

DigiGen webinar: Digitally deprived children in Europe: Focusing on concepts and ideas

Notes from Halla B. Holmarsdottir

Slide 1:

Digital inequalities have emerged as a growing concern in modern societies. These inequalities relate to disparities in access, actual use and use efficacy of digital resources. Reducing digital inequalities is critical for sustainable digitalized societies in Europe and beyond. All types of digital inequalities are encompassed in the term **digital divide** and while there are several other concepts that are relevant and related (digital inclusion, e-inclusion, digital exclusion, digital inequality, digital poverty, digital capital and even the concept we are referring to here today digital deprivation) we can agree I think they fall under the overarching concept of digital divide). I would also like to acknowledge and thank Alitia Pavlutuk for starting a discussion around the terminology with regard to digital inclusion on Twitter a couple of weeks ago. See her list, which can be added to at https://docs.google.com/document/d/16R2N-ydZRCaXksJRV0wOJZZiITneV0n7Ri3cj_KamxE/edit

As I see it the digital divide is linked to both outcomes and opportunities, but also the need to understand the mechanisms behind it. E-exclusion can be seen as linked to the pedagogy where individuals are kept out and a lack skills or capacity. Finally, digital deprivation is linked to structural decisions, both conscious and unconscious decisions. This will be more apparent when Sara presents the findings in the next session.

Slide 2:

If we go back to the focus on the digital divide, one of the first uses of the term is traced back in a US government report published in 1999 referring to the divide between those with access to new technologies and those without (NTIA 1999). The term was soon broadened to signify the “gap between those who can effectively use new information and communication tools, such as the Internet, and those who cannot” (Gunkel 2003). Overall, the term digital divide includes digital inequalities between individuals, households, or geographic areas (Pick and Sarkar 2016; OECD 2011). The conceptual broadness of the term aims to capture a multifaceted economic and civil rights issue in an era of continuous efforts to digitalize society. The ongoing digitalization poses a challenge for individuals who are not fully capable of using digital resources and may feel partially excluded or completely left out of the society and this is where then digital deprivation in terms of resources comes into play.

Slide 3:

The early digital divide literature focused on inequalities in accessing the Internet as dependent upon socioeconomic and cultural differences (DiMaggio et al., 2001),



what is today known as the first level of the digital divide (Attewell, 2001). Accordingly, these preliminary findings showed how the most socially advantaged people were the first to acquire technologies and access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) (DiMaggio et al., 2004). However, with the diffusion of ICTs and the spread of the Internet, some scholars expanded this definition by including the different uses of the Internet and the possession of different grades of digital skills, what is today known as the second level of digital divide (Hargittai, 2002). This second level showed a digital ‘stratification’ (Peter and Valkenburg, 2006) and inequalities in terms of both Internet usage (Van Dijk, 2006) and online participation. Finally, researchers have also identified the third level of digital divide (Ragnedda, 2017; Wei et al., 2011) that refers to inequalities in terms of the benefits and concrete outcomes that users can gain from ICT usage (Van Deursen et al., 2015).

Slide 4:

The relational aspects of technology use have, however, been more central to studies of unequal access to the internet and internet-capable devices, commonly referred to as digital inequality or digital inclusion/exclusion. This broader focus reflects that technology experiences for people with constrained connectivity more obviously depend on other people by, for example, going online in public spaces like libraries or using devices owned by family or friends (Dailey, Bryne, Powell, Karaganis, & Chung, 2010). Social interactions are fundamental to how individuals secure access to ‘personal’ technologies. Furthermore, Rideout and Katz (2016) report that one-third of lower-income parents with school-age children feel they have insufficient time online because they share devices with too many family members. That finding suggests that social negotiations for digital access occur even when families own digital devices and are able to pay for an internet connection.

Lower-income parents with school-age children are an important population for scholars concerned with digital inequality and intergenerational social mobility. Policymakers and educators are increasingly concerned that unequal access to technology exacerbates inequities in educational opportunities between low- and high-income students. The primary response to those concerns has been efforts to increase in-school technology access.

Slide 5:

With the growth of digital technology there are both benefits and risks. While the risks of such technology have been well documented and include negative health effects on sleep, attention, and learning (de Jong et al., 2010; Bruni et al., 2015; Lenhart et al., 2015); exposure to inaccurate, inappropriate, or unsafe content and contacts; and compromised privacy and confidentiality (Moreno et al., 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011; Moreno et al., 2016). Many of these risks are related to **innate or situational vulnerabilities**, but at times these two terms are used interchangeably in the research literature. Whether or not risk and vulnerability overlap is an issue that has received some attention in the research literature (Beck, 2009; Brown, 2017) and in some cases the two concepts are considered as “two sides of the same coin” (Beck, 2009 p. 178). Nevertheless, vulnerability “appears to speak to a sense of social inclusion, empathy and sympathy in a way

that risk does not” (Brown, 2017 p. 16), while risk implies the “chances of adversity translating into actual negative outcomes for children” (Daniel, 2010, p. 233) and the likelihood that something bad can happen.

Slide 6:

In an upcoming working paper we provide a first step in contributing to a more precise understanding of the concepts of vulnerability and risk with regard to ICT use. But what does it mean to be vulnerable or at risk? In our investigation of this question there is a need to likewise consider the value of the digital activities along with the ideal uses of technology that form a bridge between the various ecosystems surrounding the digital generation and the technology itself. These foci are part of the overall objectives of the DigiGen project. Before we can begin considering the use and value of digital technology the question of access is particularly important. The focus on access is examined in the next presentation under the theme of digital deprivation, which is part of the larger report that will be available on the project website in the next couple of months.

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