



Mind the gap

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Highlights

- The digital divide, deemed to be one of the biggest challenges facing developing knowledge economies in the last decade, was conveniently forgotten in recent years as India celebrated the mobile internet boom and an ever-widening broadband network.
- It was assumed that if every panchayat was connected, and if calling and connectivity costs remain low, the force of rapid growth alone would sweep over inequalities.
- But a report released by a policy think tank which researches information and communications technology in India, among other markets, comes as a wake-up call: The digital divide is still here, and inequality is deeper than was anticipated.
- A study released by LIRNEasia reveals that ironically, the divide is deepest precisely where the internet was supposed to bridge it.
- Internet access was expected to be a great equaliser between the sexes, giving women access to knowledge and connections that they could not get offline.
- But it appears that India has the **fewest number of women online**, and the highest gender gap in mobile phone ownership among 18 similar countries.
- The gap is 34 per cent in urban areas and rises to 52 per cent in rural areas.
- Other groups who have been left behind on the information superhighway include rural populations and the economically or educationally weaker sections.
- The revolution is real enough, improving the lot of huge populations, but it has not been a great equaliser.
- Partly, inequality must owe to legacy attitudes — if a family owns only one phone, it is likely to be in the hands of a man.

But clearly, anticipated components of the divide, like illiteracy, have not been adequately addressed.

Source: The Indian Express

