

Fast Internet and Gender Norms: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

Eugenia Maria Frezza

Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

frezzae@tcd.ie

Abstract:

Is internet a tool for women's empowerment or does it exacerbate discriminatory gender norms? I answer this question by exploiting the gradual arrival of fast internet between 2008-2012 on African coasts via submarine cables from Europe to retrieve a causal effect of internet on gender norms around attitudes towards intimate-partner-violence (IPV). Specifically, I compare individuals' attitudes towards violence in locations with high internet penetration and those without, exploiting differences in the timing of the high-speed internet arrival. Results show that fast internet leads to more regressive gender norms. Individuals located in connected areas are more likely to find violence justifiable. This effect is stronger for males. I then explore the potential mechanisms behind this result. The most likely mechanism to be at play in this setting is that internet causes more regressive gender norms because it might change the balance of power within the household, by affecting labour market opportunities for men and women differently.

Keywords: Development Economics, Gender Economics

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