

A Critical Analysis of Digital Literacy Impact on Lgbtq+ Communities.

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ABSTRACT

In the present technological era, accessibility of the internet and digital awareness are no longer manifested as a luxury. They are considered as a bare necessity which has become imperative for the present generation as a fundamental pillar of their identity and survival. Digital literacy is considered as the knowledge and awareness of using the new technology for the basic functioning of life. Today many tech companies focused on the rapid marketing of the tools without doing the risk assessment of the tools on the marginalized groups. Laws and regulations do not keep pace with the rapid growth of technology, due to that the tech companies are often do not held accountable for the violations. Gradually, the internet has paved the way for the LGBTQ+ Communities to express their views globally and strengthen their political struggle. However, online harassment, cyberbullying, privacy violations and discriminatory algorithms often deteriorated the presence of LGBTQ+ people over the internet thereby catalyzing the gender digital divide. This research paper focused on the problem whether the digital literacy is need of an hour for the upliftment of the LGBTQ+ community and what could be the possible measure to tackle the hindrances in providing the digital literacy to them.

KEYWORDS: Digital, LGBTQ+, Literacy, Marginalized, Digital Divide.

INTRODUCTION

In the present technological era, accessibility of the internet and digital awareness are no longer manifested as a luxury. They are considered as a bare necessity which has become imperative for the present generation as a fundamental pillar of their identity and survival. Digital literacy is considered as the knowledge and awareness of using the new technology for the basic functioning of life. Today many tech companies focused on the rapid marketing of the tools without doing the risk assessment of the tools on the marginalized groups. Laws and regulations do not keep pace with the rapid growth of technology, due to that the tech companies are often do not held accountable for the violations. The difference of knowledge with regards to the usage of digital tools is known as digital divide. The term "digital divide" implies disproportionate and unequal use and access to the contemporary information and digital technology. This term primarily connotes disparities between the population and the regions on the basis of geographical conditions, economic status, gender and the availability of the resources. Although, there has been a significant escalation in digitalization rate from 10% in 2019 to 55% in 2020, still only 27.5% of the youth between 15-29 years is regarded as digitally skilled. Therefore, one of the detrimental aspects of the digital divide is the "gender digital divide" which highlights the inequitable use, access and participation in the digital realm on the basis of gender. When it comes to the marginalized section of our communities, the less talked or recognized section of LGBTQ+ community suffers at its worst.

Specifically, the Digital Gender Gap not only accounts for the gap between the men and women but also takes into consideration the entire LGBTQ+ community. As per the reports, surveys done around the globe acknowledge that LGBT youth reported being online 45 minutes a day more on average than surveyed non-LGBT youth¹. Which shows that access to internet and digital tools are found in this community as well but the question remains the same that whether this access is for every age group or just for the youth, and at same time is this true for the India or not?

Earlier, the LGBTQ+ society due to various socio-economic challenges were not in a position to afford the access to internet. Gradually, the internet has paved the way for the LGBTQ+ Communities to express their views globally and strengthen their political struggle. However, online harassment, cyberbullying, privacy violations and discriminatory algorithms often deteriorated the presence of LGBTQ+ people over the internet thereby catalyzing the gender digital divide. This research paper focused on the problem whether the digital literacy is need of an hour for the upliftment of the LGBTQ+ community and what could be the possible measure to tackle the hindrances in providing the digital literacy to them.

DIGITAL LITERACY vs DIGITAL DIVIDE.

The Internet began as a global network where people could access information and instantly communicate with anyone in the world². In the today's era where with each passing second a new technology is emerging, digital literacy becomes an essential thing. Digital literacy is an umbrella concept for important skill clusters whose names are often used as synonyms; their content, however, is not exactly the same³. Digital literacy encompasses an individual's ability to access, understand, and use information through various digital platforms⁴. Digital literacy is important to understand, evaluate and manage the large amount of data in much easier way than the traditional set of learning. Digital literacy helps to manage information by joining online communities, helps to evaluate information by reliable online sources, and later on use of that particular source of information for the better lifestyle. Based on various surveys this digital literacy specifically the social media platforms help the LGBTQ+ community to put forward their point of views, and provides them the source which helps them to achieve their freedom of speech and expression.

The easy availability of internet shows the any nation's development and progress which shows the social and economic well being of its citizens. The same goes in the opposite direction when that accessibility is hindered by the digital divide. The development era has witnessed a humongous growth in research area of digital divide as it impacts the economic, social and political structure in any country. The term originated in the mid-1990s in the United States⁵. The digital divide has many dimensions and can be divided into regional, social and gender specific. digital divide is related to the existing knowledge gap

¹ How the Digital Divide Affects the LGBTQ+ Community, available at: <https://accesspartnership.com/opinion/how-the-digital-divide-affects-the-lgbtq-community/>, (last visited on march 3rd, 2026).

² PLACING GENDER EQUALITY AT THE HEART OF THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT TAKING FORWARD THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SIXTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, UN WOMEN, available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/placing-gender-equality-at-the-heart-of-the-global-digital-compact-en.pdf>, (last visited on 9th June 2026)

³ DIGITAL LITERACY IN EDUCATION, UNESCO IITE Policy Brief, available at: https://iite.unesco.org/files/policy_briefs/pdf/en/digital_literacy.pdf, (last visited on 6th June, 2026)

⁴ Bachtar, Willy & Priatna, Wahyu & Santoso, Hudi & Wijaya, Abung & Nugroho, David. (2024). The Importance of Digital Literacy in Enhancing the Quality of Education and Social Harmony. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS. 07. 10.47191/ijmra/v7-i11-43 (last visited on 6th June, 2026)

⁵ Digital Divide: Impact of Access JAN A. G. M. VAN DIJK University of Twente, Netherlands, available at: https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/vandijk/publications/digital_divide_impact_access.pdf, (last visited on 9th June 2026)

that persists because of the inequality in Internet usage due to disparity in educational levels of different sections of the population⁶. This gap is growing larger and larger in LGBTQ+ communities due to their status in our present society. Many nations have built their rules and regulations for the betterment of LGBTQ+ community but when it comes not India's stand, on paper they are the protected and accepted but in reality, they are not even seen in the society as normal human being.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY LGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES IN DIGITAL ARENA

With the advent of any new technology, the motivation, attitude, and intention to accept it are relatively low. When the technology began to diffuse through society more widely, the motivation to obtain the digital media increased quickly. Even very elderly people and people with low education were motivated to gain access, often afraid of being excluded from society or of not being able to communicate with grandchildren or family and friends⁷. There remains a clear gender digital divide in terms of access to digital technology; girls and women are often on the wrong side of the divide.⁸ The reports, surveys and literature is totally missing when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community. Technology plays an important role in the today's world and lack of accessibility to this community make them suffer more than any other marginalized section of community. Following are the major challenges faced by this community due to the absence of digital literacy:

1. Political And Economic Marginalization

LGBTQ+ community is struggling from the political and economic deprivation which is motivated from the stereotypes vested in the society. The dearth of the legislative measures exposes the community to the issues of the unemployment and political underrepresentation.

2. Lack Of educational opportunities.

One of the principal concerns in education learning and assessment is fairness. Fairness means different things to different people and fairness can be defined in a number of ways⁹. But in general, it means equal opportunities when it comes to the right to get education. Many educational institutions and organisations resist the admission of transgender people in academic programmes. Consequently, they are deprived of the education which is indispensable in building their technological competence and digital literacy.

3. Violation Of the Privacy

Time and again, LGBTQ+ persons are often forced to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity. Moreover, the offences of Cyber impersonation, identity theft, deep fakes and data breaches have further intensified the issue.

4. Multitude Of Cyber Offences

The advancement of the means of technology have substantially augmented the cyber offences in the cyberspace. Precisely, LGBTQ+ persons are often the targets of these offences involving online violence

⁶ Singh, Swapnil & Singh, Guru Ashish. (2021). Assessing the Impact of the Digital Divide on Indian Society: A Study of Social Exclusion. *Research in Social Change*. 13. 181-190. 10.2478/rsc-2021-0018. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358887044_Assessing_the_Impact_of_the_Digital_Divide_on_Indian_Society_A_Study_of_Social_Exclusion (last visited on 7th June 2026)

⁷ Digital Divide: Impact of Access JAN A. G. M. VAN DIJK University of Twente, Netherlands, available at: https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/vandijk/publications/digital_divide_impact_access.pdf, (last visited on 9th June 2026)

⁸ Digital divide: a literature review Research Report Jo Ireland Santi Lestari 31 October 2025, available at: <https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/745788-digital-divide-a-literature-review.pdf>, (last visited on 9th June 2026)

⁹ Digital divide: a literature review Research Report Jo Ireland Santi Lestari 31 October 2025, available at: <https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/745788-digital-divide-a-literature-review.pdf>, (last visited on 9th June 2026)

and harassment over the digital platforms. These include Cyber Defamation, Online Threats, Sexual Abuses, Doxxing etc.

This scenario forces the victims to abstain from accessing the digital platforms and services available online. All these problems can be solved if these people can have access to digital libraries, online communities' programs, and skill development plan specifically designed for them. In society because they are not acceptable by any section of our society, they are abstained or neglected by the policy makers for the basic rights and digital access.

DIMENSIONS UNDERSCORING DIGITAL DIVIDE IN LGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES

As discussed in earlier section the menace of the digital divide can be broadly classified in the following 3 categories highlighting different aspects of lacunae in the digital era: -

1. Skills Divide: -

The relationship between gender and digital skills appears to be more nuanced¹⁰. Lack of education and availability of equal opportunities has undermined the position of the LGBTQ+ community who is unable to inculcate the technological skills and digital literacy necessary for operating the internet.

2. Access Divide

Unequal availability and distribution of resources have led to the economic exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals from society. Hence, they are incompetent in affording the services of the internet and digital devices.

3. Usage Divide

LGBTQ+ persons often abstain from harnessing the benefits of the digital platforms due to hate speech, privacy violations, online stalking and gender discrimination.

CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS PROMOTING THE DIGITAL INCLUSION OF LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

The Constitution is regarded as the "grundnorm" which entails the provisions for the protection of the rights and liberties of the individuals. It entails a series of fundamental rights which are essential for the survival of an individual in a dignified manner. It also elucidates the mechanism for redressal of the violation of the fundamental rights which are being expressly and impliedly vested in a person. Moreover, the judiciary has also widened the scope of various rights thereby establishing a foundation for the protection of the LGBTQ+ rights and liberties. These constitutional safeguards involve: -

1. Right to Equality: - Article 14 of the Constitution

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution states that the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. The term "equality before the law" establishes a negative connotation as it implies the absence of any special privilege in favour of any individual. All individuals are designated as equal in the eyes of law. Especially, the term "Person" used in Article 14 also covers within its ambit the LGBTQ+ people. Hence, the digital elimination emerging from the discriminatory mechanisms and policies fundamentally violates the constitutional guarantee of equality.

¹⁰ Digital divide: a literature review Research Report Jo Ireland Santi Lestari 31 October 2025, available at: <https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/745788-digital-divide-a-literature-review.pdf>, (last visited on 9th June 2026)

2. Prohibition of Discrimination: - Article 15 of the Constitution

Article 15 enforces an obligation upon the state that it shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. The term Sex referred to in Article 15 mandates that the Gender of an individual shall not be a valid ground for discrimination in any matter. In the landmark case of National Legal Services Authority vs. Union of India, the court specified that discrimination of sex includes discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation or gender identity. The term "Sex" is not only confined to biological sex but also includes people who identify themselves to be neither male or female.

3. Freedom of Speech and Expression: - Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India

Article 19(1)(a) provides citizens a crucial right to freely express their thoughts, opinions, and ideas. This includes the freedom to express oneself through diverse measures like speech, writing, printing, visual representations, or any other means. With the passage of time, the Internet evolved as an imminent platform for showcasing the expression of an individual. Similarly, it also grants liberty to the LGBTQ+ community to express their opinions, identity and experiences on the digital platforms through the medium of the internet like other citizens. Moreover Article 19(1)(a) also includes the Right to information and communication technologies which emphasises the participation of the LGBTQ+ citizens.

4. Right to Life and Personal Liberty: - Article 21 of the Indian Constitution

Article 21 of the constitution enshrined that no person shall be deprived of their life except according to the procedure established by law. The judiciary has substantially widened the horizons of this right with its binding precedents.

In the historic judgment of Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978), the Supreme Court elucidated that the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 is not limited to mere animal existence but includes the right to live with dignity. The court also emphasized that the procedure established by law must be fair, just, and reasonable, and it cannot be arbitrary, oppressive, or unreasonable. It also grants the LGBTQ+ community a dignified existence in cyberspace.

STATUTORY PROVISIONS GOVERNING DIGITAL INCLUSION OF LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

a. Provisions Under Transgender Persons (Protection Of Rights) Act, 2019

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 is a chief Indian legislation which aims at the protection of rights, legal recognition and welfare of the transgender individuals. Digital Literary programmes, online education initiatives and E-governance services are essential perspective of the promoting education among the transgender community.

b. Provisions Under Information Technology Act 2000

The Information Technology Act, 2000 is the foremost legislation that deals with the offences committed in cyberspace. It penalises numerous digital offences like Unauthorised access to personal information, Cyber Impersonation, Identity Theft, Cyber pornography, Cyber Harassment etc. Although, it is not directly linked with LGBTQ+ rights but it helps to ascertain the culpability of the accused in the digital space.

1. Section 66C of the act penalises identity theft and safeguards the personal information of the individuals.
2. Section 66E ensures the protection of the privacy by punishing the capture and publication of the private images without the appropriate consent.

3. Section 67 of the Act penalises publication and transmission of obscene material in electronic form. These provisions act as a deterrence for the offenders to commit offence ultimately promoting the representation of LGBTQ+ community on online platforms.

c. Provisions Under Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023

Right to Privacy enumerates the protection of the data which is stored or transmitted in any electronic medium or device. Often, the LGBTQ+ Individuals are prone to the breach of the privacy regarding their sexual orientation. This act is an excellent measure of the legislature for protecting the personal information. This act obligates the "Data Fiduciaries" to grant specific privacy rights and establishes an independent regulatory authority for the enforcement of penalties in cases of noncompliance.

Since the protection of the personal information is the utmost necessity which can again consequently contribute to the infusion of the LGBTQ+ community on the digital arena.

JUDICIAL DECISIONS SUPPORTING DIGITAL INCLUSION OF LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

In the case of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India (2014), the Supreme Court asserted that gender identity is an apex aspect to an individual's dignity and personal liberty as prescribed under Article 21. The court held that self-determination of gender by an individual is a fundamental right. By implementing the above judgement to the digital world implies that any online platform or the services of e-governance that restricts an individual to a specific gender identity shall be treated as violative of its fundamental rights

Again, in the historic judgement of Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018), the Supreme Court by partially striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code ended the regime of discrimination. It recognized the right to love, intimacy, and public expression among the LGBTQ+ individuals. The court placed constitutional morality above the stature of social morality.

In a digital context, this implies that public platforms cannot rely on majoritarian biases to suppress LGBTQ+ content.

The Explicit Right to the Digital Domain

In the landmark decisions of Faheema Shirin v. State of Kerala (2019) Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020), the Court recognized that the right to access the internet is part of the Right to Education and the Right to Privacy under Article 21. The Supreme Court remarked that freedom of speech and expression, as well as the freedom to practice any trade or profession through the medium of the internet, enjoys explicit constitutional protection under Article 19(1)(a) and Article 19(1)(g).

The judgement of Amar Jain v. Union of India (2025) was a major advancement in digital rights jurisprudence, the Supreme Court explicitly elevated digital accessibility from a matter of mere policy discretion to an enforceable constitutional imperative under Article 21. The Court ruled: "In a world where digital platforms are mandatory to access basic services like banking, healthcare, education, and government programs, denying equal access to digital content amounts to exclusion and discrimination.....Bridging the digital divide is a constitutional imperative."

SUGGESTIO AND RECCOMEDATIONS

Digital literacy is a need of an hour its absences can be harmful or sometimes a little beneficial depends upon the usage by the specific persons. Its impact always depends on the factors. While digital literacy can empower the marginalized sections specially LGBTQ+ communities through education, networking and providing a safe pathway for online experience. It can also create a state of anarchy if not properly

regulated by the law and policies. To use digital literacy as a tool for the betterment of this community, several measures should be used, such as:

1. Specific programmes that address the LGBTQ+ communities need should be formulated by the legislature.
2. Today India witnesses a huge success in internet connectivity but it lacks the affordable internet services and digital devices. For the digital literacy it must increase affordable internet services and digital devices specifically for LGBTQ+ communities.
3. Strengthen law, policies and regulation to protect vulnerable users and promote gender neutral policies when it comes to digital accessibility.
4. Research in this field is at most. The lack of books or content for LGBTQ+ communities make them suffer in the present society. Steps should be taken by the government where digital libraries should collect data and provide a platform for the targeted marginalized group by fostering partnerships with governmental or non-governmental bodies.

Therefore, it is responsibility upon the shoulders of the law makers to devise a mechanism for bridging this gender digital divide for securing the inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community in the digital world.