

## Emerging Digital Empowerment Debates -Determinants & Policy Implications - The Case of Rural Women in India

Nandan. P.

*Assistant professor & HOD Department of Commerce Sri H.D. Devegowda Government First Grade College Paduvalahippe Holenarasipura taluk Hassan District Ph :9945344692 nandanmcom@yahoo.com*

**Abstract:** This paper examines the emerging digital empowerment debates of the rural women in India & focuses on several emerging determinants & policy implications. The rural women in India form nearly 50% of the rural population & are deprived of a number of opportunities towards receiving a sustainable livelihood. Even though they play a decisive responsibility in ensuring food and nutrition security of the country, they are sidelined when it comes to digital empowerment. They countenance grave challenges as an outcome of gender-based societal discrimination and unfairness, which contradict with societal progressive trends. They are often denied of equitable access to opportunities, resources, assets and services relating to digital resources usage. There is a need to prioritize policies towards digital empowerment of rural women.

**Keywords:** Rural women, digital empowerment, innovative strategies, policy Implications

### I. Introduction

Rural women in India who account for nearly 50% of the total rural population are still considered as vulnerable because their male counterparts are busy migrating to urban centers. The case of rural women is deplorable because government makes several schemes for their sustenance & well-being , but majority of these schemes goes unnoticed or not completely utilized. The un awareness & comprehension towards developmental projects is mainly caused due to their illiteracy & poor economic transaction level. These are the days of globalization & each village is opening up to global economy through internet connectivity, India is still behind in complete digital literacy. Rural women are still impoverished because they lack access to economic resources are not able to make their living though digital opportunities. The rural women keep away from any connectivity with internet world as they basically lack education & specially English language awareness. In Indian context , rural women still feel going online is a dream,

**Constraints to equal access** - The rural women suffer from several constraints which are impediments to their social progress

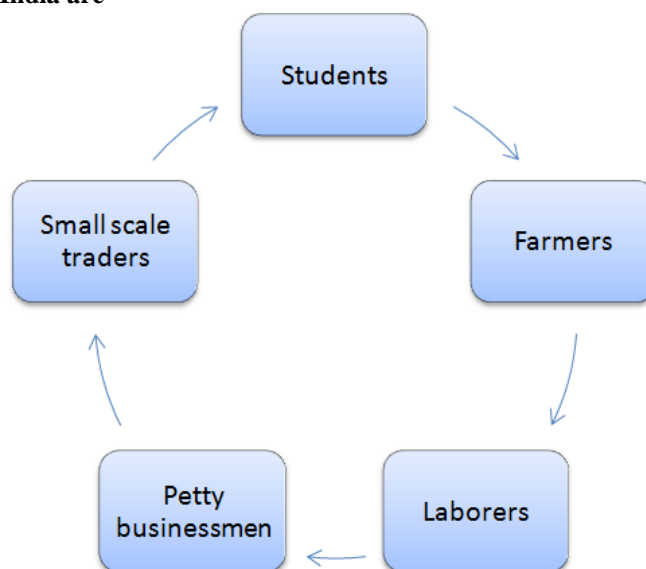
1. Increasing rural indebtedness,
2. Increasing impact of environmental crisis,
3. Increasing reliability on male counterparts,
4. Increasing communication gaps ,
5. Increasing social constraints ,
6. Increasing economic limitations ,
7. Increasing urban migration etc

have made them support less. Even though Tele- communication sector is speedily covering up the rural areas with internet connectivity , with a promise to increase the connectivity by 2020 to 315 million which barely covers 36% of the total population. It is estimated that by 2020, this share of rural India will jump to 48%, creating a huge opportunity for brands and marketers in places where establishing a physical presence is still a challenge, according to a study by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) titled ‘The Rising Connected Consumer in Rural India’.

1.	70 % of the Rural Indians use internet for social network such as face book , mailing chatting etc.
2.	15% of the Rural Indians use internet for research products
3.	15% of the Rural Indians use internet for giving feedback on product purchase
4.	12% of the Rural Indian women use internet
5.	10% of the women who use internet for social network are college educated
6.	15 % of the educated rural women have mobile phones
7.	49% of the rural women do not have any technological awareness
8.	15% of the rural adult women use phones via their dependents.

**Source:** Boston Consulting Group (BCG) titled ‘The Rising Connected Consumer in Rural India’. 2014

**Internet users in rural India are**



These categories of the internet users in Rural India use Internet for following reasons

1.	Banking	12%
2.	Chatting	54%
3.	Gaming	28%
4.	Listening to music	47%
5.	Mailing	48%
6.	Social networking	39%
7.	Viewing films /serials	38%

**Source :** Boston Consulting Group (BCG) titled ‘The Rising Connected Consumer in Rural India’. 2014

**Constraints to internet usage-** The rural women are unacquainted about internet usage as only 12% of the rural women use internet that too through male counterparts .They are less educated / illiterate as the literacy level in rural India is still below 50% . The primary reason is they cannot afford a smart phone as they are struggling for a minimum livelihood. Millions are not in a position to purchase basic necessities hence they cannot afford to learn basic computer or get basic digital training.

**The risk of economic transaction-** Besides, the economic phase of the rural women is very passive. They do not hold rights whatsoever over economic resources at family level. Millions of rural women are reliant on male partners for economic transactions. 72% of the rural women in India are dependent on either their husbands / brothers/ fathers /on maternal /paternal uncles for their daily transactions.

**The risk of online transactions** -The rural people in general , believe that online transactions are hazardous & are out of the purview of rural people . Several rural Indians do not trust online marketing or online shopping or online banking . They avoid being online because they think that their personal information is at stake.

**The risk of English language barrier-** The rural women keep away from any connectivity with internet world as they basically lack education & specially English language awareness As majority of the online applications are in English language they prefer to stay away from using it or they are made to seek male help.

Even though IAMAI report for the financial year 2015 calculated that the rural Indian internet users is increasing , the percentage increase in rural women access to internet use is still very less.

**Role of telecom sector** -As India moves faster in the upward movement towards a global economy, telecommunication sector is expanding with every chance towards covering up all rural & remote areas with internet connectivity. The telecom sector reach even promises to 315 million by 2020. It is estimated that by 2020, this share of rural India will jump to 48%, creating a huge opportunity for brands and marketers in places where establishing a physical presence is still a challenge.

**Need of the hour** Rural women need unbiased to education, access to internet usage, access to economic resources & unfathomed support for digital awareness. Women learn everything faster than demanded hence she can be included in the mainstream internet connectivity through

1.	Basic computer education for women
2.	Simpler mobile applications designed for rural women
3.	Simplified mobile banking technological supportive assistance designed for rural women
4.	Community awareness programs designed especially for women supported by all stake holders of the community
5.	Public Private partnership in creating awareness for women in accessing digital awareness
6.	Free & easy user friendly applications for rural illiterate women
7.	Basic digital literacy training for women

## **II. Conclusion**

Thus the fact that the rural women can be active agents of economic and social change and environmental protection is attested by their internet usage levels. Women can be harbingers of economic progression through getting awareness on & their access into internet world. The Entry of smart phones into Indian Rural arena has been creating magic & the rural women are finding support through several free user friendly online applications. Even the Mobile companies are going towards simplification of mobile applications. The introduction of Google initiated internet saathi type of internet resources can help rural women to better their living conditions. But at the same time gender-based societal discrimination and unfairness has to be removed to provide rural women with a fair chance of equity & access. Any tradition which contradicts with societal progressive trends need to be contained through social legislations. There is a dire need to prioritize policies aiming at removal of equitable access to social- economic opportunities, resources, assets and services relating to digital resources usage. There is a need to prioritize policies towards digital empowerment of rural women through community development.

## **References:**

- [1]. Nelasco, Shobana (2010). Status of women in India. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications.
- [2]. Boston Consulting Group (BCG) titled 'The Rising Connected Consumer in Rural India'.
- [3]. Forbes, Geraldine (1999). Women in modern India. Cambridge University Press., A major scholarly survey.
- [4]. Healey, Madeleine (2014). Indian Sisters: A History of Nursing and the State, 1907–2007. Rutledge.
- [5]. Jayapalan, N. (2001), "Status of women in Hindu society", in Jayapalan, N., Indian society and social institutions, New Delhi, India: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors
- [6]. Joshi, Rama; Liddle, Joanna (1986). Daughters of independence: gender, caste, and class in India. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press
- [7]. Forbes Report on India Rural villages 2015
- [8]. Healey, Madeleine (2014). Indian Sisters: A History of Nursing and the State, 1907–2007. Rutledge.
- [9]. IMAI report (2015)
- [10]. Joshi, Rama; Liddle, Joanna (1986). Daughters of independence: gender, caste, and class in India. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press
- [11]. UN women Watch 2015 report of the United nations on women empowerment strategies.
- [12]. Bridging digital divide - Times of India report 2014-