

# **Digital Readiness:**

**An emerging challenge beyond the digital divide**

**John B. Horrigan, PhD**

**June2014**

**[john.horrigan@gmail.com](mailto:john.horrigan@gmail.com)**

# Motives for paper

- When everyone has everything, does the notion of the “digital divide” make sense any more?
- After the 2009 Recovery Act investments, are the main digital access problems solved?
- Or have problems evolved? If so, how?

# Digital divide declining

- Growth in broadband-at-home
  - 63% in 2009
  - ~ 72% by 2013
- 85% of Americans are Internet users
- Advanced online access = broadband-at-home + smartphone = 82%
- Digital divide has narrowed:
  - 83 million adults without broadband in '09
  - Today, counting advanced access, 43 million lack access
- Digital divide continues to warrant attention, especially among specific population segments.

# Digital Readiness is emerging issue

- Digital readiness – skills & trust:
  - The capacity for all users to engage with online resources with knowledge about service attributes & use of personal/household data
- Paper uses cluster analysis to estimate size of groups with different levels of digital skills.
- Built on index of:
  - Knowledge of tech terms (e.g., cookie, spyware/malware, app, refresh/reload, WiFi, QR code)
  - Self-reported comfort with computers
  - Self-reported confidence in finding information online

# Results

- Digital readiness is not distributed evenly:
  - 29% of all Americans have low levels of digital readiness
  - 42% have moderately good levels of digital readiness
  - 29% have high levels of digital readiness
- Those with low digital readiness are:
  - Older
  - Low-income
  - Low educational attainment

# Variation in digital readiness among highly connected

- Among those with advanced online access (broadband or smartphone):
  - 18% have low levels of digital readiness
  - 46% have moderately good levels of digital readiness
  - 36% have high levels of digital readiness
- What this means for online use (those with advanced access):

	Low Digital Readiness	Medium Digital Readiness	High Digital Readiness
Visit govt website	62%	79%	89%
Use Internet in job search	10%	38%	52%
Take a class online	2%	17%	26%

# Comparing digital readiness to the digital divide

Nature of skills and access (adults)	Millions of American adults
Americans who do not use the Internet (15%)	36 million
Americans without advanced online access (18%)	43 million
Americans with low levels of skills AND advanced online access	33 million
Americans with low levels of digital skills	70 million

# Policy Implications

- Many next generation ICT applications are public in nature
  - Complementary investments in digital readiness by government agencies
- “Internet of things” applications will call for new levels of data-sharing and trust for users
- Policy steps to promote digital readiness:
  - Leverage existing programs that focus on digital divide (e.g., Comcast Internet Essentials, BTOP)
  - Develop community “tech champions” for digital readiness
  - Invest in libraries
  - Engage philanthropic community on digital readiness

**CONTACT ME:**

[john.horrigan@gmail.com](mailto:john.horrigan@gmail.com)