DIGITAL LITERACY: AN EXIGENCY FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

The concept of Digital Literacy was initiated on 6th October, 2018 by our Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modiji which brought technological transformation in the up-liftment and conception of better India. It was an effective way that assured transparency, competent service delivery and good governance. It intended on the use of computers, smart phones, laptops and tablets for sending and receiving emails, browsing internet, approaching government online services, dealing with online transactions etc. The paper begins with the concept of digital literacy, and further extends to role and the importance of women in digital literacy. It also emphasis on the concept of e-security and the measures to be taken.

The women as the pillars of the society are encouraged to become digitally literate. There was an attempt to make them avail opportunities on digital platform, independent, rethink their identities and powerful transformation. But only 29% of India's internet users are women. The major constraints are fear of unknown, illiteracy, lack of internet awareness, exploitation, lack of access of technology, digital gender gap, financial & cost bearing problem, balancing work-home commitments etc.

Keywords: Technological Transformation, Online Transactions, Digitally Literate, Exploitation.

INTRODUCTION

DIGITAL LITERACY:

The term '**literacy**' in general is an ability to read and write. Digital literacy means an ability to read, write, create, understand, comprehend, utilize, share, find, and evaluate the information with the use of information technologies and internet. It facilitated the way to digital learning. It involves the knowledge to handle digital devices such as smart phones, laptops, tablets, computers for the purpose of communicating, sharing, collecting etc. It is also an ability to use and operate the digital devices smartly. It is a platform to express our views and speak out our own ideas. In the fast growing world of technology it is imperative for all of us to become aware of digital literacy. It equips all citizens with a basic level of understanding to perform online tasks safely. It allows people to communicate with family and friends using digital technology in this busy life. It is often confused with '**computer literacy**'.

Digital Literacy consists of two concepts: **Cyber Security** is the responsible behavior and rules

framed to ensure safety of individuals over the internet. **Cyber Ethics** are informal positive code of conduct used over the internet. Digital literacy is incomplete without these two concepts. Individual is himself/ herself responsible for how they use technology to interact with the world around them.

Digital Literacy= Digital Tool Knowledge+ Critical Thinking+ Social Engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

"Digital Literacy is the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process." "[Digital] literacy is the basic understanding of how to interact with a computer, how to interact with applications on that computer, how to make it do what you want," said Carol Smith. "Nine in ten jobs that we're creating right now require some form of digital literacy."About two third of the world's population don't use internet, many are women. In developing countries on an average 75% women are literate compared of 86% of men. India the ratio is 51% of women to 75% of men. According to Curtis Kularski [1] (p. 5) "the digital divide is composed of a skill gap and a gap of physical access to Information Technology (IT) and the two gaps often contribute to each other in circular causation. Without access to technology, it is difficult to develop technical skill and it is redundant to have access to technology without first having the skill to utilize it". Women face lots of problem in gaining digital literacy because lack of education, family and child responsibility, comfort with technology, socio-cultural factors, financial problems, lack of time etc. Empowering of women brings digital transformation not only to themselves but also to their families, communities and nation. If the gender inequality gap is eliminated, this can bring a big difference to the quality of life and family as a whole.

There are three components of digital literacy:

1. **Social awareness:** understand your identity, collaborate, adapt, and communicate to context / audience.
2. **Critical Thinking:** evaluating and contextualizing information literacy.
3. **Knowledge of digital tools:** hard and software awareness/competence.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the position of women in newly emerging areas of digital technology.

2. To create foundation for the discussion about digital literacy gap among men and women.

3. To recommend the safety measures to be taken by women for cyber security.

NEED OF DIGITAL LITERACY:

India is the second fastest growing mobile market. Government has taken efforts on digital skills which will drive the citizens to a successful and globally connected digital economy. With the increasing paramount of technology in today's world, digital literacy is gaining its importance. It has changed the education, health care, financial services and business sector drastically. With the help of technology we can book our online tickets, find doctors, tutors, direct access to buyers, etc. It helps in accessing the public services, online shopping, digital communication, enhancing employment options etc. By great efforts taken by our Prime Minister, the Government of India has tried to transform the society into digitally empowered and knowledge one. It aimed at making at least one person in a family digitally literate. Still there is a '**digital skill gap**'. Government has approved two schemes to promote digital literacy:

1. National Digital Literacy Mission
2. Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan

The aim of 'Digital India' is to provide a high speed internet network in rural areas which can improve the economy of nation.

DIGITAL LITERACY: A GENDER BASED PRIVILEGE

According to recent open signal report, India ranks lowest in 4G in comparison to rest of the world, the average speed is 6.07Mbps. In terms of 4G signals, ranks number 14 with an increased 86.26% coverage of 4G. Today's population of India is 132.42 crores, in which women is about 48.5 % of it. If we talk about, the internet users in India, only 29% (less than 1/3) are women. In villages, majority of Indian girls are refused to use internet based on gender. Some of them are unable to dial numbers or read messages due to literacy. It is necessary to make primary and secondary education of girls/women compulsory. According to reports, in India 43% of man have cell phones while only 28% are women. In India, out of 191 million facebook users only 24% are females. To bridge the digital literacy gap, we should encourage and address the social, educational and cultural barriers along with economic factors for empowering them. This digital gap leads to barrier in accessing online services related to women health, education and skill enhancement which will help them to contribute in global economy of 21st century.

BENEFITS OF DIGITAL LITERACY:

1. **Minimizing Corruption**: Digital literacy helps to eliminate corruption by bringing transparency in transactions.

2. **Education Promulgation & Skill Development:** It helps in easy and effective dissemination of education and skill development.

3. **Woman Empowerment:** Digital literacy enhances the ability of women to use digital technologies for meaningful and challenging situations.

4. **Employability:** This will boost the employability of the today's youth.

5. **E-Commerce:** It also helps in the increment of online banking transactions which streamline the circulation of the currency.

TYPES OF DIGITAL LITERACY:

1. **Media Literacy:** It helps in analyzing the media communication in various forms.

2. **Computer Literacy:** It is an ability to use computer and its software to complete the tasks.

3. **Digital Literacy:** The digital devices such as smart phones, laptops, PCs, tablets have invaded every corners of our lives

4. **Information Literacy:** It is a concept in which an individual is able to retrieve and use the information when required to solve the issue or problem.

5. **Technology Literacy**: It provides a responsible attitude to use the technology in all learning processes.

BENEFITS OF DIGITAL LITERACY:

1. It helps in empowerment of all citizens especially women.

2. It provides better understanding of government policies and facilities.

3. It gives ease to derive and information

4. It also increases the internet usages.

5. It helps to improve the economy of the nation.

6. Access to financial services

7. Access to health services and information

8. Access to educational resources.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND WOMEN:

Digital Literacy is the need of the hour and most important for up-liftment and empowerment of women. It helps to retrieve basic information from the internet. It helps to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within their own life. Reaching out women and girls in terms of digital literacy is the bottom of the pyramid. But only 29% of India's internet users are women. Women face a lot of problem to mobile access, cost and network connectivity. They are unable to connect mobile internet due to lack of digital literacy and skills. Some of the women are not able to handle their cell phones, dial a number or read a message and their use is to just press the green button when the phone rang. Illiteracy is the barrier to online access that affects women more than men.

In today's worlds, women are not just buoyant and assured but are true entrepreneurs. It gives them self-confidence and self-esteem in their lives. It has helped women to participate in each and every walk of life. The term '**Women Empowerment**' means to give them greater control and power to direct their own lives. Digital literacy has opened the direct window to the outside world. The women are generally engaged in online business, broadband services and social networking sites on internet. Mobile phones are user friendly but sometimes there is a fear to lose money through experimentation. Women usually hesitate to ask their family members to ask something which can be easily accessible on internet. They indulge themselves on finding buyers and senders for shopping purposes, booking online tickets, sending birthday greetings etc. Introduction of Adhar card and opening a bank account in '**Jan Dhan Yojana'** has encouraged women to form **Self Help Group** to face financial problems. The **"New Panchayati Raj"** has been implemented to empower women at least at the village level.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND E-SAFETY:

Internet is an eye-opener. We are connected 24X7 on internet and it is now our second life. Our eyes are glued to the screen, the first work we do is to check our updates, notifications or any messages on mobile phones. We cannot stay away from our mobile phones or internet for a minute. We are more prone to facebook and whatsapp messenger on daily basis. It has blurred the lines between personal, social and professional. We are being exposed to the dark side of this '**virtual life**'. India gives facebook its 2nd highest number of users after the US. By current updates, the facebook data is being shared by the company, hence people are on the mode of #deletefacebook campaigning. Children and women are more vulnerable to criminals and bullies. Now a day the internet facility is not used for ethical and productive purposes. They are often manipulated by fake news and by mis-guided by social media. NCRB shows that every sixth cyber crime in India is committed through social media. About 73% of the women have experienced online violence. Due to lack of awareness, cyber crime victims generally women don't come out in open to register complain against the criminals. The women are usually embarrassed, fearful or otherwise ignore the crime on account of family prestige and societal stigma. Lack of awareness and ignorance are root cause for such exposure.

Cyber Crime is a global phenomenon and women are the soft targets of this new form of crime. The women are harassed and exploited through this medium. This includes:

a) **Harassment via emails:** It involves harassing through mails by bullying, blackmailing, threatening, cheating etc.

b) **Morphing:** It is a technique in which the original image is downloaded by fake users and is disturbed or edited which is different from the original one.

c) **Defamation:** It is an act, deed, word or gesture which harms the other's person's reputations/image on internet.

d) **Cyber-stalking:** It is a situation in which an individual is harassed or threatened by pursuing or continuously followed through e-mails, chats, messaging, etc.

e) **Cyber-pornography:** This crime is a crucial threat to females/girls.

f) **Email spoofing:** It is techniques in which someone's name is changed in an email and then it is re-send which appears that it is send from someone else.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Say 'No' to strangers
2. Be very careful with your passwords
3. Customize your personal setting carefully.
4. Think before you share
5. Don't follow trends blindly, be smart with them.
6. Protect your computer
7. Remember to log off when you are done
8. Don't share more than necessary
9. Don't leave your webcam connected.
10. Don't meet online acquaintances alone
11. Reveal only as much as needed
12. Block people you don't want to interact
13. There is no such thing as 'Freebies'
14. Read the fine print
15. Secure your devices with anti-virus software
16. Update all operating systems on your devices.
17. Learn about online safety
18. Avoid giving personal data
19. Don't share your emotions

CONCLUSION:

Digital literacy is an emerging phenomenon in today's world. It is very crucial for the women upliftment and empowerment. To make a women advance, we should emphasis on digital literacy and e-safety measures to avoid cyber crime. In India, the major section of women are illiterate or having a fear to use technology due to lack of awareness. It is our prime concern to teach them about safe digitalization and new technological advancement. If they suffer from cyber crime, we should educate and support them to get rid of it. We should keep our secret password, don't share your personal information on any web page, or any related material on computers, etc.

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