Internet Saathi in India: How Far We Moved to Drive

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Abstract

India is an agricultural based economy where most of the population leaves in village, working in the fields and breathing in unhygienic living conditions. On the other side, in the globalized scenario, cities are full of population; people are techno-savvy, digitalized and living a remote life. As Gandhi Ji explored that soul of India lives in villages, if we want to construct our nation we have to look upon rural areas especially rural women. It isfoundthrough various studies that a women living in urban area is more progressive than a woman in rural area is. Therefore, two types of gaps are there;one is the gender gap, another one is the location gap between urban women and rural women. The gap in the sense, that in urban areas, a women is much aware about the education, lifestyle, social rights, working conditions, government welfare schemes, scholarships,health matters and maximum of the them have smartphone in hand with a fast connectivity to catch the surroundings through social media etc. However, as we turned towards the villages, we found that a few of them having a simple phone only, no knowledge about rights, health, social status, world or the internet. So theinitiative toward the Internet Saathiin collaboration with Tata and Intel is a good effort to instillrural women about internet and indirectly towards the other necessary aspects discussed above. Though the implementation of the initiative require lots of attention, planning, provisions for social barriers and handling various issues like lack of literacy, Punchayat support, self-motivation, and ofcourse the infrastructure. Keeping in view the miserable position of women in rural area, present paper

contributes to the benefits of scheme, its necessity in rural areas plus various other key issues in this context.

Keywords: Internet Saathi, Rural, Connectivity, Tata, Google, Women.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Internet Saathi is an initiative taken by Google in collaboration with Tata Trust and Intel on July, 2015 [2] to educate rural women about Internet, tools to use it and benefits that how life can be changed if they use Internet. It is achieved through hiring of a trainer from the local NGOs or other help groups, train them to become Saathi, arm them with sufficient resources to teach the rural women,say 2 smartphones, 2 tablets, power backups and a big umbrella on the bicycle or the cart. They create cluster of three villages to cover and communicate females and train them about Internet and key benefits. [1] This plan is to reach 50 lakhs women in 18 months and cover 45000 villages [2]. It is studied that there are around 6.5 lakhs villages in India and Google try to reach at least half of those in 3 years [6]. It is further stated that Google add 500 trainers or Saathis per week to accelerate the program to become a change agent through helping rural women to learn Internet and enhance social status [2].

The bicyclist or the cart or the Saathifirstly moved to the Dausa district of Rajasthan where they taught the features of a smartphone and use it to access Internet. Another campaign started in Dholpur village of Rajasthan. [1][2]

 It is stated that only one third of Indian online users are women indicating biggest gender disparity [2] in which under the category of the rural users of Internet, only 12% women uses Internet [1]. The growth rate of women Internet users in India is only 27% [5], and only one in every ten women is aware about Internet [6], however the next era is the era of Internet where even language will be no bar and website will be popularized based on the local languages. [1]

2.   KEY BENEFITS

Being a village girl having keen interest in the rural women development and analyzing various sources, following benefits are suited to the mind.

- While doing certain home tasks, a rural mother can find the tips for child healthcare [2].
- She can acquire knowledge through Internet with the basic primary skills or education.
- They can teach other women also about the use of the Internet and advantages and operating of the smartphone [2].
- Through the use of the Internet a women can easily get online help to stop violence against women [3] where various urgent helplines are given region wise in which 31 major regions of India are covered.[3] The other campaign

run online is helping Women Get Online [4] in which language options Hindi or English is also given to become more friendly and make a women aware about benefits of Internet [5].

- The SaathiProgramme now touched around 4000 villages with a number of 1900 trainers [2] in which approx.1 lakh women are trained to surf Internet. [2]
- Ability to read news online and know the world [2].
- Learn new skills and trainings to enhance the knowledge to market their business or handmade products [2].
- Setting up new small scale industry through online information and acquire various aids given by Government or other private agencies for a social cause. [2]
- Enhanced social status through enhanced respect in male society and recognition by Punchayat or Sarpunch. [2]
- Various domestic tasks like cooking- learning to make new dishes like Spring rolls, Dhosa etc. through online material on YouTube, training for sewing, sweater design can acquired and in this way sharing of thoughts collaborating the cultures. [7]
- Google Saathi makes the best possible use of ICT tools for rural women.
- Various medical consultancies can be taken online for those problems a women hesitate to share or tell even during pregnancy in which most of the rural women are found to be of poor health, e.g. WelcomeBabyHome is one of the site that regularly aware a women about health plus other sites to aware women about regular checkups and hygiene also. [1][2]
- It is one of the way of interaction with the field level workers specially females who remained unnoticed however can provide lots of information on fundamental problems which may be unnoticed thus can in turn help for the further successful implementation of the Saathi Program plus other futuristic welfare programs.
- A survey can also be conducted during the program to know more about the ground realities, lives, cultures to make the program more attending, promoting and even be helpful for the other NGOs or Government agencies to make new policies for social cause especially for females or the children.
- Campaign can prove a best tool to motivate village women to accelerate and give meaning to their lives, read & transform their behaviors, attitudes towards social context and economic growth.
- Able to reduce gender gap and gaps of the urban &rural moreover enhance the rate of women users of Internet. [6]
- Get more confident through self-dependency. [7]
- Can watch the serials online or to hear the pray during fasts from YouTube etc. [7]
- Even can train the others who just know nothing more than the farming. [6] an example has been given in this context that how a women Karjee turned to be

a Saathi and talked to Indian Express to define the utility of Internet in her farm work and also convince other women to use Internet. [6]

- Also helpful to find the destinations or the roots in case of emergencies such as police stations or the hospitals.
- Exam results can be checked and also can be applied for the online courses. [6]
- Modi Ji's dream of Digital India will be fully turned to reality to teach them to make payments online and do online transactions [7].
- To strength the root of India i.e. rural to make them use the smartphones and Internet even generate the demands for the smartphones and Internet Service providers to come in market and force them to provide the best quality services thus resultant in overall production and economic growth.
- It is further elaborated that mid-day meals are fresh after the above campaign as they can nowread about the various Government policies online and now more aware. [9] Another good example of Phoolwati of Rajasthan given that how with a group of ladies controls the alcohol consumption in the village. [9]
- Internet has bought dignity and self-respect to woman and she becomes empowered through the enriched knowledge. [10]

3.   ISSUES

The hundred percent success of the Saathi is not an easy chore; there are several issues that may slow the progress of the campaign, being a rural moreover, a women is itself a biggest problem that is enlarged by fewer infrastructural competences, rigid attitude and behavioral factors and customs prevailing in the rural areas are givenbelow.

- Cost is the main issue. To purchase a smartphone, cost of Internet connection, speed of data or the connectivity are the key issues [2].
- Various social norms stop the women to use the Internet with a thought that she has to work for home and these are the undesirable undertakings.
- Small knowledge is more dangerous than lack of knowledge. As a new comer of Internet, a woman may not decide what to access or what not to. It is obvious for her for a long living in the boundaries to open world traversing. Sometimes even Internet create a hazard for a perfectionist too. Therefore, it is more risky for a novice that they can caught by undue interactions, immoral stuffs cause a stressful life and may spoil the completely happy family life, social regards.
- Lack of the awareness about the usefulness of campaign, literacy and understanding of the Economic progress, [6]it is quite difficult to train an uneducated woman. Firstly they need to learn ABCs even of their local language plus somewhat other popular language like Hindi or English. Not all the terms are mentioned in Hindi so quite difficult to interpret in their local languages. The spoken or the voice search is their but that is mostly using the English words for surfing thus the task is quite hectic.

- Difficult to prepare them to involve in the campaign and to attend the classes regularly apart from the domestic tasks. [7]
- The rate of using the smartphone in rural areas is very low; most of the females have the basic phone used for calling or the music. Without smartphone there will be no Internet. [8]
- Visual learning is also required to make them interpret the meaning of various buttons or icons and to go through the menus. [9]

4. SOLUTIONS PROVIDED

To make the Internet accessible widely by the trainees after accomplishment, keeping in view the cost hitches, various devices like tabs, smartphones are sited in Agricultural centers, School Premises, Self-help Groups where anyone can access to get its optimal use. [2] [5] This program, Saathi is started all over India at a time but implemented in chunks to deal with the various local issue and get expertize to make it successful in next clusters of villages. For example; initially it was started in Rajasthan [1]and has been active inother states of India i.e. Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand, [2] and expending further toward the Uttar Pradesh, Assam etc. [2] the program in West Bengal has been launched in Parulia district [5]. Tata is an oldest trust of India that played a crucial role in implementation of Internet Saathi by arranging the Saathis, doing teamwork with NGOs, self-help groups, women federations etc. To make training explicable, the program introduces a module for the awareness and local language to use the mobile. [5]. Google agents go from village to village to teach about the use of smartphone and Internet [9] as a result of the dream to see the 50 millions of women online to cover the gaps of gender through the training of 3 lakh villages to turn them to include Internet in their daily life. [10] One of the solutions to the language barriers is the use of Wizards or pictorial touch panels to go for the surfing.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER SCOPE OF WORK

The applicability of a new thought is likely to be deniedat first, as it will be an art to collect the females to attend the program regularly. The availability of the smartphones either at specific premises or at discounted rates may gear them to use those. More hazardous will be the loss of connectivity that may occur in rural areas. Moreover, though the campaign is targeted to empower rural women but of course, it is a decent effort nevertheless to say that male part cannot be ignored.The campaign required the support of males,especially;that of the Sarpunch of the Punchayat plus a preliminary survey before the launching of the campaign in that particular areas to learn about their thoughts that in turn will be helpful to mortgage their behavior and make the program successful, achieving wider consumers, adequate economic growthand digitalized India withstout rural base.

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