

# A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

## A Level Sociology

### The impact of digital forms of communication on social equality

#### *Instructions and answers for teachers*

*These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'The impact of digital forms of communication on social equality' activity which supports OCR A Level Sociology.*

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A Level Sociology

The impact of digital forms of communication on social equality

Task 1 – Getting you thinking

- In pairs make a list of the people in the UK who you think are the least likely to have access to a computer or the internet.
- Next to each one write why you think those individuals may have limited access.
- Finally think about what impact not having access to a computer or the internet may have on their lives.

People with limited access to computers and the internet	Why?	How will this affect them?

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Oxford Cambridge and RSA

#### **The Activity:**

This activity consists of 5 tasks.



*This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.*

#### **Associated materials:**

'The impact of digital forms of communication on social equality' Lesson Element learner activity sheet

#### **Suggested timings:**

**Task 1:** 20 minutes

**Task 2:** 30 minutes – 60 minutes

**Task 3:** 30 minutes

**Task 4:** 20 minutes

**Task 5:** 20 minutes



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## Aims and objectives

- To research the digital divide in relation to access, use of and knowledge of digital forms of communication in the UK.
- To consider the impact of the UK digital divide on young people.
- To assess different reasons for digital divides in a global context.
- To evaluate traditional theoretical explanations for the digital divide both in the UK and in a global context.

## Suggestions for delivery

1. Students should begin by considering the impact of a digital divide in the UK on inequality and opportunity in their own context.
2. The research task using statistics should highlight some interesting data in relation to computer and internet usage in the UK as well as giving students a chance to assess the disparity between using different research to gain effective quantitative data.
3. Students should consider the digital divide amongst young people in the UK and the effects this will have on inequality of opportunity. The impact of limited access to computers or the internet in the UK should be considered in relation to social, economic and educational disadvantages. This can lead into discussions about global differences in the use of the internet and the inequalities this may cause on a larger scale e.g. looking at the differences between the developed and developing world.
4. As the digital divide needs to be considered globally, task 4 can be used in different ways. Either teachers can give the names of countries they want students to research individually to create case studies which look at the impact of the digital divide in that country on inequality or students can be given a 'reason for global digital divide' to research countries which are affected by it. Either way it is important to consider inequality between countries globally or reasons why certain countries may encourage a digital divide.
5. Traditional theoretical concepts can be applied to the global digital divide by getting students to think about the explanations in context. However it is also worth encouraging students to think about the usefulness of these theories for such a contemporary issue.

## Introduction

A digital divide refers to social inequality according to a person's access to, use of, or knowledge of information and communication technologies (ICT). The divide within countries, such as the digital divide in the United Kingdom, may refer to inequalities between individuals, households, age, or geographic areas.



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The gap in a digital divide may exist for a number of reasons. One telling fact is that "as income rises so does Internet use". Most commonly therefore, a digital divide stems from poverty and the economic barriers that limit resources and prevent people from obtaining or using newer technologies. However, research shows that the digital divide is more than just an access issue and just providing the necessary equipment will not close the gap. Individuals also need to know how to make use of the new digital forms of communication once they have access to them. For example 44.6 million adults (87%) in the UK had used the Internet. Almost all (99%) of 16 to 24 year olds have used the Internet, compared with 37% of adults aged 75 years and over (ONS 2014) suggesting that although a majority of households in the UK now have access to the internet, there is still a 'digital divide' in relation to age and ability, understanding and use of the internet.

The global digital divide describes global differences between access to and use of digital forms of communication between developed and developing countries. The Internet is expanding very quickly, and not all countries—especially developing countries—are able to keep up with the constant changes.

## Task 1 – Getting you thinking

- In pairs make a list of the people in the UK who you think are the least likely to have access to a computer or the internet.
  - Students should be encouraged to reflect on differences in access to and use of computers and the internet in the UK in relation to social class, gender, age, disability, region, ethnicity, education, religion etc.
- Next to each one write why you think those individuals may have limited access.
  - Encourage students to compare differences between the individuals they have chosen. i.e. why might somebody from a working class background have limited access to a computer in comparison to somebody with a middle class background or why is a girl is less likely to use the internet than a boy?
  - Reflect on issues such as money, identity, social control, socialisation, ability, language barriers, social change, norms, values and roles etc.
- Finally think about what impact not having access to a computer or the internet may have on their lives.
  - Make sure students can apply issues related to social mobility and social exclusion such as social, cultural and economic capital, marginalisation, relative poverty, social and economic barriers and social stratification.



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- Encourage discussion based on digital communication and social media and how these are increasingly used in society such as schools using twitter to announce notices or instant news updates via the internet.

## Task 2 – Using the internet to research the digital divide in the UK

Students may come up with a range of varied statistics but should be directed to statistics from reputable sites such as the Office for National Statistics (ONS). A good publication to use from the ONS is the 'Internet Access - Households and Individuals' (2013). This publication also produces quarterly updates so students and teachers can stay up to date on such a contemporary issue. Students should also be encouraged to assess the validity, reliability and representativeness of their statistics and choose data which is up to date.

## Task 3 – Focusing on the digital divide between young people and children in the UK

1. Why is the digital divide and young people an under researched area?

Young people are labelled by society to be 'ahead' of the adult population and are often referred to in the media as 'the internet generation'. This suggests that all young people have access to and use the internet effectively therefore meaning that people believe that the digital divide may not affect young people.

2. What are the strengths of conducting 40 minute, face to face, computer assisted interviews when researching children and young people? Think practically and ethically.

**Practically** – Direct students to consider the rapport that can be built over 40 minutes increasing validity, the reliability of computer-assisted interviews producing standardised questions and the large sample of 1,511 increasing the representativeness and generalisability of the research.

**Ethically** – Encourage students to think about the difficulties of researching children and young people and how the face to face interviews at homes means parental consent will have been given and deception is decreased.



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3. What are the weaknesses of conducting 40 minute, face to face, computer assisted interviews when researching children and young people? Think practically and ethically.

**Practically** – Encourage students to consider issues associated with face to face interviewing such as social desirability, interviewer effect and bias decreasing validity. Think about the standardised approach to computer based interviewing decreasing verstehen and understanding. Also consider the representativeness of a random sample and the bias of the young people chosen to participate.

**Ethically** – Direct students to consider the anonymity, confidentiality and privacy issues associated with interviewing face to face in respondents' homes.

4. Which young people are least likely to have access to and use the internet according to Livingstone and Helsper?

Girls, younger children and working class young people.

5. Why might these groups of young people be the ones that use the internet the least? Try to give different reasons for each group.

**Girls** – Encourage students to think about gender differences in the use of media. Focus on gender role socialisation by the media in relation to video gaming and social media. Consider parental control over the protection of girls and the moral panics associated with girls' safety on the internet. (Direct students to research on gender roles and the media.)

**Younger children** – Direct students to think about restrictions on access, lack of interest and parental anxieties about internet safety.

**Working class** – Consider economic differences between class groups and hence access to computers and the internet. Discuss regional differences in broadband access in the UK and the characteristics young people from working class backgrounds might be socialised into (direct students to sociological research on working class subcultures).

6. Livingstone and Helsper suggest that policy should focus on the class divide in internet access and use amongst young people, why might this be?

Direct students to consider the educational, social and economic barriers not having a computer or access to the internet might bring for young people from lower economic backgrounds. Encourage students to consider the following concepts - social and cultural capital, barriers to learning, social exclusion, relative poverty, social mobility, social stratification and marginalisation.



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## Task 4 – The digital divide globally

Complete the spider diagram by finding examples of countries who experience digital divides because of the reasons included. Your teacher may also give you a country to create a case study about the use of computers and the internet in that country. You should use the headings to consider why there is a digital divide in that country.



**Censorship** – Use examples of North Korea, Iran or China to show how governments can censor access to particular internet sites, social media or the whole internet in general.

**Language** – Encourage students to assess how the majority of websites visited are in English and the barriers this creates for countries where English is not spoken or taught.

**Economy** – Lack of access due to material deprivation in developing countries e.g. lack of electricity, broadband, computers, mobile phones etc.

**Political Unrest** – Assess specific examples of countries from the media which have used digital forms of communication as social or political protests.

**Education** – Focus on literacy rates between and within countries and the impact this has on access to the internet.

**Religion** – Link to cultural defence and the specific example of Iran.

**Physical Access** - Individuals need to obtain access to electricity, computers, landlines and networks in order to access the internet. Focus on limited access in developing countries as well as regional differences in richer countries.

- Countries that can be considered for students to create case studies for include North Korea, Iran, Syria, Cuba, China, South Africa, Egypt, United States and Argentina.



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## Task 5 – Applying traditional theoretical explanations to the digital divide

Teachers may need to remind students of the meaning of some concepts but should encourage students to apply them themselves to explaining inequality in relation to digital forms of communication

### Functionalist - Value Consensus and Social Solidarity

- Encourage students to consider the usefulness of the internet in creating a functioning society. This can therefore lead to a discussion on social exclusion and Durkheim's concept of anomie.
- Students may also think about the benefits of the internet on the global society and a global village.
- Students can be directed to thinking about socialisation and the media globally and the benefits of this on a functioning society.

### Feminist - Patriarchy and Gender role Socialisation

- Feminists focus on the divide in girls' education globally and hence the digital divide between the genders. Students can be encouraged to research high profile feminist campaigns which focus on improving the education of girls globally.
- Students can also be encouraged to think of the gender role socialisation which may cause differences in use of the internet and computers between boys and girls.

### Marxist – Alienation

- Teachers should encourage students to think about the effect of a digital divide on alienation. Limited access to computers and the internet will divide a society and encourage an us (those that have power over digital communication) and them (those that consume) divide.

### Marxist - Ideological Control

- Encourage students to focus on the influence of increased advertising over the internet and its impact on global capitalism.

### Weberian - Status/Consumption

- Discuss the impact of social media increasing conspicuous consumption and the ability to show status and hence increase status inequality.



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## Weberian – Party

- Focus on political power in relation to a person's ability to use and access knowledge over the internet. Those who have access are more able to be empowered and bring about change locally and globally.
- Access to the internet can also increase opportunities for lower income groups to have increased political power or enable those who are more likely to be disengaged from politics to take part ie the young.

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