WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

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ABSTRACT: In earlier days of the internet, it was thought that coming online would bring communities together, help individuals locate each other, and that social media would become a strong advocacy tool, allowing communities to better campaign for causes they cared about. Instead, on the internet, there is a lot of gender discrimination, trolling, and unpleasant behaviour. This overview of women in the digital world sets the stage. This paper tries to investigate the relevance of online access to information, the role of women in the IT industry, online harassment, how women are treated online, and how NGOs deal with evidence of women's mistreatment. This research will also look at the important causes and trends that influence women's engagement in ICT and its dynamics, as well as the behaviours that enable women to participate in the digital world.

KEYWORDS: Women, digital harassment, political engagement, gender bias, online social media.

Introduction

No doubt, the world around us is becoming more (and more) computerised. We are all being affected by the technological revolution, which is transforming how we live and work. Many businesses have gone through, or are going through, a digital transition. Deeper changes in attitudes and behaviours, as well as working methods, accompany these changes.

Among them, gender equality is one fundamental consideration amidst this change. Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but also a prerequisite for a peaceful, affluent, and long-term world. Women's empowerment refers to expanding and improving women's social, economic, political, and legal authority in order to ensure women's equal rights. Women's empowerment allows them to have more control over their resources, assets, income, and time, as well as the ability to manage risk and enhance their economic standing and well-being. The entire family benefits when women are empowered. Over the last two decades, there has been progress: more girls are attending school, fewer girls are being forced into early marriages, more women are serving in parliament and in positions of leadership, and laws are being modified to promote gender equality. Many women in India and other areas of the world are still missing out on chances in various fields, and many people discriminate against them simply because they are female.

In addition to this, the digital age not only exposes the structural and attitudinal roots of gender disparity, but it also provides tremendous opportunities to empower women. Women in digital have the potential to earn more money, improve their job chances, and learn new skills.

Need of Women Empowerment

Women have a crucial role in family, community, and societal development in India, as in the rest of the developing world. Women, on the other hand, are frequently unnoticed and unheard. Women, more than males, are responsible for balancing the complexity of life in extreme poverty, but they are generally left out of discussions because they are illiterate, lack confidence, and mobility. Empower is a multifaceted term that encompasses social, physical, spiritual, emotional, political, and psychological aspects. Empowerment entails personal development in decision-making, analysing important situations, dealing with a variety of scenarios, and confronting challenges. Women have an important role in family, community, and societal development in India, as they do in the rest of the developing world.

Likewise, when schools move to a digital format, it will be more difficult for girls to get an education, owing to rising demands that they help with family tasks. Poor access to technology also has an impact on education; in rural India, only about 28% of women have access to technology, compared to 33% in metropolitan regions. According to the Gender Budget Statement, only 0.4 percent of the entire education budget for 2020-2021 was dedicated to women, which is insufficient to tackle the mounting issues of access to school in the face of the pandemic.

Besides these, gender-based violence is on the rise as the COVID-19 epidemic causes greater economic and social stress, as well as restrictions on transportation and social isolation. Many women are being forced to 'lockdown' at home with their abusers, while services to support survivors are being disrupted or made unavailable.

Role of Digitalization in Women Empowerment

Female empowerment and more equitable female participation in labour markets, financial markets, and entrepreneurship are some of the benefits of digitalization. Currently, digitization appears to favour female workers, who are less likely to be replaced by robots than male workers. In the digital age, women's typically greater social abilities constitute a competitive advantage, especially when social skills are combined with higher education and sophisticated technology literacy.

However, the same restrictions and weaknesses that are currently impeding women's growth in many nations may also keep them from taking advantage of many good prospects in the digital age. To invalidate these hurdles, governments must make significant efforts. Providing improved access to new digital technologies for women appears to be a potential starting point for such efforts, and for achieving gender equality as a result.

Challenges of Digitalization

The digital revolution, which is characterised by artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, and mobile robotics, has the potential to boost women's economic and social autonomy in three ways. To begin with, mobile and digital technology, particularly

in emerging and developing nations, allow women to skip some of the conventional cultural and mobility restrictions. Women might use digital technology to gain access to new markets, work more freely and remotely, acquire and communicate with consumers, obtain training and mentoring, and improve their financial autonomy and access capital for their businesses.

Secondly, women frequently have greater social abilities, which will be rewarded more in the digital age in work marketplaces. Women-dominated jobs frequently require such social skills, which include a larger sense of community responsibility, greater empathy, more effective communication, and a greater willingness to adjust to changing conditions, among others. They should assist women in avoiding the massive job losses that are expected to occur as a result of automation in industrialised countries over the next two decades, with up to 60% of all jobs at risk. It's worth emphasising that little is known about how digitization affects labour markets in emerging and developing economies.

Thirdly, if abstract (or cognitive) capabilities and improved computer literacy, which has become a key requirement in the digital age, the female social skills advantage could be enhanced even more. Such talent complementarities are likely to grow in popularity, potentially paving the path for women to advance into higher-paying management and leadership positions.

Women may not be able to completely benefit from the benefits of digitization due to current gender imbalances. Women are frequently caught in a vicious cycle in which existing gender disparities obstruct future progress. As a result, in many emerging and developing economies, legal and cultural barriers to female autonomy limit women from accessing digital gadgets that could assist them overcome some of these barriers. Even in the most industrialised countries, lower female enrolment rates in higher education, particularly in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), prevents women from fully exploiting the opportunities provided by digitalization. As a result, women are at risk of missing out on some of the most promising digital-era employment.

Digitalization is also going to open up a slew of new entrepreneurship prospects. Gaps in entrepreneurial skills, a lack of developed social networks for female business owners, a dearth of female role models for entrepreneurship, and the predominance of financial restraints may prevent women from discovering and pursuing those entrepreneurial chances. Governments must address these current inequities if women are to reach their full potential in the digital era. Using new digital technology, many of these gender disparities can be effectively remedied.

Role of Women in IT Industry

With advances in technology, the world is becoming a much better place, and the role of women in world growth today cannot be overstated. Women played important roles in the information technology sector, but the ratio of men to women in this sector is probably 80-20 percent.

With that ratio, women need to focus their efforts on achieving greater success in this field. We are looking for more ladies to work in this field. Women must demonstrate that gender equality in the field of information technology is a must.

There are various groups of women working in the information technology business, such as the Django girls, Python women, and Andela girls, among others. We're looking for women who can help shape the future of technology. We want women to follow in the footsteps of Impact Zuckerberg and Bill Gates, and make their mark in the same way that these guys have.

Though it is well known that mastering code requires a great deal of patience, time, energy, and focus, this should not cause us to close our doors, but rather drive us to put our significant hands-on training to use. Women must demonstrate that they can work in any industry. More women should be encouraged to work in this field around the world.

Online Abuses and Harassment

Although digital technologies have given women and activists new ways to interact and organise, they have also perpetuated patterns of harassment and abuse that women journalists experience throughout their journalistic or public-interest work, in a variety of digital formats.

Women are being threatened, silenced, and stigmatised by the rise in online abuse and harassment, which has become both more frequent and more coordinated, with the ability to keep them out of public settings. To ensure full enjoyment of the right to free expression and provide an atmosphere where women may engage in both online and offline areas, combating online abuse against women is therefore critical.

Harassment and abuse of women on the internet is rooted in societal gender inequity, which is mirrored in the media environment. Women must be at the centre of and involved in efforts to address the issue, and governments and other actors should include civil society, particularly women's rights and freedom of expression organisations, in response formulation as well as broader policy discussions about the use of digital technologies.

Governments should not only legislate and implement comprehensive public policy measures to protect free expression, gender equality, and anti-discrimination, but also create comprehensive prevention-based mechanisms, monitoring, and response measures, which include efforts to close the gender digital divide and protect women's privacy.

As developers and moderators of the products and platforms through which this abuse frequently occurs, businesses, particularly social media platforms, have a responsibility to play. They should include particular sections in community guidelines for gender-based harassment and abuse, undertake freedom of expression and non-discrimination impact evaluations, analyse the effectiveness of reporting channels for online abuse, and increase transparency in content moderation. Only by working together to advance women's equality both online and offline will we be able to put an end to online harassment and allow women to participate in and enjoy their human rights without fear of discrimination.

Supporting Firms

There are various firms working in this direction which includes government agencies, NGO's, educational institutes, radio stations, industries etc. A key focus of development has seen in NGOs and international organisations extending micro finance and micro credit opportunities to women entrepreneurs. In India, for example, despite the efforts made by the government to provide support in education, food, social benefits and pension plans, many communities – but particularly women – continue to be excluded from financial autonomy and the ability to maintain a living.

Smile (Savitri Marketing Institution for Ladies Empowerment) is one of the organisations that organises IT seminars for women in partnership with IT companies, such as NIIT's Swift Jyoti session. It was an 18-hour programme for ladies between the ages of 6 and 60. The goal was to educate women about computers and the advantages they may provide. Another one is SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) that works to support rural women.

Besides these, there are various firms, such as GOOGLE, MICROSOFT, TCS, and others, offer maternity leaves, child care leaves, flexible working hours, work from home options, pick-up and drop-off options, and other benefits to attract female employees. Various initiatives for girls have been implemented by the government, including free education, job reservation, admissions, elected members of local bodies, and membership on the boards of directors of public limited businesses, among others. They provide loans and subsidies to women to help them pursue higher education, projects, and research.

Role of ICT in Women Empowerment

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is a broad term for Information Technology (IT), which encompasses all communication technologies such as the internet, wireless networks, cell phones, computers, software, middleware, video conferencing, social networking, and other media applications and services that allow users to access, retrieve, store, transmit, and manipulate data in a digital form. ICTs also refer to the integration of media technologies such as audio-visual and telephone networks with computer networks via a unified cabling (signal distribution and management) or link system.

ICT is playing a critical role in shifting society's attitude and perception about women. It increases women's psychological comfort at work by providing them with additional information and abilities. Organizational, personal, and social psychological empowerment are all possible. Women are gaining information about all the real happenings happening in the world and acquiring methods to deal with them through the Internet, television, radio, and mobile phones, which is helping to develop leadership traits in them.

E-governance is a new phrase coined by information and communication technologies, and it is something that all emerging countries are working on. It can gain improved access to services, greater accountability, transparency, and citizen empowerment, as well as strategic rewards such as improved decision-making through information, improved knowledge sharing and organisational learning, improved interactions with citizens, other government organisations, businesses, and industry, improved market relationships between the public and private sectors, and increased organisational change management capability. Here are several areas of life where ICT has a direct impact, particularly on women:

- Increased access to the employment market for women and improved entrepreneurship through the use of ICT: Women make up a considerable portion of the labour force in most nations, and in some, they account for more than the global average of 51 percent. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), women's employment of information and communications technology (ICT) has resulted in not only improved business performance but also improved living conditions. It's also particularly effective in easing restrictions on female entrepreneurs.

- Increase of average household income in villages: Using ICT, rural women's access to paid job has become critical to their self-sufficiency and also the well-being of dependent family members.

- Women empowerment: It includes -
  -Personal empowerment by obtaining the knowledge and information they want, as well as participating in certain group activities and being able to discuss certain social or personal matters.
  -Educational empowerment that occurs when ICT delivers information about the entire world in a language and medium that they are familiar with. Each area is well-versed, and new concepts are easily grasped.
  Non-formal and adult women's education is highly benefitted from ICT.
  -Social empowerment refers to as the ability to learn new and relevant knowledge, information, and awareness about a variety of issues, topics, and activities that are of interest to them. This new knowledge and information frequently stimulated participants' minds and broadened their perspectives. It assists in participating in a variety of events with other women and persons in positions of influence in which you can openly discuss issues, share concerns and experiences, and reflect on matters that impact you.
  -Economic empowerment: In terms of economic empowerment, information and communication technology (ICT) assists them in increasing their monthly revenue. It creates jobs and allows for mergers with large corporations. ICT education helps women become economically stable, which leads to various forms of female empowerment.
  -Technological empowerment: Emerging information, awareness, and understanding about new ICTs, as well as their potential benefits and impacts, are all part of technological empowerment. New skills, experience, and increased confidence and competence in the use of new communication technology. Advice and assistance with email and the Internet were provided in a variety of ways that largely matched the needs of the participants.

- Improved Governance: The goal of e-government is to connect government functions to today's technological technology. E-business, e-banking, and e-procurement are just a few examples of how this technology has helped the private sector become more efficient. E-government aims to improve public sector efficiency, transparency, and accountability while also lowering government costs.

- Indigenous Knowledge: Indigenous knowledge is the foundation for many isolated, rural, and marginalised communities in society, and it is an important component in the educational development of community members. Parallel to the growing acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledge's worth and significance in today's society, as well as the need to protect it, is a growing appreciation of the role that information technologies (IT) may play in its capture, management, and distribution.

- Increase Social awareness: Many new generation youngsters have already adopted social networking as a social norm in this digital era. Facebook status updates, tweets, and Instagram photos have all become commonplace. Their lives are represented on social media, where they share photographs of pleasant times and record other emotionally significant occurring and events, resulting in a wealth of memories.

Safety Apps Helps in Women Empowerment

When it comes to security, technology has proven to be crucial. Many businesses have developed unique methods to increase the safety of women. Apps, wearable gadgets, GPS trackers, and many other options are available. The following are some list of the top safety tech tools for women.

1. Letstrack: This app may be used as a vehicle security system. Users can use this software to install their smartphone in their vehicles. The app includes features such as rural connectivity, real-time tracking, zone alarms, and a 24-hour history.
2. Rescuer: Users of this women's safety app can send unlimited messages to other app users. You can enter the contact information for two persons and have them meet at the designated location to help the person who is in need. If a user is in danger, all they have to do is open the app and tap the emergency tab.
3. Safetipin: This is the most popular app for women's safety. SafetiPin includes features such as GPS tracking and emergency contact number dialling. In addition, the app provides information such as a local safety location where the user can go in an emergency. Safety scores are assigned to the pinned sites.
4. Smart24x7: The police in many states have backed the Smart24x7 app to safeguard the safety of women and older persons. When a problem arises, the app sends panic notifications to emergency contacts. During a crisis situation, it also records voices and takes images, which it then sends to the police.

   It also includes call centre assistance, which will follow the user's primary motions. Users simply only press the panic button, choose the sort of help they desire, and then click submit.
5. bSafe: Women's safety and security are ensured through the bSafe app. Contacts may track you using a live GPS trace, and you can set a timed alarm to go off if you haven't 'checked in' yet. Furthermore, it will ring your phone with a false call and will notify your emergency contacts with the location, video, and even a siren.

   There's also a Guardian Alert button, which sends a message to your friends or family members with your GPS location and video when you're in trouble.
6. CitizenCop: This app is perfect for reporting a crime as soon as possible. When a woman finds herself in an emergency situation, she reports it right away. The software was created with people's health in mind. The app serves as a link between the police and the general public.
7. 112 India: The Indian government has introduced 112 India, an all-in-one women's security app that can be used to send an SOS warning in any situation with just a single tap. The emergency alarm is sent by audio/visual media in this app. This programme is so useful that you can use it at any moment. It seamlessly connects with existing emergency services. It also assists with the examination of the incidents.

Conclusion

Women's engagement in ICT and digital sectors does not appear to be improving considerably over the world. Micro-level projects and experiences are the only way to find the path to transformation. Due to a multitude of constraints such as infrastructural, social, cultural, and linguistic barriers, the majority of women in the poor countries do not have access to ICTs. Actions at the regional, national, and worldwide levels should be required to make women independent, powerful, and strong in all professions using ICT. Women's empowerment has improved in recent years as a result of the execution of several ICT-related projects. There are also numerous programmes aimed at increasing women's participation. The primary goal is to empower women both economically and socially. The study concluded that women have reaped significant benefits from the usage of digital sectors, and that it has had a significant impact in teaching knowledge about current technology and its applications. This research found that technology has empowered women in a variety of areas, including social, educational, psychological, political, technological, and economic empowerment, as well as some degree of disempowerment owing to internal and external factors.

Despite this, the majority of women in poor countries lack access to ICTs due to a range of factors such as poverty, computer literacy, infrastructure, social, cultural, and linguistic limitations. As a result, we should concentrate on how to overcome such obstacles in order to improve women's empowerment.

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