

## Guest Editorial

# Women's Participation in the Digital Economy and Digital Society

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**Abstract:** This guest editorial provides some background to the Special Issue on “Women’s Participation in the Digital Economy and Digital Society”. It describes the major themes emerging from the twelve papers selected for publication.

**Keywords:** Digital gender gap, women, digital economy and society

## On Women as a Cornerstone Topic in a Journal Special Issue

Although each of us is an individual, community is the pure essence of our human being. All our goals and activities are forming numerous and different groups, building up our societies. The core idea of group involvement has always been formed around needs and interests that evolved and changed over time. Starting from Maslow’s hierarchy (1943) of ground, physiological needs, progressing towards the complexity of reaching higher self-esteem levels of the needs pyramid, and, especially, keeping up with the level’s priority, our individual and collective goals cannot be obtained without those intangible bonds and threads, forming our hubs and the social tissue of our networks, groups and communities.

Therefore, from the collective, group standpoint, we must deploy all our top resources to achieve individual but simultaneously common societal goals, regardless of all the differences

we find among ourselves. These may be based on characteristics that differentiate us in colour, gender, and age. Additionally, variety makes us potent in resolving contemporary global challenges. Our resilience and strength lie in the diversity among us.

Historically and cross-culturally, we are aware of the supremacy status certain social groups have claimed and forced upon others, often aiming towards isolated, selfish, unilateral and narrow goals. Those examples, presented or experienced at a micro or macro level, have given us a mandatory basic lecture on the certainty of inclusiveness, openness and diversity as a universal benefit for all, as the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) has endorsed.

Bearing this thought in mind, we aim to set this Special Issue on Women's Participation in the Digital Economy and Digital Society as a non-binary (as opposed to Hofstede's (2001) masculine vs feminine concept) but inclusive topic. Focusing on women, we see it as a piece of a globally differentiated social group's kaleidoscope. Other social group varieties (minorities, disabled, elderly, Indigenous, marginalized) are scrutinized as humanity's eternal quest for global socio-economic equilibrium continues.

Therefore, focusing on Women in the Digital Economy and Society in this Special Issue has been chosen purely in the form of interest from different socio-economic aspects of our digital society. The variety of interests in higher rates of women's participation in the digital economy and society is rational and reasonable, firstly, due to the general population composition, as women comprise half of the overall population. Looking narrowly through a profit lens, human potential and capital in half of the population should not be wasted. It is also grown in our values through a principle of equality and equity, the rule of law and justice, and it sets the way we aspire. Further, our societies and economies have been proven to benefit from gender-balanced and inclusive practices. However, our current data still show plodding resistance in different aspects of gender equilibrium: from parliamentary seat occupancy, ICT business participation, to AI development. A digital gender gap stands stubborn and persistent, obvious and measurable in the gender pay gap, glass ceiling patterns, and the overall cultural and ideological matrix (Pisker *et al.*, 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022).

Finally, this Special Issue hopefully makes a step forward in our effort for a more inclusive and balanced society of tomorrow.

## On this Special Issue

The idea of joint work on this Special Issue came alive after a debate on Women in ICT, a paper presented at the ICDEc 2021 conference, where Dr Leith Campbell, as a session moderator, suggested broadening the topic and bringing it closer to *Journal* readers. In fulfilling this goal,

the guest editorial team has been gathered with a notion of cross-cultural diversity, expertise in scientific and professional backgrounds, and a sense of gender balance.

The topic itself is currently the focus of the socio-economic community, and the twelve contributions published here cover the topic from a global perspective: from Brazil, the EU and Russia, to India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia.

The issue is organized into five thematic parts, ordered according to the common characteristics of the papers, the topics prioritized from the general to the specific.

The first block of papers on general gender cases and perspectives in the digital economy and society confirms and debates key topic issues through three contributions. *Gender Bias in Artificial Intelligence*, through a systematic literature review, confirms gender bias exists in AI development, highlighting types, causes and mitigating strategies to overcome future development trends. *“Is It Okay That She is a Woman?”* describes gender prejudice in ICT, from within a scientific, higher education institution, and reveals a shift beginning towards non-binary gender neutrality in Russian academia. *Not a Toy for Boys Only* takes a business perspective in qualitative research to identify reasons for the underrepresentation of women in ICT in Croatia.

Section two brings an insight into access and ability of broadband use in Australian women (*Being Digitally Savvy*), confirming current women’s digital capital and pointing a path towards inclusive practices. On work-family balance in the Philippine business process outsourcing industry (*Telecommuting on Women’s Work-Family Balance through Work-Family Conflicts*), quantitative research results refer to persistent inequality in household work distribution, while qualitative research on mindfulness suggests it can be a balancing factor in work-family conflicts.

The following three papers present work on digital literacy. The first, *Conditions Affecting the Perspective Towards the “Work-From-Home” Setup*, explains the interconnections between digital financial literacy and women’s economic empowerment in Indonesia. The second, *Financial Literacy, Digital Financial Literacy and Women’s Economic Empowerment*, examines the need for digital financial literacy among women. The third, *Non-Obvious Connections Between Information Literacy and Online Payments*, reveals some connections between information literacy and online payments.

The fourth section encompasses two research papers on women and entrepreneurship, confirming that empowered ICT skills and cultural capital reinforce entrepreneurial intention among women and prove women are vital in SME sustainability.

Finally, the issue concludes with research on women’s technology usage. *E-wallet and Women in India* shows that women are trendy and up-to-date, at whatever age. Lastly, research on the

impact of technology-evoked mental imagery on brand personality and brand association for beauty brands shows women are technologically smart, using Augmented Reality as a critical societal frame of the future.

Through different approaches and aspects of a modern digital economy and society, the research has identified various social roles that women obtain: as producers and users, in academia, business and industry. Through theoretical and practical, qualitative and quantitative approaches, the papers in this issue have confirmed the perpetual existence of old, traditional divides and barriers that woman face; and have opened new horizons in challenges they are facing nowadays with AI and VR (Virtual Reality) as current socio-economic drivers.

The articles have proved that gender bias and prejudice is present in AI and ICT, and that the digital gender gap and work-family balance are continuing burdens. The papers have stressed the importance of digital literacy, ICT skills and cultural capital in women's economic, entrepreneurial and sustainability empowerment, showing women being technologically and digitally aware, witty and ingenious.

Due to the findings noted above, we acknowledge various cross-cultural differences in phases and stages women face in their response to the omnipresence of digital transformation. It is also worth underlining here how technology has no inherent potential to favour any social group before others. It is always upon the creators and users in their intention to make the best version of it, fitting responsibly to a broader societal frame.

We welcome all the reactions and comments related to this Special Issue, hoping for a prosperous and inclusive future collaboration in new challenges to come.

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