

Bringing Women from Indian Slums Closer To Digital Knowledge & Trends

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Abstract— “Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.” – Mahatma Gandhi

Learning and education forms an important part of modern world. Right education grooms an individual, gives him access to think logically & factually. Education transforms lives and is at the heart of UNESCO’s mission to build peace, eradicate poverty and drive sustainable development.(1) Today, education has become accessible to a vast population around the world, yet, many are still devoid of this ‘luxury’. Poverty plays an important role in this. Many rural areas are devoid of education. Even in urban areas, slums don’t have education levels up to the mark. As a result people in such areas suffer from unsustainable living. A slum can be defined as ‘A residential area where dwellings are unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, lack of ventilation or sanitation facility and having drinking water facilities in unhygienic conditions’. Around 24% of India lives in slums.(7) Cramped spaces, bad sanitation, garbage and filth are some of the highlights of slums of India. The people residing in these spaces mostly belong to lower income class who make their living by doing odd jobs. Hence, they have limited reach to education. In a deeply patriarchal society such as India, the access of women to various facilities is generally much more limited than men. The situation is particularly worse in educationally backward areas such as slums. Hence women in slums are deprived of many basic necessities. Thus, digital literacy for women can bring a huge change in this space. This paper focuses on analyzing the overall situation and suggesting a way to improve it. A case study has been used as a catalyst to highlight how this goal could be achieved.

Keywords: Digital Knowledge & Trends, Internet Trends in India

I. INTRODUCTION

A. What is Digital Education?

Digital education and trends makes access to learning and education easier. With the advent of smart phones and computers, the process of learning has evolved rapidly. E-learning, virtual lectures, educational gratification, portals containing educational resources and so can contribute to the development of digital learning

B. The Digital Revolution in India

India is today considered a success story being written. The economic growth is one of the biggest among the large economies of the world. But the past was not always the same. After the end of colonial rule in 1947, the majority of the country was in poverty. India missed the bus of industrialization in early 19th and 20th century as it was a fodder to colonial powers. But the country has witnessed the digital boom of 21st century. Reach of internet has been growing faster than ever imagined. If we see at the following

graph, in comparison to 2006, India has seen a spectacular jump of 1647% of the internet users in the country.

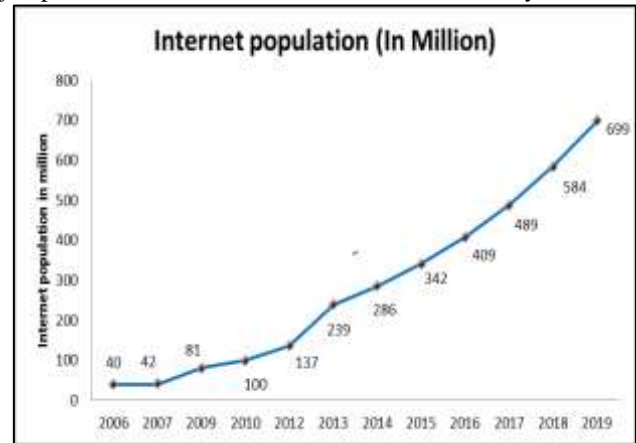


Fig. 2: Internet Trends in India ⁽²⁾

C. Role of Smartphones in Increasing Digital Reach

According to a 2019 study, 97 percent of users in India use mobile phone as one of the devices to access internet.(6) Smartphones, being cheaper than a conventional PC, also more mobile have made it to all economic classes. As smartphones become cheaper and cheaper day by day, its reach widens up even more. India today has more smartphones than entire population of US.

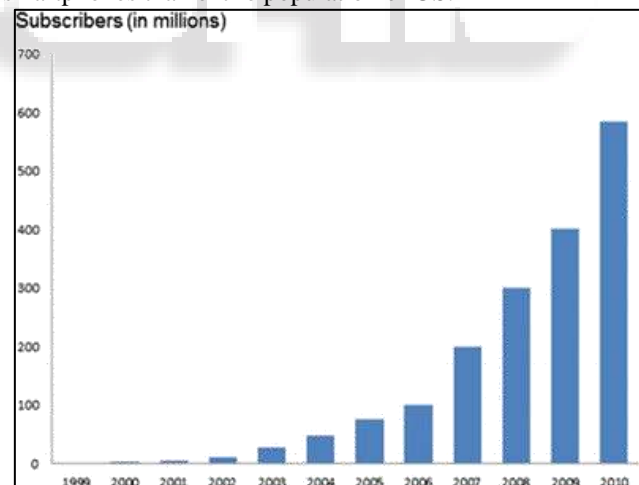


Fig. 2: Rise of Cellphones in India ⁽³⁾

In terms of data industry, 4G bandwidth is becoming common day by day. The eyes are on to introduce 5G in upcoming future. The open economy with competition from different companies across industry has led to aggressive pricing by data providers that have helped in deep penetration of digital medium through mobile phones in even the low income regions.

D. Where do Women Stand in this race?

As of 2018, only 30% internet users in India are women⁽⁴⁾ (175.2 million women). While the data gives an overall

picture of women users in India, the situation of digital usage by women in rural and urban slum areas is even worse.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Upon observation it was found that in the slum areas, the internet education is not even basic. Women are not aware of the most basic ways by which their life can become easier. Indian internet market today offers a wide range of useful daily life facilities. Though these facilities are well known in urban setup, just few meters away in slums, the knowledge is negligible. Hence, imparting digital education in these areas in a prime priority. Access to digital education to these women, will not only make their lives easier but also help them come out from chains they are tied in.

Digital classes becomes a necessity, it can be an asset for women with even no or with little education. The prime objective is to make the women retrospective to these learning. It is important to help them understand the necessity and importance of this education.

III. DISCUSSION

A. Who could be a teacher?

Basic digital classes do not require expertise. Basic education can be provided by even a child studying in Class 8 with a good knowledge about his surroundings and internet. That gives us a large base of people who can support in bringing the much needed digital revolution. India has a huge base of people studying in senior classes of schools and colleges who are internet savvy, the working professionals from MNCs can provide support on weekends.

B. The number of hours that needs to be dedicated

According to observations made, a class of 1 hour with a ratio of 1:5, i.e. one teacher to 5 students can make these 5 women learn a lot of things in even a short span of time.

C. How to get these women onboard?

1) Hurdles:

It has been observed that it is not easy to get a woman onboard for a digital session. There can be many hurdles. Let's look into few scenarios:

- A housewife may not be willing to come out of her house. One of the factors behind such a decision may be it being considered 'waste of time'.
- Most of these women belong to conservative backgrounds, digital education may be considered something that makes them 'corrupt'.⁽⁵⁾ It is commonly believed in many communities that women should not be allowed to be exposed to such educational reforms.
- A laborer working on a field would consider dedication of time to digital education as a loss of revenue in many ways. She is supposed to be paid on the basis of number of hours she works. A similar case can be observed for women working in other low paying unorganized sector jobs.

2) Some possible ways to overcome hurdles:

- Motivation is biggest factor that can work towards bringing the necessary change. Making the women realize the necessity of digital education by giving useful

examples from their own everyday life and providing a solution to those through digital means.

- Awareness in a society is very important with respect to menace of patriarchy. There are various government schemes that have been in place to promote Girl Child education e.g. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Dhanalakshmi Scheme etc. Still a lot needs to be done to with respect to education of adult women.

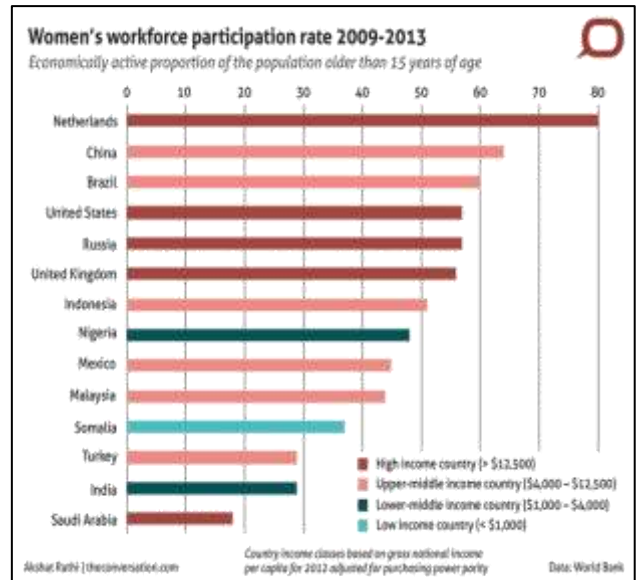


Fig. 3: A reflection of patriarchy in India ⁽⁸⁾

IV. CASE STUDY

Location: Hakeempet, Towli Chowki, Hyderabad, India
Hyderabad is one of the fastest growing cities in India. It is considered one of the biggest IT hub in the world. As a result a large number of residents here have high end paying jobs. Banjara Hills is one of the prominent sub urban areas in the city. It is popular for its cafes and restaurants etc. In the backyard of this posh locality lies a slum area. There is a stark contrast between an area such as Banjara Hills & the locality in its backyard. Multi lanes roads, big bungalows, clean surrounding are replaced with cramped lanes, no sanitation within a distance of few meters. The Hakeempet area houses a lot of people working in low paying jobs or domestic helps in the posh localities.

An interaction was done with number of residents in the area especially the women residing there. Most of the women belonged to very conservative families. They mostly were home makers while some of them worked as house servants and other low paying jobs in Banjara Hills area. Most of them had little or no knowledge of digital revolution.

A digital session was planned for them. Convincing women to participate in this session was not an easy task. They were motivated about the importance of such knowledge. This helped organizing a 1 hour class for them. Volunteers with good knowledge of smartphones and internet played the role of teachers and each volunteer took a 1 hour session of a group of 5 women.

Planning and research was done on how to go ahead with the session to make full use of this 1 hour. There were few levels that were planned, decided and adopted by the participating volunteers for their students:

A. Level 1 (Motivation):

After, students got onboard, the first phase was to create a need, a desire to learn. A daily life example helped them understand why this learning was necessary. E.g. they were told that they need not to go to market to buy vegetables, they can order them online with no delivery charges. This helped in maintaining their attention for the required period

B. Level 2 (Start with Basics)

Not everyone can be on same level of knowledge, hence it was decided to start with the very basics. Some of the very basic knowledge that was transferred included:

- How to Switch On/Off phone?
- How to call?
- How to save phone number?
- How to set alarm?
- How to use calculator?
- How to SMS?
- What is a smart phone?
- What is an 'App'? What app does?

C. Level 3 (Focus on the aspect that interest them the most)

To further improve their interest and curiosity levels, the focus was made on the aspects that those women were most interested in: Entertainment. They were delighted to know that their favorite TV series & movies were easily accessible on digital space.

Knowledge was imparted to them about 'YouTube', free cooking channels, songs and entertainment videos available on the platform.

They learned about various channel for their children's education.

D. Level 4 (Social Life)

Very basic knowledge was provided to them about various methods and social media tools that can help them connect with each, their relatives and their friends. A focus was also made on benefits of these social media tools.

E. Level 5 (Every Day Essentials)

After covering the above levels, focus was made on how digital world can make everyday life much easier to live.

Knowledge about various online available facilities was imparted:

- Online groceries apps were discussed in details.
- Benefits of online banking, use of UPI, mobile wallets for easy transfer of money.
- Ways were discussed on how to pay electricity bills, water bills etc. online. How to do mobile recharge and other such important utilities were discussed.
- How get benefits online of different schemes by government for Below Poverty Line people was in focus.
- An important use of Digital medium i.e. in ticket booking of railways and bus was highlighted. This helped them understand how they can escape long queues at train.
- How to connect with a doctor online for free and get a free consultation was discussed.
- How to book cab/bike in case of emergency including other everyday useful things were discussed.

F. Level 6 (Further Learning)

The most important aspect of this session was, a discussion on how to further enhance learnings. Various learning modules that are available online free of cost or even with little cost that can help these women, learn and grow were discussed.

Focus was on professional courses that could be accessed online and would help these women start a business, learn to run an organization etc.

V. CONCLUSION

Education is important in self-development and in current times digital knowledge forms a primary source to obtain education. It is very important to improve the reach of this aspect to as far as possible in the society. More focus should be on the groups that have been left out in this race of development. Women from urban slums are one such group.

A. Learnings from Case Study

After the end of the session, the women felt much more enlightened. They were now a lot more aware about their surroundings. They were more inspired to learn and grow. They now were more aware of how they can make their everyday life easier with digital technology. Upon talking later with some of the women involved in the session, it was observed that they started using internet for teaching their kids, learning entrepreneurial skills, etc. Some of them used social media platforms to share their availability and contact information for the job of part time cook.

B. Suggestions

- Policies should be adopted by governing bodies that would focus on digital education of women from these areas.
- Certification and Rewards & Recognition from Govt. bodies for the volunteers that show interest in conducting such digital classes would inspire people to come forward.
- Such initiatives must be taken up individuals as well as group. Involvement of organizations: NGOs and Corporate Companies with CSR programs can support a much planned conduction of such events.
- Longer and even more detailed sessions can be organized for the women who are eager to learn even more after the first session is over.
- If we start with a ratio of 1:5 and more such sessions are conducted we can train a lot of women and bring them out of darkness to the brightness of education.

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