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"Read More, Grow More"

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STATUS OF DIGITAL LITERACY AMONG RURAL WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

Technological advances in recent decades have led to numerous changes in the ways we communicate, learn and teach, regardless of whether we have embraced this change or derided it. With these technological changes, new skill sets are also required. One notion that is often discussed is digital literacy, sometimes referred to in plural form to emphasise the many components contained within it. Today, laptops, tablets, cell phones, email, e-Readers, and social media reign supreme. While these devices have brought a tremendous amount of value to learners of every age, the digital world is one with its own set of rules and risks. It is necessary to develop digital literacy skills with which students can communicate and express their ideas effectively using digital media.

The term 'digital literacy' was coined in 1997 by Paul Gilster who defined it as "The ability to both understand and use digitized information" (Gilster 1997) The concept, which had been discussed widely throughout the 1990s, was built upon the discourses of visual literacy (using non-textual symbols and images to make sense of knowledge); technological literacy (the ability to use a particular technology or technologies); computer literacy (which had developed in the 1980s as a response to the launch of personal computers and which described the computer as a means to achieving a specified outcome); and information literacy (finding, evaluating, using and sharing information)

Digital literacies are defined by the authors as 'the individual and social skills needed to effectively interpret, manage, share and create meaning in the growing range of digital communication channels. The authors state that someday in the future, digital literacies will be 'so enmeshed in our routine language and literacy practices that we will barely notice them anymore' and they make a strong case for digital literacies claiming that if we continue with a traditional print-medium approach to language teaching, we 'short-change our students on their present and future needs.

Kress (2003) stated that there is "the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen." The illiteracies are beyond reading from the screen.

Baker, Pearson and Rozendal (2010) argued that "By the ways we help our populace engage in technology-based communication. Finally, new perspective may shed new light on the phenomena of

reading and writing with technology and proposed that there are four characteristic of literacy, namely semiotic, public, transitory, and product-oriented, where the literacy is a process of understanding "multiple sign system" that it is shared with others and endure different dynamics of making to make communication to specific audience. Furthermore, they claimed that "Literacy was shaped by the culture of a technology-rich...that used technology to find and share information and insight. Given socio cultural perspective, focus shift from individual cognition to cultural norms."

According to Cole & Pullen (2010), "multiliteracies is therefore a platform for the multiple elements that converge in educational practice as it is performed in formal and non-formal situation to explain the ways in which emotion work in human cognition by making connections between the mind desire, rationality, language, and the unconscious."

Reyna, Hanham & Meier (2004) listed the terms given to the new literacies as online literacies, media literacy, new media literacy, multimodal literacy, and digital.

Lankshear and knobel (2003) gave the various names for literacies as oral literacy, visual literacy, information literacy, media literacy, science literacy, and emotional literacy.

IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL LITERACY

Technology holds immense potential for the achievement of gender equality, in ways far exceeding social media activism. But in many developing countries the digital literacy gender divide is growing. In a world that is increasingly moving online and reliant on technology for business, social connection, just about everything.

When we think about women's empowerment and gender equality, access to technology and digital literacy may not be front of mind. But the gender digital divide is real, and it's a real problem. While it varies from country to country, studies suggest that globally in developing countries the number of women using the internet is 12% less than men. The Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs), the new global framework for development, point to digital literacy as a key driver of gender equality.

WHY TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL LITERACY IS SO IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN:

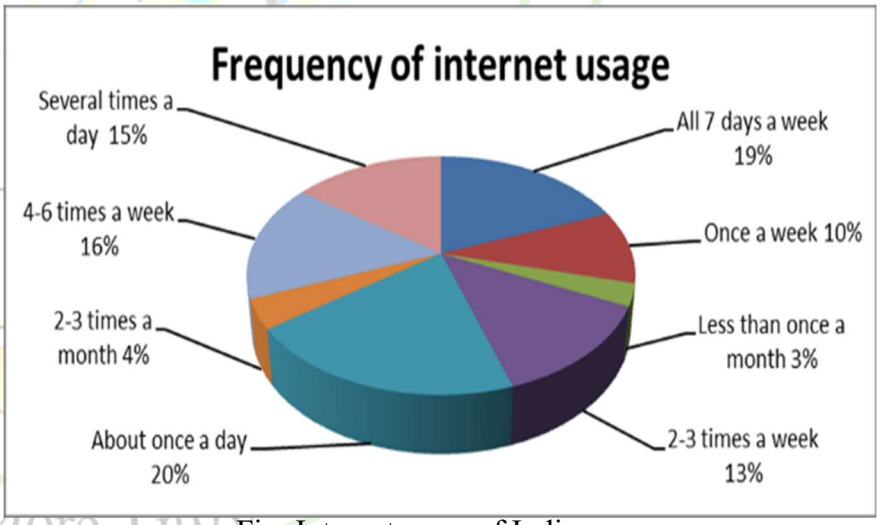

Fig: Internet users of India
(Source: DART consulting, Market news,2014)

1. Economic participation

Supporting access to and use of technology could create 140 million new jobs. Increasing women's digital literacy gives them the chance to actively participate in the economy. It can provide access to finance, mobile banking and employment-related services. And we know when women

are economically empowered these ripples out to their families and communities.

2 Activism and participation in campaigns against gender inequality

Campaign has increased visibility of women in public spaces throughout the country. Women's ability to connect and mobilise via social media and the internet is increasingly vital to the success of campaigns against gender inequality.

3 Access to information, connection and liberation

The internet means access to a wealth of information. It means women's ability to communicate with each other freely. It can mean access to maps which changes the way they travel and the routes they take. It can mean regaining a sense of agency in their own education as they teach themselves new skills and develop their interests by searching the web and accessing resources. As they say, knowledge is power.

4 Provide an interim solution to traditional limitations of mobility

Women in developing countries face structural and social barriers that prevent them from participating in activities outside the home. Traditional gender roles position women primarily in the household which can physically prevent them from seeking educational opportunities. Learning how to access a wealth of resources online removes the physical barrier of having to leave the house to learn. Although this doesn't directly address the inequalities that keep women in the home in the first place, it represents an important nudge in the direction of gender equality.

STATUS OF DIGITAL LITERACY AMONG WOMEN IN INDIA:

The status of digital literacy among women can be understood by this fact that digital gender gap in India is huge. Less than a third of India's total internet users are female, that is 29%. Globally in developing countries, the number of women using the internet is 12% less than men. The reasons for low digital literacy amongst women are manifold.

The first among them is social conditioning. Women often do not make use of ICTs meant to empower them because of several obstacles such as lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, illiteracy, averseness to use of modern technology.

The second cause is affordability. Mostly due to poverty and lack of resources, they are unable to afford computer and internet services. Given that women on average earn 25% less than men globally, high internet prices discriminate disproportionately against women.

The third reason is digital skills and education. Women face several barriers such as lack of competence in use of equipment, lack of training facilities, etc. India is making slow progress on providing digital literacy training and internet access in public institutions at large scale.

The fourth cause is the situation the in rural sphere. Women in rural India face multiple issues that prohibit them from gaining digital literacy, such as lack of education, awareness, accessibility and often restrictions because of their gender.

The fifth is online safety. Mostly, police and courts are still not equipped to handle ICT mediated violence and

harassment cases, and there is no legislation to protect the privacy of data and communication.

The process of digital literacy and digital inclusion is significant for women because of accession to financial services. Knowledge of and access to these digital services such as mobile money services can empower women to start small businesses and give them greater control over their money and savings. This has positive implications for their communities as women globally reinvest about 90% of their income into the households.

Gender gaps in access to resources, services and information are a major obstacle to women's empowerment. In this context ICTs are emerging as a key facilitator for empowering women, especially rural and deprived women. The present study is an attempt in this context to study the role of ICTs for the empowerment of rural and deprived women.

In the recent past, ICTs have been added to the women and gender equality debate. ICTs are being presented as a tool having potential to benefit women's 'empowerment' and a number of ICT projects that specifically target women have been established in several developed and underdeveloped countries. Before going to study the role of ICTs in women empowerment, is necessary to understand what is ICT.

Empowerment of women in the context of knowledge societies entails building up the abilities and skills of women to gain insight into the issues affecting them and also building up their capacity to voice their concerns. In this context ICTs are emerging as a powerful tool for gender empowerment in many developing 2 countries. There has been a rapid growth in the ICT sector since the late 1980s and the use of ICT has dramatically expanded since the 1990s. According to the World Bank, tele-density in India had reached 3.8 per cent of the population by 2001 (Jain 2006).

THE CURRENT STATUS OF MOBILE TELEPHONES AND INTERNET USE:

The Gender divide on one side Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being recognized as the engine for growth and development, on the other hand, there are various challenges which limit their potential and benefits. One of the major challenges is the digital divide across various sections of society such as the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, the educated and the illiterate as well as the gender divide which is very vividly reflected in the use and access of technology. Such divides often overlap with each other. As an example, rural women have a dual disadvantage in accessing and using ICTs owing to their geographic location, limited resources as well as gender. Women fail to benefit from ICTs because they lack severely in the awareness, exposure, access and skills in the use of ICT based services. The number of mobile phone users in India has been continuously increasing over time while in 2013, there were more than 524 million mobile phone users, which increased to 730 million in 2017 and are expected to touch 831 million in 2019. However, according to GSMA intelligence consumer survey 2017, there is gender gap in mobile ownership pattern. On the whole, only 65 percent women in India own mobile phones as compared to 84 percent men. The same study has also shown that 78 percent of people (males and females) use mobile phone for

calling purposes. Only 35 percent females, as compared to 46 percent males are able to send or receive SMS. The gender gap in internet connectivity on mobile phone is clearly visible by the fact that about 31percent males have internet connections on their mobiles as compared to only 13 percent females. Of this population with access to internet on the mobile phone, only 50 percent males as well as females browse the internet, use social media or download and use different mobile applications. About 57 percent people (males as well as females) use internet for making video calls. The data clearly points towards low internet connectivity of both males and females and still lower usage of internet-based applications, reflecting poor digital literacy skills of both males & females (GSMA, 2017).

REASONS FOR GENDER GAP: LOWER STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

In most developing countries including India, women perform the triple roles of reproduction and household, production, and community participation work. They struggle to fulfil their Practical Gender Needs (food, freshwater, fuel, fodder& fiber) and in process their Strategic Gender Needs of education, skill development, income generation, decision making & leadership get thoroughly neglected (Moser, 1980). Despite putting in long hours of work within and outside the home, women are given a secondary status within the household and the workplace due to traditional patriarchal norms. Besides women have much lower literacy level as well as digital literacy rates as compared to men and are excluded from the process of development and get marginalized by the family and society. All these practices disempowered women by negative impacts on health, education, economic and political participation at various levels of decision-making. The poor status of women is well reflected by the poor performance of India as well as several other developing countries in gender related indices.

CONCLUSION

Now a days information users and learners are trying to navigate virtual environment without an essential set of skills to formulate new knowledge, to sharpen critical thinking skills, and to make decisions. Human behaviour and way of thinking is influenced by the technology they have at present. The advancement of the computer is one of the examples on how technology affects the human life. The computer does not affect only in a certain part of the human life, but all aspects that sometimes total changes are necessary. The ability to make use of the technology is called the digital literacy that comprises two aspects namely technological knowledge or technical skills to operate the computer and pedagogical knowledge and skills that is needed to manage the information obtained from the internet. In the broader sense, it is also closely related with the socio-cultural aspects since the integration of technology in the daily life involved the language and cultural symbols. The integration of technology in education is as the answer to the demand in the society since the students should be able to live within the social function, then the mastery of technology in their daily life becomes crucial. Besides, the advancement of technology helps the teachers to conduct the teaching learning process.

Technology-oriented programs are being conducted in rural India for the benefit

of women, but the projects are not successful because of the lack of equipment provided to the women. However, the policies of ICT are focused on bringing greater benefits to women. More online and offline jobs must be provided to women so that they grow stronger economically. It must be understood that exposure to technology will in itself empower women. This has ensured that more programmes linked to technology are required and should be organized. Familiarity with computers and other technical devices not only makes women technologically literate but also enables them to become economically stable. Digitalization makes them economically stronger and stable; it helps them become technically savvy individuals. Promoting digitization among women can also empower them. Digital literacy helps rural women to become digitally proficient and also helps them to become economically independent

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