

# **VISION VIKSIT BHARAT 2047: CONTRIBUTION AND INITIATIVES OF DIGITAL INDIA FOR EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN**

Vol - 2

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# EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH DIGITAL LITERACY: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER

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## Abstract

*Technology has become an integral part of society and it has affected different spheres, and one of them the increasing significance of digital literacy as the tool of people's empowering. The subject matter of this research paper relates to gender and technology; this paper adopts a sociological lens to analyse how the least digital literacy favours women. It looks at how digital skills mitigate existing gaps that limit women from gaining information, education and employment to make the gaps between male and female minimal. Hence the conclusions drawn from the study indicate the importance in assisting women be economically and socially empowered by enhancing the digital literacy as this transforms the power relations in the household and other spheres of life.*

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, Digital Literacy, Information technology

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## Introduction

Information communication technology in particular has been recognized as an influential changer for social and economic transformation in the contemporary society. Opportunities to use such 'technology tools' and the ability to use them are imperative if one is to be an active participant in the globalised world today. In most developed countries, and even more so in the developing world, women and girls' access to education, work, health, and politics, is at an inflection point, where digital literacy can close gender gaps that have persisted for decades.

Such tasks stem from cultural, economic and/or structural issues that are behind a digital gender divide. Basically, this study aims to understand the literacy necessary for women's empowerment through the use of technology integration to change the stereotyped gender roles and enhance the socio-economic status of the women. In as much as technology has the ability to enhance the availability of information to all and thereby promoting gender equality, the cyberspace remains quite patriarchal. And limited education and Internet infrastructure in the digital world means women cannot benefit from this new shift in technology. In what way include digital literacy beneficial to empowering women and which factors need to

be addressed so as to have women fully participate in the digital space. The study also underscores the need to provide specific incentives and policies for developing gender-sensitive and/or gender-sensitive digital literacy initiatives.

#### Literature Review

The rise of digital literacy has attracted lots of researches to investigate its effects on women, girls, gender equity and marginalized groups. In the period beginning with 2020, there have been efforts made by several authors to study the dynamics of digital literacy and, on the one hand, its positive impact on women while on the other, negative influence of socio economic and cultural factors. This paper aims to review literature from 2020 onwards on the effects of integrating technology in learning with regards to the gender and digital literacy. Modern researches pay much attention to the significance of digital literacy in increasing the economic and social women Empowerment. As highlighted by Rahman et al., (2020) digital literacy can enhance women's opportunity in learning, shopping online, and business and Birmingham especially in the rural areas.

Moreover, the language barrier also contributes to the exclusion of women from digital literacy. Many digital resources and platforms are primarily available in English or in major Indian languages, which may not be accessible to women who speak regional dialects. This linguistic gap further limits their ability to engage with digital content and hinders their learning process. Addressing these socio-cultural barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that includes community sensitization, promoting gender equality in education, and creating safe spaces for women to learn and engage with technology. Efforts to challenge and change societal norms must be coupled with initiatives that actively involve women in the digital literacy movement. By dismantling these barriers, India can move closer to achieving true digital inclusion, ensuring that women have the tools and confidence to participate fully in the digital age.

#### **Economic Factors and Access to Digital Resources**

Economic factors play a critical role in determining access to digital resources and the development of digital literacy, particularly among women in India. Economic disparities, both at the household and community levels, significantly impact women's ability to acquire digital devices, internet connectivity, and the necessary education to become digitally literate. These economic challenges are often intertwined with gender inequalities, further exacerbating the digital divide. One of the most significant economic barriers is the high cost of digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers. For many low-income households, these devices are considered luxury items, and when resources are limited, purchasing digital technology often takes a backseat to more immediate needs like food, healthcare, and education. In households where digital devices are available, they are often controlled by men, leaving women with limited or no access. This gendered control over resources reflects broader economic power dynamics within

households, where men typically have greater financial autonomy and decision-making power. In addition to the cost of devices, the expense of internet connectivity presents a substantial barrier. The cost of data plans and broadband services can be prohibitive for economically disadvantaged families, particularly in rural areas where income levels are generally lower. Even in urban areas, where connectivity is more readily available, the cost of maintaining consistent internet access can be a significant burden. As a result, women in these households are less likely to have regular and reliable access to the internet, limiting their opportunities to develop digital literacy.

Economic inequality also impacts women's access to education and training programs that could enhance their digital skills. While there are various government and private sector initiatives aimed at promoting digital literacy, participation in these programs often requires some level of financial investment, whether for transportation, course fees, or materials. For women from low-income families, these costs can be prohibitive. Furthermore, the opportunity cost of time spent in training programs, which could otherwise be used for income-generating activities or fulfilling domestic responsibilities, further discourages participation. The economic constraints faced by women are further compounded by broader systemic issues such as unemployment and underemployment.

Moreover, economic disparities between urban and rural areas contribute to unequal access to digital resources. While urban women may have relatively better access to digital infrastructure, women in rural areas often face significant challenges due to inadequate infrastructure, including limited availability of electricity, poor internet connectivity, and the absence of digital education facilities. These regional economic disparities further widen the digital divide, with rural women being disproportionately affected. To address these economic barriers, there is a need for targeted policies that focus on reducing the cost of digital access for women, particularly in low-income and rural households. Subsidized devices, affordable data plans, and free or low-cost digital literacy programs can help bridge the economic gap. Additionally, empowering women economically through initiatives that promote financial independence and employment opportunities can create a more conducive environment for women to invest in and benefit from digital literacy. By addressing these economic factors, India can take significant steps toward ensuring that all women, regardless of their economic background, have the opportunity to participate fully in the digital age.

### **Impact of Digital Literacy on Women's Empowerment**

Digital literacy has emerged as a powerful tool for women's empowerment in India, offering transformative opportunities that extend beyond the traditional boundaries of education and employment. By acquiring digital skills, women are better equipped to access information, connect with broader social networks, participate in the economy, and engage with civic and political processes. The impact of digital literacy on women's empowerment is multi-dimensional, influencing various aspects of their personal, social, and economic lives. One of the most significant impacts of digital literacy is its ability to

enhance women's access to education. Digital platforms provide women with the opportunity to pursue online courses, access educational resources, and participate in e-learning programs that may not be available locally. For women in rural areas or those with limited mobility, online education is particularly valuable as it overcomes geographical and social barriers. By gaining new skills and knowledge through digital means, women can improve their employability and pursue career opportunities that were previously out of reach. In the economic sphere, digital literacy enables women to participate in the digital economy, opening up new avenues for entrepreneurship and income generation. With digital skills, women can engage in e-commerce, online freelancing, and other digital-based work that allows them to earn an income from home. This is especially important for women who are unable to work outside the home due to familial responsibilities or societal restrictions. By leveraging digital platforms, women can start their own businesses, sell products and services online, and access global markets, thereby increasing their financial independence and contributing to household income. Digital literacy also plays a crucial role in enhancing women's access to information and resources that are critical for their well-being. Through the internet, women can access health information, financial services, and legal advice, which can significantly improve their quality of life. For instance, access to digital financial services, such as mobile banking and digital payment platforms, enables women to manage their finances more effectively, save money, and make informed economic decisions. Additionally, digital platforms can provide women with information on their legal rights and entitlements, helping them to navigate issues such as domestic violence, property rights, and access to government welfare schemes. Social empowerment is another key impact of digital literacy on women. Through social media and online communities, women can connect with others who share similar experiences, challenges, and aspirations. These digital networks offer a platform for women to share knowledge, seek support, and advocate for their rights. Online activism, facilitated by digital literacy, has become a powerful tool for women to raise awareness about gender issues, challenge patriarchal norms, and mobilize collective action. Movements such as #MeToo in India have shown the potential of digital platforms to amplify women's voices and bring attention to issues of sexual harassment and gender-based violence. By participating in these digital spaces, women can assert their agency, influence public discourse, and contribute to societal change.

Furthermore, digital literacy empowers women to engage in civic and political processes. Women who are digitally literate are better able to access information about government policies, participate in online forums, and engage with political leaders. This engagement enhances their ability to hold public officials accountable and advocate for policies that address their needs and concerns. Additionally, digital platforms provide women with the tools to organize community initiatives, participate in local governance, and influence decision-making processes, thereby strengthening their role in society. However, the impact of digital literacy on women's empowerment is not uniform across all demographics. The benefits of digital literacy are often mediated by factors such as age,

education, economic status, and geographic location. For instance, younger women, particularly those in urban areas, are more likely to benefit from digital literacy due to better access to technology and educational resources. In contrast, older women, those with lower levels of education, and those living in rural areas may face greater challenges in acquiring and utilizing digital skills. To maximize the empowering potential of digital literacy for all women, it is essential to address these disparities through targeted interventions. This includes ensuring equitable access to digital resources, providing tailored digital literacy training that considers the specific needs of different groups of women, and creating supportive environments that encourage women to engage with technology. By doing so, digital literacy can become a powerful catalyst for women's empowerment, enabling them to fully participate in and contribute to the digital society.

### **Conclusion**

Digital literacy has emerged as a crucial determinant of individual empowerment, socio-economic development, and national progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In India, where a significant gender divide persists in access to and use of digital technologies, enhancing digital literacy among women is not merely a matter of inclusion but of transformative change. Addressing this divide is essential to achieving broader goals of gender equality, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. As this paper has explored, the barriers to digital literacy for women in India are deeply intertwined with sociocultural norms, economic inequalities, resources, are major obstacles to their digital inclusion.

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# **DIGITAL LITERACY FOR RURAL WOMEN: PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper explores the line of how digital literacy can give rural women power, addressing the hurdles those women face and what innovations might be needed to bring inclusion and economic advancement. This paper aims to look at what has been done so far to promote digital literacy among rural women through existing literature on digital literacy initiatives for rural women and to determine the best way to enhance digital skills to meet their needed. It aims at circumventing some of the barriers rural women encounter in accessing digital resources, evaluating the effectiveness of the existing training models to propose scalable, culturally innovative methods of improving digital literacy.*

**Keywords:** *Digital literacy, empowerment, inclusion, rural women, training module.*

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## **Introduction**

The 'digital divide' in India has led to a huge disparity in the opportunity to access technology; in particular rural areas where women are more affected than men. Although urban areas have seen progress in digital connectivity, many rural areas remain high on the number of the internet lacking disciplines and digital gadgets. Limited rural women's opportunity to take advantage of the socioeconomic opportunities from digital literacy and the ability to utilize online resources has also been due to this divide. For instance, "Digital India" seeks to bridge this gap but its implementation has been uneven especially since women in remote areas face structural and cultural barriers to access, and use of technology. What is limited also keeps rural women from digital access further marginalizing them so as to be unable to take part in economic participation and educational advancement.

## **Women's Empowerment**

"Empowerment means that people – both women and men – can control their lives: set their agendas, gain skills (or have their skills and knowledge recognized), increase self confidence, solve problems, and develop self-reliance." (UN Women, Women's Empowerment Principles, 2011) Empowering women is essential to sustainable development and a human rights issue. Gender inequality still exists in many parts of the world, including access to healthcare, education, employment, and political representation.

The United Nations has set out the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which depend on empowering women since they are crucial for advancing economic growth, social advancement, and environmental sustainability. This essay examines the relationship between women's empowerment and a sustainable future, stressing the obstacles to advancement and the many advantages of gender equality.

### **Women's Empowerment: A Catalyst for Sustainable Development**

**Environmental Sustainability:** In the fields of agriculture, conservation, and resource management, women are indispensable. Providing women with resources, knowledge, and training enhances their capacity to tackle environmental problems and promote sustainable practices. **Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change:** Women are disproportionately impacted by climate change because they are typically the significant carers and resource managers in underdeveloped nations. Women can better adjust to the effects of climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions when policies and activities are gender-responsive. **Health and Well-being:** Attempts to attain universal health coverage and enhance the health of mothers and children are hampered by gender differences in healthcare outcomes and access. Sustainable development is aided by investments in women's health, especially their sexual and reproductive rights, which also encourage healthier families and communities. India presents opportunities and challenges for digital empowerment programs due to its large population and diverse socioeconomic landscape. Despite significant progress, gender disparities persist in access to and use of digital technologies, with women lagging behind men in internet usage, particularly in rural areas. Here are some aspects of life that have a direct influence on digital literacy, especially on women.

### **Empowering through Digital Literacy**

For many women, such as Sneha and Aasha, the intervention of digital skilling opens a window to interact with a larger world. They represent the 1 lakh plus beneficiaries reached through the program in the last year, with a substantial 71.2 percent now actively adopting digital payment methods, which enhances their financial inclusion. The training encompasses various digital payment gateway, learning platforms (YouTube, Pinterest), social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram) and video conferencing making customer interactions easier and helping these women generate more business online. A significant percentage of participants (76.8 %) have incorporated social commerce into their business strategies, demonstrating the notable impact of integrating these tools into business practices. The real transformation is more profound; these women, who had minimal exposure to the larger business ecosystem, now find themselves adept at navigating complex digital landscapes.

### **Impact of Digital Literacy on Rural Women's Empowerment**

Digital literacy enables women to access a wealth of educational resources available online. They can explore diverse subjects, access e-books, academic journals, and

educational websites, fostering self-learning opportunities. With digital skills, women can engage with various e-learning platforms offering courses in different subjects, languages, and skill sets. These platforms provide flexible learning schedules, allowing women to balance their educational pursuits with other responsibilities. ICT training can focus on specific skills relevant to education, such as computer proficiency, software applications, online research, and digital communication tools. These skills are crucial for academic success and employment opportunities.

Digital literacy facilitates remote learning opportunities. Women in rural areas, who might have limited access to traditional educational institutions, can benefit from online courses, webinars, and virtual classrooms, thus overcoming geographical barriers to education. ICT enables women to utilise educational apps, software, and online tools designed to enhance learning experiences. These tools could include language learning apps, educational games, and interactive educational resources that make learning more engaging and effective. Digital literacy not only benefits learners but also empowers teachers. Educators can access online teaching resources, attend training sessions, and employ digital tools to enhance their teaching methodologies and improve student engagement.

With over 624 million internet users, India's digital landscape has grown significantly despite women making up only 34% of this population. This gender gap highlights the necessity of focused initiatives to give women digital empowerment, especially in rural areas where access and connectivity are still scarce. In India, women comprise a sizable share of the rural populace and are integral to the rural economy. These women work as vendors in cities and make a living by making handicrafts, sewing, rolling cigarettes, and weaving baskets and textiles.

Employment in the formal and informal sectors. Government support programmes that promote job progress while adhering to customs. • State laws that combat social inequality, domestic abuse, and sexual harassment. Up-to-date daycare centres. Even if internet penetration in rural areas has increased significantly, digital literacy is more critical for women's empowerment. NABANNA is a prime example of how Digital literacy can empower rural women. In Nabanna, India, a UNESCO project called "Networking Rural Women and Knowledge" investigates creative ways to help impoverished women by utilising databases and intranet portals. However, obstacles like social norms and educational gaps still exist, making it difficult for women to take full advantage of digital potential. In response, the Indian government has started several programmes to empower women through digital means, particularly granting them equal access to opportunities and resources. By addressing women's obstacles, such as restricted access to education and skill-building opportunities, these programmes hope to promote more gender equality in the digital arena and unleash the unrealized potential of women all around the nation.

### **Barriers and Challenges in Women Empowerment**

In the Indian context, women have not benefited from the Digital revolution mainly because of social structures, values, and beliefs. The benefits of this transformation have

yet to reach rural India; urban India has been enjoying them. There is still a long way to go, despite the efforts to harness digital information as effectively as possible to empower our women. Encouraging women and girls to use digital literacy is fraught with difficulties. These are discussed as follows: **Poverty:** Poverty in India, affecting 37% of the population, is a barrier to Digital literacy empowerment in Women as many view it as a luxury they cannot afford, prioritizing basic needs over technology access. **Literacy:** In India, literacy challenges persist, particularly for women, with only 45% of females above 7 years old being literate and high dropout rates indicating limited access to education beyond primary levels, exacerbated by language barriers and systemic issues despite government initiatives for free education.

**Computer literacy:** Computer literacy in India faces disparities, with urban students having better access to primary education while rural students rely on limited government support, hindered by affordability issues and language barriers, especially as most resources are in English, impeding widespread internet access and education. **Socio-Cultural aspects:** Socio-cultural norms in India perpetuate gender disparities, favouring boys over girls in education and digital technology access, with women often confined to household roles, limiting their exposure to technology and opportunities for empowerment. **Early marriages:**

Early marriages in India, affecting over 50% of adolescent girls, contribute to high dropout rates and limited educational opportunities, perpetuating gender inequalities and hindering access to digital literacy as family responsibilities take precedence over personal development, leaving television as the primary source of information and entertainment. **Language barriers:** Language diversity in India poses a significant barrier to empowerment, with internet learning predominantly in English, inaccessible to many in rural areas, highlighting the challenge of imparting knowledge across numerous languages and hindering widespread digital access and communication.

## **Conclusion**

Infrastructural, social, cultural, and linguistic hurdles preventing women from obtaining digital literacy must be addressed through coordinated initiatives at the regional, national, and international levels to close the gender gap in technology. By utilizing digital efforts, we can provide women with possibilities for holistic growth, information, and resources, promoting their independence and strength in all spheres of life. Information technology empowers women. Their position has shifted from before. Thus, women's empowerment has significantly benefited from digital literacy. Its capacity to transcend social, political, and economic boundaries gives women the leverage they need to create a new identity and a more respectable position for themselves in society.

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