gap in technology between the haves and have not, a financial one.

In general the poor tend to have a lack of understanding when it comes to investing, and they find aviation as a hobby financially unfeasible. The same applies to technology. We all know that giving planes and large bank accounts to the poor won't solve these problems. Yet that is how we are attacking the gap in technology: giving away computers in poor neighborhoods and wiring schools with high-speed Internet access as a bandage and then walking away.

The use of the term "digital divide" has convinced many people that technology is the solution to what is actually an economic problem. But it is not.

Technology is a great tool in helping to bridge the economic divide, but it alone cannot solve our problems. Placing computers into schools is only the first step -- modifying the education system to integrate new technology into the learning process is the next, more important, one.

Some would have us place thousands of computers in poor rural countries and connect them to wireless networks to promote commerce, but these measures will only take us so far. In many developing countries road infrastructure and transportation infrastructure are non-existent. It's obvious that all the online orders in the world can't help them unless investments are made to develop physical infrastructure.

Let's not make technology a cop-out. It is cheaper for companies and governments to spend \$10,000 on computers then to really invest the millions needed to promote business development and infrastructure building in poor rural areas. It's cheaper then looking at the problem of why we have such a large economic gap between the rich and the poor.

The use of the term "digital divide" only fuels such irresponsibility. Ask yourself what is the cause of our technology divide? Once you find the answer, I believe you will agree with me that whatever the solution is that it has little to do with computers.

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