

Chapter 10

Marginalisation of Older Adults in the Digitalisation Drive in Ghana: Exploring the Potential of Adult Learning and Education

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has witnessed an overwhelming digital wave, with the Internet and associated information communication technologies (ICT) permeating every facet of life. This has had governments implement digitalisation agendas to provide their services online. However, although globally, the number of Internet and ICT users have increased tremendously, there continues to persist a digital divide in access and use of these ICT and related technologies. One such divide is generational, prevailing among younger and older adults. This chapter examines such a divide within the Ghanaian context. The chapter analyses Ghana's digitalising attempts and the positioning of adult learning and education in bridging the digital inequalities affecting older adults in Ghana. The chapter argues that the continual marginalisation of adults in the digitalised space could create a new form of social exclusion. However, adult learning and education can be harnessed as a nexus in bridging such a generational gap and must be considered within Ghana's broader digitalisation policy frameworks.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid changes in today's 21st-century societies have increased the impetus for the demand for learning among all and sundry. The ongoing technological changes, the emerging global economy, and the recent Covid-19 repercussions have made digitalisation of societies more pronounced, warranting continuous learning for ease in technology usage. One of the critical characteristics of these digitalised societies is the diffusion and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for everyday interaction. Hence today, ICT and its associated technologies have become an essential part of life, affecting education, economies, governance, employment, and our daily life activities such as shopping, banking transactions, leisure time life, communication, and interaction with others (Polat, 2012; Wildemeersch & Jütte, 2017).

While the upsurge in digital technologies is becoming more pervasive, it opens a new space for learning by acquiring corresponding digital literacies to be functional in usage. Digital literacy refers to a person's ability to understand and use ICT in multiple formats, mainly through the Internet (Gilster, 1997). Globally, Internet and ICT users are rising. In 2021, Internet users increased by 17% since 2019 to about 63% (4.9 billion people) (ITU, 2022). In the same year, there were about 54% of people in EU countries aged 16 to 74 with basic digital literacy skills, with the highest found in the Netherlands and Finland (79%) and Ireland (70%) (European Commission-Eurostats, 2022). Despite the overwhelming increase in the adoption and use of ICTs, the digital divide is still prevalent and remains a concern for both developed and developing countries. There is a recognition of a "second digital divide" that identifies inequalities among some social groups regarding their adoption and use of ICT (Howard et al., 2010; Ono & Zavodny, 2007). These social groups lag behind in technology adoption and use, not because they cannot afford the tools but because they need the necessary skills to use digital devices for varied tasks (Chen & Persson, 2002).

One such group is the older adults, persons above 60 years. Even though the number of older adults adopting technology is growing, there is still a grey divide, or generational gap, that disadvantage them (Friemel, 2016). Internationally, 23% of adults are digitally illiterate (US Department of Education, 2018). For older adults above 60, evidence suggests their lower engagement with digital technologies because of their digital illiteracy (Friemel, 2016; Hale et al., 2010; Schreurs et al., 2017). Older adults lack direct and easy access to digital technologies (Hunsaker & Hargittai, 2018) and risk facing exclusion from the digital world and their meaningful participation in 21st-century society and the global economy. Once this marginalisation persists, a newer form of social exclusion is likely to be created; thus, urgent redress is needed.

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