▼ Introduction to Digital Divide Minitrack

Karine Barzilai-Nahon
University of Washington
karineb@u.washington.edu

Narcyz Roztocki
State University of New York
roztockn@newpaltz.edu

Since more than two decades, the concept of digital divide continues to draw a great deal of public attention. The term "digital divide" started to be used widely in the 1990s to express differences in computer access and infrastructures gaps between the "have" and "have-not." In the following years, the term has evolved beyond its initial definition as the fraction of population with the access to computers. Several other dimensions of the "divide" such as computer skills, education level, economic status, and legal regulations have also started to be considered.

This minitrack, featured for the first time at the HICSS-40 meeting in January 2007, tries to step out of the simplistic, traditional look at the digital divide. Consequently, we try to encourage inclusions of multiple perspectives of the digital divide, such socio-demographic factors, geographical location, level of governmental support, usage patterns, and more. Our aim is to provide a platform for researchers interested in this topic to disseminate their work and to discuss their ideas.

The minitrack has six papers to be presented during two paper sessions. These papers use various research approaches and focus on different aspects of digital divide. The first paper, entitled "Transcending the Digital Divide in Native America: A Framing Analysis of the Effects of Information and Communication Technologies and Media on Empowerment and Development," co-authored by Sajda Qureshi and Teresa Trumbly Lamsam, examine the use of *information and communications technologies* (ICT) in Native American communities. The second paper, entitled "Digital Usage Behavior: A Sense Making Perspective," co-authored by James Freedman and John Henderson, proposes a model of digital sense making. This model attempts to explain the digital divide as a function of *information technology* (IT) utilization. The third paper, entitled "Factors Influencing Users' Intentions to Make the Web Accessible to People with Disabilities," co-authored by Karine Barzilai-Nahon, Izak Benbasat and Nancy Lou, aims to provide a theoretical model to analyze obstacles, challenges and incentives which lead a non-professional user to produce information that is accessible to people with disabilities and to develop a relevant instrument to measure that. The fourth paper, entitled "Understanding the Factors Influencing the Attitude Toward and the Use of Mobile Technology in Developing Countries: A Model of Cellular Phone Use in Guinea," co-authored by Bangaly Kaba, Koffi N'Da and Victor Mbarika, examines the effect of various microeconomic factors on use of cellular telephones in developing countries. A survey among 1000 cellular phone subscribers in Guinea was used to collect the data. The fifth paper, entitled "Connecting Communities of Need with Public Health: Can SMS Text-Messaging Improve Outreach Communication?" authored by Elizabeth Avery Gomez, examines whether or not text-messaging can be used as a low cost communication tool for health professionals in poor communities. The six paper, entitled "Rethinking the Digital Divide: Towards a Path of Digital Effectiveness," co-authored by Corlane Barclay and Evan W. Duggan, proposes a staged digital effectiveness framework. This framework uses factors such as knowledge acquisition, access, adoption, exploitation and innovation.

Overall, the research results presented in the six papers attest the significance of the topic, which clearly deserves more of academic attention. Moreover, the papers confirm that oversimplified approaches to digital divide are not sufficient and more complex models needs to be constructed, validated and refined.