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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

OBJECTIVES

HYPOTHESES

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

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ICT & WOMEN**S. S. PATHAK****VICE PRINCIPAL & ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
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PAREL****ABSTRACT**

ICT has emerged as a powerful tool for gender empowerment. However, ensuring access to ICT tools is critical to bridging the gender digital divide and achieving empowerment. Equally significant is equipping women across all sections to make effective use of ICT by providing skills education and training. Currently, the ICT sector does not take full advantage of female talent. This is bad for the sector and bad for those women who could create new opportunities for themselves and their families with the ICT jobs that we know deliver better salaries and career paths than most other sectors. The ICT has a potential to bring development for a nation. It can reduce trade distortions, eliminate poverty, empower weaker segments including women, etc. The same is, however, possible only if a nation follows sound ICT strategies and policies. We have to set our priorities to those areas where we are lagging far behind. One such area is the unequal access of ICT to women. This paper looks at the avenues created by ICT-enabled networking processes for women's empowerment. This study is based on sample size of 100 urban women and examines how women's 'power within' has been enhanced through their access to and control of Information and Communication by use of ICTs. It discusses the main challenges and obstacles faced by women, suggests practical strategies to address those challenges and goes on to suggest ways to improve the conditions leading to women's empowerment.

KEYWORDS

ICT, women empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

There can be no doubt that ICT is a major driver of economic and social modernization. Information and Communication Technologies are not just limited to research and employment but in almost all sections of the society including education, entertainment, public administration etc. Another significant facet of ICT has been that they have emerged as a powerful tool for gender empowerment. However, ensuring access to ICT tools is critical to bridging the gender digital divide and achieving empowerment. Equally significant is equipping women across all sections to make effective use of ICT by providing skills education and training.

The concept of gender equality is a common concern all over the World. The same has now acquired new dimensions with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The ICT has a potential to bring development for a nation. It can reduce trade distortions, eliminate poverty, empower weaker segments including women, etc. The same is, however, possible only if a nation follows sound ICT strategies and policies. We have to set our priorities to those areas where we are lagging far behind. One such area is the unequal access of ICT to women.

ICTs are emerging as a powerful tool for gender empowerment in a developing country like India. 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, teledensity in India had reached 3.8% of the population by 2001. The number of internet accounts is growing at a rate of 50% per annum. The ITES-BPO¹ sector alone grew at 59%, and employment had reached 106,000 by 2004 [NASSCOM 2004]. The IT and ITES sector is projected to grow 18% in the next five years to become an industry of Rs. 4.58 lakh crores by 2011, according to an IDC² release. But there is a strong digital divide in society. According to the 2004 report by the Cisco Learning Institute³ women comprise only 23% of India's internet users. This gender digital divide in India is characterised by low levels of access to technologies. Poverty, lack of computer literacy and language barriers are among the factors impeding access to ICT infrastructure, especially in developing countries.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Currently, the ICT sector does not take full advantage of female talent. This is bad for the sector and bad for those women who could create new opportunities for themselves and their families with the ICT jobs that we know deliver better salaries and career paths than most other sectors.

This paper looks at the avenues created by ICT-enabled networking processes for women's empowerment. It discusses the main challenges and obstacles faced by women, suggests practical strategies to address those challenges and goes on to suggest ways to improve the conditions leading to women's empowerment. The paper also analyses a case study from India and examines how women's 'power within' has been enhanced through their access to and control of Information and Communication by use of ICTs.

ICT can deliver potentially useful information, such as market prices for women in small and micro-enterprises. For example, use of cellular telephones illustrates how technology can be used to benefit women's lives, by saving traveling time between the market and suppliers, by allowing women to call for product prices and by facilitating the constant juggling of paid and unpaid family activities. However, use of ICT will be limited in impact wherever women have limited or no access to roads or transport, credit and other development inputs. ICTs require that users have some skills and one should not assume that providing the facilities means that everyone in the community will immediately embrace the technology. Two important aspects need to be mentioned. First, as Eva Rathgeber⁴ clearly stated, "the key issue is that the technologies should be adapted to suit women rather than that women should be asked to adapt to technology." And secondly, ICT training is of utmost importance if women are to use the technology of their choice. Gaining the required skills further empowers women to use ICT in order to increase their employment choices and contribute to community development. Therefore, the provision of ICT facilities should be complemented with additional services and training. ICTs can become tools for women's active participation in improving their situations. Simple access to information and improved communications can end the isolation of women and promote improved health, access to reproductive services, economic growth.

INDIAN SCENARIO

In developing countries like India, more than 90% of women work in the informal sector and sewing or rolling cigarettes, weaving of baskets and fabrics, working in cities as vendors – working without any contracts or benefits. These are the women who need and deserve poverty alleviation programmes more than any other. IT will expose these women to telecommunication services, media and broadcast services that will create markets for their products and services. The challenge will be to reach these women and provide them with ICT tools that they feel can make a difference in their income generation potential. For example, the well-known Self-Employed Women's Association [SEWA]⁵ in India has done extensive work to assist women in the informal sector and has established an ICT programme aiming to increase efficiency of rural women. ICT has been used to bring education to the doorstep of the traditionally deprived gender The Self

Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India is an initiative to encourage women to become fully employed and self sufficient. SEWA's initiative to start Rudi no Radio, the first community radio station in a village near Ahmadabad has made hundreds of women gain access to knowledge and information on career opportunities, education, health and sanitation and so on.

Kerala State IT Mission⁶ has initiated programmes aimed solely at women, especially women from the less privileged sections of the society.

According to the annual I-Cube Report jointly published by IAMA⁷ and IMRB⁸, India's internet population is expected to grow to 121 million users by December 2011 estimates based on a land survey conducted among 201,839 individuals spread across all 4 regions of the country between Apr-Mid June 2011 (covering 32,876 households in 104 cities and 15,889 households in 766 villages). Estimates cover both 'regular' and 'occasional' users as well as both 'computer' and 'mobile' based internet users.

India vision 2020⁹ has estimated growth of number of telephone lines to increase by 34 to 203 per population of 1000 and number of personal computers to increase by 3.3 to 52.3 per population of 1000. Computerisation of education will dramatically improve the quality of instruction and the pace of learning, so that many students will complete the first twelve years of school curriculum in as little as eight. Computerised distance education will catch on in a big way and enable tens of thousands more students to opt for affordable higher education.

In India cultural values, traditional beliefs, financial dependence on men, and restrictions to entering public places are some of the many reasons for gender disparity. A key point to note when understanding gender inequality in Education in India is that even when gender parity in enrolment is achieved, discrimination toward women still exists as girls are discouraged from choosing subjects at the secondary and tertiary levels which would lead to higher paying career opportunities.

ICT tools provide an opportunity to overcome some of these key barriers. However, initiatives have to be designed specifically for women and awareness needs to be generated among women on the advantages of ICTs and their potential to address specific problems faced by them. Empowering women through access to information is a critical requirement. This awareness raising is an important aspect, as quite often there is no reliable information on available options for women.

Encouraging women to use ICT remains however a challenging task since technology uptake of women and girls tends to be low in India, even in environments where computers are available; since it is generally the boys who are encouraged to use it. To ensure that ICT is used efficiently to deliver education and to overcome the gender gap, differential attention is needed for boys and girls in ICT schemes in Education. Positive discrimination or Affirmative Action in favor of girls, in provision of access to ICT facilities in schools needs to be explored in many of these traditional societies.

To find out the ICT awareness in women an empirical study was conducted

OBJECTIVES

1. To know the extent of use of ICT among women.
2. To know the extent of use of tools of ICT among women

ANALYSIS

A sample of 100 women was selected, where 78 women fall under below 25 age category and while 22 were above 25 years of age, out of which 47 were working women and 53 were non working women. This paper primarily aims at finding out the exposure of communication technology to women users. The communication technology includes Computers, Mobile phones Television and Radio.

The following charts will explain the findings more clearly.

FIG. 1.1

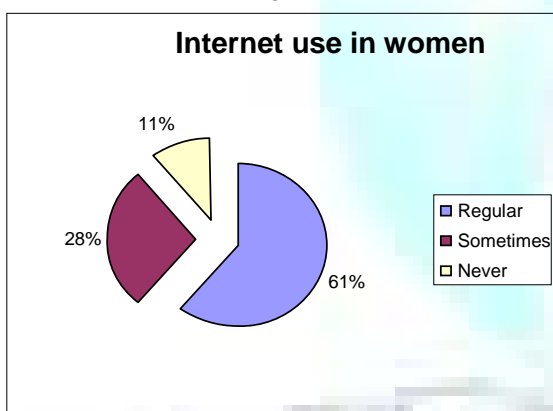


FIG. 1.2

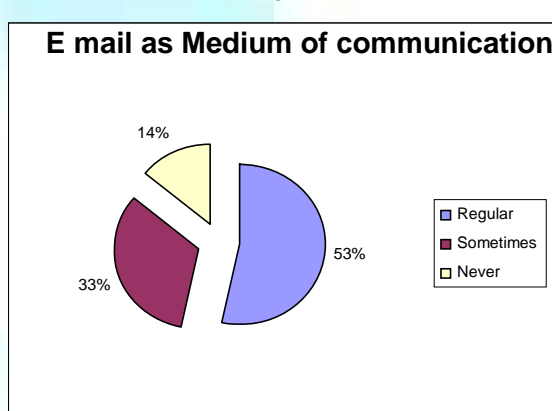


FIG. 1.3

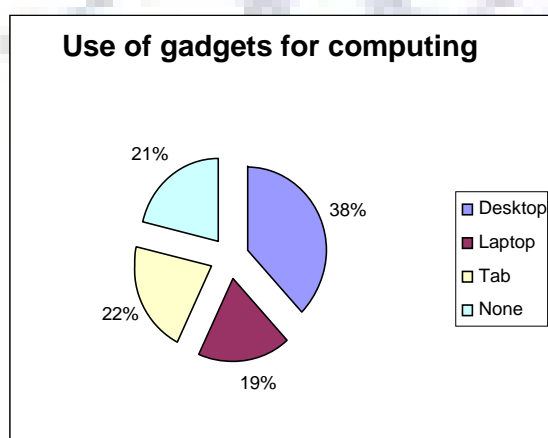


FIG. 1.4

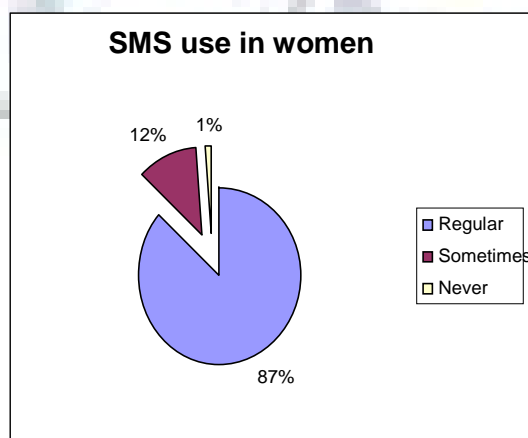


FIG. 1.5

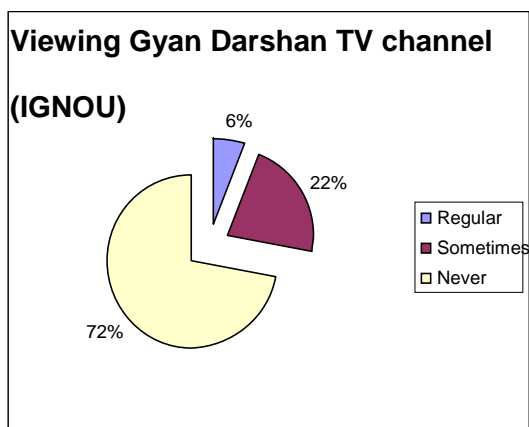
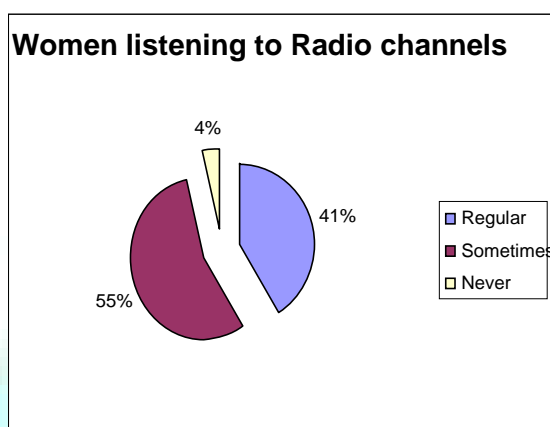


FIG. 1.6



OBSERVATIONS

The above charts are self-explanatory. 61 % women use Internet and 53 % women use internet as medium of Communication which shows substantial growth.

53 % women use email as medium of communication regularly and other 33 % sometimes show the change in communication media.

Use of gadgets is also substantial. But the SMS technology on mobile phones is used mostly by all regularly.

Regular radio listening is again 55% which is quite high and can be explored to maximum capacity.

SMS since used by all should be more often used as aid in learning. Radio medium also should be developed more for learning process. But Television as medium for learning needs more awareness.

The advent of ICT has changed the global scenario and many unexplored areas are now open for encashment. It is for us to utilise the benefits to the maximum possible extent. The best part about ICT is that it is capable of various adjustments as per the requirements of the segment using the same. The same can also be adjusted as per the needs and requirement of women in India. So much so that it can be operated from every home irrespective of its location. This means that even the traditional and orthodox families can allow the women to participate and use ICT from their respective homes. In India there is an abundance of "women entrepreneurs" who are capable of making their mark at the global level. However, the awareness and facilities are missing drastically. The national policies and strategies have not yet considered this unexplored potential pool of intellectual inputs.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

1. It is evident that Internet technology exposure and use of computing devices among women is good.
2. Women are using all type of devices and which can be used as advantage in teaching learning activity.
3. Gyan Darshan channel of IGNOU was introduced in year 2000 as 24 hr education channel but due to content quality and time table problems has failed the purpose of this channel and has reached limited people.
4. With simple training and awareness programmes we can make a big difference. Further, we can also encourage the establishment of "Small and Medium Enterprises" (SMEs), Small Scale Industries (SSIs), etc. The need of the hour is to show a positive will to achieve that much needed purpose.
5. Due to high rate of illiteracy & popularity of radio & TV, the communication channel should not be restricted to computer & internet. Integrated multimedia approach should be adopted.

NOTES

1. Information Technology Enabled Service/ Business process outsourcing.
2. International Data Corporation (IDC) is the premier global provider of market intelligence, advisory services, and events for the information technology, telecommunications and consumer technology markets.
3. The Cisco Learning Network is a social learning community that is focused on the IT industry. The mission of the Cisco Learning Network is to provide learning tools, training resources, and industry guidance, to anyone interested in building an IT career through Cisco Certification. The certification preparation materials offered on the Cisco Learning Network do not constitute a complete self-study program; they represent a suggested starting point for your studies.
4. Eva M. Rathgeber is a consultant in international development. From 2002-2006 she held the Joint Chair of Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa/ Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada and she continues to serve as an adjunct professor at both universities and was elected the new Chairperson of the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) early August 2009.
5. Self Employed Women's Association SEWA is a trade union registered in 1972. It is an organisation of poor, self-employed women workers.
6. It is an autonomous nodal IT implementation agency for Department of Information Technology, Government of Kerala which provides managerial support to various initiatives of the Department.
7. Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)
8. Indian Market Research Bureau
9. The Planning Commission constituted a Committee on Vision 2020 for India in June 2000 under the chairmanship of Dr. S.P. Gupta, Member, Planning Commission.

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WEBSITES

4. www.keralaitmission.org
5. www.sewa.org

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