

Time for gender digital equality

MOST aspects of our lives nowadays revolve around digital technology, especially the Internet. The digital revolution has indeed benefited all segments of society. Many who have lost their jobs, for example, have turned to the digital world for a lifeline and engaged in online businesses as a means to achieve their economic recovery.

The digital world, like so many other aspects of society, poses a challenge to women: Based on the current landscape, it can be said that women have not yet achieved gender digital equality, and this is an issue that needs serious attention.

In fairness, within Asean countries there is already a relatively high level of gender digital equality. Due to mobile phones' rapid diffusion, the number of women owning mobile phones has been steadily rising.

Based on 2020 data from the International Communication Union, in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, and Indonesia, the differences between the genders have become smaller.

This is a positive development from which to build on.

However, going deeper into women's inclusiveness in the digital revolution, we can see that, before women can achieve total gender digital equality, there are still many aspects that need to improve.

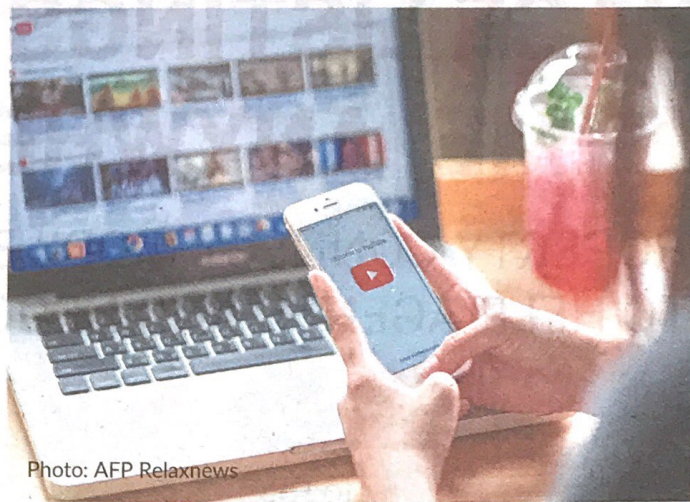


Photo: AFP Relaxnews

As good as statistics on women owning mobile phones sound, what is more important is the need to empower women with digital knowledge and skills.

Without these, they will not be able to make their way in the digital world and will be left behind.

The need to empower women with these skills is even more crucial now, amid the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent global economic downturn. Their inclusive participation in the digital economy is crucially needed as they play a vital role in sustainable development.

For example, the gig economy offers women opportunities to work around the care work they do for their families and their domestic roles.

This arrangement can help women overcome time and mobility constraints that prevent them from seeking additional sources of income for their families.

On an encouraging note, an analysis by Valberg (2020) on the trends from 1991 to 2014 in 156 countries revealed that digital technologies have gradually helped women's labour market

participation, with the gender gap steadily narrowing.

For women to be empowered with digital knowledge and skills, other factors must be set up to lay the foundation for equal participation.

These prerequisites include equal digital access, equal ability to utilise technologies in beneficial ways, and equal ability to gain the requisite basic and advanced digital skills to be consumers and producers in the digital economy.

Empowering women with digital knowledge and skills will enable them to be active participants in the digital world, especially in the digital economy, which will ensure the sustainability of their livelihoods.

Most importantly, it will help women inch closer towards achieving gender digital equality.

In conjunction with International Women's Day today, let us hope that women can achieve equality in every aspect in this Covid-19-infected world.

Happy International Women's Day 2021!

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