Women Empowerment: Role of Information Communication Technology (Internet)

Dr. Ehtesham Ahmad Khan

Associate Professor & Head Department of Mass Communication & Journalism Maulana Azad National Urdu University Gachibowli -Hyderabad (A.P).

ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are for everyone and women have to be an equal beneficiary to the advantages and benefits offered by the technology. The benefits coming out of the ICT need not be restricted to the males only but have to freely flow to all segments of the female population. The areas in which ICT can put a great control in the hands of women are wide and are continuously expanding from Education to Healthy lifestyle.

At present, only one third of users who use the Internet are women. Lack of easy access to Internet, lack of knowledge on how to use the Internet and its relevance in their daily lives are some of the biggest barriers for women to get online.

Basically, this paper deals with empowerment of women through the Information Communication Technologies (Internet) in terms of Educational and Health issues.. Empowerment of women led to the development of the family, community, society, state and the nation. This paper will specially highlight the positive perception and use of Social Media as a development tool to empower the women specifically related to Health and Education based Issues. It will also focus on how to create awareness about the benefits of Internet for women, educate women to use the Internet to improve their health and lives and work with partners to enable easy Internet access points for women in the country.

INTROUCTION

The term ICT which stands for "Information Communication Technologies", refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. This includes the Internet, Community radio, wireless networks, cell phones and other communication mediums. Today is the era of ICT, various ICT tools are used to educate and inform the women.

The Internet is one of the greatest inventions of the 20th Century as it has significantly changed the way modern people communicate. Due to its speed and worldwide reach it has created a "global village", in which people can communicate with others across the world as if they were living next door.

In India, at present, only one third of users who use the Internet are women. Lack of easy access to Internet, lack of knowledge on how to use the Internet and its relevance in their daily lives are some of the biggest barriers for women to get online. To empower women even further, Goggle India has launched an initiative called 'Helping women get online' it will encourage women in the country to use the online medium more effectively. The initiative aims to help 50 million additional women get online by end of 2014 by undertaking a variety of initiatives across India.

Blogs are used as public diaries where women discuss public and personal issues in their life and development. Storytelling used by women in blogs to introduce their thoughts has been proven to have its major effect (Ayish, 2009).

In recent years the creation of different websites that focus on women empowerment in terms of education , literacy , health , knowledge , lifestyle and many more areas have been proliferated. , which can be surf to search anything. To find anything related to empowerment by typing keyword searches using a reliable internet browser.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Today there are different Schemes of the central government as well as state government to empower the women, but in India women are discriminated and marginalized everywhere be it home or work place, whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare.

Women are the equal beneficiaries to the advantages offered by the Internet and the product and the processes, which are by product of the technology use. However, it should not be confined to elite group of the society but to flow to the other segments the women in the society. According to several reports, with over 200 million internet users in India and growing, the country is on its way to become the second largest internet market in the world overtaking the US. But only one third of India's online users are women. Internet can play a very important role in empowering women in India and help them to transform their lives. Internet one of the medium of communication can be used for the empowerment of women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various Information Communication Technologies such as Community Radio, Television, Mobile Phone, Internet are used for empowering women via spreading awareness, education, healthy lifestyle and education. This era belongs to ICT, but still women are suffering from various types of problems due to the existing gap between ICT and its use.

The Internet, considered as one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century (Gates, 2000), is claimed to be a window for information technology. The arrival of the Internet has opened many possibilities for many people. This is due to the fact that this technology allows a more efficient way to communicate, so that not only communication is mediated to be faster, but it is also relatively cheaper and is accessible to many people with minimum skills required.

Internet help people to connect , it easily collaborate with other people and create new content, services ,communities and channels of communication that help people to deliver information and services. The Internet power as the platform for the World Wide Web is manifested in Metcalfe's Law, which states that "the power of the Web is enhanced through the network effect produced as resource links by network members" (Esplen & Brody, 2007, p.14). This means as the number of people in a network grows; the connectivity between members also increases (Ibid.). This characteristic enabling network members to connect to one another is said to increase social capital among network users.

One advantage of social Internet is its ability to help users manage both their weak and strong ties. Especially on sites such as Twitter, Facebook, "features to search people by name, region and school allows them to find and keep in touch with friends with whom they might have otherwise lost touch" (Ellison, 2011, p.874). At the same time, users can also connect to casual acquaintances that might have some similarities with them, such as similar hobbies, occupations, educational backgrounds, and so on. Sites such asFacebook, and Twitter have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily life. There are many reasons behind this popularity. With these media, we can see interaction that \are more personal and direct, because the account owner can communicate directly to those within his/her friend list.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In developing countries, there has been an increase in the use of Internet for development initiatives. A study by the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC) on   ICT for poverty reduction strategies states that trends show that "ICT have   been applied to systemic improvements important to poverty reduction such as education, health and social services delivery, broader Government transparency and accountability, and helping empower citizens and build social organization.

Women's empowerment is focused on increasing their power to take control over decisions that shape their lives. For women who can access and use Internet, it offer potential, especially in terms of improving health, to educate them , reducing poverty, improving   governance, overcoming isolation, and providing a voice to them However, There is a growing demand of the use of Internet for women's empowerment, through increasing their access to health, nutrition, education and other human development opportunities, such as political participation. .

About two thirds of the illiterate adults in the world are female. The female literacy rate according to the Literacy rate 2011 Census is 65.46% where the male literacy rate is more than 80 %. Higher levels of women's education are strongly associated with both lower infant mortality and low fertility, as well as with higher levels of education and economic opportunity for their children.

Education is an area where both developed and developing countries are applying and allowing the process and content of education to be adapted to learner preferences and priorities. In India, some State Governments and Central Universities are distributing free laptops to the students as a tool to support the learning processes apart from the class room teaching. For example, the use of computers and the Internet , in formal and informal learning, distance education and in establishing e-learning centres to support education & training of women and girls. The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children.

Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in education for girls yield especially high dividends.

Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's in most developing countries.

Experts feel that education is not just the process of imparting literacy, but actually it is a process of socialisation that helps children cope with the natural and the social environment. All children must be given access to education of comparable standards, at some places parents send their children for earning at a very young age because they don't have information about Right to Education scheme and other necessary information's related to child's education. After finishing primary and secondary education large number of youngsters gets educated but due to the lack of proper information sources and counselling remain unemployed. Internet can be an efficient medium. Through the use of Internet among women, we can generate:

- Inforamtion about different schemes of State and Central Government
- Information regarding different educational schemes for

Women like Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child , Post Doctoral Fellowship for Women Candidates etc.
- Information and Guidelines regarding different online courses offered by different Universities and Institutions
- Information regarding correspondence and regular courses available
- Information regarding jobs available in different companies on web sites like naukri.com
- Information about plans, like, the Ministry is also implementing the Swayamsidha programme – an integrated scheme for the empowerment of women at a total cost of Rs. 116.30 Crores. This programme will benefit about 9, 30,000 women with the setting up of 53,000 self-help groups, 26,500 village societies and 650 block societies.

The urban educated women need information mainly on the following things:

- Employment /Job Prospects in India and Abroad
- Research and Information
- Educational opportunities
- Career advancement facilities
- Beauty and Fashion , Hair care , Health & Lifestyle , Apparel and accessories
- Matrimonial ads
- Art and Entertainment , Music videos and films
- Social Support system for working women

The urban lower middle class women need information mainly on the following topics:

- Employment /Job Prospects in India /self locality
- Inexpensive childcare & Healthcare
- Educational facilities at their doorstep
- Dowry system , other legal rights like self help, violence etc
- Information about NGO's
- Legal provisions against Sexual harassment, Domestic Violence and Social injustice

Internet provides them with opportunities to bring information on every issues / topic to them at their doorstep, and reach everyone in new ways. In women, Internet user base is increasing rapidly. Internet has changed lives of women, empowered them, enabled them and connected them to rest of the world.

According to the report released in June 2013 titled "Women & Web Study", some of the findings of the study are as follows:

- Total 150 Million users in the country
- 60 Million Women use the internet to manage their day to day life.
- 75% are young affluent and in the 15-34 age group
- 50% say that internet research influenced their decision before purchasing product
- 1 in 4 Shoppers buying baby products online
- 80% say that they recommend their purchase to other women , and
- 25% women say they share it online

Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems, including maternal mortality and morbidity represent a major – but preventable -- cause of death and disability for women in developing countries. There is a vast potential for Internet to facilitate global, regional and national health initiatives for women. The use of internet by health practitioners in developing countries like India is quite well established. Organizations such as Satellite and Health Net, ndtv.com are examples of projects that have been successful in providing health information   and connections health   professionals. Satellite is a US-based NGO that works to break down barriers to health information access through innovative applications of Internet.

The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are an important factor in gauging

the empowerment of women. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned. Lack of knowledge of nutrition leads to high maternal mortality and infant mortality rates. Low nutrition education explains the poor intake of vitamin rich food ,especially green leafy vegetables and fruits among women ,even though they are available in the village at a very low cost ,it causes anaemia in them .This is further compounded by irregular visits of health practitioners and Aanganwadi workers for nutrition education. Their contribution becomes less effective due to lack of communication and other infrastructural facilities. Women in these areas want detail information about the various health problems and preventions. Women don't have the knowledge of the importance of breast feeding during lactation period. .

CONCLUSION

Today, Information Communication Technologies has changed the communication paradigm, making it no longer difficult to reach a large number of people. ICT can play a significant role in the empowerment of women through the help of Internet. High illiteracy rates of women and girls and their lack of Internet training are two of the   most serious barriers that prevent them from using this ICT tool effectively and efficiently.   Initiatives that focus on educating women in and teaching them computer literacy have demonstrated the value of Internet for women. Google India's latest initiative, 'Help Women Get Online', aims to help women to understand internet in a more profound way and attempts to spread digital literacy to bring more women online. It is an initiative that aims to overcome different hurdles and barriers and empower women to improve their lives

The use of ICT in the form of Internet in the creation of different websites that focus on women empowerment in terms of education , literacy , health , knowledge , lifestyle and many more areas have been proliferated. Today it is possible, to find anything related to empowerment by typing keyword searches using a reliable internet browser. New Media has played an important role in empowering the women. Women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come forward and help themselves to empower. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, launching schemes to promote education among women and prevention of different types of Health problems among them.

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