

Mobile Phone: A new tool to empower rural women in India with special reference to Bolpur-Santiniketan

A POST DOCTORAL RESEARCH SUPPORTED BY INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN IN RADIO AND TELEVISION (IAWRT)

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Executive summary

The potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) in bringing about a radical transformation in the everyday living pattern of individuals have been realized by social scientists. The capacity of ICTs in providing a better living is witnessed in the spheres of employment, health, agriculture, education and so on.

This gradual transformation is also evident in an emerging nation like ours. Women, in rural India have always faced severe challenges in terms of social development as well as economic empowerment. The research aims to trace the trajectory of the socio-economic changes that are happening in rural communities in lieu of mobile phone use and also depicts how newer technological innovations are embraced by them readily.

The aforesaid work also outlines the constraints faced by women in rural India which are detrimental to the process of empowerment. These constraints can be the lack of education, poverty, lack of skills to manage technology, gender inequality and so on. In a traditional, patriarchal society like India, these challenges are hard to overcome. Despite such hurdles, the rural woman confronts every hindrance on her path to development and mobilizes herself for an overall emancipation.

The undertaken project shows women empowerment through the use of mobile technology by the use of mobile phone communication and also clearly marks the eventual psychological empowerment of these rural women.

The basic challenge that exists in this scenario is the 'digital divide'. Even though the potential of ICTs have been realised soon enough, but it cannot be harnessed completely due to the factor of inaccessibility to the majority.

Especially the women in these remote rural corners cannot access technology mainly due to the lack of proper infrastructural development. The research project attempts to decode this shift in how the use of mobile phone technology by women is assisting to shape the agenda for social and economic transformation in rural belts of India.

The mobile phone use by rural women has the benefit of addressing locally relevant information and issues. Dissemination of information in the form of employment information, information regarding education, agricultural information and so on is some of the many benefits that the use of mobile phone technology has to offer. The mobile phone technology also offers even a greater scope in reaching out to women in the rural belts.

In other words, it has improved the rural woman's accessibility to significant information which in turn is instrumental in bringing a change in their socio-economic status. The use of ICT is not directly associated with the empowerment of rural women. The mere use of technology does not develop their status. On the contrary, in order to understand the true meaning of women empowerment in rural India, one has to explore the changes that have been brought about through the use of mobile phones by the rural women. Previously, women have been marginalized and by-passed. The policies of government regarding the empowerment of women must be implemented at grass root level. Only then can women in rural communities can be truly emancipated.