

The Gender Digital Divide: An Exploratory Research of University of Kashmir.

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Abstract

Our generation is defined by the use of technology. A lot of technological innovations like mobile phone and computers are omnipresent in our homes and workspaces. They have changed the way we live and the way we work. If we consider the demographic discrepancies of information and communication technologies (ICTs), we always think about age. We assume that young people are avid users of digital tools while older ones are uninterested in these tools. While assuming people somehow include another important factor as well, gender. The digital divide between the two genders is an inconclusive global debate nowadays. Research suggests that women lag behind men in the ownership of technology and the development of technological skills. For example, men own and use computers and the Internet more than women, spend more time online, take more technology classes, and show more motivation to learn digital skills. People claim that women are technophobic while men are much better users of the technology. Contradictory to this notion are researchers who argue that women embrace digital tools as enthusiastically as men. It would be interesting to explore the relationship between gender divide and digital divide. This paper puts this question to an empirical test. The paper will analyze the situation in University of Kashmir. The paper will try to answer some of the basic questions related to gender digital divide: Is it true that fewer women access and use internet? Are men more technology savvy than their female counterparts? Are men more aware about digital tools than women?

Key Words: Gender, digital divide, ICT, stereotype, internet

1. Introduction

Since times immemorial humans have tried to make the knowledge, they have more accessible. This trial resulted in a lot of transformations especially culturally and socially. These transformations were based on how communication was carried out globally like the internet, telephone, social networking in short, the use information and communication technology (ICT) in all shapes and sizes. ICT's boosts our capacity

to search, achieve and store large amounts of data. The penetration speed of ICTs is extraordinarily fast; unfolding a digital revolution. ICTs are a great benefit to human development and are assumed to make economic processes more efficient, generate employment, better health and support and expand access to education. Social scientists, scholars and policy makers have worried about the barriers to ICTs since its emergence. The barriers may differ because of differences in socioeconomic,

technological and linguistic factors. The differences between the 'have' and the 'have not' of ICTs may be dependent on the following variables like who (individuals vs. organizations/communities, vs. societies/countries/ world regions, etc.), with which attributes (income, education, geography, age, gender, or type of ownership, size, profitability, sector, etc.), connect how (pain access vs. usage vs. real impact), to what kind of technology (phone, Internet, computer, digital TV, etc.).

Apart from these barriers gender digital divide is now-a-days the most discussed and research barrier among all. Gender digital divide refers to the growing gap in access rates among males and females. There are two views that are prominent in the gender digital divide. According to some scholars and critics women have greater access to ICT's whereas contradicting it are some scholars and critics who suggest women have limited access to the ICT's than men. In this research study the research tends to explore one specific barrier for ICT users: their gender. As a contribution to this ongoing discussion, this research analyzes the differences between men's and women's access to and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in University of Kashmir.

2. Review of Literature

Perceiving technology as a gendered space illuminates the ways women and men are socialized to develop different relationships with technology from childhood, at home and school. When the computer was in its early stages of adoption, boys were three times more likely to use a computer and participate in computer-related activities. Although those gaps have diminished, there

are strong differences in the way women relate to technology, particularly computers and the Internet.

During late 1990s, researchers and critics observed that women tend to be laggards to ICT's (Dholakia, 1994). Because of which the digital era was popularly known to be men's realm. In 2000 it was concluded that there is a gender digital divide in ICT. Researchers asserted that the gender divide was because of various reasons like their usage skills, attitude towards ICT which led to low usage of ICT. It was concluded that men are more interested in technology and hence more tech savvy whereas women were termed as technophobic and reluctant. ICT in the broader sense was seen as a toy for the boys. Males use the Internet more than women for a wide range of activities, particularly those that require greater technological skills such as job searching, e-banking, and posting or uploading material. Sharma (2003) reasons out that women have less access to ICT than men because of reasons like time, money, learning opportunities and so on. She further argued that it is because of the gendered society, inequality in fields like education, employment and income that women might be naturally technophobic.

Malcolm Brynin reviewed the gender-related impact on economics, as determined by technology proficiency. The data showed a measurement of women utilizing computers as much as men at work, but still showed a higher number of working men (55%) using computers at home than women (46%). There is no major gender difference when it come to locating online content for both the genders, but women have this perception that their ability to search online

content or use ICTs are lower than their male counterparts. This perception ultimately affects the motivation and comfort level with ICTs. Gorski (2001) states that even if women have an equal access to ICT as men that won't signify the end of gender digital divide.

Women have been using computers mainly for data entry purpose only and fewer women are seen to be working in computer designing or programming. United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (2003-2005), documented that a gender divide exists as part of the digital divide in society and called for a need to augment communication and provide media literacy for women so that they are in a position to understand and develop ICT content.

Summing up, the literature available on gender digital divide stresses for a re-thinking about women and ICT usage. This step will affect the policy making which is still influenced by the superficial and unsustainable argument that women are technophobic. The policies should focus more on use of the natural communication skills and media capacities of women and their proven embrace of the new digital opportunities to overcome longstanding gender inequalities. Such re-thinking is necessary to create policies and projects that truly allow girls and women to become

equal members of an information society, digital society, network society, knowledge society, or simply equal members of society, independent from the forename it may be given.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sources of Data Collection

To study the "gender digital divide", two sources of Data Collection have been used:

- i) Primary sources:
 - a) Survey through questionnaire
- ii) Secondary sources:
 - a) Books
 - b) Journals
 - c) Articles
 - d) Research papers
 - e) Other printed/published material

3.2 Setting/Sample

In order to obtain a general profile of gender digital divide, an exploratory research was undertaken in University of Kashmir. 84 respondents were taken as sample for the research under study. Random sampling technique was used to select these 84 respondents. Table I gives a brief profile of respondents. To address and analyze the issues of gender digital divide, a questionnaire was structured as tool of investigation. The questionnaire contained a mix of close ended and open-ended questions.

Table I: Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	42	50%
Female	42	50%
Total	84	100%

4. Data Analysis

Table II: Hours spend on internet/week

Hours	Male	Female
1-3	50%	60.5%
4-7	30.9%	29.5%
8-10	11.9%	7%
>10	7.2%	3%

From Table II we can see 50% of the males use internet for 1-3 hours per week whereas 60.5% of the females use internet for the same time. Males tend to use internet for a longer span of time as compared to females, but females use more internet for shorter span of time than men.

Table III: Reasons for using internet

Reasons	Male	Female
Communicate socially	63.5%	62.4%
Be entertained	22.3%	19.5%
Engage in course work	14.2%	18.1%

Table III shows that females tend to use internet more for course work making it to 18.1% whereas 14.2% of the males use it for the same purpose. It can also be seen that both genders use internet mostly for communicating socially.

Table IV: Various items related to gender digital divide

Owns more technical access	N	Percentage
Male	53	63%
Female	31	37%
Total	84	100%
Reluctant to use technology	N	Percentage
Male	23	27.3%
Female	61	72.7%
Total	84	100%
Will take up digital learning classes	N	Percentage
Male	46	54.8%
Female	38	45.2%
Total	84	100%

Limited or lack of awareness regarding ICTs

Male	40	47.6%
Female	44	52.4%
Total	84	100%

Skilled to work online

Male	39	46.4%
Female	45	53.6%
Total	84	100%

Spends more time on internet

Male	43	51.2%
Female	41	48.8%
Total	84	100%

Is there a gender digital divide

Yes	67	79.8%
No	17	20.2%
Total	84	100%

Reasons for gender digital divide

Financial constraints	23	27.4%
Limited free time	5	6%
Patriarchal society	39	46.4%
Technophobia	17	20.2%

Table IV clearly indicates that majority of the respondents believe that males have more access to internet than females and it is this inequality in the access to computers that leads to gender digital divide 72.7% of the respondents think that females are reluctant to use technologies as compared to their male counterparts. At the same time 54.85 of the respondents are of the opinion than males readily take up technical classes than women. More than half of the

respondents think that women either lack or have very limited knowledge about ICTs. Interestingly it was seen that 53.6% of the respondents think that women are more skilled to work online than men. There was very less difference between the respondents to say who among the two genders use spends more time on internet. The data collected through the survey clearly showed that the respondents believe that gender digital divide exists. This implies that a

gender divide exists as a part of digital divide in our society and is clearly evident. The respondents believe that males own and use computers and the Internet more than women, spend more time online, take more technology classes, and show more motivation to learn digital skills. The reasons that may constrain women from using ICTs vary from having financial constraints, limited free time, and gendered roles in our society to many cultural and psychological factors.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that the gender digital divide is a serious problem and needs attention. Our societal norms and values play an important role in determining the access and use of ICTs by women. Women are constrained by these norms and values that confer men as controllers of technologies. Women are widely stereotyped not be good at technology which can also affect the mindset of women. They are the multi-taskers of the family taking care of all household chores and being care givers which leads to less free time for them to explore, understand and use new technologies. Financial barriers also stop women from advancing in technology. These barriers are surmountable.

The research clearly showed that there are “divides within the divide” and in this research study gender is the greatest divide. Both the genders are using ICTs differently and hence the perceptions and experiences vary among males and females. It was also seen during the research that some of the respondents report they hate computers and others welcome them to life. Respondents

who hated use of computers were not comfortable in using it. The relationship of men and women with technology from their childhood, at home or at school lights up the gender divide. Women who didn't use computer and its related activities are seen to be less friendly with computers when they grow up.

What needs to be worked on are the roots for the gender divide. For example, if we pick up the case of video games (the primary use of computers when we are kids), the nature of games available on video games make boys more attracted to them than girls. In addition to this even the computer software are usually developed by males as a result of which boys are more attracted and comfortable with computers while girls develop negative attitude and uncomforted towards computers.

The more universities provide access, encourage computer equipment and software purchases, and incorporate digital learning opportunities into the curricula, the more women will appear to take advantage of computer access. This will lead to develop skills and knowledge about computers more.

ICTs can be a form of empowerment for women but only when gender dimensions are identified, understood and addressed. Unless and until gender digital divide is addressed specifically, ICTs may aggravate the existing inequalities and create new ones. It is needed that ICT policy may ensure technologies that suit women rather than forcing women to adapt them and it is here where access, training and relevance will do the magic!

5.1 Limitations and Future Scope

- 1) Any study done through a questionnaire suffers from the basic limitation of the possibility of difference between what is recorded and what is the truth, no matter how carefully the questionnaire has been designed.
- 2) It is necessary to recognize the limitations of the current study. The first limitation is the small sample size taken. For any good research to happen accurately larger sample is required.
- 3) Another limitation is the sampling method used in the study. To have more diversified and accurate viewpoint about gender digital divide other sampling methods can be employed.
- 4) A comparative study can be conducted between the University of Kashmir and the other Universities of Kashmir/India to know the perception about gender digital divide.

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