

Exploring the Gender Digital Divide in E-Government Use in a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the gender digital divide in e-government use in Turkey. Historical trends and differences in internet and e-government use by males and females are investigated. The findings of this study indicate that although internet use has increased over the years, there remains a steady and significant gap between males and females in terms of internet use and e-government services use. It appears that females in Turkey tend to be on the wrong side of the digital divide, and a significant number of females do not benefit from the potential advantages of the internet and e-government services. The gender digital gap in e-government use is higher than in internet use.

KEYWORDS

Developing Country, E-Government, Gender Digital Divide, Internet Use

INTRODUCTION

Technology, especially information and communication technology (ICT), has become an integral part of modern life. Today, people in their daily lives and most of the business have become almost dependent on these technologies. The ubiquity of the Internet in our life grows incredibly with the pervasive use of smart mobile devices.

ICTs have affected almost all aspects of our lives, from education and health services to work and entertainment. These technologies, especially the Internet and WWW, have radically transformed the societies and the economies around the world over the last decades. Today, ICTs have become an essential part of modern societies and economies. As ICTs became more accessible and ubiquitous worldwide, a gap started to appear between users and non-users. This phenomenon is called a digital divide. Information and knowledge are recognized as power, and those without Internet access are increasingly being identified as the “information poor” (Morris, 2007). ICTs offer vast and new opportunities for human development and empowerment in areas ranging from education and the environment to healthcare and business; however, they are also the main contributing factors to social and economic inequalities across different social and economic groups (Moghaddam, 2010).

The Internet has become a vital resource in society (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2014). In political, social, cultural, health, and economic domains, information and services are increasingly delivered online, and it is expected that they will be used by all (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2014). Digital inclusion, enabling everyone to have access and capability to use the Internet and associated digital technologies, has wide-ranging benefits to the individual, the economy, and society (Olphert & Damodaran, 2012). Being digitally disengaged has essential social, health, and economic disadvantages (Siren & Knudsen, 2017). ICTs have provided a new landscape of development for everyone, and women should get equal benefits provided by these technologies without exception (Bala & Singhal, 2018).

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In the last century, there have been profound changes affecting our life dramatically all over the world. One of the most significant changes among them is the transformation of women's social role; women's participation in the workforce and daily life has been raised dramatically (Gargallo-Castel, Esteban-Salvador & Pérez-Sanz, 2010). Even though there has been significant improvement in women's rights in the last century, women in many parts of the world still face serious social inequalities and issues, including violence, crime, illiteracy, discrimination, and mobbing. It is widely accepted that women, specifically living in developing countries, are discriminated against in many aspects of social life, including employment, income, political life, and education (Hilbert, 2011; Chang et al., 2012). The vast majority of women live in developing countries, and they suffer even more gender-related discrimination than their counterparts in developed countries (Hilbert, 2011). Even though much progress has been made in securing women's rights across the world in recent decades, some groups of women face additional forms of discrimination based on their age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, health status, marital status, education, disability, and socio-economic status, among other grounds (UN, 2014). Gender inequality is still one of the main problems, especially in developing countries (Chang et al., 2012). Gender discrimination and other gender problems are accepted as a global socio-economic problem, and therefore gender equity is listed on the United Nations' millennium development goals (3rd goal) and sustainable development goals (5th goal). ICT can help to tackle longstanding challenges of gender inequalities in developing countries, including access to employment, income, education, and health services (Hilbert, 2011).

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world (UN, OECD, 2018). Since the advantages that technology provides are being conveyed disproportionately to men in modern society, and women are disadvantaged in the process, we risk losing women's talents as contributors to science, technology, and the arts (Cooper, 2006). Economic and academic success have become dependent more and more on ICT; therefore, any inequality in interest or skill that differs systematically with gender is a problem for society (Cooper, 2006).

Despite a substantial increase in access and usage of ICTs worldwide, there are still significant challenges to overcome in ensuring women are included in the transformation to a digital-enabled society (Mariscal et al., 2019). Female users tend to use fewer digital services than men and are less confident in using the Internet (OECD, 2018). Existing researches show that women are less likely to access and use ICTs in developing countries (Primo, 2003; Hilbert, 2011; Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017; Codoban, 2005). In developing countries, women tend to be on the wrong side of the digital divide. Males generally have more computer and Internet knowledge and experience than females and tend to use these technologies more (Codoban, 2005). Besides, women also present a lower frequency of ICTs use and less intensive Internet users than men (Bimber, 2000; Gargallo-Castel, Esteban-Salvador & Pérez-Sanz, 2010). ICT access and use inequalities between genders can also be found in some of the developed countries.

The main aim of this study is to explore the gender digital divide in e-government use in Turkey, a developing country. Gender differences in Internet use and e-government use are explored. Even though there has historically been a significant gender digital divide in Turkey, only a relatively small body of research has been conducted on this important social issue. The gender digital divide in Turkey is not well focused and covered. It is particularly important to investigate the digital gender gap where gender discrimination is deeply embedded in society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Gender Digital Divide

The gender digital divide refers to unequal access and use of ICTs by females and males. Gender is important to understand ICT use in society, and therefore the gender divide is prominent in the

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