

# Digital divide widens, research finds

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The "digital divide" -- the gap in Internet access and usage due to socioeconomic factors -- is increasing, according to research published in the Communications of the Association for Information Systems.

Debabrata (Debu) Talukdar, associate professor of marketing in the University at Buffalo School of Management, and Dinesh K. Gauri, PhD '07, assistant professor of marketing in Syracuse University's Whitman School of Management, compared [survey data](#) from the past decade and found that, while Internet access in the U.S. has increased significantly, the digital divide has actually widened in several key dimensions, including [income](#) and urban-rural separation.

By late 2009, about 75 percent of U.S. adults were using the Internet, compared to about 48 percent in 2000. Despite this increase, there has been no significant change in access and usage based on age, gender and education. Younger people, men and those with a [college education](#) remain more likely to use the Internet in their homes.

In terms of income, race and urban vs. rural residents, the digital divide has actually become greater in the past decade. The researchers found that people with higher incomes had a 60 percent higher likelihood of home Internet access than those in the next lower income group, an increase from 40 percent at the beginning of the decade. In addition, Internet access in African-American homes is 60 percent less than in Caucasian households, and rural residents have 40 percent less access than urban dwellers. In both cases, the gap is significantly broader than

earlier in the decade.

Talukdar says that this research can have implications for both business and public policy. "For businesses, our study is directly relevant to their strategic goal of matching media with target markets by evaluating the effectiveness of Internet media across different target market segments," he says.

"As for the public policy goal to achieve an effective and equitable 'cyber society,' a study like ours can help prioritize relevant policy targets and initiatives," Talukdar says. "For instance, in the U.S. context, our findings underscore the issue of urban-rural [digital divide](#) as a key area for evaluation of past policy initiatives and for prioritization of future initiatives."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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