

Clicktivism and Social Media: Role of Educational Policies in Bridging Gender Digital Divide in India

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Social media is the space available online for people across the globe that is digitally connected, sharing dimensions of ideas with the help of a click. Social media could be used for purposes such as acquiring new educational techniques or for facilitating social change and activism. Activities that may be included in social media may range from organizing to facilitation. Activists, educators, regimes, politicians purposefully use the potential of social media especially among young people so as to produce, mediate and receive communication. While mass popular policies are by no means a new phenomenon, digital tools are facilitating their formation.

Clicktivism

Clicktivism is defined as the use of this social media and various other online methods to promote causes such as educational techniques and gathering information. The basic premise behind clicktivism is that it allows a quick and easy way to gather, process and transmit information. These digital technologies have often influenced the formation of active educational groups and civil society groups.

Information and Communication Technology

Information and Communication Technologies include technologies that provide an enabling environment for physical infrastructure and services development for generation, transmission and processing, storing and disseminating information in all forms, including voice, text, data, graphics and video. 'Traditional' and 'modern' technologies including radio, television, video, mobile and fixed telephones, letters, posters, brochures and computers are some of the categories of Information and Communication Technologies. The power, speed and global reach of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) provide unprecedented opportunities for sharing information and knowledge.

Literacy and benefits from ICT

Technology has the potential to greatly contribute to the prosperity of developing areas. With this however, there are several key misconceptions regarding the digital revolution. Poor areas need more than the equipment; they need to know how to use the technology in a resourceful way so that they can improve their circumstances, whether it is related to health care, economic support, or other areas of distress. The problem of literacy remains as one of the primary setbacks for poverty stricken areas. The misconception here lies in the fact that most people see the availability of technology as the primary factor in reducing the digital divide. As Ranjit Devraj states, "Even literate South Asians cannot benefit from the IT revolution without a working knowledge of the English language because of poor 'localisation' -- a highly technical process by which computer programmes are translated into another language." Therefore, in order for the digital divide to decrease, more people must learn to use the technology.

Access to Digital Technology and Digital Divide

The expression Digital Divide originally came into existence in the mid 1990s, initially referring to the gap in ownership of computers between certain ethnic groups. This term appeared in several news articles and political speeches of mid 1990s. President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore used the term in 1990s in their speeches at various occasions.

Digital divide is the term used to describe space between geographic areas, households, individuals and businesses at different socio-economic levels with regard to their use of the Internet. The wide

variety of internet activities which include imbalance both in physical access to technology and the resources are considered to be pivotal factors in deciding digital divide.

Digital Citizen

Various skills are needed to effectively participate as a digital citizen and absence of these skills invariably leads to digital divide. The expression has been defined variedly by various scholars. Lisa Servon argued in 2002 that the digital divide is a symptom of a larger and more complex problem - that of persistent poverty and inequality. Bharat Mehra defines it simply as the troubling gap between those who use computers and the Internet and those who do not. More recently, some have used the term to refer to gaps in broadband network access. The term can mean not only unequal access to computer hardware, but also inequalities between groups of people in their ability to use information technology.

Given the range of criteria used to assess various technological disparities between groups/nations and lack of data on some aspects of usage, the exact nature of the digital divide is both contextual and debatable. Mehra (2004) identifies socioeconomic status, income, educational level, and race among other factors associated with technological attainment, or the potential of the internet to improve everyday life for those on the margins of society and to achieve greater social equity and empowerment. Depending upon the theory of the diffusion of innovations through social networks, a common framework can be set up to distinguish the main approaches researchers have taken to conceptualize the digital divide.

Diffusion of Innovations through Social Networks

Based on the theory of the diffusion of innovations through social networks, a common framework can be set up to distinguish the main approaches researchers have taken to conceptualize the digital divide. All kinds of studies and approaches to the digital divide can be classified into the following four categories.

- Digital divide amongst individuals, organizations, communities, societies, countries and world as a region.
- Digital divide as a result of variation in income, education, geography, age, gender, type of ownership, size, sector, etc.
- Digital Divide as a result of access, usage and impact.
- Digital Divide considering the use of phone, internet, computer, digital television etc.

Categories of Digital Divide

The categories of studies and approaches to the digital divide can majorly be classified into four significant categories. 1.) Digital divide amongst individuals, organizations, communities, societies, countries and world as a region. 2.) Digital divide as a result of variation in income, education, geography, age, gender, type of ownership, size, sector. 3.) Digital Divide as a result of access, usage and impact. 4.) Digital Divide considering the use of digital television, internet, computer and phone. These four distinct dimensions of digital divide could further result into a complex web of other various variables.

Gender and Digital Divide

Men have always been present in the technological world and the software may be designed primarily to appeal to men. It is also argued that the stereotype of the tech-savvy man acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy. There is a division between men and women, not only in terms of pure economics, but also in the realm of technology. Women's lack of technological access is caused by many factors, and it will ultimately hurt them.

A typecast in developing societies is being developed that women are relatively technophobic and are less capable of using technology. In his article "The digital divide: the special case of gender", J. Cooper states that there is "a dramatic digital divide for gender, and women are not reaping the benefits of the technological revolution". Cooper believes this is due to the types of toys that children

play with. While girls play with dolls, boys play with video games and become more connected with technology.

Access of Information and Communication Technology for Women

As a result of less access of Information and Communication Technology to women, a stereotype has been developed that women are rather technophobic. It is the unfortunate social status of women and the elevated social status of men that leads to men having more access to ICT than women. If women are provided a "digital gender opportunity", they will surely have access to employment, education, income and health services.

ICT and Gender based Digital Divide in Developing Countries

Women's ability to contribute fully towards shaping the development of the global knowledge, economy and society is usually constrained by many inequalities. H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni notes that "when we talk about the gender digital divide we are recognizing a fundamental obstacle to development in our countries. Without access to information and knowledge, women are at risk of permanent economic backwardness, which in turn makes our countries poor." Gender digital divide recognizes a fundamental obstacle to development in our countries. Without access to information and knowledge, women, who compose the majority of our population are at risk of permanent economic backwardness, which in turn makes our countries poor.

Gender Digital Divide in Education Sector

There is a wide range of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) available; there is still a division of who is allowed access to it. Women are deprived not only economically, but also in terms of information. Digital divide is considered to be more prominent in education sector. In the 1990s, better resourced schools were much more likely to provide their students with regular computer access. In the context of schools which have consistently been involved in discussion of the divide, current formulations focus more on how students use computers, rather than simply whether there are computers or internet connections. Education also extends beyond the classroom. Given that developing countries do not have access to extensive educational opportunities, there is still a great need for technological education.

Technically Trained Female Labour Force

Women are less likely than men to know the international languages that are used on the Internet. Moreover, given their limited education, women are much less likely than men to have computer skills. Women's lack of access to transport and inability to leave the home also hamper their access to information. In virtually all developing countries, communications infrastructure is significantly weaker in rural areas and poor urban areas.

India is one of the largest democracies of the world and challenges faced are of various dimensions. Digital divide is one of the most prominent challenges faced by Indian democracy in the 21st century.

In order to increase the participation of women in the political process, government has to take few urgent initiatives. First, there should be an adequate proportion of technically trained female labour force. Second, for the permeation of an alternate gender culture, there needs to be a process of de-learning and re-learning from the new work environment for both men and women.

Women and Technology Approach

The family life of a woman and her professional commitments invariably adapt to one another. To illustrate the gender situation, one has to view 'the women in technology approach' and 'the women and technology approach'. The former approach tries to involve more women via equal access to education and employment; while the latter has a broader focus on the nature of technological work. The women in technology approach advocate the 'add women and stir' approach which insists on imparting skill to women to survive in the world of new technology. This approach locates the problem in women, but does not ask the broader questions of whether and in what way science and its institutions could be reshaped to accommodate women. The women and technology approach looks into the gender segregation of skills and jobs and the gender sensitivity of the organisation in particular. It aims to alter the masculine practices of these occupations so that women could enter

into such work without any loss of identity or integrity. What is needed is a transformation in the nature of paid and unpaid work, as well as looking at the impact women can have on technology and technology on women.

Challenges for Educational and Occupational Sectors

The willingness to relocate is a major factor that drives the growth of working professionals. It is one of the areas where men outscore women. The other reasons that deter women from climbing up the carrier ladder include the mounting pressure at work place, work timings, time flexibility and travel. The demands of high responsibility may play a role in keeping women from accepting jobs.

Married women outnumber men in low-experience categories. Marriage is understood to be one of the important factors restricting choices of women. It is because childcare and housework remain women's responsibilities, irrespective of her income, educational level or employment. This places a great burden on women and restricts women's choices in terms of better job opportunities. Only a few women rule in the workplace as well as into marriage.

The strategy to draw more women lies in improving the manner in which work is conducted without jeopardizing the quality of workers lives. Access to jobs is more or less restricted to the urban based upper class youth. It reduces the hard choices that women have to make.

The biggest challenge for organizations is to be sensitive to family and social pressures under which women have to work. It is clear that untimely exits, either due to circumstances or personal choice, are the biggest reason why the number of women declines so sharply with a rise in experience in various industrial sectors. The government should develop a definite strategy to curb those exits. Organizations should be sensitive to the needs of their women employees. They are wives, mothers and homemakers amongst other significant roles that they play. Various organizational policies must be drafted with these points in mind.

The discrimination is far more subtle and indirect in developing countries like India. Most official norms and procedures are not overtly discriminatory. Hiring policies have no gender bias. This defines that the action plan in the Indian case has to be different. Some of the corrective measures suggested in the Western World are already in place in India. It is clear that there could be tremendous potential in scientific advances and technological change for gender equality and empowerment of women. However, this potential can only be realized if efforts are made to clearly identify and address relevant gender perspectives in this area.

- **Urban rural divide:** Access to jobs is more or less restricted to the urban based upper class youth. It reduces the hard choices that women have to make. The strategy to draw more women lies in improving the manner in which work is conducted without jeopardizing the quality of workers' lives.
- **Relocation preference:** The demands of high responsibility may also play a role in keeping women from accepting such jobs. The willingness to relocate is a major factor that drives the growth of IT professionals. It is one of the areas where men outscore women. The other reasons that deter women from climbing up the carrier ladder include the mounting pressure at work place, work timings, time flexibility and travel.
- **Marriage and family commitments:** Childcare and housework remain women's responsibilities, irrespective of her income, educational level or employment. This places a great burden on women and restricts women's choices in terms of better job opportunities. Though women employed in the IT industry are relatively free from domestic drudgery, this is a class-specific phenomenon restricted to a few in high level jobs whose domestic responsibilities have been transferred to women of a lower economic class. The opportunities offered by other industries have only benefited a privileged few. Married women outnumber men in low-experience categories, but in 10 years, a large number of women either opt out of their careers, or accept less demanding roles.
- **Unconventional working hours:** The BPO industry which is a subset of the IT industry has its own unique conditions that pose impediments to achieve a good work-life balance for

women. For women, it becomes even more challenging and hence the burnout is much higher. Marriage more or less forces women to quit night shift operations. For instance, the trend of more women employees in call centers is more visible in the North and the Western part of the country. In the South, although there has been considerable increase in the number of women an employee in call centers, yet it is quite low. This is attributed to the unconventional working hours that call centers have.

- **Workplace and Gender discrimination:** Gender discrimination is not considered as an issue because the type of work done by software professionals, whether men or women is the same and they have equal opportunities of rising up the ladder provided they stay on in the job. In some cases, companies prefer to recruit women as the attrition rate among women is lower than that among men.
- **Media sector:** The type and nature of problems that women face in media sector are different. There is no such discrimination in media sector and there is no gender preference. If there was no gender preference for outsourcing, one would imagine there would be no gender preference for employment. Software is the only sector, barring one or two instances, which said that they prefer women.

Social Change and Women Empowerment

Social change and women empowerment with the help of social media has become a philosophical tradition in last few decades. Media and communication technologies have been available to a very limited number of women in society. Opportunities to build communities and share experiences with other women on a global basis therefore have remained limited for women. Men have always been almost exclusively the inhabitants of cyberspace since its early developments. Digital divide is a concept through which inequality in the use of computer technology is mapped. It refers to the gap between regions or groups of people that are left behind in use of computers and internet. Digital gender divide is an extension of this concept and focuses specifically on the inequity of women's access to use of communication technology. If we consider issues of women using internet for civic participation, the answer is less optimistic than a resounding yes. Social Media gives abundant opportunities to develop and empower women especially when it comes to gather information in a globalised world.

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