

Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: The Gendered Impact of Technologies and AI on Civic Engagement and Democracy Building

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of AI into various aspects of social and political life worldwide has a multifaceted impact on civic engagement and e-democracy. While AI shows potential to enhance participation and inclusivity, when viewed through a gendered lens, it can also introduce biases and challenges that disproportionately affect different genders and age groups.

The *objective* of this paper is to explore the societal impact that technologies and AI have on civic engagement in crisis response, local governance, and collective issue-solving, considering a gendered perspective within the frameworks of the empowerment theory and the theory of collective action.

Keywords: technology, society, participation, crisis management, Ukraine

JEL codes: H11, H12

RESULTS

The introduction of AI and technology in civic activism to support democratic transformations at the community and state levels presents both opportunities and challenges from a gendered perspective.

On one hand, the use of AI and technology enhances inclusivity, benefiting individuals of all genders, particularly those facing barriers to physical participation, amplifies women's and LGBTIQ+ voices, and increases the efficiency and convenience of e-participation in addressing socially significant issues.

On the other hand, challenges such as gender-based data gaps, gender bias in algorithms leading to discriminatory decision-making, underrepresentation of female and LGBTQ+ perspectives, as well as those of youth and older people, and a widening digital divide exist.

These challenges affect access to civic and government technology products and public services.

In conclusion, the author describes how technologies empower civic actors to acquire interpersonal and political power for effective co-action, considering such action as socio-technical arrangements where technology, institutions, and societies are interconnected and mutually shape one another.

Civic actors and their networks engage in technology-mediated interactions, forming new techno-social assemblages. The paper concludes with policy recommendations on how these assemblages can be leveraged as a driving force for societal development during crises and toward democratic progress, fostering the creation of a more supportive, inclusive, and equal society for all.

METHODOLOGY

To comprehensively investigate the gendered impact of technologies and AI on civic engagement and democracy building, this study employs a qualitative research approach, primarily relying on a case study of Ukraine. The choice of Ukraine as the case study is particularly relevant due to its unique context, which encompasses ongoing digitalization reforms and the profound challenges posed by the Russian war, including physical infrastructure damage and blackouts. To delve into the intricacies of these developments, we have conducted expert semi-structured interviews with five representatives from civil society organizations actively engaged in the processes of digitalization reform within Ukraine.

The interviews were conducted on-site by experts possessing profound knowledge of the e-service systems provided by both the government and the civic sector. This knowledge helps to build a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and nuances of these systems, which is crucial for the thorough analysis of the research questions. The familiarity with the challenges induced by the ongoing Russian conflict allows author to investigate the gendered impact of technology in a crisis-ridden environment.

While the sample size of five interviewees is not considered representative for the country, it was chosen to capture diverse perspectives from both providers and consumers of e-services in Ukraine, while also maintaining a gender-sensitive lens throughout.

To ensure a comprehensive exploration of the topic, author uses the snowball sampling method, whereby each interviewee was asked to recommend additional experts or stakeholders with relevant insights. This approach helps us paint a more holistic picture of the gendered impact of technology in the context of civic engagement and democracy building, ensuring that voices from various facets of Ukrainian society are included in the analysis.

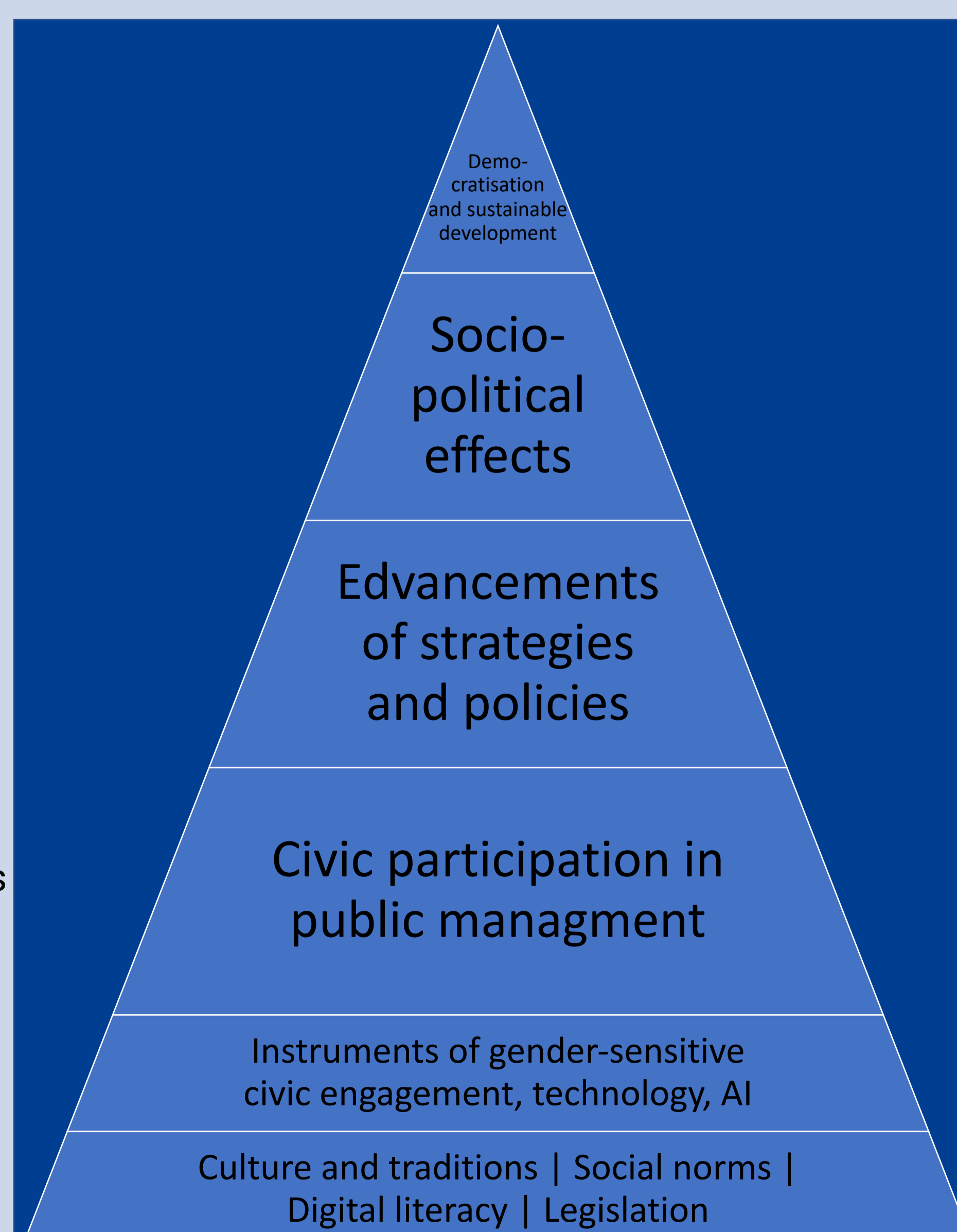
CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTION AND NOVELTY

The research is conducted within the framework of civic engagement theory offers :

The study explains how technology and AI have affected various aspects of civic engagement, including how different genders are included in civic participation and the creation of digital services.

Insights from the study highlight gender-sensitive issues for strategies that promote greater participation and representation of underrepresented genders in civic activities and democratic processes.

The study provides recommendations for policymakers and civil society organizations to address gender disparities and barriers in civic engagement. This includes policy changes to promote inclusivity and diversity, as well as the development of gender-sensitive civic tech initiatives.



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