

The relevant social group analysis of the SCOT theory for gender differences among Teacher Education students' attitude towards using the Internet for their learning potentials

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ABSTRACT

Different societies and social groups use technologies and interpret the meaning of technology accordingly, depending on their interactions with the technology. The interpretations about the technology enable manufacturers to focus on the advantages/disadvantages of the technology that result in new and improved technology. An understanding of relevant social groups is essential to understanding a particular technology. The key requirement of relevant social groups is that all members of a certain social group have the same interpretation of an artifact. Thus the relevant social group factor of the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) theory was used to examine the relationship between gender differences and tertiary education students' attitude towards Internet use for their learning potential in this article. The quantitative research method was used in this study and a survey was employed for data collection process. The survey instrument was a partially adopted survey consisting of forty-six items. The sample consisted of 1092 tertiary education students from India and the results revealed a significant gender difference among tertiary education students in using the Internet for learning potentials.

Keywords: *Gender studies; The Internet; The Social Construction of Technology Theory; Teacher Education.*

INTRODUCTION

The Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) theory (Bijker & Pinch, 1986) stresses the social shaping of the technology - that societies' perceptions play a significant role in innovation of new technology (Carr, 2014). Different societies use technologies and interpret the meaning of technology accordingly, depending on their interactions with the technology. The interpretations about the technology enable manufacturers to focus on the advantages/disadvantages of the technology that result in new and improved technology. Thus, the SCOT theory emphasises that technical and social factors interact and interplay in a technology's development.

More specifically, Bijker (1995) argued that an understanding of relevant social groups is essential to understanding a particular technology. The key requirement of relevant social groups is that all members of a certain social group have the same interpretation of an artefact (Bijker & Pinch, 1987). Each relevant social group interprets the perceived meaning in a similar way. These particular groups are considered to be agents imparting meaning to the artefacts (Klein & Kleinman, 2002). Furthermore, Klein and Kleinman explained that every social group negotiates the design of the artefacts and demonstrates the different views and perceptions about the objects. The different

relevant social groups show their different meanings along with the artefacts' weaknesses and strengths, which help designers in improving the quality of the artefacts. The selection of the relevant social group must be undertaken carefully. Bijker and Pinch (1987) demonstrated that

"in deciding which social groups are relevant, we must first take whether the artefact has any meaning at all for the members of the social group under investigation" (p. 30).

The homogenous meaning given to the artefact by different social groups leads to the choice of relevant social groups. Relevant social groups can be the users and the producers of the technology. Considering 'the gender' as a representative of different social groups, this article examines the role of gender differences among teacher education students' attitude towards using the Internet for their learning purposes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender is considered to be a socio-cultural aspect of a society and divides societies into different groups, for example, males, females, and others. There was interest in examining the relationship between gender and tertiary education students' attitude towards Internet use for their learning potential. Gender differences and attitudes towards the Internet is an interesting phenomenon to study. Numerous previous research (such as, Jeyshankar, 2020, Leung & Yau, 2016; Zabadi & Alawi, 2016; Bhubanswari & Padmanaban, 2012; Yacob, Kadir, Zainudin & Zurairch, 2012; Liaw & Huang, 2011) have demonstrated the existence of gender differences in attitude towards the Internet use for learning. For example, Zabadi and Alawi (2016) conducted a case study on 371 students from different faculties at the University of Business and Technology in Saudi Arabia. The results showed that the attitude of male students was more positive towards the Internet use for learning than their female counterparts. Similar to this, Liaw and Huang (2011) conducted research on the individual's attitudes towards e-learning in regard to gender differences. Findings indicated a more positive attitude of male participants towards e-learning than females.

Similarly, in 2008, Jabreen and Jamal conducted research on the attitudes of tertiary education students towards the integration of the Internet as a channel of communication and a study tool in traditional teaching at the Hashemite University of Jordan. A survey was carried out with a sample of 502 university students. The study showed that there was a significant gender difference in attitudes towards Internet use in their study practices. Male students had more positive attitudes towards the Internet than the female participants. The study showed that university students commonly used the Internet to check their emails and for Internet browsing.

In contrast, a study by Sebnmen (2015) on students' attitude towards Internet use for learning provided the opposite result as female students showed more positive attitudes towards the Internet than males. Similarly, Khudair and Oshan (2008) conducted research among 532 male and 261 female university students at King Saud University which showed that female tertiary education students had more positive attitudes towards Internet use than males. Findings by Dhiman, Birbal and Bhim (2014) in their study also demonstrated that female university students' had a more positive attitude towards Internet based learning than males.

Other studies, however, have found no significant gender differences among tertiary students' attitude towards Internet use. In 2013, a quantitative study by Abedalaziz, Jamaluddin and Leng was carried out on 289 postgraduate students enrolled in Master Degree programs at the University of Malaya in Malaysia. The results revealed no significant gender differences in attitude towards the use of the Internet for their study purposes. Both gender groups were equally interested in using the Internet. Similarly, Suri and Sharma (2013) conducted a research on 477 students enrolled in

various courses across many departments in Punjab University, India and found no gender differences in attitude towards the Internet use for learning.

There is a discrepancy in the results about gender issues surrounding attitudes towards the use of the Internet for learning. Some studies (Tobishima, 2020; Zabadi & Alawi, 2016; Liaw & Huang, 2011; Jabreen & Jammal, 2008) indicated that male students had more positive attitudes toward Internet use than female students. However, some researches (Sebnmen, 2015; Khudair & Oshan, 2008; Dhiman, Birbal, & Bhim, 2014) demonstrated that females had more positive attitudes towards the Internet than males. On the other hand, Abedalaziz, Jamaluddin and Leng (2013), Suri and Sharma (2013) found no significant gender differences towards the use of the Internet. In this way, all the above studies formed the basis for investigation of 'what is the relationship between gender differences and higher education students' attitudes towards the Internet use for their learning?' To explore the relationship between gender and attitude towards Internet use for learning, the following research methodology has been used.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research method was used in this study and the survey was employed for data collection process. The survey instrument was a partially adopted survey consisting of forty-six items (see Appendix A). Some of the items were adopted from three scales: the 'Computer Anxiety Scale' (Glass, Heinssen & Knight, 1987), 'Internet Attitude Scale' (Nordin, Othman & Sam, 2005) and 'Students' Attitude towards Internet Use' (Brinson, Manuel & Slate, 2002). The first scale was used in a Western context, whereas the two latter scales were used to study Malaysian (Nordin et al., 2005) and Pakistani tertiary education students (Hunjra, Rehman & Safwan, 2010), respectively. Items 6 and 7 (in Appendix A) were adopted from the 'Computer Anxiety Scale' by Glass et al. (1987); items 3, 25 and 28 (in Appendix A) were selected from the 'Internet attitude Scale' of Nordin et al. (2005) and items 20, 33, 34 and 35 (in Appendix A) were adopted from 'Students' Attitude towards Internet Use of Brinson et al. (2002). Therefore, a total of nine items were adopted from the above scales and 37 items were self-constructed to prepare the full questionnaire, shown in Appendix A.

Considering the contexts of study, India has a different education system and socio-cultural background. Therefore, the scale should be suitable for the teacher education students' needs in Indian contexts, however, only a few items from the mentioned scales above were found to be relevant to this study, and we used those items in preparing the questionnaire.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE SCALE

Under the reliability analysis, the Cronbach's alpha reliability test was employed to measure the reliability of the survey items. The Cronbach's alpha values for each item were computed between .810 to .820. For example, items 13, 20 and 23 have the minimum Cronbach's Alpha value, which was .810 and item 46 has the maximum Cronbach's Alpha value (.820). The computed Cronbach's alpha values (.810 to .820) were greater than 0.7, which suggested high reliability of the items. The normality test showed that data was not normal (nonparametric) - as shown in Table 5, therefore, the Mean and Standard Deviation for each item were added.

RASCH ANALYSIS

The quantitative data obtained in this study relied on a partially adopted survey, thus Rasch analysis was employed to measure the person and item reliability. 37 items were new in the survey (Appendix A) and Rasch analysis was employed to test the co-relation between items. The survey utilized three subtests. Each subtest measured a different latent trait, for example, the first subset

focuses on 'attitude towards the Internet for study use', the second measures 'the Internet skills for study use' and, the third deals with 'Internet resources (access and cost)'. The followings sections describe the Rasch measurement results for each subset of the survey:

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE INTERNET FOR STUDY USE SUBSET

Attitude towards the Internet for study use was the first subset of Internet use Scale (Appendix A) and contained 27 items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 33, 34, 35, 39, 40 and 42). Rasch based reliability for items and persons were obtained. Table 1 shows the summary of item and person reliability.

Table 1: Summary of item and person reliability for attitude towards the Internet for study use

Measure Summary	Item	Person
Mean (S. D.)	0.00 (0.49)	0.31 (0.35)
Reliability	1.00	0.73

The item reliability for attitude towards the Internet use was 1.00, indicative of a very good measure for item spread on the measurement scale. The person reliability was 0.73, and whilst not high in regard to item reliability, was considerable and fell within the acceptable range for the person reliability index.

INTERNET SKILLS FOR STUDY USE SUBSET

Internet skills for study use was the second subset of the survey and contained 13 items (6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 21, 22, 24, 30, 32, 38 and 41). Rasch based reliability for items and persons were obtained, as shown in Table 2. The item reliability was 0.99 and indicative of a very good measure for item spread on the measurement scale. The person reliability (0.74) was also within the acceptable range of person reliability index.

Table 2: Summary of item and person reliability for Internet skills for study use

Measure Summary	Item	Person
Mean (S. D.)	0.00 (0.43)	0.39 (0.59)
Reliability	0.99	0.74

INTERNET RESOURCES (ACCESS AND COST)

The third subset of the survey was Internet resources (access and cost) and contained six items (36, 37, 43, 44, 45 and 46). Rasch based reliability for items and persons were obtained, as shown in Table 3. The item reliability was 0.99 (see Table 3) and indicative of a very good measure for item spread on the measurement scale. The person reliability (0.59) was also within the acceptable range of person reliability index.

Table 3: Summary of item and person reliability for Internet resources (access and cost)

Measure Summary	Item	Person
Mean (S. D.)	0.00 (0.31)	0.39 (0.72)
Reliability	0.99	0.59

ANALYSIS OF NORMALITY

Many parametric tests (correlation, regression, t tests, and analysis of variance) assume that the population or sample is normally distributed. In a normal distribution, the data are represented by a smooth curve which peaks in the middle and has symmetrical tails. However, type 1 errors cannot be avoided in the assumption of normality (Myers & Well, 1995). Type 1 errors occur when the null hypothesis is true and researchers accept it. The normality of the distribution could be substantiated by a test of normality such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test, in which the theoretical cumulative distribution function of the sample distribution is contrasted with the empirical distribution function (EDF) of the data (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Factors of the survey were checked for normality. Table 4 shows the result of the normality tests.

Table 4: Normality statistics of the survey data

	Mean	S.D	Test	Level of significance
Attitude towards the Internet for study use	2.65	0.42	One-sample K-S	.006
The Internet skills for study use	2.70	0.52	One-sample K-S	.000
Internet resources (access and cost)	2.59	0.68	One-sample K-S	.000

Based on the assumption of the null hypothesis (the sample distribution is normal), the normality test (the K-S test) was conducted. The level of significance was measured at $p \leq .05$. Using one-sample K-S test of normality, significant values for 'attitude towards the Internet for study use', 'the Internet skills for study use' and 'Internet resources (access and cost)' were computed at .006, .000 and .000 respectively, which were significant at $p \leq .05$. As the test was significant, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. The rejection of the null hypothesis showed that the sample distribution was not normal. For the context of non-normal data, Ghasemi and Zahediasl (2012) demonstrated that if the sample consists of a large amount of data, the assumption of normality could be ignored. Moreover, most of the education data are non-normal, therefore results should be interpreted cautiously (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The survey results were interpreted cautiously and the percentages of each response (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree) were computed and used to describe the survey findings.

SAMPLE

In this study, the students from eighteen Indian Bachelor of Education colleges were selected. Colleges of Punjabi University, Patiala (India) and Punjab University, Chandigarh (India), were selected. Initially, data were collected from 1090 participants. However, while preparing data for analysis and during the data cleaning process, 48 of the survey instruments reviewed showed corrupted responses (for example, participants ticked more than one response to the individual survey items) and 42 participants did not complete the instrument. Thus, only 1000 survey instruments that had been accurately completed were used and analysed in this study. Table 5 shows the distribution of the survey participants on the basis of university name and gender.

Table 5: Number of survey participants

University name	Males	Females	Total
Punjabi University	155	435	590
Punjab University	40	370	410
Total	195	805	1000

A total of 590 students (155 males and 435 females) who participated were from Punjabi University, Patiala (India), and 410 students (40 males and 370 females) who participated were from Punjab University, Chandigarh (India). In this way, a total of 195 males and 805 females took part in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey results showed that male and female students have different attitudes towards Internet use for educational purposes. Table 6 presents the distribution of male and female students' attitudes towards use of the Internet for their learning.

Table 6: Gender differences in attitude towards the Internet use for study purposes

Gender	N	M	S.D.
Males	195	2.59	0.41
Females	805	2.66	0.42
Total	1000	2.65	0.42

N = Number of participants, M = Mean, S.D. = Standard Deviation

The above table shows the mean score (M) of attitude towards Internet use of male participants is 2.59, with a standard deviation of .41. The females' mean score of attitude towards the Internet was slightly higher at 2.66, with a 0.42 standard deviation (S.D.) value. Both genders showed a positive attitude towards Internet use for learning. In order to determine whether there was a difference between these mean scores, comparative analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used, where significant differences were evaluated at an alpha level of .05 and less. A significant difference was found for attitudes towards the Internet between males and females [$F(1, 998) = 4.60, p < .05$]. The results showed that male and female students had different attitudes towards the Internet. Females showed more positive attitudes towards the Internet ($M = 2.66$) than their male counterparts ($M = 2.59$). The more positive attitude of female students in this study demonstrated that female participants preferred to use the Internet more for study purposes than the male participants.

The assumption of Bijker and Pinch (1987) regarding the gender differences in using the technology proved to be correct, as this thesis showed female participants had a more positive attitude towards the Internet use than male participants. The more positive attitude of female students in this study demonstrated that female participants preferred to use the Internet more for study purposes than the male participants.

In contrast to past research, such as, Abedalaziz, Jamaluddin & Leng, 2013; Suri & Sharma, 2013, that claimed no gender differences among tertiary education students in relation to Internet use for learning purposes, the current study found a significant gender difference in attitude towards the Internet use. Furthermore, this study contradicts the findings by Tobishima (2020), Zabadi and Alawi (2016), Liaw and Huang (2011), Jabreen and Jammal (2008) which found that male students possessed a more positive attitude towards the Internet than female counterparts and suggests female students have more positive attitudes towards Internet use for learning than males. Similarly, some other research (Jeyshankar, 2020; Sebnmen, 2015; Khudair & Oshan, 2008; Dhiman, Birbal, & Bhim, 2014) demonstrated that female students had more positive attitudes towards Internet use for learning, however these studies were limited by that fact that only one university was included in each population studied. The population might have been extended to include universities at different development levels and within different geographical regions. The

current study addresses this issue by selecting samples from different tertiary educational institutions in India.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation that placed constraints on this research is the sample used for the study. The sample was selected from tertiary education students who were doing a Teacher Education degree from the Punjab state of India. The results of this study had to be cautiously interpreted against the educational colleges of India, as the bigger context of the study.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that both genders showed a positive attitude towards Internet use for learning. Bijker and Pinch (1987) demonstrated that there could be a significant gender difference in the use of the technology, similarly, in this study, a significant gender difference was found in the positive attitude towards the Internet; female participants showed a more positive attitude towards Internet use for their learning than their male counterparts.

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**APPENDIX A
INTERNET USE SCALE**

Dear Student,

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions in this survey.

Since everyone is different, it is important that your responses reflect your personal views.

Your responses are confidential and these surveys are anonymous. Please respond to all items inserting an X in the box that states whether you strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement.

This survey should take from 15 – 20 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time!

Date:

Gender: *(Please insert an X in the box)*

Male	
Female	

Item- No.	Survey items	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	The Internet has a great impact on tertiary students' studies.					
2.	The Internet helps to students in their studies.					
3.	The Internet is a fast and efficient means for gaining information.					
4.	The Internet provides a wide range of study materials to tertiary students.					
5.	I look forward to using the Internet for my studies.					
6.	I have full command of using the Internet.					
7.	The Internet learning challenges are very exciting.					
8.	I think it is easier to do academic work and studies with the help of the Internet.					
9.	I believe that the Internet helps me a lot in my studies.					
10.	I think the Internet is one of the best information sources.					
11.	I prefer to use the Internet rather than textbooks for learning.					

12.	I think that the Internet is a necessary educational tool.					
13.	If given the opportunity, I would like to learn more about the use of the Internet for my studies.					
14.	The Internet helps tertiary students in their studies.					
15.	The Internet helps to collect study materials from around the world.					
16.	Knowledge of the Internet is essential for tertiary students.					
17.	Internet is as important as other educational tools.					
18.	Using the Internet is more comfortable than being in the Library.					
19.	I have found the Internet to be as informative as lecturers.					
20.	I feel overwhelmed using the Internet in my studies.					
21.	The Internet helps me in finding the study material.					
22.	I do not hesitate to use the Internet in my studies.					
23.	The Internet is an effective learning tool for educational research.					
24.	I become curious when using the Internet in my studies.					
25.	I feel intimidated by the Internet.					
26.	The overuse of the Internet may be harmful and damaging to tertiary students.					
27.	The Internet is a very important tool for tertiary students.					
28.	The complexity of the Internet intimidates me.					
29.	I think textbooks provide better content for learning than the Internet.					

30.	I am not skilled in using the Internet for study purposes.					
31.	I use the Internet only if I don't have reading material in printed form such as books.					
32.	I never use the Internet because it requires technical skills to use it.					
33.	The Internet contains useless information.					
34.	I am insecure about using the Internet for educational purposes.					
35.	I have security concerns about using the Internet.					
36.	I have a computer at home.					
37.	I can connect to the Internet from my home computer.					
38.	I often use the Internet for my study purposes.					
39.	The Internet is an effective tool for learning.					
40.	Internet access at home helps enhance learning opportunities for students.					
41.	The Internet provides diversity of learning materials.					
42.	Using the Internet is very helpful for university students' learning.					
43.	I can easily afford having the Internet at home.					
44.	It is convenient to use the Internet in my home.					
45.	I often depend on my university library for using the Internet.					
46.	I use the Internet for a limited time in my home because of its cost.					

You are requested to return the form after completing it. The form should be returned in person to the student researcher.