American Psychological Association

Technology, Mind & Society
2021 Conference Proceedings

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/xxxxxxx
ISBN:

Abstracts of the 2021 Technology, Mind, & Society Conference

Understanding Community Definitions of Digital Literacy: Findings from the Nashville Digital Equity Study

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Digital literacy plays a key role in internet adoption and interest in using the internet (NTIA, 2017). According to American Library Association (2021), digital literacy is "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills" (n.p.). Research shows some communities are considered "tech deserts," wherein deep pockets of need and inequity exist when it comes to access to broadband, an essential infrastructure linked to social determinants of health (Brookings, 2020). The Metro Nashville Information Technology Services (ITS) predicts the zip codes of 37207, 37208, and 37211 see the largest number of residents without access to the internet by device, phone, or at home. These same communities also do not feel like they know how to use the internet and lack the necessary digital training and skills needed to fully participate in our digital society. As such, the Nashville Digital Inclusion Taskforce has partnered with Vanderbilt University to conduct a mixed method needs assessment to better understand the unique context of Nashville's digital skills gap. This effort includes community leader-derived definitions and understandings of digital literacy, as well as quantitative measures of internet access, use, engagement, and skills, specifically in identified tech deserts (n=2,548) This poster will present focused findings pertaining to measures and definitions of digital literacy (via data visualizations) and will highlight the challenges digital skills and training gaps pose for internet use and adoption in Nashville. Implications for future digital inclusion efforts will be discussed.