



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STARLINK, CELLULAR NETWORKS AND FIBER OPTICS: BENEFITS, APPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE TRENDS

Jehaiah P. Amba¹, Sarah Mae S. Badol², Job A. Pongdad³, Iverson M. Shog-Oy⁴, Axel Curt Licay⁵, Marielle Angela P. Fianza-Buya⁶

King's College of the Philippines
La Trinidad, Benguet 2601, Philippines

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Abstract - This paper reviews the utilization of Starlink satellite networks, fiber optics, and traditional cellular networks, focusing on their benefits, applications, and future trends. The study explores the roles of Starlink in providing global broadband coverage, particularly in underserved areas, and contrasts it with the performance and reach of established cellular networks and the unparalleled speed and reliability of fiber optics. In addition, the study conducts a comparative analysis of these network technologies, exploring their strengths, limitations, and potential applications in future developments. This paper also discusses emerging trends in network technology and how the convergence of satellite, cellular, and fiber-optic networks could shape the future of global communications. The findings reveal that while fiber optics remain the gold standard for high-speed and reliable connections, Starlink offers unique advantages for remote and rural areas. Cellular networks, on the other hand, excel in mobility and widespread coverage. The study concludes that integrating these technologies can address diverse connectivity needs and drive the evolution of global communication infrastructure.

Keywords – Starlink, Cellular Networks, Future Trends, Fiber Optic

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly connected world, the digital divide remains a pressing issue, particularly in rural and underserved areas where access to high speed internet is often limited. Reliable internet access is not merely a convenience; it has become a vital component for education, healthcare, and economic development (Adewumi et al., 2020). Various technologies aim to address this gap, including satellite networks like Starlink, cellular networks, and fiber optics, each with unique capabilities and limitations.

The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC), in partnership with Space Exploration Technologies Corporation (SpaceX), initiated a groundbreaking project called “Starlink”. This innovative satellite internet

service employs a network of 6,426 low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites to deliver high-speed internet access globally, especially in remote locations (Shaengchart, 2024). Leveraging advanced satellite technology and user hardware, Starlink provides low-latency connectivity, transforming access to information and enabling opportunities for telecommuting, online education, and telehealth in regions previously marginalized by inadequate infrastructure (Fourtane, 2018).

Cellular networks have also become an integral part of modern communication (Techopedia, 2024). These systems deliver wireless connectivity through a series of geographically distributed cells, each equipped with a base station or transceiver, enabling seamless communication with mobile devices via



radio waves. Designed to facilitate efficient coverage of large areas, cellular networks support continuous connectivity as users move. Advancement in cellular technology, from 3G to 5G and emerging 6G, have significantly improved speed, capacity and latency, enabling a wide array of applications such as social media, online gaming, and real-time IoT deployments (Techopedia, 2024; Moore, 2023; Sufyan et al., 2023).

Fiber-optic networks, often considered the gold standard of internet connectivity, offer unmatched speed, reliability, and capacity for data transmission. Fiber optics utilize light to send data across long distances with minimal loss, which makes them ideal for high-bandwidth uses such as streaming, cloud computing, and industrial automation (Wisely et al., 2018). While primarily deployed in urban and suburban areas due to infrastructure costs, fiber optics remain essential components of the connectivity landscape, complementing satellite and cellular networks by delivering high speed backbone connections.

The evolution of these technologies raises important questions about their respective roles in bridging the digital divide. As society increasingly relies on digital communication and online services, it is essential to assess which technology offers the best solutions for different contexts and needs (Pultarova & Howell, 2024). This comparative study examines the pros and cons of Starlink, cellular networks, and fiber optics in various applications while also aiming to offer thorough insight into their individual benefits and challenges. Additionally, it explores possible improvements in these technologies while looking at new trends that might have a big impact on how we connect across the globe (Shebab et al., 2023).

To guide this exploration, the following research objectives have been established:

1. Assess the Advantages and Disadvantages of Starlink, cellular networks, and fiber-optic in providing a detailed exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of each technology in various contexts.

2. Identify and Analyze Specific Applications and scenarios where Starlink, cellular networks and fiber-optic excel, highlighting use cases that demonstrate their effectiveness.

3. Investigate the Potential Advancements and Developments in Starlink, cellular technology, and fiber-optic considering emerging trends and their impact on connectivity.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodology and procedures were discussed to achieve the following research goals.

General Literature Search and Selection

Thorough browsing of studies have been conducted in multiple internet research databases like Google Scholar, IEEE Xplore, ResearchGate and other repositories. The databases have been employed to identify and access conference proceedings and journal articles, surveys, procedures, and other relevant resources.

To tackle the research questions and develop an effective method for grouping students, a review of related literature was conducted. This involved searching through various online research databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and ERIC to find relevant articles, books, and academic publications. The search terms included "starlink," "cellular networks," "network technology," and "others." With this, the researchers will be using the filtration tool of research, databases and registers.

Search and Selection Search Keywords: After existing research, all articles were searched according to:

- a. *Starlink advantages:* The keywords used are: "advantages of Starlink," "Starlink network benefits," "LEO satellite network strengths," and "Starlink for remote connectivity."

- b. *Cellular network limitations:* Search terms included: "limitations of cellular networks," "challenges in 5G deployments," "cellular network issues in remote areas," and "cellular vs satellite networks."

c. Future network trends: Keywords such as: *‘future of satellite and cellular networks,’ ‘6G and satellite integration,’ ‘emerging network technologies,’* and *“hybrid satellite-cellular networks”*

d. Global broadband: Keywords included: *“global broadband access,” “broadband in rural areas,” “digital divide and network access,”* and *“universal internet coverage”*

e. Fiber Optic Technology: Search terms included: *“fiber optic advantages,” “fiber optic internet applications,” “fiber satellite networks,” “fiber optic infrastructure challenges,”* and *“fiber for high-speed broadband.”*

Criteria: To ensure a comprehensive and systematic review of related literature, inclusion and exclusion criteria will be applied to research articles obtained from selected academic

a. The paper presents evidence and supported studies to substantiate its claims, ensuring that conclusions are drawn from verified data and comprehensive analysis.

b. The abstract, methodology, and discussion sections clearly address Starlink or cellular networks’ technical characteristics, applications, or future trends, aligning closely with the research objectives.

c. All selected articles have been published within the last five years, prioritizing recent insights and technological advancements relevant to the research field.

Summary of Literatures

Table 1 provides a percentage summary of the consolidated research findings from various databases, utilizing a range of keywords. The selected publications span from 2019 to 2024, including a diverse mix of articles, journals, surveys, and patent papers.

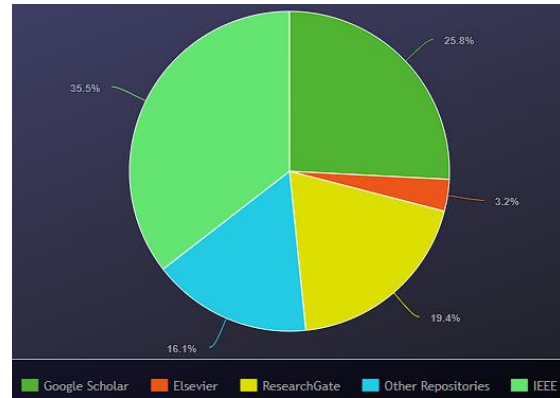


Figure No.1 : Search results form the research databases

Source	Articles
Google Scholar	(Techopedia, 2019), (Moore, 2023), (Shehab et al., 2022), (Wisely et al., 2018), (Sufyan et al., 2023), (Imam-Fulani et al., 2023) (Galleto Jr. et al., 2023), (Pons et al., 2023)
ResearchGate	(Wisely et al., 2018), (Shaengchart and Kraiwanit, 2024), (Mazurek and Prey, 2024), (Chu and Chen, 2021), (Yue et al., 2023), (Zhang et al., 2021)
IEEE	(Shehab et al., 2022), (Wisely et al., 2018), (Sufyan et al., 2023), (Imam-Fulani et al., 2023), (Oughton and Lehr, 2022), (Ahmmed et al., 2022),

	(Abderrahim et al., 2020), (Tirmizi et al., 2022), (Meena et al., 2022),
Elsevier	(Prieger, 2013)
Other Repositories	(Environmental and Energy Study Institute, n.d.), (Pultarova and Howell, 2024), (Starlink, 2023), (Fourtané, 2018)

Table no. 1: Final tally of Selected articles

Evaluation of Starlink, Cellular Networks, and Fiber Optics

This section provides an in-depth evaluation of Starlink, cellular networks, and fiber-optic networks, emphasizing their advantages, disadvantages, applications, and future trends.

Identification of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Starlink, cellular networks, and fiber-optic across diverse contexts.

To synthesize the findings, **Table No.5** was developed summarizing the main advantages and limitations of Starlink cellular networks and fiber-optic networks based on the literature. Key metrics considered included coverage, latency, speed, infrastructure, requirements, and adaptability to remote areas.

Identify the Application Scenarios for Starlink, fiber-optic and Cellular Networks

The researchers examined various sources to determine key application scenarios where each network type (Starlink, fiber optic and cellular networks) excels, based on their respective strengths and limitations. To understand these application areas more thoroughly, a detailed review of recent studies was conducted, focusing on specific use cases

that demonstrate the effectiveness of each technology. Sources published within the last five years were selected, and each article was assessed for relevance and empirical support to ensure accurate insights. Based on this review, a comprehensive table was developed outlining the primary applications for each network type.

Compare Future Trends and Convergence Potential

To analyze the future trends and convergence potential of Starlink and cellular networks, all selected peer-reviewed articles were reviewed to identify common themes and emerging technological advancements. This comparison aimed to explore hybrid network solutions, the role of 6G integration, and the impact of AI and automation on each network. A table was created to present these trends in a structured format, highlighting the ways in which both networks could benefit from collaborative advancement and AI-driven optimization. Each solution was evaluated based on its proposed benefits, limitations, and potential applications in future global connectivity scenarios.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Advantages and Disadvantages of Starlink, cellular networks, and fiber-optic across different contexts.

There are three key network technologies that are currently utilized to address connectivity needs across various environments. Each technology offers distinct advantages and faces specific limitations, making them suitable for different use cases.

Starlink Satellite Network

Starlink, developed by SpaceX, provides global high-speed internet access through a constellation of low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites. Starlink's infrastructure, utilizing thousands of satellites, is designed to offer low-latency broadband, even in remote areas where traditional infrastructure is not feasible. This technology has demonstrated particular efficacy in delivering internet access to underserved regions and in scenarios where cellular infrastructure is limited or absent [3][4][9].

Core Feature	Description
Global Reach	Satellite coverage enables internet access in rural and remote areas where cellular networks are sparse or unavailable. (Pultarova and Howell, 2024), (Starlink, 2023), (Shaengchart and Kraiwanit, 2024)
Low Latency	Starlink's low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite configuration minimizes latency, making it competitive with terrestrial networks for many applications. (Starlink, 2023), (Shaengchart and Kraiwanit, 2024), (Badikov and Zaytsev, 2023)
Applications	Key uses include remote area connectivity, disaster response where terrestrial networks are down, and military or strategic deployments. (Prieger, 2013), (Pultarova and Howell, 2024), (Shaengchart and Kraiwanit, 2024)

Table no. 2: Starlink Feature and Advantages

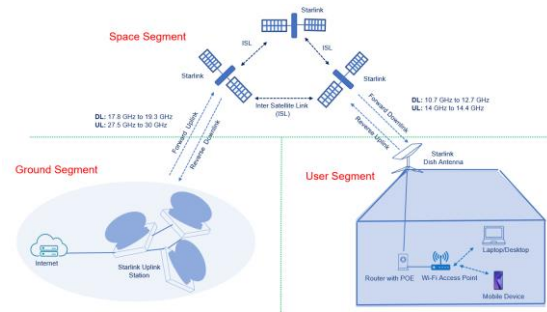


Figure No.2 : Adopted Starlink Satellite Network Architecture (Techplayon, 2024)

Starlink offers extensive global broadband coverage, particularly in underserved and remote areas. The low Earth orbit (LEO) configuration reduces latency compared to traditional geostationary satellites, enabling applications such as telehealth, remote education, and disaster recovery. However, challenges such as high initial hardware costs, potential signal disruptions due to weather, and long-term environmental impacts from satellite debris persist (Pultarova and Howell, 2024), (Starlink, 2023), (Shaengchart and Kraiwanit, 2024).

Cellular Networks (5G and Beyond)

Cellular networks, especially those based on 5G technology, offer high-speed, low-latency connectivity primarily designed for densely populated urban areas. Cellular networks use geographically distributed base stations to create coverage zones, enabling users to maintain connectivity while moving across these zones. With advancements in 5G, these networks are capable of supporting diverse applications from high-speed mobile data to IoT and real-time data applications (Moore, 2023), (A Review of Cellular Networks, 2020), (Sufyan et al., 2023).

Core Feature	Description
Low Latency and High Speed	5G networks can achieve speeds significantly faster than previous generations, enabling real-time data applications like augmented reality and

	autonomous driving.(Techopedia, 2019), (Moore, 2023), (Wisely et al., 2018)
Scalability in Urban Areas	Optimized for high-density locations, cellular networks can handle thousands of simultaneous connections, making them ideal smart city and Iot applications.(Shehab et al., 2022), (Sufyan et al., 2023)
Applications	Cellular networks are best suited for applications in urban and suburban settings, industrial automation, smart city development, and large-scale event connectivity.(A Review of Cellular Networks, 2020), (Shehab et al., 2022)

Table no.3 : Cellular Networks Feature and Advantages

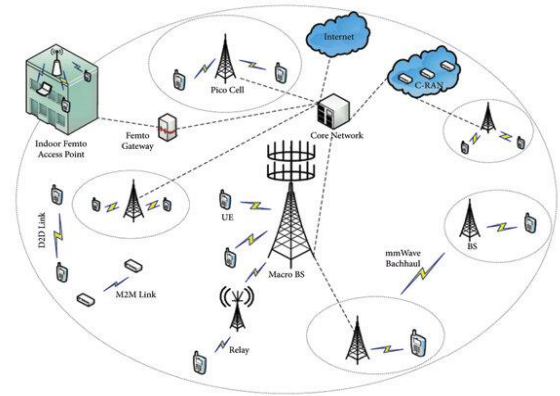


Figure No.3 : Adopted Cellular Network Architecture for 5G (Attar et al., 2022)

Cellular networks, especially 5G, deliver ultra low latency high speed connectivity ideal for densely populated urban and suburban areas. They support advanced applications, including real-time IoT communications and autonomous systems. Despite their strengths, cellular networks face limitations in providing reliable service to remote locations incur high deployment and maintenance costs, particularly for 5G infrastructure in rural regions.(Wisely et al., 2018),(Sufyan et al., 2023),(Mazurek and Prey, 2024)

Fiber Optic Networks

Fiber optic networks are widely regarded as the global standard for high speed internet connectivity. Using light signals transmitted through thin strands of glass or plastic, fiber optic technologies offer unparalleled speed, reliability and capacity. It is particularly well-suited for high-bandwidth applications such as streaming, cloud computing, industrial automation, and data-intensive research. Fiber optics is often deployed in urban and suburban settings, serving a backbone for many modern internet infrastructures.(Shehab et al., 2022), (Wisely et al., 2018), (Sufyan et al., 2023),(Pons et al., 2023)

Core Feature	Description
High Speed	Fiber optics delivers up to 1 Gbps or higher, with symmetrical upload and download speeds ideal for data-intensive tasks.(Wisely et al., 2018),(Sufyan et al., 2023),(Mazurek and Prey, 2024)
Low latency and reliability	Fiber technology minimizes latency, ensuring stable connections and consistent performance, unaffected by weather conditions.(Shehab et al., 2022),(Pons et al., 2023)
Applications	Ideal for industrial automation, high-quality video conferencing, streaming, telemedicine, and smart city infrastructure.(A Review of Cellular Networks, 2020), (Sufyan et al., 2023), (Pons et al., 2023)

Table No.4 : Fiber Optics Networks Features and Advantages

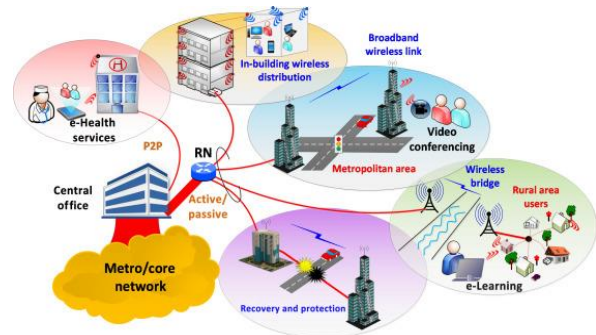


Figure No. 4: Fiber Optic Infrastructure and Data Transmission Illustration (ScienceDirect, n.d.)

Fiber optic networks offer unrivaled performance, particularly for data-heavy applications. Their resistance to electromagnetic interference and weather conditions ensure high reliability. However, the deployment of fiber optics involves significant costs due to the need for extensive trenching and installation of cables. This infrastructure requirement often limits its availability to urban and suburban areas, leaving rural regions reliant on satellite cellular networks for connectivity.(Sufyan et al., 2023),(Mazurek and Prey, 2024),(Serafica et al., 2023),(Pons et al., 2023)

Advantages and Limitations of Starlink, Cellular Networks and Fiber Optics

This section evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Starlink, Fiber optic and cellular networks, focusing on their practical applications and technical characteristics. The analysis is grounded on literature and peer reviewed articles, providing an evidence based comparison.(Prieger, 2013),(Techopedia, 2019), (Badikov and Zaytsev, 2023)

Network Technology	Advantages	Limitations
Starlink	- Global coverage, particularly in remote areas -Low latency for a satellite	-High initial hardware cost -Weather related signal disruptions -potential

	network -Effective for disaster and remote access	environmental impacts
Cellular	-Ultra-low latency and high speed -Scalable for urban and High traffic areas -Supports advanced IoT applications	-Limited reach in remote areas -High infrastructure costs for rural deployment
Fiber Optics	-Unmatched speed and bandwidth; ideal for data-intensive tasks like streaming, telemedicine. -Low latency and high reliable; unaffected by weather or electromagnetic interference	-High deployment costs due to trenching and infrastructure requirements. -Limited availability, primarily deployed in urban and suburban areas.

Table no. 5: Network Technology Advantages & Limitations

Comparison of Starlink, Cellular Networks, and Fiber Optics: Benefits, Applications and Future Trends

There are numerous recent advancements in satellite, fiber-optic and cellular network technologies aimed at expanding and improving connectivity. This section discusses the feature comparison of Starlink, a satellite based internet service, and traditional cellular networks, and fiber optics, which help illustrate their respective strengths, limitations, and areas of application.

All three support high-speed data transfer, but they differ in their underlying infrastructure, coverage areas, and latency. Each network type offers unique capabilities based on the criteria provided, meeting various functional and non-

functional requirements for users across diverse environments. (Starlink, 2023), (Techopedia, 2019), (Sufyan et al., 2023) (Shaengchart and Kraiwanit, 2024)

The table below presents a set of identified features and compares the network type across these criteria to highlight their applicability in different contexts.

Criteria	Starlink	Cellular Networks	Fiber Optics
Coverage Area	Global, including remote and rural areas	Primary urban and suburban areas; Limited in rural locations	Urban and suburban areas; limited rural due to high deployment costs.
Latency	Low latency (20-40 ms for LEO satellites)	Very low latency (sub-20ms) in urban areas; higher in rural due to distance	Very low latency, ideal for applications requiring precision and stability.
Bandwidth/Speed	Up to 100-200 Mbps per user	4G: Up to 1 Gbps; 5G: Up to 10 Gbps	Up to 1 Gbps or higher; supports symmetrical upload and download speeds.
Infrastructure Required	Satellite dish and receiver	Towers, fiber backhaul	Underground cables and

		,base stations	advanced trenching .
Applications	Remote connectivity, disaster response	Mobile internet, IoT, smart cities, public safety	Data-heavy tasks like streaming, telemedicine, and industrial automation.
Reliability	Weather-dependent; potential interruptions	Generally reliable; affected by network congestion in high-usage areas	Highly reliable; not affected by weather or electromagnetic interference.
Scalability	Scalable globally but limited by satellite capacity	Scalable within regions; high scalability with 5G	Highly scalable but constrained by high initial deployment costs.
Future Trends	6G integration, IoT, global connectivity	6G integration, IoT, smart cities, VR/AR applications	Expanding fiber networks to underserved areas; integration with 5G and cloud services.

Cost in USD	\$523.21 USD one-time for equipment, \$48.21 USD/mo	Devised cost \$178.57 USD(basic), 17.86 USD-\$35.71 USD/month for unlimited data; prepaid plans from \$3.57-\$8.93 USD for capped data	Installation cost \$120 - \$599; subscription \$50-\$165 USD/month for high-speed plans.
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Table No. 6: Starlink, Fiber optics and Cellular networks Comparison (Pultarova and Howell, 2024), (Starlink, 2023), (Shaengchart and Kraivanit, 2024), (Shehab et al., 2022), (Prieger, 2013), (Badikov and Zaytsev, 2023)

Table 6 provides a comparative analysis of Starlink and traditional cellular networks across criteria, including coverage, latency, data speed, infrastructure, installations requirements, dependency on terrain reliability, scalability, and cost in PHP.

Coverage Area

Starlink provides global coverage, reaching even the most remote and rural areas where traditional internet services are often unavailable. This makes it a vital solution for regions with limited infrastructure. In contrast, cellular networks primarily serve urban and suburban areas, with rural coverage being less comprehensive and often limited to lower-speed connections. Fiber optics, while offering extensive service in cities and densely populated areas, face significant challenges in rural deployment due to the high costs of laying cables over long distances. As a result, fiber coverage is largely confined to urban centers.



Latency

Fiber optics lead in latency performance, consistently delivering sub-10 ms response times, making them the top choice for applications requiring minimal delay, such as gaming or financial services. Cellular networks, particularly with 5G, offer low latency (often under 20 ms), though performance may vary in rural areas or under heavy network congestion. Starlink, leveraging low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites, achieves latency between 20-40 ms. While this is higher than fiber and cellular, it is a significant improvement over traditional satellite services and sufficient for most online activities.

Bandwidth/Speed

Fiber optics provide the highest bandwidth, with speeds up to 1 Gbps or more, often symmetrical for uploads and downloads. This makes fiber ideal for data-heavy applications. Cellular networks offer impressive speeds, with 4G providing up to 1 Gbps and 5G reaching up to 10 Gbps, supporting high-definition video, VR, and IoT devices. Starlink delivers speeds between 100-200 Mbps, which, while lower than fiber and 5G, is sufficient for streaming, large downloads, and remote work. However, performance may fluctuate depending on the number of users and satellite capacity.

Infrastructure Required

Starlink requires a satellite dish and receiver, which users can easily install, making it a convenient option for remote locations. Cellular networks depend on extensive infrastructure, including cell towers, base stations, and fiber backhaul, requiring significant investment in urban and suburban areas. Fiber optics demand underground cable installation, often involving trenching, which can be costly and time-consuming but results in highly reliable, long-term infrastructure.

Applications

Fiber optics are best suited for bandwidth-intensive applications like telemedicine, industrial automation, and high-definition streaming. Cellular networks drive mobile internet, IoT solutions, and smart city

projects, providing flexible and widespread connectivity. Starlink excels in providing internet access to remote areas, supporting emergency response, and delivering connectivity in disaster-stricken regions where terrestrial infrastructure may be damaged or nonexistent.

Reliability

Fiber optics are the most reliable option, unaffected by weather and capable of maintaining stable connections under heavy usage. Cellular networks are generally reliable, but performance can degrade during peak hours due to congestion. Starlink, while effective in clear weather, may experience interruptions during heavy rain or snow, although ongoing improvements aim to mitigate these issues.

Scalability

Cellular networks and fiber optics offer high scalability, though at different levels. Cellular networks scale regionally, with 5G supporting greater device capacity and higher data throughput. Fiber optics can scale within urban environments but face economic barriers when expanding to rural areas. Starlink scales globally, though its capacity is limited by the number of satellites in orbit, with expansion dependent on further satellite launches.

Future Trends

Fiber optics continue to expand, integrating with 5G networks and supporting cloud services. Cellular networks are evolving with 6G technology, smart city initiatives, and augmented reality (AR) applications. Starlink plans to enhance global connectivity, integrate with future 6G services, and expand IoT applications, positioning itself as a key player in bridging the digital divide.

Cost

Starlink requires an initial equipment investment of approximately \$523.21 and a monthly service fee of around \$48.21. Cellular networks offer more affordable entry points, with devices costing around \$178.57 and monthly plans ranging from \$17.86 to \$35.71 for unlimited data. Fiber optics have installation



costs between \$120 and \$599, with monthly fees between \$50 and \$165, making them a costlier but more stable long-term option.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of Starlink, cellular networks, and fiber optics highlights the strengths and limitations of each technology in addressing the persistent digital divide. Starlink emerges as a transformative solution for remote and underserved areas, providing global coverage and low-latency connectivity through a constellation of low Earth orbit satellites. Despite weather-related reliability concerns and higher initial costs, Starlink's reach and adaptability make it a critical tool for connecting isolated communities and enabling access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Cellular networks, particularly with the expansion of 5G, offer unparalleled mobility, low latency, and high-speed connectivity in urban and suburban environments. These networks drive advancements in IoT, smart cities, and mobile applications, but they face deployment challenges and higher costs in rural areas where coverage may be sparse. Fiber optics, often regarded as the gold standard for internet connectivity, provide unmatched speed, reliability, and capacity for data-intensive tasks. However, the prohibitive cost of infrastructure limits widespread deployment, confining fiber networks to urban centers and leaving rural regions reliant on alternatives like Starlink or cellular networks.

Ultimately, the best solution for bridging the digital divide lies in the convergence of these technologies. Starlink can extend connectivity to remote areas, cellular networks can provide seamless mobility and scalability, and fiber optics can serve as the backbone for high-speed, high-capacity urban networks. As technological advancements continue, the integration of these systems—alongside emerging technologies like 6G and AI-driven optimization—will play a pivotal role in achieving universal internet access and fostering global digital inclusion.

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