Empowering Women through ICT: A study

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Abstract

ICT is not a brand-new idea. It has existed for some time and has seen some substantial improvements. ICTs quick development in recent decades has boosted women's advancement. Women now have greater prospects for success thanks to ICT. With so many doors for women now open that were before closed, ICT makes anything possible. Offering them a variety of online education platforms eliminates the gender pay gap, lowers prices, improves access and quality of education, and encourages women's entrepreneurship, which in turn offers them financial independence and boosts their political engagement. The current paper examines several research papers and articles on how ICT helps empower women in order to highlight the ways in which ICT has helped women progress.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Women, Girls, Empowerment

Introduction

Women play a significant and varied role in the development of nations and economies. Half of the world's population is made up of women, and progress and sustainable development depend on their involvement in all spheres of society. According to the U.N. Report from 2019, SDG5 aspires to promote the use of enabling technology, in particular ICTs, to boost women's empowerment. In order to empower women, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is essential. It gives women more influence in a variety of spheres, including social, psychological, political, technological, and economic (Beena et al., 2012). It takes a multi-layered strategy that covers access, skills, safety, inclusion, and opportunity in order to empower women through ICT. ICT has the potential to be a potent instrument for advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls in the digital age if the right tools, training, and support are given to them. ICT gives women access to e-commerce platforms, online marketplaces, and digital entrepreneurship as a means of economic empowerment. These platforms can be used by women to launch their own businesses, sell goods and services, and gain access to international markets, thereby raising their standard of living and achieving financial independence. Financial services are increasingly more accessible to women, particularly those who live in rural regions, thanks to ICT's new financial services like mobile banking and digital payment systems. Today, women may use their mobile phones to access banking services, save money, and conduct transactions, giving them financial stability and empowerment.

Conceptualization of terms

Empowerment

Empowerment refers to the process of giving or receiving power, authority, and confidence to people or groups—often those who have been marginalized or oppressed. It entails empowering and providing people or communities with the instruments, assets, information, and assistance they require to take charge of their lives, make educated decisions, and accomplish their objectives.

World Bank. (2008). Empowerment is the process of increasing a person's or group's capacity to make decisions and translate those decisions into desired actions and outcomes.

Kabeer, N. (1994). When a person's ability to make wise decisions in life is increased in a situation where it was previously unavailable to them, they are said to be empowered.

Women Empowerment

Giving women the same rights, opportunities, and resources as men and enabling them to fully participate in all facets of life without bias or discrimination based on gender is referred to as "women empowerment." Important social, economic, and political issues are involved in it. It involves numerous initiatives to advance gender equality, remove discrimination, and foster a supportive atmosphere where women can actively engage in all aspects of life. It entails giving women the freedom to assert their rights, make decisions, and take charge of their own lives, which promotes their overall development and well-being.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The broad category of tools and technologies used to process and transfer information electronically is known as Information and Communication Technology (ICT). To acquire, process, store, and exchange information using various kinds of communication, such as computers, cell phones, the Internet, and other electronic devices, this can involve hardware, software, networks, and other digital technologies. Telecommunications, data management, cybersecurity, e-commerce, digital media, and other areas are only a few of the many applications that fall under the umbrella of ICT. It is a fast-developing field that has a significant impact on how we communicate, work, learn, and interact with technology in the linked world of today.

Objective

- To highlight the capabilities of ICT in empowering women.

Methodology

The methodology deployed in this study is mainly descriptive and exploratory in nature. An attempt has been made to highlight the role played by ICT in empowering women based on secondary data by reviewing existing information from various research papers, articles, books, theses, and online resources in the period of 2002-2020. This helped in building a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Further, by analyzing existing data, the researchers are able to draw conclusions and make inferences about the relationship between ICT and women's empowerment. The analysis is solely based on the review of related literature.

Importance of Empowering Women

For a society to progress, empowering the women therein is ubiquitous. Their empowerment for societal

Development and Sustainable Development can happen in numerous ways. Warth and Koparanova (2012) explored how empowering women can help the United Nations accomplish its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provided evidence-based examples from various countries and regions. They also recognized important tactics and initiatives for advancing social advancement and women's empowerment, such as gender equality, health and well-being, education, and economic opportunity. Similarly, Bayeh (2016) asserted that the nation would not accomplish sustainable development if only men were acknowledged to participate in all of these sectors until gender equality is realized and women are given the freedom to play their share in the economic, social, political, and environmental spheres. Having empowered women makes it easier to achieve gender equality. Women should have the same rights, opportunities, and access to resources as males because they make up half of the world's population. Men and women shall have equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic, and social arenas, according to the Indian Constitution Article 14. Also, the prohibition of discrimination against any citizen in accordance with one's caste, race and religion is mentioned in Article 15 (1). Building a more just and inclusive society is dependent on gender equality, which also promotes social justice and fairness. Economic development can benefit immensely from empowered women as well. They can be used to increase productivity, innovation, and economic competitiveness. Women who are empowered can start enterprises, participate actively in the workforce, and contribute to the economy, which is good for families, communities, and countries. Women who are empowered have higher health and well-being, which benefits their families, communities, and themselves. Increased access to healthcare and nutrition, decreased infant mortality rates, and better family planning options are all associated with women's empowerment. According to Article 42, the state must make provisions to guarantee first-rate working conditions and maternity leave. Women who are more empowered are also better equipped to make choices about their own bodies, particularly those concerning their sexual and reproductive health, which leads to better general health outcomes. Women are more likely to be educated when they are empowered. Women who have received an education are thought to make wise decisions about their lives, participate in society, and fight for their rights. The cycle of poverty is also broken by education since educated women are more likely to have better salaries, invest in the education of their families, and give back to their communities. For women to participate more actively in social and political areas, empowerment is also essential. Women who are empowered can take on leadership responsibilities, take part in decision-making, and speak up for women's rights and gender equality at all levels of society. In addition to these, prevalent problems like child marriage and female genital mutilation can only be resolved by empowering women. Therefore, Women require support and encouragement from their families, the government, society, and male coworkers, among other groups. With the correct help from a variety of organizations, they may integrate into the mainstream of the national economy and so contribute to its development (Mishra & Kiran, 2014).

Capabilities of ICT for Empowering Women

By giving women access to technology, opportunities to develop their digital skills, and opportunities to participate in the digital world, ICT empowers them in a variety of ways. ICT empowers women in the following ways:

- **Training in digital literacy and skills:** ICT resources like computers, the Internet, social media, and other digital platforms can be used effectively by women and girls if they have access to training programs that concentrate on developing their digital literacy and abilities. They may be able to communicate, obtain information, and engage in online activities as a result. Mukherjee et al. (2019) examined the relationship between the digital literacy program and its effects (perceived ICT proficiency, pursuing education and employment possibilities, and the role played by the perceived value of the training). The research by Nedungadi et al. (2018) showed how tablet-based learning might empower women. Women acquire life skills, safety awareness, and computer literacy. Febro et al. (2020), in their research revealed that using the e-learning module had a substantial impact on how girls and women developed their talents. This project was a step toward helping marginalized girls and women in Philippine society develop their technical abilities. The usage of ICTs and the e-governance system was taught to the women. These abilities help them achieve a higher social rank (Karan & Mathur, 2010). Women and girls have been able to increase their self-confidence by using digital ICTs and gaining new skills (Cummings & Neil, 2015; Intel, 2013). Women were trained to manage ICT kiosks as part of the E-Seva initiatives in India, and as a result, they benefited from the system's facilitation (Karan & Mathur, 2010).

- **Reducing the gender gap in digital environments and promoting gender equality:** For women and girls to be empowered by ICT, it is essential to ensure that they have equitable access to ICT infrastructure, including internet connectivity and gadgets. This may entail delivering subsidized or free devices, extending affordable internet access to underserved and rural areas, and advocating gender-responsive policies that address obstacles to ICT access for women and girls. The adoption of mobile technologies alone can significantly help to reduce the gender gap by empowering women to feel safer and more connected and by giving them access to information, services, and opportunities that improve their lives, such as health information, financial services, and employment opportunities (GSMA, 2018). ICT is the most recent in a long line of technical revolutions, and it is thought to have a big impact on female empowerment (Ark et al., 2002). As it motivates girls and women to seek technological careers and increases their awareness of entrepreneurship education, ICT can be a significant weapon for gender equality. Women can improve their social, economic, and educational position in this way (Bhimrao et al., 2015).

- **Promoting women's involvement in ICT-related fields:** Women in the Middle East are liberated as a result of women's participation in STEM fields (Islam, 2019). By supporting and promoting their participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) courses, which include ICT, women can be encouraged to pursue careers in these fields, which are typically dominated by men. According to a descriptive research method used in an Italian university, there is still a gender disparity between university professors and students who study computer science, computer engineering, and other STEM subjects (Marzolla, 2019). This can be accomplished by implementing programs like mentorships and

scholarships and promoting admirable female role models in the ICT sector. In workshops geared at luring women into STEM fields, tablets and internet technologies like Socrative for online surveys were employed (Morales, 2020). Tools like statistics and figures that try to inform on the achievements of women in the many fields of STEM fall under this category. These sites provide listings of well-known women and their experiences in the STEM fields, including their achievements and disappointments (Islam, 2017; Holgado et al., 2020). The promotion of gender equality and science education has been the focus of a variety of programs and initiatives, including W-STEM, Science for Girls and Boys, and Tec novation Girls. Utilizing all available human resources while integrating gender through ICT gives organizations a crucial competitive edge and fosters innovation, both of which are necessary for sustainable development and economic progress (Dickins, 2017).

- **Encouraging women to start their own businesses in the digital economy:** Women can gain economic empowerment by being encouraged and assisted in launching and expanding their own businesses in the digital economy. The goal of gender equality is to expand women's participation in the digital economy, which will strengthen the nation's capacity and lead to higher economic development and growth (Ranganath et al., 2011). Technology empowers women both financially and holistically in both their professional and personal lives, including in the areas of entertainment, knowledge, and consumer power (Pascall, 2012). Access to networks and information, lower transaction costs, and better market access are three of the major advantages of ICTs for women entrepreneurs. For most women who own modest or home-based enterprises, technologies are strong tools that can be used to encourage female entrepreneurship in the corporate world. Information and communication technology usage (ICTs) and the creative ways in which they have been applied have sparked the creation of new service delivery models and created new opportunities for smallholders (Rani & Joshi, 2012; FAO, 2017). In the larger business community, it increases the visibility of female business owners (Golmohammadi, n.d.). Their economic strength, independence, and freedom all increased (Kivunike et al., 2009; Olatokun, 2009). ICTs are viewed as a crucial tool for fostering socioeconomic development and have the potential to reduce poverty (Gopalakrishna, 2005). Many women have been drawn to technical and management roles because of the Internet, which has opened up excellent employment opportunities for female candidates. As a result, increased female engagement in public life has liberated them from male constraints and elevated their claims of equality (Bhattacharyya & Ghosh, n.d.). ICTs have enormous potential and opportunities to give rural women new career options and give them economic empowerment (Sulaiman & Kalaivani, 2011). The Internet offers a method for women who have found the traditional workplace to be less than ideal for making a fantastic career with little to no overhead (Padmannavar, 2011). Women can choose how to spend their money as well (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014).

- **Addressing women's violence and online abuse:** Access to ICTs may be made easier, which can help stop violence against women and

empower women (Brimacombe & Skuse, 2013; Gill et al., 2010; Weiss & Tarchinskaya, 2015). To empower women and girls using ICT, safe online places must be created for them. This entails addressing online harassment, cyberbullying, and violence against women, as well as putting safety and security precautions in place for them online. The promotion of safe online habits for women and girls can be accomplished through legislative and policy frameworks, awareness campaigns, and capacity-building initiatives.

- **Using ICT to promote gender equality and social change:** Using ICT to advocate for gender equality and social change can enable women and girls to speak out. ICTs are enhancing the global networks of women (Bonder, 2002). It promotes their rights and works to improve local communities. In order to do this, women's voices can be amplified, gender concerns can be brought to light, and legislative reforms that support gender equality and empowerment can be advocated for through social media, online campaigns, and digital platforms. Women can use digital ICTs to petition decision-makers, engage with peers online, exchange information, and foster solidarity (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). Women share their public opinions on blogs and other digital venues (Gurumurthy, 2012; Chami, 2014). Using digital ICTs, women can start or grow their micro-businesses while avoiding patriarchal societal conventions (Srivastava & Manzar, 2013).

- **Women's political engagement**: ICT can give women access to political information, such as news, statements, laws, and regulations. This makes it possible for individuals to continue learning about political topics and processes, which is essential for effective participation. Even when they have inadequate reading abilities, women's understanding of government programs and processes can be improved via ICT (Karan & Mathur, 2010). Online forums can be utilized for civic engagement, including petition signing, discussion participation, and attendance at virtual town halls. Social media can give women a platform to express their viewpoints, connect with others who share those viewpoints, and form networks with like-minded people or organizations. ICT can also facilitate remote political engagement, such as online voting or virtual meetings, making it more accessible for women who face obstacles like limited mobility or cultural norms. The Andhra Pradesh State Wide Area Network (APSWAN) serves as the state of A.P.'s main network for phone, data, and video communication. Because they now have the ability to write directly to the chief minister, cutting over the layers of hierarchy, women stand to gain much from them. Gyandoot is an intranet project that links 21 rural cybercafés known as Soochanalayas in the Dhar region of Madhya Pradesh, India. These interventions assist women because they now have more knowledge about and control over regional dynamics (Golmohammadi, n.d.). ICT can be a potent driver of women's political empowerment, which advances gender equality (Ramilo et al., 2005).

- **Conclusion**

- Information and communication technology (ICT) can revolutionize society and empower women in a number of ways. Women and girls can take advantage of ICT platforms, which facilitate communication, information acquisition, and online participation, by receiving training

that imparts digital literacy and skills. A key component of advancing gender equality is closing the gender gap in digital spaces and pushing for equitable access to ICT infrastructure. Encouragement of women's engagement in ICT-related sectors, especially in STEM fields, improves female representation while also paving the road for innovation and professional progress. Additionally, encouraging female entrepreneurs in the digital economy can result in economic empowerment and open doors for business growth and financial independence. Safe online environments must be built and maintained by regulations and awareness efforts in order to use ICT to solve issues like violence against women and online harassment. ICT is also a powerful weapon for advancing social change and gender equality by amplifying the voices of women and supporting advocacy initiatives. Finally, ICT helps to increase women's political involvement and empowerment by giving them access to political information and enabling remote political engagement. ICT emerges as a dynamic force in the effort to empower women, close gaps, and advance society thanks to its wide range of possibilities.

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