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EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND USE OF ICT

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ABSTRACT

Information and communication technology (ICT) is one of the ways to accelerate the process of women empowerment by providing them with education, knowledge and information, occupational opportunities, information about appropriate government policies and programmes, health related information and many more. ICT can deliver potentially useful information. Information technology is gradually changing the primitive or contemporary ideas. It is one of the effective processes to facilitate the empowerment process of women and girls to develop, involve and integrate them in political, technological, social and above all in the economic environment. Access to ICT can enable women to gain a stronger voice in their communities. Increased use of ICT create new ethical standard with emerging issues in daily life.

KEYWORDS*: Challenges, empowerment, ethics, ICT.*

INTRODUCTION

Information Technology is changing the traditional society to modern society. Women and girls have always taken a back seat in economic, political and social structure in Indian society. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are the best way to facilitate the empowerment process of women and integrate them in political, social and economic environment of the world. Advocacy for women's improved access to ICT, and attention to gender perspectives in the development, use of ICT has significantly increased. The information technology has connected the world in one platform and it is helping in the integration of various societies into one, changing the traditional society with some modifications in their lifestyle patterns.

The empowerment of women has been recognized as a vital element in national development effort. There are hurdles and challenges in empowerment of women and girls through ICT in India and many steps are being taken by the government organizations and N.G.Os. The pervasive use of technology in communication is an important characteristic of modernity. Use of ICT, modernity and empowerment is interrelated and ICT find space for its maximum utilization in the ongoing process of development and modernity. ICT has played a major role in the rapid breakthroughs in the women's world of rural India and are changing the way of knowledge. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but is improving the quality of life at home and outer society. The IT educated women not only promote education of their girl children, but also help in reducing the infant mortality and maternal mortality rate.

ICT is one of the ways to accelerate the process of women empowerment by providing them with education, knowledge and information, occupational opportunities, information about appropriate government policies and programmes, health related information, financial services, market information and many more. The potential of ICT for women in developing countries is highly dependent upon their levels of technical skills and educational qualification and is the prime

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requirement for accessing knowledge from global pool. The sophistication of any ICT infrastructure introduced into any environment becomes meaningless if women don't have the skills to operate the system and use it to their best advantage. Modernity, women empowerment and use of ICT is highly interrelated. Modernism is the cultural super structure and modernity is the base. The pervasive use of technology in communication is an important characteristic of modernity. A no. of researches has been made to relate to relate women empowerment with ICT and further to the ethical and behavioral changes and modernism with them. In modern societies,ICT is omnipresent, with over 3 billion people having access to the internet. In 1990's the internet became one of the most powerful trademarks of ICT with immense reach and wide acceptance across the countries within a short span. Indeed, the world became closer and shorter with almost merging of time and space that revolutionized many aspects of social life. As technology advances, computers continue to have a greater impact on society. As the world of computer evolves, computer ethics continues to create ethical standards that address new issues raised by new technologies. Information technology is introducing changes in day to day life that create new security and ethical issues for societies to debate and resolve. The increasing online environment is challenging traditional rules of right and wrong behavior of women in Indian society.

AREA OF THE STUDY:

The area of study is ward no. 24 and 25 under Bhatpara Municipality of Barrackpore II subdivision of 24 Parganas (North) district. The area is selected purposively. Ward no. 24 is mainly a slum near railway lines and mostly low income group of people working in unorganized sectors are residing in this ward. While ward no. 25 is the residence of financially stable persons with a supportive economical family background and mostly engaged in organized sector though few of them are self employed. The area of study is in the close vicinity of Shyamnagar town, only 25 kilometers away from Kolkata but still has open spaces, ponds and orchards and greens. The residents are of varied educational qualifications, economic structures and occupations.

METHODOLOGY:

To serve the purpose 52 women are randomly selected. Well structured questionnaire is used to collect the information by covering their socio-economic status. The questionnaire is used as a tool to collect the required data and then the data is tabulated and analyzed.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

Questionnaire is prepared in such a way to satisfy the main objectives of the study. The main objectives are:(i) The socio-economic characteristics of the samples are analyzed. (ii) Main thrust is given to their educational background of the surveyed women to the use of ICT. (iii) The role of ICT (information and communication technology) in their daily life is also studied to analyze the empowerment process of the surveyed women. (iv) Total time they spend in computer or using ICT is also questioned to the samples and the result came out is very interesting. (v) One of the objectives of the study is to know how computer education is helpful for the economic and social independence.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

The study area is ward no. 24, 25 of Bhatpara Municipality and 52 women aged between 15 to 55 years are surveyed. Occupations of the surveyed samples are also varied. Students, workers, homemakers all are included in the survey and the marital status of the samples is also surveyed. Field survey done in the month of February and March, 2018.

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TABLE I

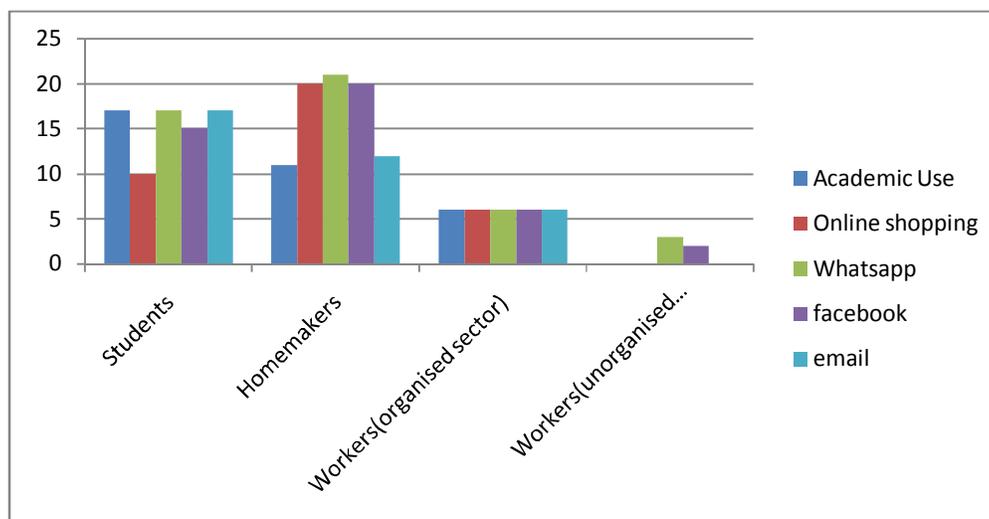| Sl. No.	Occupation	No. of samples surveyed	Age(years)	Educational Qualification	Using ICT/Computer	Using Mobile phones
1.	Students	17	16-25	Class VIII to Post Graduate	100%	100%
2.	Homemakers	22	20-50	Primary to Graduate	62%	100%
3.	Worker(Organized sector)	06	26-54	Madhyamik to Post Graduate	100%	100%
4.	Worker(Unorganized sector)	07	20-55	Illiterate, upto higher secondary	25%	72%

Data collected in February, March 2018 and tabulated by the author

It is found that girl students are mostly academically computer learned and 100% of them are using ICT and mobile phones though 50% of them do not have the smart phone and personal internet connection. Home makers are found of varied educational qualification from primary to graduate. From the primary survey it is found that 62% are using ICT are aged below 40 years. Eight housewives above 40 years found not interested in using computer and internet. Women working in the organized sector as teachers, bankers and office workers are all computer trained and using ICT in their daily life for entertainment and resolving the day to day problem. Home makers using ICT are least interested in knowledge sites, rather all of them are highly addicted to the social networking and spend daily at least 2 hours for it. Workers in unorganized sector are not interested in using ICT in their daily life. Nearly 20% of them found to be spending time in social networking.

TABLE II

Sl. No.	Occupation	Academic Use	Online Shopping	Whatsapp	Face book & other social Network	email
1.	Students	17(100%)	08(50%)	17(100%)	15(88%)	17(100%)
2.	Homemakers	11(50%)	20(90%)	21(95%)	20(90%)	12(55%)
3.	Worker(Organized sector)	06(100%)	06(100%)	06(100%)	06(100%)	06(100%)
4.	Worker(Unorganized sector)	NIL	NIL	03(43%)	02(29%)	NIL

Data collected in February, March 2018 and tabulated by the author

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The primary survey and the data analysis show that:

(1) The increased use of ICT is expanding the reach of women and magnifying their impacts in their family.

(2) The online environment is challenging the traditional rules of behavior and remarkable changes are noticed in their clothing, behavior and ethical values.

(3) The paper also tries to identify ways to use ICT proactively and effectively to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. The primary survey reveals that women's improved access to ICT is increasing the attention to gender perspectives in the development and empowerment process.

(4) The use of Information and Communication Technologies is gradually expanding the potentiality among women to get the economic and social independence. The survey reveals the fact that not only the workers but also the home makers are getting the power to take major household financial decisions.

(5) As women involved in using ICT, they are gaining more respect in their local communities. Access to ICT can enable women to gain a stronger voice in their families and communities.

Apart from the above the **negative impacts** of using ICT among the women are also very much prevalent in the study area.

(1) Increased uses of ICT in the study area have not proven as transformative as expected. Women apart from students others are mainly engaged in online shopping, or in social networking. Home makers of very little number are using email to communicate with others but 100% of them are addicted in chatting in social network and wasting a huge time daily. Three of the surveyed confess that the time they get for household work has been reduced remarkably after they became interested in social networking.

(2) While there is a recognition of the potential of ICT as a tool for the promotion of **"Gender Equality"** and the empowerment of women, a **"Gender Divide"** has also been identified. Women are in the minority of users in almost all the surveyed households.

(3) From the study it is found that there is a risk that ICT may exacerbate the existing inequalities between women and men and may create a new form of inequality. The survey supports the fact that in Indian society the revolution of ICT has not been passed on to the women folk primarily due to the social structure, values and beliefs. The **hurdles and challenges in** using ICT are:

(a) Computer Literacy: Basic computer education is available in English language. Internet access and education is also a big problem for many of the women as most of the websites are in English.

(b) Socio-cultural aspects: Potential for empowerment is also affected by socio-cultural aspects such as class, age and ethnicity. It is observed that boys are given preferences over girls even in education and access to ICT.

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(c) Language barrier: As told earlier most of the internet learning is through English and therefore out of the bounds of knowledge of many women. The primary survey also supports the very fact.

(d) Ownership: Ownership of communication language like computer, mobile phones, smart phones, internet connection are still rarity in ward no. 24 for women and girls. The social structure is such that men and boys are given preference over women and girls.

(e) Spending pattern: In India there is a belief that boys are going to be the bread earners in the family, so their development is essential and girls are going to be the homemaker but the belief is gradually changing.

The primary survey reveals a quite interesting feature. It is found that women using internet is gradually facing some ethical change in them. The study showed that gender perspectives played a significant part in determining the positive effects of ICT for empowerment. The study reveals that information systems raise new and often perplexing security and ethical problems. It increases information, network capabilities including the internet which is expanding the reach of individual and is magnifying their impacts. The online environment is rather challenging the traditional rules of right and wrong behavior especially among the girl students and the young aged.

CONCLUSION:

For centuries women in this country have been socially and economically handicapped. The paper concludes with the very fact that with the use of ICT a part of women of the study area is getting a fair chance to learn, discover and use this valuable invention in a constructive and positive way for the betterment of their family. ICT is accelerating the empowerment process with some ethical and behavioral changes of both positive and negative impacts.

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