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Rafi Goldberg
National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
U.S Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 4725
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Goldberg,

As a professor of communication studies, for more than two decades I have been studying inequalities in people's Internet uses resulting in over one hundred academic publications that have been cited 25,000+ times in the scientific literature. In particular, I have focused on differences in people's Internet skills (also referred to as digital skills or digital literacy) and how these are often linked to what people do online. People with higher skills are consistently more active online especially in so-called capital-enhancing activities, i.e., the types of activities from which they may reap rewards like looking up health and financial information and learning about government services.

I write to request and recommend that future iterations of the CPS Internet Use Supplement include the succinct Internet skills measure (exact wording at the bottom of this letter) that I have developed over the years and which has been adopted by numerous scholars since.

It is worth noting that the item went through a competitive call for inclusion in the European Social Survey (ESS) and would be in the field right now were it not for Covid (it is an in-person survey). It will be included when ESS is able to go back into the field.

I published three methodological papers specifically about the development of this instrument sharing results about: (a) the testing I did on it in relation to observing people's actual skills (Hargittai, 2005); (b) whether the survey proxy reflects something real by including bogus items which proved to perform the lowest (Hargittai, 2009); and (c) recommendations for a shortened version of the original 27-item scale based on data gathered about two special populations (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2012). (All of the papers cited in this document are accessible directly at bit.ly/wuppubs.) It is this latter short version that I recommend here.

Earlier in my career, I relied on the CPS CIUS for research (e.g., Dobransky & Hargittai 2006 on the disability divide in Internet use was one of the first papers on that topic), but as it became increasingly evident from other data sets that skills are an important part of the puzzle when it comes to understanding inequalities in people's Internet uses, and given that the CPS IUS does

not collect data on such skills, this data set could no longer address some of the most fundamental questions about digital inequality so I stopped analyzing it. Were a future version of the Internet Use Supplement to incude such a measure, it would open up its potential tremendously. Scholars regularly contact me to ask about the measure so that they can include it in their studies. Unfortunately, no one beyond the Census and NTIA has the resources to collect the type of data set the CPS makes available and thus we lack crucial data to understand the contours of digital inequality in the United States. (I wrote about the problems with such dearth of data in an oped on "Broadband Subsidies Important, but More Data Needed to Inform FCC Policy Decisions" published in *Huffington Post*.)

Internet skills represent people's ability to use the Internet effectively and efficiently. Beyond gaining physical access and having autonomy to use digital devices, people also need to have Internet-relevant awareness and understanding to benefit from information and communication technologies. That is what the proposed measure captures.

I appreciate your consideration of this addition to the CPS IUS. Please let me know if I can provide additional information as you consider this addition.

Sincerely,

Eszter Hargittai

Proposed addition to the CPS Internet Use Supplement: Internet skills survey question:

What is your level of understanding of the following Internet-related items? Please indicate whether you have no understanding of the item, little understanding, some understanding, good understanding or full understanding of the item.

Answer options:
1   No understanding
2   Little understanding
3   Some understanding
4   Good understanding
5   Full understanding

1   Advanced search
2   Cache
3   PDF
4   Spyware
5   Wiki
6   Phishing