



Cultural Capital and Reproduction of the Intelligence Gap

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ABSTRACT

An ever-increasing digital divide around the globe has turned into one of the greatest challenges to several areas of the information society with direct and indirect consequences. This has also increased the demand for more research in this field. This study, which is based on Bourdieu's cultural capital reproduction theory, is an attempt to answer the question as: To what extent individuals' cultural capital affects the digital gap among them? The survey method was applied in this research where a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The population of the study consisted of 183,198 youths from the city of Bābol (Mazandaran, Iran) aged 18-29 years. The sample size was estimated to be 385 by Cochran formula. The data were then collected randomly in a multistage cluster sampling from 8 areas in the above city. The results showed that there is a digital divide among people with different cultural capitals. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that the objectified dimension of the cultural capital ($\beta = 0.472$), the embodied dimension ($\beta = 0.41$) and the institutionalized dimension ($\beta = 0.20$) had the greatest effect on the people's digital divide. The results also showed that the independent variable of the research, i.e. cultural capital, explained about 0.26 percent of the variance of the dependent variable, i.e. the digital divide.

Keywords: cultural capital, Internet, digital gap, digital intelligent inequality, digital divide

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INTRODUCTION

Although inequality and social divide are not new phenomena as they have emerged and evolved in various ways throughout the human history, along with the evolution of societies. In a decade when the concepts of digital inequality and gap have entered the literature on cyberspace sociology, the meaning of digital gap has seen changes as well. The traditional definition of digital divide i.e., whether or not individuals had access to the Internet has changed with the expansion of digital devices such as tablets and smartphones. The new gap such as "new digital divide" or "smart gap" occurs among individuals who have access to the Internet. This type of difference and inequality is manifested in individuals' skills and ability to use a complicated information technology.

Although there is a consensus among sociologists on the existence and emergence of this type of gap, they do not agree on the factors influencing intelligent inequalities in society. Some researchers have pointed to the differences between classes in access to information and communications technology (Gurstein, 2003; Patterson & Wilson, 2000; Kvasny, 2002; and Di Maggio & Hargittai, 2001), but others believe that the digital inequality is not only affected by discrimination in access to information and communications technology but also by inequalities that already exist in the society, such as the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, and the cultural capital that is reproduced.

PURPOSE

The main purpose of this study, while describing the extent of the digital divide among Internet users (in terms of ability, skill and motivation and the way individuals use digital technology) is to answer two fundamental questions: Does the cultural capital of individuals affect the digital divide? Is the digital divide in society being reproduced?

METHODOLOGY

The survey method was applied in this research where a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The population of the study consisted of 183,198 youths from the city of Bābol (Mazandaran, Iran) aged 18-29 years. The sample size was estimated to be 385 by the Cochran formula. The data were then collected randomly in a multistage cluster sampling from 8 areas in the city of Bābol. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was

used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, where the accepted coefficient of each of the variables under study was determined to be above 70.

FINDINGS

The results showed that there is a digital divide among people with different cultural capitals. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that the objectified dimension of the cultural capital ($\beta = 0.472$), the embodied dimension ($\beta = 0.41$) and the institutionalized dimension ($\beta = 0.20$) had the greatest effect on the people's digital divide, respectively. The results also showed that the independent variable of the research, i.e., cultural capital, explained about 0.26 percent of the variance of the dependent variable, i.e., the digital divide. Also, the results illustrated that there was a significant difference between men and women in terms of the average digital divide. The average digital divide for women was higher than that for men. This means that women had a lower average in the skills of using the digital environment as well as using scientific contents, knowledge, and skills of the Internet environment. The results showed that there is no significant difference between the single and married groups in terms of the average digital divide. Single and married people were not significantly different in terms of skills in using the digital environment as well as the use of scientific content, knowledge, and skills of the Internet environment.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed the differences and inequalities of individuals in the level of skills, information literacy and functional content of digital space as indicators of intelligent social inequalities. One of the most important results of this study is that having cultural capital (a combination of objectified, embodied and institutionalized cultural capital) plays an important role in explaining the extent of the intelligent social gap. In other words, smart digital inequality that reflects the diversity and differentiation in the structure of access, skills and use of communications technology is the product of long-term social inequalities, beliefs and expectations, and cultural capital. Therefore, it can be stated that this important finding confirms the reproduction of Bourdieu's cultural capital inequalities. That is, digital inequalities must be understood in the system of social relations that is considered by its cultural meanings.



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Most studies in the subject area have focused on the first meaning of the digital divide which includes the gap between those who have access to the Internet and those who do not. But the second meaning of the digital divide: the gap in application content, the differences in skills and information literacy of digital technology users among different classes of society, which are interpreted as social inequalities intelligent, is a less studied sociological topic on which this article explored. Most of the previous studies have been to describe intelligent digital inequalities, but have ignored important factors such as the cultural capital in which they have been influential, which this article addresses. As the finding demonstrates that “intelligent digital inequality” reflects the diversity and distinction in the structure of access, skills and use of communications technology; also, the product of long-standing social inequalities is cultural beliefs and expectations and capital. In addition, this study will enhance the existing theoretical literature in the field of digital divide sociology which has received less attention from social scientists in Iran.



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