

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented changes in social dynamics that have continued to impact the post-pandemic world. In response to the demands of the pandemic, digital technologies have become a major pillar in communication, work, and service delivery, making the digital environment ubiquitous. However, this shift has also exposed and amplified pre-existing digital inequalities despite substantial efforts towards digital inclusion. Research shows that modern societies still face challenges as many vulnerable groups lack access to and skills to use digital technologies. Renowned

scholars will come together for this event to examine the effects of the pandemic on digital inequalities and evaluate the significance of disparities and their impact on social well-being. This event offers an opportunity for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to engage in a dialogue about strategies to address these challenges and promote equitable access to digital technologies and the internet. By fostering an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas and perspectives, this event aims to generate innovative solutions and contribute to a nuanced understanding of digital inequalities in the post-pandemic era.



15th June 2023



University of Ljubljana
Faculty of Social Sciences

Room 21

Kardeljeva ploščad 5
1000 Ljubljana

Organizers

Dr. Andraž Petrovčič, Dr. Darja Grošelj, Dr. Simona Hvalič Touzery

The symposium is supported by the research projects “The implications of proxy internet use for the internet skills of older adults” (ARRS, J5-2558), “Digital inequalities and older adults in Slovenia” (V5-2275), and “Digital inclusion and longevity society in the post-pandemic time” (BI-US/22-24-055), in collaboration with the programme group “Internet research” (P5-0399).



DIGITAL INEQUALITIES IN THE POST - PANDEMIC WORLD

Book of Abstracts



- 09.00** ● **Opening**
Introduction to the symposium objectives and participants
Dr. Simona Hvalič Touzery

Welcome address
Dr. Katja Lozar Manfreda
- 09.15** ● **Presentations – Part 1** (Chair: Simona Hvalič Touzery)
Digital Privilege During COVID-19 Lockdowns
Dr. Eszter Hargittai (University of Zurich)

A Pandemic Silver-Lining: Remote Learning and Increased Intergenerational Technology Guidance Within Lower-Income Families
Dr. Bianca C. Reisdorf (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

The Consequences of the Digital Divide for COVID-19
Dr. Grant Blank (University of Oxford)
- 10.45** ● **Coffee break**
- 11.15** ● **Presentations – Part 2** (Chair: Simona Hvalič Touzery)
How do Inequalities in Digital Skills Intersect with Digital Media Use in Creating Advantage and Disadvantage in the Exchange of Social Support in Later Life: Insights from East York Toronto
Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase (University of Western Ontario)

Age Differences in Online Privacy Literacy
Dr. Philipp K. Masur (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Digital Inequalities and Algorithm Literacy: Development and Validation of an Explanatory Model
Dr. Andraž Petrovčič (University of Ljubljana)
- 12.45** ● **Lunch break**
- 14.15** ● **Roundtable**
Challenges and Opportunities for Digital Inclusion after COVID-19
Moderator: Dr. Darja Grošelj

Discussants: Dr. Philipp K. Masur, Dr. Grant Blank, Dr. Eszter Hargittai, Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase
- 15.45** ●



Dr. Eszter
Hargittai

Digital Privilege During COVID-19 Lockdowns

Rarely is access to information as important as during a global health crisis. During the initial COVID-19 lockdowns, at a time when information could mean the difference between life and death, information inequalities were of paramount significance. Drawing on national survey data collected in the early days of the pandemic in three countries (US, Italy, Switzerland), this talk shares how people's digital privilege related to their knowledge and misconceptions about the virus.



Dr. Bianca C.
Reisdorf

A Pandemic Silver-Lining: Remote Learning and Increased Intergenerational Technology Guidance Within Lower-Income Families

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as an “accelerant” in many aspects of social life, in that it sped up existing social trends as opposed to fostering entirely new behaviors. That has been particularly evident in relation to technology use. We examine intergenerational technology guidance—how parents help children, and how children help parents—within lower-income families one year into the pandemic. Our analyses draw on nationally representative surveys of lower-income U.S. families with school-aged children in 2015 and 2021, enabling us to compare families' pandemic experiences to an earlier time point. We ask whether socio-demographic patterns of intergenerational technology guidance changed between 2015 and 2021, and identify what factors might explain these changes. Logistic regression results suggest that the pandemic was an accelerant for intergenerational technology guidance within lower-income U.S. families with school-aged children. The socio-demographic differences noted in 2015 having largely fallen away by 2021 suggests a “silver lining” of the pandemic period, in that a key form of digital inequality among lower-income U.S. parents was much less pronounced by 2021. Our findings have important implications for policy and practice in the aftermath of pandemic remote learning.



Dr. Grant Blank

The Consequences of the Digital Divide for COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been unusual in that information about the transmission of the virus came out slowly and recommended practices changed over time. This made communication media, like the Internet, unusually important. Building on three research streams—vaccine hesitancy, information-seeking, and digital inequalities—we examine how digital inequalities, health information media, and mass media affect COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy. Using representative survey data, our structural equation model demonstrates the importance of digital inequalities and media use for vaccine hesitancy. Our model provides two novel contributions. First, we show that digital inequalities play an important role in public health. They lead to increased health information-seeking, which reduces vaccine hesitancy. Second, our model presents strong evidence supporting a more comprehensive approach to vaccine hesitancy beyond factors like socio-demographics and prior health beliefs to include broader factors like sources of health information. Where and how people find information on public health issues seems to be as important as demographics.

How do Inequalities in Digital Skills Intersect with Digital Media Use in Creating Advantage and Disadvantage in the Exchange of Social Support in Later Life: Insights from East York Toronto

How do older adults mobilize social support and what is the role of inequalities in digital skills? To investigate this, we focus on older adults 65+ residing in the Toronto locality of East York, using 42 interviews. We find that once older adults start using digital media, it becomes routinely incorporated into their lives. Email was used more with friends than relatives; some Skype was used with close family ties. The study has implications for the development of age-specific interventions to strengthen much needed digital life skills that will aid individuals in mobilizing their social support during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and help mitigate the negative effects of stress. Based on our study findings, we examine the challenges of digital inequalities research in a post-pandemic world with a focus on new and transferable skills.



Dr. Anabel
Quan-Haase



Dr. Philipp K.
Masur

Age Differences in Online Privacy Literacy

In any discussion about online privacy, people will put forth that we simply need to foster sufficient privacy literacy among Internet users to ensure an appropriate level of protection and self-determination. However, research on online privacy literacy is far from being conclusive in this regard. Challenges not only remain with regard to its conceptualization and measurement, its role in actually shaping online behavior likewise remains understudied. Furthermore, the differences in privacy literacy across socio-demographic markers such as age, gender, or educational levels is only poorly understood. In this talk, I address these shortcomings by first introducing a comprehensive, multi-dimensional model of online privacy, which aims to capture literacy beyond awareness and procedural skills. Based on both theoretical and empirical analyses, I will then highlight the contingency of online privacy literacy on age, gender, and education and close by proposing avenues for literacy research and education.



Dr. Andraž
Petrovčič

Digital Inequalities and Algorithm Literacy: Development and Validation of an Explanatory Model

Algorithms have become almost ubiquitous on the internet. They shape the way Internet users interact with digital services and what outcomes they obtain from their Internet uses. While scholars have extensively studied the societal implications of algorithm curation, only a few studies investigated the relationship between digital inequalities and algorithm literacy. Little is known about how disparities in Internet access and skills affect the algorithm awareness and knowledge of Internet users, and how they affect their Internet uses and outcomes. To fill this gap, we present and test a conceptual model to assess how algorithm awareness and knowledge mediate the three levels of digital inequalities. The survey data were collected on a large-scale sample of Internet users in Slovenia in 2022. Results showed that both dimensions of algorithm literacy are significant mediators in sequential paths of digital exclusion, suggesting that learning algorithmic literacy should become part of digital inclusion initiatives.

Digital Inclusion after COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities

Moderator: **Dr. Darja Grošelj**

Discussants: **Dr. Philipp K. Masur, Dr. Grant Blank, Dr. Eszter Hargittai, Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase**

This roundtable discussion with renowned scholars in the field of digital inequalities aims to identify the challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic in the area of digital inclusion. The discussion will address a variety of topics, including the extent to which the pandemic has impacted digital inclusion and changed aspects of people's lives. Panellists will also explore the impact of the pandemic on under-connected groups, such as the elderly, and highlight the structural factors contributing to post-pandemic digital inequalities. The discussion will also highlight the challenges faced by those who lack digital skills and explore ways to encourage digital skills development. It will also examine how policymakers have responded to the pandemic to address digital inequalities and discuss possible policy solutions for creating a more equitable and inclusive digital society. Finally, the discussion will also highlight possible avenues for future research to improve our understanding of the complex dynamics of digital inequalities in a rapidly changing digital landscape.