

Examining the impact of social technologies on empowerment and economic development



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ABSTRACT

Globally, many women continue to face economic and technological challenges. To complicate matters, more than half of the population has no access to the internet. These issues have drawn international attention leading to global efforts by U.S. tech giants to provide world-wide access to the internet. Do social technologies play into the equation of economic development and empowerment for women? This paper reports results from studies conducted in Taiwan and Turkey regarding the use of five different social technologies platforms. Facebook—the largest social network worldwide—also is the most widely used platform in Taiwan and Turkey according to this research. Differences appeared between the two countries among the usage of other social platforms studied including Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Google+. Implications of this data—and data from other countries under study by the authors—will provide answers to women's empowerment and economic development in both developing and developed countries.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the world, women face economic and technological challenges. Recently, international attention of women's equality—including technological and economic issues—have come to the forefront. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2015 (World Economic Forum, 2015), gender inequality exists for women in every country without exception. Women need powerful tools for empowerment which will lead to equality and economic stability.

This research investigates the use of social technologies as it relates to economic development and women's empowerment in both developed and developing countries by surveying women in the workplace regarding the purposes used and benefits realized from social technologies in two countries—Taiwan and Turkey.

Qureshi (2015), supports the need for this global research indicating that the effects of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in improving people's lives should be studied at the individual, organizational, country, regional and world levels. Development at this level is about increasing people's choices so they may have the freedom to pursue the lives they value. In this, income is seen to be an instrument of this freedom to pursue their well-being.

Social technologies have impacted communications on a personal level and more recently as support platforms for businesses. Many studies have been conducted and much has been written on ICTs and specifically social technologies (Chitwood, 2014; Fairchild, 2014; Nord, 2013; eBiz, 2016; Nord, Koohang, and Paliszkievicz, 2014; Qureshi, 2011; Statista, 2015; StatsMonkey, 2015; Ting, Ao, and Lin, 2014; Wu, Tian, Chen, and Chong, 2016), the internet (Bonson & Bednarova, 2015; Harris, 2016; Intel, 2014; Microsoft, 2015a,b; Rushton, 2014; Sareah, 2015; Simonite, 2015; Thapa, 2014), and economic development and women's empowerment (Flor, 2014; Hsu, 2009; Khan & Moin, 2013; Qureshi, 2015; Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010; Gholipour, Rahimian, Mirzamani, and Zehtabi, 2010; Landig, 2011; Levi, Factor, and Deutsch, 2013; Levin, 2011; Maden, 2015; Mosedale, 2014; Najjar, 2011; Nazneen, Darkway,

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and Sultan, 2014; NCJW, 2014; Presby, 2013; Sengupta, 2013; Shah, Aziz, and Ahmad, 2015; Sinha, 2012; UNWomen, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2015) separately. No previous studies, however, were identified which specifically examined women's empowerment and economic development through social technologies. Rapid growth, global reach, ease of use, and numerous social technologies platforms available cannot be ignored as potential empowerment tools.

Based on the literature, it is known that an economic participation and opportunity gender gap exists world-wide (World Economic Forum, 2015) and despite awareness, government policies, and court cases, this gap has shown very slow improvement and even setbacks over the years.

The question remaining is "What action will significantly reduce or eliminate this gap and provide empowerment for women leading to economic development?" This study addresses this question by determining whether the benefits realized through social technologies provide the answer.

The next section includes the theoretical background and literature review including 1) The two countries studied—Taiwan and Turkey; 2) The Internet and Social Technologies; and 3) Economic Development and Women's Empowerment followed by results of the study.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

2.1. Taiwan

Taiwan—officially the Republic of China—is a sovereign state in East Asia. Today Taiwan maintains an advanced industrial economy as a result of rapid economic growth and industrialization in the late twentieth century. The 21st-largest economy in the world, its high-tech industry plays a key role in the global economy. Taiwan is ranked highly in terms of freedom of the press, health care, public education, economic freedom, and human development. (Taiwan, 2016)

A gender pay gap exists throughout the world, and Taiwan is no exception. An article in the Taipei Times (Gender, 2015), indicated that The Ministry of Labor set the current year's Equal Pay Day at Feb. 24, based on estimates that Taiwanese women needed to work that far into the year to earn the same amount as the average man did last year which translates into 15% less than the salaries of their male co-workers. Closing the gap has improved—although slow—from 20% in 2003–15% in 2015. There are many countries, including the U.S. which are contending with even greater gender wage gaps.

2.2. Turkey

Turkey—officially the Republic of Turkey—is a parliamentary republic in Eurasia, largely located in Western Asia, with the smaller portion of Eastern Thrace in Southeast Europe. Turkey is bordered by eight countries: Syria and Iraq to the south; Iran, Armenia, and the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan to the east; Georgia to the northeast; Bulgaria to the northwest; and Greece to the west. The Black Sea is to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the south, and the Aegean Sea to the west. The Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles demarcate the boundary between Thrace and Anatolia; they also separate Europe and Asia. Turkey's location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia makes it a country of significant geostrategic importance. (Turkey, 2016)

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2015), Turkey ranks 130th out of 145 countries listed with a score of 0.624 on the economic participation and opportunity index. This means that Turkish women face a 38% gender gap from males

working in the same fields. Landig (2011) believes that Turkey has not tapped into the potential of information technology to benefit its women.

Women find it challenging to balance home and work life while experiencing gender inequalities. Taiwan and Turkey are examples of how the problem exists globally, but in most cases the problem is much more severe in developing countries. What is the solution? Could social technologies—as a means of economic development and empowerment for women—help close the gender gap and provide economic stability for women?

2.3. Internet and social technologies

2.3.1. Global access to the internet

A survey of internet users around the world conducted by Microsoft Corp. shows an overwhelming majority believes personal technology is making the world a better place to live and has vastly improved how they shop, work, learn and generally get things done (Microsoft News Center, 2015). Blair (2014), indicates that access to the internet may be a key to addressing age-old inequalities on a significant scale.

"The internet is an essential tool that provides a way for women to get access to the wider world—the world of networks, communities, health and education information, financial advice and business skills training. It's a platform for women to seek help where they need it, so helping to redress the gender imbalance and foster the empowerment of women. Yet, access alone doesn't equal digital empowerment; it is, rather, one of many conditions required to reduce gender inequalities online" (Intel, 2014).

Out of more than 7 billion people on earth, over 4 billion of them don't have access to the internet according to a recent report from the United Nations' Broadband Commission. Only one in every 10 individuals has regular access to the internet in lesser developed countries, and worse yet, access is often striated along gender divides. Given the enormous potential in terms of education, equity, and opportunity provided by the internet, the pace at which broadband has made its way around the world is viewed by many as problematic. (Chung, 2015)

Tech Giants such as Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Intel, and others have taken this seriously and are making significant efforts to bring the internet and social technologies to individuals not as fortunate as those who have found empowerment through these tools (Intel, 2014; Microsoft, 2015b; Rushton, 2014; Simonite, 2015).

Facebook and Google are collaborating on efforts to use balloons and drone aircraft to expand internet access to the four billion people that don't have it. Documents filed with the U.S. Federal Communications Commission show that both companies are pushing for international law to be modified to make it easier to use aircraft around 20 kilometers above the earth, in the stratosphere, to provide internet access. Google has been working for several years on balloons that float in the stratosphere and function as aerial cell towers to provide internet access in areas with poor infrastructure (Simonite, 2015).

Facebook has numerous initiatives in progress to get more people online including its internet.org project encouraging carriers to offer free access to certain sites and through its future solar powered drones. Facebook has also launched 'lite' versions of Facebook and supported low cost smartphones to select developing countries (Vincent, 2015).

Although a number of American companies have plans in place to help spread the wealth when it comes to internet, the U.N.'s Broadband Commission points out that empowering people via broadband needs much more than infrastructure alone, indicating that extending access must be accompanied by the development

of relevant content in different forms (e.g., print, audio, video) and new services (e.g., e-commerce and payments in local languages) (Chung, 2015).

In addition to internet access, tools such as laptops, tablets, or smart phones are needed in order to access the world through social technologies platforms. Facebook's inexpensive smartphone initiatives are an example of such and have made a difference (Dredge, 2014; Vincent, 2015).

2.3.2. Social technologies studied

Social technologies are that dominating force in the modern world that can change minds, catch more business, increase sales or build and shape a brand or business (Sareah, 2015). There are numerous internet organizations listing the top social technologies sites coupled with statistics. Although the results vary somewhat, there seems to be general agreement on at least the top five. The site smallbiztrends.com—a business related site—lists their top 10 in a recent report (Sareah, 2015). The top five follow.

1 Facebook

This is the biggest social networking site with the largest number of users. There are more than 1 million small or medium sized businesses advertising here and it is estimated that larger companies are spending as much as \$100 million on Facebook advertising per year (Sareah, 2015). Statista (2015) reported that as of the third quarter of 2015, Facebook had 1.55 billion monthly active users. Active users are those which have logged in to Facebook during the last 30 days. Furthermore, according to this same report (Statista, 2015) as of that quarter the social network had 1.31 billion mobile MAU—monthly active users—making it the most popular social network worldwide based on global reach and total active users. “Due to its global reach, advertisers and marketers have recognized Facebook's potential as a marketing tool to reach new and existing customers and as a result have come up with innovative ways of reaching their target audiences” (Statista, 2015).

2 Twitter

Twitter is loved for spreading the word via tweets. This site has revolutionized social media. Approximately 81% of Twitter's advertising revenue comes from mobile and there is a \$200,000 cost estimated for a 24-h Promoted Trend on Twitter (Sareah, 2015). As of the third quarter of 2015, Twitter had more than 304 million monthly active users world-wide (Statista, 2015).

3 LinkedIn

LinkedIn helps to build professional networks and engagement with other users. It is the world's largest professional network being used for this purpose. Today, it has over 332 million users and each second adds two new members, all of which attracts marketers (Sareah, 2015).

Understood as a crucial aspect of business, companies have realized the importance of using LinkedIn to actively create, develop and sustain relationships with their stakeholders (Bonson & Bednarova, 2015).

4 Google +

This site has 300 million monthly active users and is used for relationship marketing. It has over a 53% positive interaction between Google+ users and brands (Sareah, 2015). Google Plus had the highest reach in Latin America with a 32% penetration rate in 2015 (Statista, 2015).

5 YouTube

YouTube is expected to generate \$5.6 billion in gross revenue in 2016. Currently, there are 6 billion hours of video watched on YouTube per month and 1 billion videos watched over mobile phones per day (Sareah, 2015). Sixty-three percent of the total US population has used YouTube to watch music videos or listen to music (Statista, 2015).

Table 1 summarizes the social technologies platforms listed above including number of users or video hours watched (YouTube) and the primary business purpose, according to these, that each platform is used (Sareah, 2015; Statista, 2015).

This study focused on the purposes used and the benefits realized from the top five social technologies platforms listed which included Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Google+.

2.4. Economic development and women's empowerment

2.4.1. The gender gap

The annual pay for women globally only now equals the amount men were earning ten years ago (World Economic Forum, 2015). According to the World Economic Forum's (2015) Global Gender Gap report, the worldwide gap has narrowed considerably in education and health and survival, but the gaps in both politics and economic participation and opportunity remain wide. The global gender gap remains a stubborn problem (Ucal, O'Neil, and Toktas, 2015).

Turkey has an abysmal rate of female labour force participation and women are regularly paid less than men (Ucal et al., 2015). Akhmedjonov (2012) notes that the gender wage gap is one of the most popular subjects in socio-economic research, reporting that although not all of the observed differences are a consequence of discrimination, many studies indicate that discrimination against women in the labor market does exist. Cudeville and Gurbuzer (2010) weigh in on this stating that in Turkey, as in all of Europe, male wage earners are better paid than are females with around 63% of the wage differential attributed to discrimination.

Even in Taiwan—the 21st largest economy in the world—the patriarchal system is gradually weakening, yet it still affects the growth of female power (Hsu, 2009).

Not only are there fewer women in leadership positions, Glass and Cook (2016) found that female leaders face greater challenges to their authority and receive less support. Yet, their research suggests, women who reach the top are exceptional in terms of their skill development and leadership capabilities.

In order for the gender gap to close, women must not only have the proper tools for empowerment, they must also take responsibility to learn and use them.

2.4.2. Social technologies and empowerment

Access to the internet and an awareness of the benefits that social technologies can provide are critical to women's empowerment (Nord, Paliszkievicz, Grublješić, Scarlat, & Salome, 2015). Lin and Chou (2011) emphasize that social technologies are becoming an increasingly popular and influential medium of communication.

One of the fastest growing technologies—social technologies—can be used for much more than just personal reasons. Qureshi (2011) adds that use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) can enable development to take place through access to new markets, increased competitiveness, and access to knowledge and skills if applied to address local conditions and individual challenges.

In addition, The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has acknowledged that research can have powerful influences on both policies and institutions in support of development objectives and is therefore likely to be an essential element in

Table 1
Summary of Social Technologies Platforms Studied.

Social Technologies		
Platform	Number of Users or Hours of Videos Watched (YouTube)	Primary Business Purpose
Facebook	1.55 B Users	Marketing
Twitter	304 M Users	Spreading the Word
LinkedIn	332 M Users	Professional Network
Google+	300 M Users	Relationship Marketing
YouTube	6 BH Watched	Marketing

Sources: (Statista, 2015)

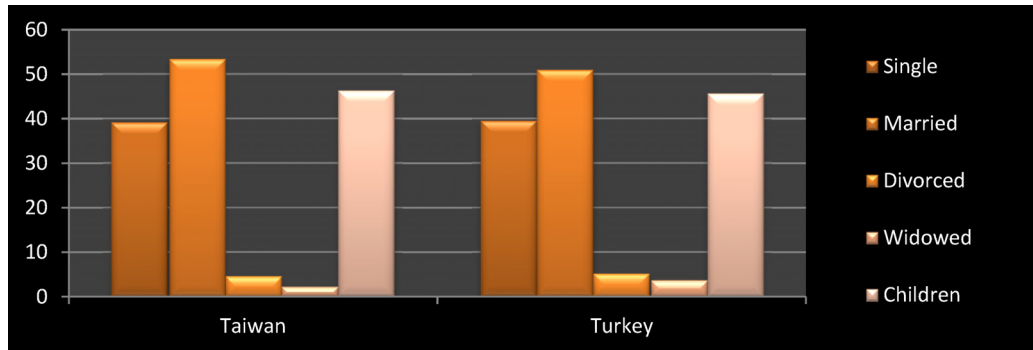


Fig. 1. Marital Status and Percentage with Children.

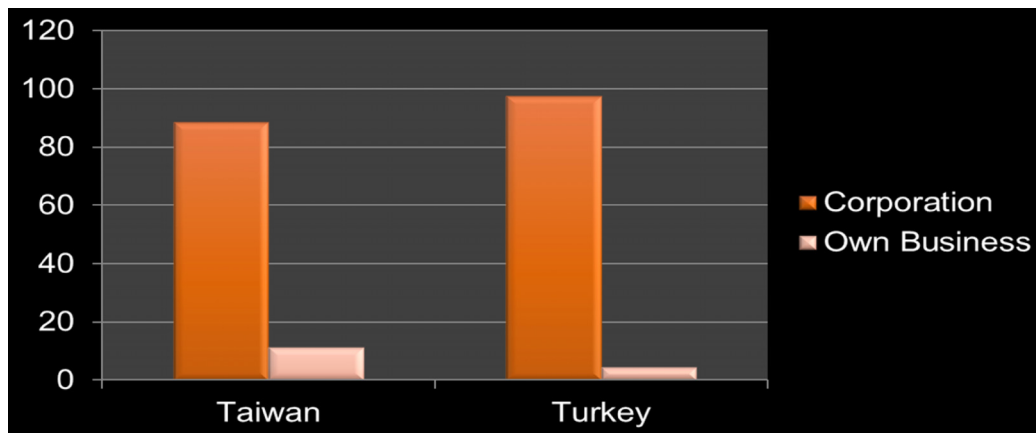


Fig. 2. Work in Corporation vs. Owning a Business.

meeting the Millennium Development Goals and reducing poverty (Harris, 2016).

Support in the workplace can provide economic development and empowerment to those who utilize these technologies to their potential including networking and building professional relationships, communicating, collaborating, customer service, gaining exposure, creating awareness, gaining new customers, increasing revenue/profits, marketing, and recruiting employees. Knowledge of how social technologies are used and benefits realized may serve to empower women worldwide. Internet access alone is not enough.

Simsek (2014, p. 419) sums it up with the following statement: "Considering that there is a directly proportional relationship between the social and economic status of women and economic growth and development, the improvement of the social and economic statuses of women is imperative, especially in the underdeveloped and developing countries." Qureshi (2011) concurs indicating that those who are unable to have access to or use information and communication technologies, risk being excluded from the economic and social processes of globalization.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and procedures

A questionnaire was developed to survey women in the workplace, to primarily determine what social technologies platforms are used, purposes used, and benefits realized. Demographics, use of technologies, and questions on empowerment were also included on the survey instrument. Results are intended to provide answers to women's empowerment which will translate into gender equality and economic development. Women worldwide stand to benefit through gaining an awareness of, a voice through, and global access to powerful support platforms.

The survey instrument was piloted to approximately 50 individuals to determine what changes should be made prior to collecting data for the ongoing global study. The results presented in this paper include data from contrasting countries—Taiwan, which has a gender gap of 15% and Turkey, with close to a 40% gender inequality issue.

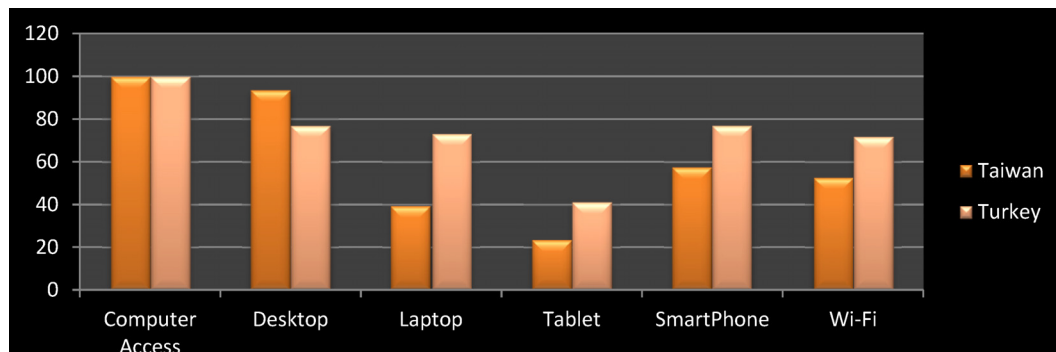


Fig. 3. Access to Computers/Technology.

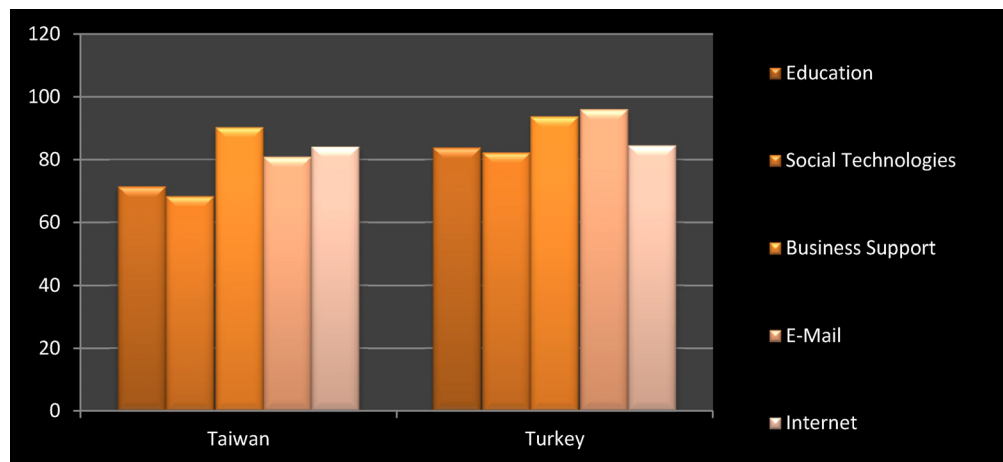


Fig. 4. Use of Computers/Technology.

Researchers in Taiwan and Turkey translated the survey instrument to their native languages and administered it to a total of over 259 working women who agreed to complete the questionnaire and used at least one of the following social technologies for business purposes: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, or Google+.

4. Data analysis

Responses of each of the surveys were translated to English by the respective countries' researchers. Descriptive statistical analyses were used to give the reader a comparative analyses and straight forward applicable results.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Demographics

Respondents provided their name and contact information for credibility purposes, but were assured that this information would be kept confidential. There were 128 usable questionnaires from Taiwanese women and 131 usable questionnaires from Turkish women.

Table 2 reveals the statistical data regarding ages of the respondents for both countries.

The age of the women were very comparable from the two countries with 37 being the average age of the Taiwanese respondents and an average age of 34 reported for the Turkish women.

Fig. 1 reveals the marital status and percentage of respondents with children.

Table 2
Age of Respondents.

Respondent's Age					
Respondent	Mean	Median	Mode	Maximum	Minimum
Taiwan	37	36	34	56	22
Turkey	34	33	39	54	20

Again, the respondents from the two countries were similar with slightly more than half married—53.7% in Taiwan and 51.1% in Turkey. Just under half of all respondents in each country have children—46.5% in Taiwan and 45.8% in Turkey.

Fig. 2 reveals the percentage of respondents from each country studied who work for a corporation vs. owning their own business.

An overwhelming majority of respondents work in a corporation—88.5% of the Taiwanese and 97.7% of the Turkish vs. 11.5% of the Taiwanese women and 2.3% of the women from Turkey owning their own business.

5.2. Technology

All respondents indicated that they had access to computers/technology. Fig. 3 shows the type of devices/technology. Since respondents checked all that applied on the questionnaire, the total percentages exceed 100%.

Women in both countries have used desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and have access to Wi-Fi, with more than 95% of all respondents using computers/technology over five years. It is interesting to note that more of the Taiwanese respondents use

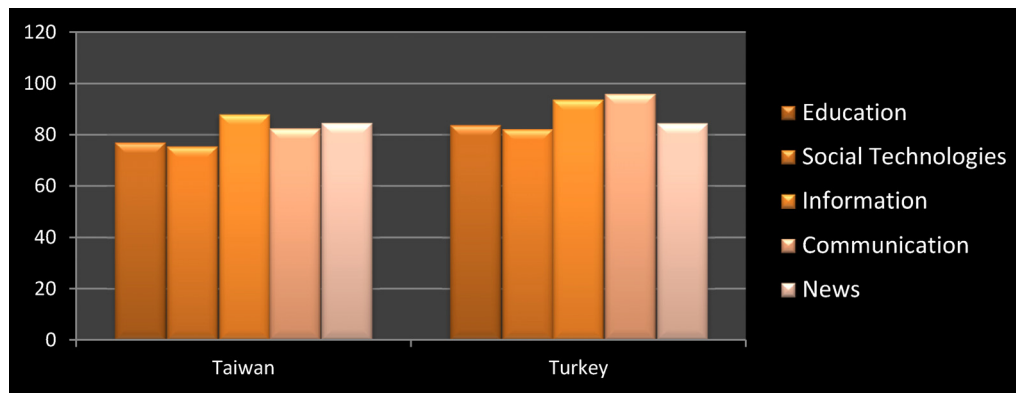


Fig. 5. Awareness of the Benefits Technology can Provide.

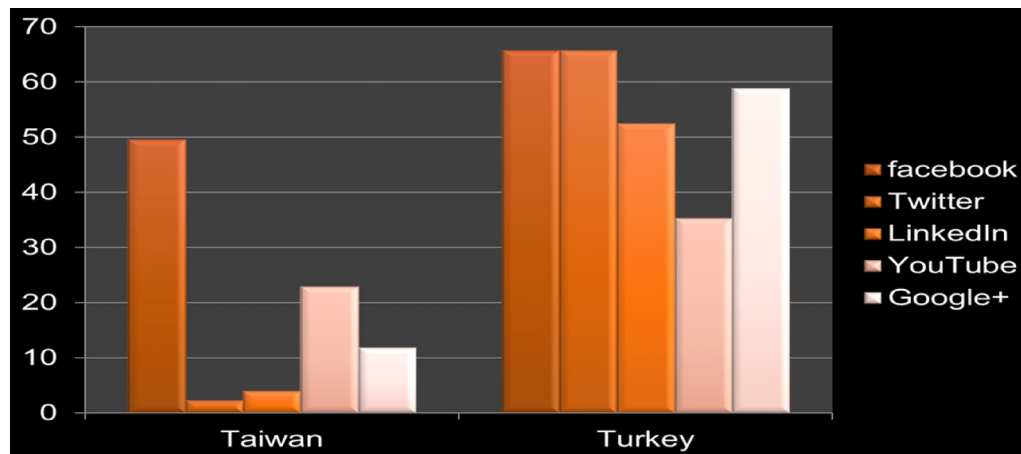


Fig. 6. Social Technologies Platforms Used in the Workplace.

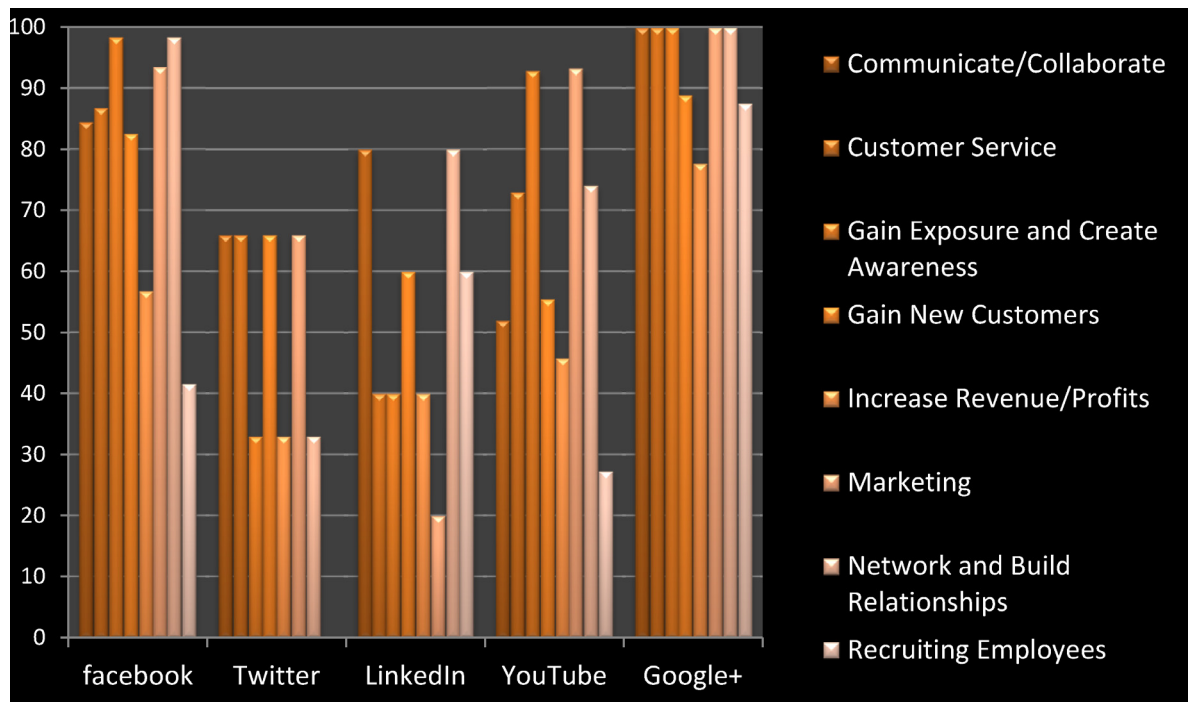


Fig. 7. Platforms and Purposes Social Technologies are Used—Taiwan.

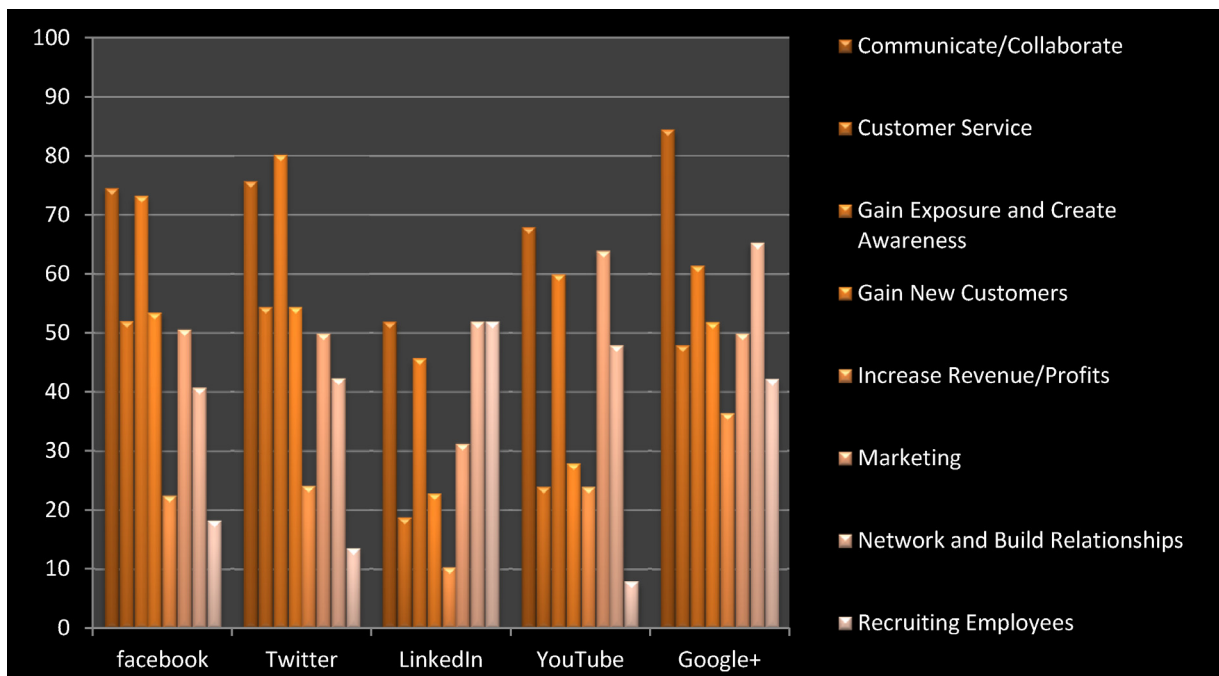


Fig. 8. Platforms and Purposes Social Technologies are Used—Turkey.

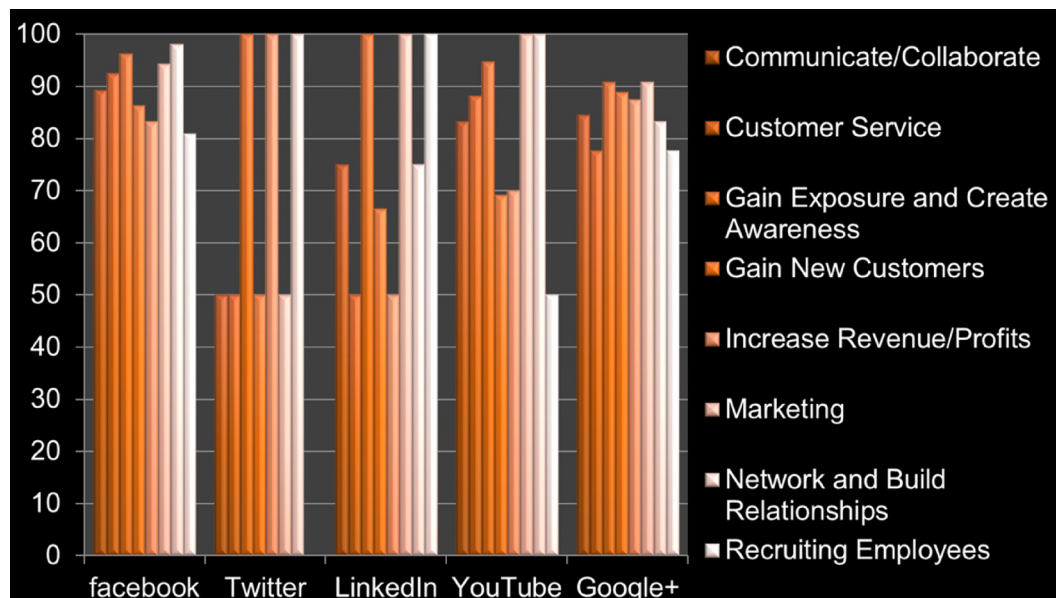


Fig. 9. Benefits of Social Technologies by Purpose—Taiwan.

desktops, while a greater percentage of the Turkish respondents use mobile devices and Wi-Fi.

Respondents use computers for a variety of reasons as indicated in Fig. 4. Fig. 5 reveals the percentage of respondents who are aware of the benefits of the use of technology by purpose.

Respondents from both countries show high levels of the use of technology for the purposes listed as well as a high level of awareness. In all cases, the Turkish women respondents were slightly higher than the Taiwanese women respondents in these two categories.

The use of social technologies for business purposes has surged in recent years. It is important to gain knowledge on how social technologies are used and whether benefits were realized. This

information can serve as empowering knowledge to women around the globe.

Fig. 6 reveals the percentage of users—women in the workplace—from both Taiwan and Turkey regarding the five social platforms studied.

All platforms are used by women in both countries, although the percentage of Turkish women using social technologies in the workplace was much higher than those from Taiwan. It is difficult to speculate without additional research, but it may be since women in Taiwan enjoy more gender equality than those in Turkey, the Turkish women have—out of necessity—discovered the benefits of using social technologies in their slow climb to equal economic participation and opportunities.

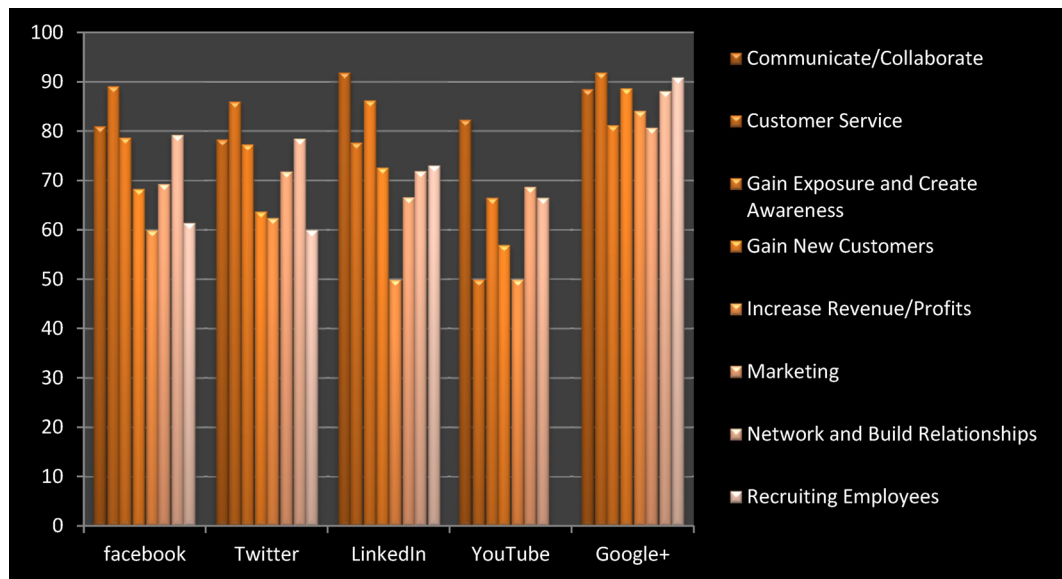


Fig. 10. Benefits of Social Technologies by Purpose—Turkey.

Facebook still dominates with approximately half of the Taiwanese respondents using Facebook in the workplace and almost 70% of the Turkish women indicating that they use Facebook for business purposes. A significant difference was found in the use of Twitter between the two countries. In Taiwan, only 2.3% of the women responding use Twitter, while two-thirds or 66% of those from Turkey indicated use of the Twitter platform. Neither LinkedIn nor Google+ are used to a large extent—less than 12%—by the Taiwanese women responding. Approximately one-fourth of the respondents from Taiwan use YouTube. Social technologies platforms listed all show significant use by the Turkish women respondents with YouTube being the lowest at 35.3%.

Equally as important to the social technologies platforms used, are the purposes these platforms are used for and the benefits realized. (Figs. 7–10) Figs. 7 through 10 graphically depict these results for each of the two countries in this study.

As the graphic results in Figs. 7 through 10 reveal, respondents who indicated that they use a specific social technology platform, were asked to indicate purposes and for each purpose whether benefits have been realized. Respondents used the social technologies for all purposes listed and realized benefits from all.

Complete details are revealed in the graphics, with highlights of the platforms, purposes, and benefits realized discussed. Over 80% of the Taiwanese respondents who use Facebook indicated that they use this platform to communicate/collaborate with 89.3% realizing benefits; for customer service with 92.5% indicating Facebook was beneficial for this use; to gain exposure and create awareness with 96.3% realizing benefits; to gain new customers with 86.3% benefitting, for marketing with a 94.3% experiencing success; and to network and build relationships with 98.1% realizing benefits.

A majority of the Turkish women respondents use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. Purposes used by the highest number of respondents for Facebook include communicating and collaborating with over 80% indicating benefits were realized; and to gain exposure and create awareness with 78.8% realizing benefits. Twitter is used by two-thirds of the respondents from Turkey with over 75% using this platform to communicate and collaborate. From this group, 78.4% believe that this was a beneficial use of Twitter. Over 80% of the Turkish respondents use Twitter to gain exposure and create awareness with 77.4% realizing benefits.

In several cases, respondents indicated that they did not know whether benefits were realized. This is understandable—especially

Table 3
Experience with Social Technologies.

Experience with Social Technologies		
Country	Positive	Negative
Taiwan	71.0	29.0
Turkey	93.3	7.4

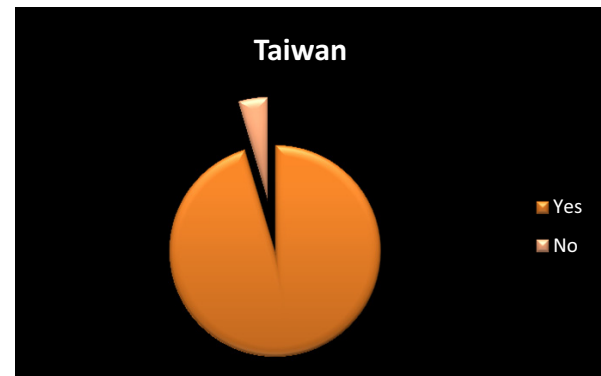


Fig. 11. Empowerment through Social Technologies? Taiwan.

in larger corporations—because those who determine ROI may be different from those who use social technologies for various purposes.

Table 3 shows the percentages of respondents from each country who indicated whether their experience using social technologies had been positive or negative. Although 71% of Taiwanese responded that their experience was positive, this was overshadowed by the responses from the 93.3% of the Turkish women responding.

Figs. 11 and 12 illustrate the responses to the question: Do you believe that education and social technologies can empower you or help you become more successful? Over 95% of the respondents from both countries studied responded with a 'Yes.' This clearly speaks to the empowerment opportunities that women across the globe so desperately need to close the gender gap.

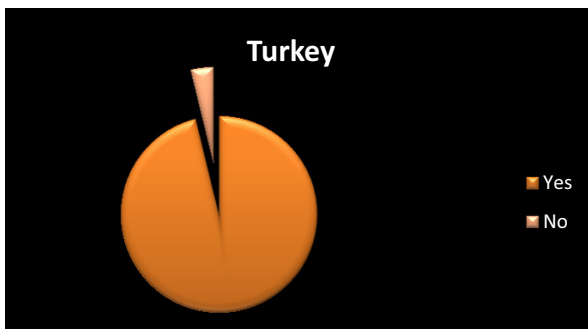


Fig. 12. Empowerment through Social Technologies? Turkey.

6. Implications and conclusions

For women, the internet and social technologies are powerful tools for empowerment. Although certain platforms are better suited for specific purposes, Facebook continues to dominate the social technologies arena.

Results from this study show that social technologies platforms including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Google+ are used in the workplace to communicate and collaborate; for customer service; to gain exposure and create awareness; to gain new customers; to increase revenue/profits; for marketing purposes, to network and build relationships; and for recruiting employees; all with realized benefits.

This research contributes to the IT for development research by providing a solution to economic development through women's empowerment using social technologies. The respondents experience using social technologies was overall positive with purposes used and benefits realized identified—but perhaps more importantly—over 95% indicated that they believe social technologies and education could provide empowerment which would help them to become more successful.

Results can not only be applied by women in search of economic equality, but are relevant to academics and practitioners in IT. Distribution of the results is equally as important as the research. Harris (2016) contends that an apparent disconnection from real-world issues and the people who might make good use of its findings exists.

Academics should strive to make results—which can shape policy and be applied by practitioners—available through ICTs including traditional publications available online, social technologies, and the media. Only then can real economic development be realized as a result of the research.

About 91.1% agree that research-based evidence is important for shaping policy and 93.8% agree that it is important for shaping professional practice (Harris, 2016).

Results revealed in this study are intended to serve women in countries across the globe—both developed and developing—many facing the same challenges. Opportunities are greater than ever before with social technologies expanding an organization's and individual's reach worldwide.

Social technologies have the potential to deliver tremendous benefits. Availability of the internet, technological devices, social technologies platforms, and knowledge of the purposes and benefits of these platforms will open the doors of empowerment and economic development to those who are willing to walk through them.

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