My term paper and presentation will focus on Chapter 5 of *Technology and Society* by Jan L. Harrington, which focuses on the accessibility of technology. I selected this chapter for my term paper and presentation because there is a common misconception that everyone has easy access to technology, but in reality access to the Internet isn’t allocated evenly throughout the world. For example, CEOs of companies that administers a major search engine (take Google, for instance) face hard decisions when a foreign government asks them to censor the results of searches that originate from within its borders using criteria that the government will supply. For this chapter I will take a utilitarian approach to look at how technology has spread across the globe and discuss a variety of profiles that describe Internet users, including where they live and demographics such as income, education, and gender. I will also consider the barriers that exist to prevent people from gaining access to technology, examine the “digital divide” to determine its extent, and look at proposed solutions to the digital divide.

**Who and where are the users?**

Chapter 5 goes on to explain how technology futurists were unable to predict the massive growth of the Internet, as millions of people who weren’t connected before gain access yearly. Although or definition of technology extends beyond computers and the Internet, the most reliable technology-use statistics are related to Internet usage, so those numbers will be used to explore how technology is dispersed across our sociotechnical society.

Geographical Differences

**Barriers to Accessibility**

There are two primary barriers to accessibility: economics and politics; in many cases economics and politics go hand in hand in preventing people from gaining access. There are also personal reasons where people who can afford computers and who aren’t restricted by political influence choose not to access the Internet.

With regards to economic barriers, the Internet isn’t exactly “free,” although we can surf the Web for free. To explain, someone has to pay for Internet connection, whether it’s most people (or employers) or even school administrators. Beyond free access availability through public libraries, individuals and companies are paying for computers and Internet connection through an ISP. If you consider that taxes pay to support libraries, library access isn’t completely free either. Internet cafes traditionally charge by the minute or hour. Even with Wi-Fi, one must pay to cover the cost of Wi-Fi connection or to frequent an area with Wi-Fi service.

With regards to political barriers,

* Technology is bad
* Computers are frightening
* Computers are too complicated to learn to use
* There is nothing of value online
* There is too much danger from pornography, sexual predator and so on in the online world
* The Internet is not secure

**The Great Digital Divide**

The digital divide refers to the gap between those have ready access to computers and the Internet, and those who don’t. There is certainly a digital divide between individuals who choose to avoid technology and those who choose to use it (assuming there are no barriers to use) and is one of the individual’s own making. How, then, do we address the digital divide for those who want computing and the Internet but are restricted by economic, political, and other various barriers?

Disadvantages of No Technology Access

What can users potentially lose if they don’t have access to current information technology? According to Harrington, on page 95, a list of factors would be devoid for users without current IT available to them:

* Access to employment opportunities that are posted exclusively on the Web
* Ability to apply for jobs that require that resumes be emailed
* Ability to acquire jobs that require technology skills
* Access to up-to-date, in-depth news. Newspapers can be as much as 24 hours behind in their reporting, while television news, the primary source of news for any people, is limited in depth because news shows are limited in time
* Access to potential markets. Businesses of all sizes have seized the opportunity to expand their markets by selling over the Internet.
* Access to a wide range of products and merchandisers. If you don’t shop online (or by catalog over the phone), you are limited to stores you can reach by foot, car, or bus, restricting which products you can purchase and the stores from where you can purchase them. While shopping online doesn’t necessarily equate to better prices for certain items, it does open up more opportunities for comparing product features and prices.
* Access to research information. Before the widespread growth of the Internet, students who wanted to research newspaper, magazine, & journal articles used paper indexes. At first libraries provides these resources for their users because back then they were costly and took up too much shelf space to own. Once the articles were found, individuals would then search the library shelves for the appropriate publications and if they weren’t available at that library, individuals would resort to InterLibrary Loaning and wait for the article to come from another library. Today, most research material is available online, although not all of it is free. Students easily look to the Internet first and print materials second (due to convenience and ease); at the same time, some materials like scientific journals only publish electronically because print publication is costly.

In conclusion, access to the Internet isn’t allocated evenly throughout the world. Western civilizations have the highest rate of Internet penetration, while China and India represent a smaller percentage of total Internet users despite the higher number of raw count users. I’ve discussed that barriers to Internet access can be economic (i.e. users can’t afford Internet access), political (government policies or other activities restrict access from users) or personal choice (some people don’t want access to the Internet). What happens to people without technology access or knowledge? They may find their job opportunities limited. They may not have access to the latest news. The wide range of business opportunities that the Internet provides also becomes suppressed. The “digital divide” is defined as the gap between those who have Internet access and those who don’t. There are programs throughout the globe attempting to curb the digital divide and provide technology access; however, most of these programs are too new to determine whether they have the desired effect.

**Bibliography**

1. Harrington, Jan L. *Technology and Society*. Jones and Bartlett Publishers. 2009. Pp. 85-101.
2. Johnson, Deborah H. *Computer Ethics Fourth Edition*. Pearson Education, Inc. 2009.