

Digital Gender Gap

Authors: Christa Markom, Jelena Tošić, Magdalena Steger

The Digital Gender Gap (DGG) or Digital Gender Divide describes the difference between men and women regarding the possibility of participating in the digital world. This starts with different ways of accessing the internet, as well as using the internet via smartphones, the general ability to own a cell phone, and the resulting disadvantages in professional life (IGI-Global, 2021). In quantitative terms, the DGG is the difference between the proportion of male and female internet users in relation to the proportion of male internet users. This value is expressed as a percentage (Sorgener, Mayne, Mariscal & Aneja, 2018). Especially in the last two years, the Covid 19 pandemic has made the difference between men and women with regards to digital participation even more pronounced. This is evidenced by the fact that gaps between men and women are reappearing that have already been closed (Global Gender Gap Report, 2021) The gender gap refers to the inequality between women and men in all areas of life. The Global Gender Gap Report uses the following areas to identify the gender gap:

- Economic Participation and Opportunity
- Educational Attainment
- Health and Survival
- Political Empowerment

(Global Gender Gap Report, 2021, S. 5)

When people talk about the digital gender gap, they usually refer to the gap in the use of digital technologies between women and men. This is also reflected in various articles and reports that talk about the difference between women and men, such as the UN report on the DGG among women in Africa, or the Global Gender Gap Report. What is missing here is a non-binary gender definition. According to Lüth, non-binary is:

"...a self-designation of persons who locate themselves outside the binary gender order, that is, who are neither (only) female, nor (only) male" (Lüth, 2021, S. 281).

The assignment of a gender at the birth of a child is based on a dominant gender regime that is oriented towards heteronormativity and is only slowly deviating from the female-male

dichotomy. In this context, social media such as YouTube channels, Instagram, or TikTok play a major role for young people, in which this topic can be exchanged. (Lüth, 2021) ¹

In general, women have more difficulty accessing the internet, and in this sense they are disadvantaged. In terms of statistics and figures, it can be seen that especially in countries of the Global South, countries with poorly developed infrastructure, and where women are excluded from many areas of society, the women (and girls) are strongly discriminated in terms of their access to the internet. Approximately half of the human population - 3.7 billion people, 47% - has no access to the Internet. Half of this population are women, which means that about a quarter of the world's population is disadvantaged in terms of internet access (UN Women, 2021). In numbers, this means that men are on average 21% more likely to have internet access (Hingle, 2021). Reasons for this massive inequality include the following:

- Women do not feel safe on the internet because harassment is more frequent.
- The infrastructure sometimes makes it impossible to have internet access.
- In schools, girls and women are not equipped with digital knowledge, as this competence realm tends to be attributed to the male part of the population.
- Women often cannot afford digital technologies (USAID, 2021).

In terms of usage behaviour, we also find gender differences. Women use the (mobile) internet more often for e-mail correspondence, to look at routes and maps, to obtain health information, and for personal communication and care work, whereas men inform themselves about the news or the weather, obtain information in the areas of sport, politics or finance, carry out job activities online, or listen to and download music. In summary, this means that women are more likely to go online for practical activities and tasks while men are online for entertainment (Fallows, 2005). Similarly, men and women behave differently when it comes to digital communication. The male part of the population participates more often in online discussions, whereas women tend to hold back here. One reason for this is the mentioned lack of security on the internet (EIGE, 2021). Women use online communication mainly to keep in touch with friends and family, while men interact with several different groups online (Fallows, 2005).

¹ More information on this can also be found in the text [Digital Queer Gap](#).

Even in statistics, differences can be found in usage, competence, and general ownership - broken down by region. The smallest Digital Gender Gap can be found in America with only 2% (Chisiza, 2017). Europe is close behind with 3% (Sarpong, 2021) and Africa has the largest DGG worldwide with 23% (Chisiza, 2017). When looking at internet usage figures by gender, we find large differences. In North America, the difference is almost imperceptible, where 90% of both men and women have access to the Internet and are online. In Latin America, on the other hand, only 60% of women and 65% of men have the chance to access the internet. The Digital Gender Gap in Asia depends on the region, which can be divided into South Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The biggest DGG can be located in South Asia and the smallest DGG can be found in East Asia. (Hingle, 2021). Australia has developed its own system and index, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII), to stay on top of their digital development. The higher this index, the more pronounced the digital inclusion. In 2019, the ADII was at 61.9 points. Again, there are numbers that illustrate the difference between women and men within the digital world. On average, women have an ADII of 1.8 points lower than men. In terms of access to the Internet, men have an ADII of 88.2 points and women of 87.7 points. (Thomas et al., 2019).

As mentioned at the beginning, in some parts of the world, the current Covid 19 pandemic has also further increased gender differences. Especially for women, who did not use digital technology before the pandemic, the costs are now even higher in gaining access to digital technology.

Due to the pandemic, everything has to work remotely and many areas, including workplaces, education, and social life, have switched to distance learning or home office. This is mainly brought about by digital technologies and internet use, which allows for staying in touch with each other across (national) borders. However, since women have less access to the internet and often can't afford or otherwise obtain access, they are experiencing a great deal of discrimination in the course of the pandemic. Social life, administrative, medical information, and advice are provided online, often leaving women dependent on their families to follow the latest research results and government measures (Aggarwal, 2020; USAID, 2021; Nefresh, Orser & Thomas, 2020). Another issue that has gained prominence since the onset of the pandemic is domestic violence. This can affect both genders but poses far greater problems for women. Although there are now dozens of homepages, hotlines, etc. to report domestic violence or talk to someone about it, women who have neither the digital literacy nor the chance to access

the internet have a limited opportunity to get help, and sometimes not at all (Nefresh, Orser & Thomas, 2020).

As mentioned above, the Digital Gender Gap has consequences in the workplace as well, especially for those who are hindered or prohibited from accessing the internet. More than 90% of jobs worldwide require digital skills from their employees, which women cannot provide due to the lack of appropriate training (Plan International, 2021). Women and girls are therefore limited in their professional opportunities and as a result, greater barriers are created in their professional lives (UNICEF, 2021).

There are many different suggestions and ways to reduce the digital gender gap. Most of them agree on one point, namely that the first step towards improvement should be taken in schools. Schools are the first stations through which children and young people across gender(s) have equal opportunities to acquire digital knowledge. Furthermore, teaching in the (natural) sciences, also referred to as the STEM subjects, should generally be promoted (Plan International, 2021; OECD, 2018; Sorgener, Mayne, Mariscal & Aneja, 2018; BMBWF, 2021). In addition, it is demanded that access to the internet is equally allowed and possible for everyone, regardless of origin, gender, age, religion, sexuality, and socio-cultural background. Thus, both the infrastructure and the affordability of internet and digital technologies should be improved (Davaki, 2018; OECD, 2018).

Another important point concerns network security. This must be changed under any circumstances so that girls and women no longer have to be afraid while being online. Here, for example, it is recommended that more research and data analysis is done to find out what needs to be improved. However, the data should also include different genders (Davaki, 2018; Sorgener, Mayne, Mariscal & Aneja, 2018). The fourth and last point refers to stereotypes. There are various socio-cultural barriers and associated stereotypes that make it impossible for women and girls to engage more with technology and the digital world. It is considered an important goal to enable both genders (and beyond) to deal with digital technologies and also to be able to work in these areas (Davaki, 2018; Sorgener, Mayne, Mariscal & Aneja, 2018).

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