

# A Study on Digital Literacy of Rural Women

BY

Dr. Tanzila Siddiqui<sup>1\*</sup> Dr. Anoop Kumar Bhartiya<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>\*Data Analyst <sup>2</sup>\* Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, University of Lucknow.

## Abstract

Women are often referred to as the social engine. Technology is constantly evolving, and this has a particularly negative influence on women's everyday lives. An analysis of the situation in our own nation shows that women lag behind males in terms of literacy. Regarding digital literacy, there is thought to be a bigger divide. More than half of women do not have access to the internet. Digital isolation of women has a pronounced detrimental influence on the social and moral well-being of women. The Smartphone is currently the most widely utilized tool in the field of digital literacy. This research paper will concentrate on the definition of digital literacy and how women are affected by it. Because cell phones are the simplest method to stay in contact with the evolving situation, they are the only way to stay linked with the new developments in society. The research paper will discuss how women are prepared to adapt in these new trends in society and why digital literacy is crucial for them. Women are recognized as the guides in their families, preaching the same. The initiative for digital literacy that has been affecting the lives of rural women will be covered in the essay. The necessity to incorporate digital media into rural women's life will have drastically different effects. The study paper will largely address the difficulties faced by rural women, their level of readiness to adopt new technology, and their desire to learn about and adapt to the social changes brought about by new technical advancements. The report will also place focus on how women view digital literacy and how motivated they are to participate in the learning process. The women have been discussing how they think this technological development would impact both their own lives and the lives of others around them. The key problem is determining whether rural women themselves view these new developments as a benefit or a burden for themselves and their environment. The futuristic elements of this new knowledge will also be examined. This study aims to provide an overview of contemporary developments and rural women's responses to them, along with their insightful opinions.

**Keyword:** Women, Rural, Digital Literacy, Smartphone

## Introduction

Women are the centre of all the activities. The focus of all activities is on women. We cannot argue against the reality that she exerts a pulling force. She serves as both the starting and finishing point of our life's journey. The creature begins in her womb and spends its entire existence in her lap. She serves as our life's guiding light. We can feel their influence in our lives in a variety of capacities, whether they play the position of our mother, sister, or life partner. The job might be either conventional or contemporary. The birth of a life via a woman can demonstrate the importance in a biological sense, and as we go through life, we may occasionally notice or experience the role of women in a social, emotional, or mental sense. Despite the significant role that women play, there are still certain obstacles that they must overcome. Despite the significant contributions made by women in a variety of fields, we have observed that prejudice against women persists in every industry.

- Telephone
- Mobile
- Computer and website
- Broadcasting
- Satellite
- Internet and broadband
- Sensor networks
- Data storage and analytics

The society is progressing in every aspect, so as the technology, as we see that the technology has been pacing with the time, the women are stagnant at the traditional outlook. The bridge is wider in the rural areas. Digital literacy is an emerging area as of now and the women are lagging behind in this area too.

## Introduction to Digital Literacy

Science and the arts go hand in hand because as time has progressed, technology has also been improving at the appropriate rate. This is only conceivable because globalization has such a broad reach, which includes the information sector. The generation we live in now is always willing to embrace changes that make our lives simpler. The result of this transformation, which has had various observable repercussions on society, is information technology. ICTs have contributed to socioeconomic sector growth. In terms of its process, this has been an acme and is referred to be a revolution. The following list includes the various ICT types:

The following are the major distinctive types of literacy:(worldpress, n.d.)

1. **Information Literacy:** According to National Forum on Information Literacy, "The ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand."

2. **Computer Literacy:** Computer literacy, which came before digital literacy, is the knowledge and proficiency required to use conventional computers (such as desktop PCs and laptops), with an emphasis on using software application packages.

3. **Digital Literacy:** Digital literacy is the capacity to locate, assess, produce, and convey information using information and communication technology. It calls for both cognitive and technical abilities.

4. **Media Literacy:** When people employ their critical thinking to assess the media, they are said to be media literate. It depends on knowing how to use the available tools and is intertwined with the interpretation and creation of new visuals in visual literacy.

Traditional way of describing literacy is focusing upon the skills in numeracy and counting, speaking with the art of reading, writing and open to critical and rational thinking. The ultimate aim of literacy lies in building the thinking capacities and learner more pro-active and critical was adding more meaning to the lives. Literacy is essentially the capacity to comprehend written or spoken word, interpret it, and then repeat it verbatim or in modified form. This enables the production of new knowledge while also enhancing comprehension. While digital literacy refers to literacy in terms of information availability via digital means. Digital literacy, to put it simply, is the capacity to understand and utilize contemporary technologies. One of the areas addressed by technical growth through information and technology is digital literacy. It is more of a process of learning and educating how to utilize digital technology, set up communication networks that can be used, and create information that has been analyzed and enhanced.

#### **Meaning of Digital Literacy**

Digital literacy is deemed as the person's ability to effectively perform a digital task in a digital environment. The capacity to accomplish a digital task successfully in a digital environment is referred to as digital literacy. An individual's social and cultural background directly affects their abilities. Digital literacy is the pursuit of meaning via one's own comprehension of the digital environment.

Digital literacy is about creating awareness, generating attitude and ability of an individual to use the digital tool and facilities to integrate the resourced in a one confined space through their own understanding. The goal of digital literacy is to enable people to use digital tools and facilities to combine resources into a single, constrained location by developing the awareness, attitude, and capacity to do so. Digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktops that are more networking devices all make use of the ability, knowledge, and behavior known as "digital literacy." It all comes down to learning and perfecting the art of using digital technology.

According to Digital World- "Digital literacy is the ability to understand, use and interact with technology, media and digital resources in real-world situations. Every interaction with the Internet or digital media requires some level of digital literacy."

Digital Literacy is not only simple know-how but also it covers a huge variety of collective responsibilities to it in terms of ethics, social and cultural contexts. Digital literacy revolves around the main core concepts i.e. Create, understand, use and access.

- create corresponds to create an inner will to learn about the new digital technology
- understand how to interpret the information provided by the digital medium
- to incorporate the use of such into the daily lives
- Access is in relativeness to the distribution and infrastructural tools.

#### **Women and Digital Literacy**

The technological advancements are gender neutral and the access are open and available to each and every member of the society. The use of technical developments is open to all members of society, regardless of gender, and access is free and unrestricted. Women continue to be a disadvantaged population notwithstanding the notion. The literacy gap is already enormous, but if we concentrate on the topic of digital literacy, the gap gets much worse. The societal stigmas and pervasive social expectations placed on women have been adding to their burdens and preventing them from embracing the newest fashions and technology. They are less likely to own devices, depriving them of the advantages of such a significant social intervention.

India has the second largest online population but only 30% are women and in rural areas this gets reduced to 12 % only. According to a study only 3 out of every 10 Internet users in rural India was a woman.(internetsaathiindia, n.d.)The consequences of this can be seen vividly in terms of their involvement in the society as an individual is minimal as they lack decision power.

#### **Initiatives undertaken to bridge the digital literacy gap**

A number of initiatives have been taken by the governmental and non-governmental sector and they have successfully sensitized the society for the issue of this degraded digital literacy gap among the rural and urban and as well as women and men. The few major highlighting steps taken are mentioned in the upcoming paragraphs:

- The **digital India program** launched in 2015 by the government was the flagship program. The program's major emphasis was on making services available to society electronically in order to assure better and more sophisticated services while also closing gaps in the networks of services. This would empower individuals online and make them more receptive to the accessible online environment..
- **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISA)** under the Digital India Mission, was launched in 2017. The main aim was to impart digital literacy to the rural people to mainstream them with the world by giving them

training on how to use the digital technology such as laptops, smartphones etc.

Apart from the government initiatives, many development have been made by the social sector. Internet Saathi is a whole soul program that have been dedicated to the specifically to the rural women unlike the other government programs.

- **Internet Saathi program** is a joint initiative by Tata trusts and Google that came together to address the gender divide and mend to bridge the gap through train the trainer model concept. Village women are trained to utilize their knowledge of Smartphone's and the services they can access to reach out to other women in their communities and introduce them to the digital world. The ladies, who go by the moniker Internet Saathi, have been through a number of astounding transformations in both their personalities and society. Because of this, individuals begin to develop a social identity and chart new paths in their lives, which has a positive effect on all of us. Up till April 2019, there were roughly 81500 Saathis who had gained their own independence and had taught over 28 million rural Indian women throughout 289000 villages.

About the program:

Particularly taking about internet saathi program in Uttar Pradesh, the program is in its 6<sup>th</sup> phase where the overall target is to teach 900 rural women and in a chain process, these 900 women will teach 700 more women on an individual basis. Which will empower forty thousand village in a span of eight months with 630,000 numbers of rural women.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Scope of the study**

This study was undertaken to access the knowledge and will of the rural women who have now become internet saathis and who were deprived of the basic access to the digital technology through the basic medium ie smartphones. The study has been undertaken with a view to gather information about the challenges and hurdles faced by them due this not negotiable attitude due to which this divide has been created.

### **Area of the study**

The study was conducted with the internet saathi in five districts of Uttar Pradesh namely Ambedkar nagar, Banda, Chitrakoot, Kanpur Dehat and Shahjahanpur.

### **Research design**

Descriptive study is designed to describe something, it describes the relationship that exists, opinion that are held, and process that are going. The research design of the study is descriptive because the researcher describes the scenario

and the condition of the rural women and also tries to make a note about the benefits that could have been gained by them if this discrimination had not been prevalent.

### **Sampling procedure**

Sampling is the process of obtaining information about the all population by examining only part of it.

**Universe** size consist of the 900 rural women who are part of the internet saathi program and reaching out to a number of other rural women.

**Sample size:** 30

The sample size has been taken as such depending upon the geographical area and the number of blocks in the respective districts.

**Sample technique:** Stratified non-proportionate sampling

Districts	Ambedkar Nagar	Chitrakoot	Banda	Kanpur Dehat	Shahjahanpur
No. of respondents	6	3	4	6	11

### **Sources of data**

The sources of the study are both primary and secondary; the primary data was directly collected from the respondents. Secondary data was collected through research papers and newspaper articles including the internet sources and the previous research studies.

### **Tools of data collection used:**

The researcher used interview schedule as tool for the data collection. Interview schedule: An interview schedule is a guide that the researcher used while conducting the interview.

## **DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-20	8	27%
20-30	10	33%
30-40	7	23%
40 above	5	17%

**Table 1: Age of the respondents**

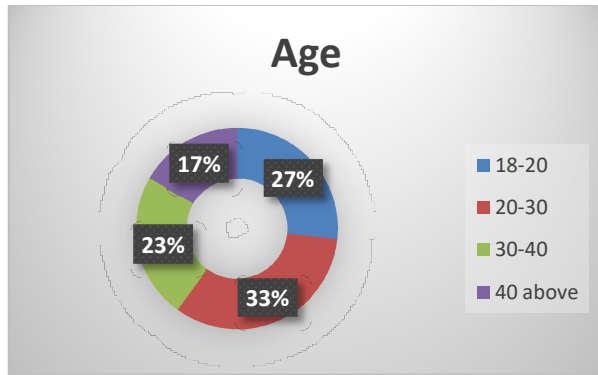


Figure 1: Age of the respondents

The above results disclosed that the majority of the respondents are in between the age bracket of 20-30 yrs. The main aim to highlight the point that the majority of the respondents belong to the young generation which makes them more vulnerable in their situation that the women in the other age brackets.

Table 2: Education of the respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	2	7%
Primary and Secondary	15	50%
College	9	30%
Post graduate	4	13%

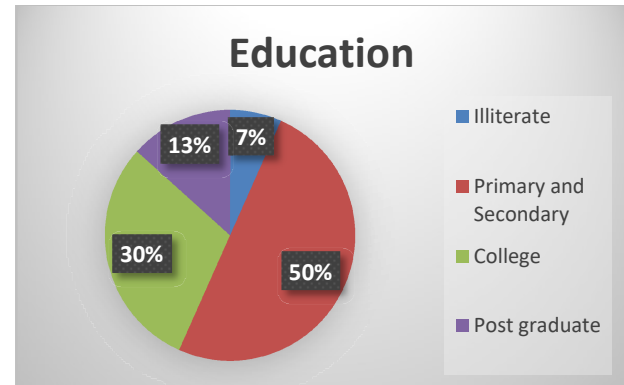


Figure 2: Education of the respondents

The above table illustrates the education level of the Muslim women. It reveals that most of the respondents are educated to the primary and secondary level, while 30% of the respondents had college level education, while 13% of the respondents had post-graduation, and rest of the respondents 7% were illiterate.

Table 3: No of respondents who knew how to use Smartphone's before joining the internet saathi program

Districts	Responses
Ambedkar Nagar	0
Banda	0
Chitrakoot	0
Kanpur dehat	0
Shahjahanpur	0

The above illustration shows that beyond the age group and education qualification there is only one thing which is the pertinent discrimination which is not made on any logical basis but only on the basis of sex. The results are surprising, in spite of living in 21<sup>st</sup> generation the respondents have no access to the Smartphone's just because they fall under the "weaker section" of the society.

The following are the supporting statements that respondents gave for not having access to the Smartphone despite of the initiatives taken in the society to remove these discriminations.

Figure 3: Supporting Statements for Digital Literacy

AFFORDABILITY			
Economic barriers		Male member owns the Phone	

RELEVANCE	
Don't know what's the use of the phone	Cannot make use of it so it's not relevant

ACCESSIBILITY	
No network coverage	No light to charge phones

USABILITY		
Do not know how to use the phone	Do not know how to use the services	DO not know how to read/write using phone

SAFETY AND SECURITY			
Insecure	False presumption	Harmful content	Purity

The results that came out seems to be a bit more biased and were inclined towards the patriarchal notion of the society.

The respondents themselves justified the non-accessibility which is more indicating convincingly the mind-set of the

women that they make them feel inferior to men whereas there is no necessary requirements for that.

The bright and shiny ray of hope is seen when the will power subsidized all the above mentioned reason over the inner will to learn to make the use of Smartphone by joining the internet saathi program. The women themselves have to put their foot forward to come in the queue to avail the resources available. The social stigmas and the prevalent notions have to be challenged in order to liberate themselves and empower them in real sense. The easiest way of empowering them is to increase their knowledge and widen their outlook towards life by stepping ahead and gaining access to the easiest mode of information that is smart phone. This digital literacy will not only bring them more closer to the digital technology But also will bring the under the umbrella where each and every individual plays an important role in gaining and sharing information.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The following are the benefits that a digitally literate society can get and will create a society which is gender neutral and whereby increasing the status of the women in the society who have been deprived and discriminated just on the basis of her biological identity. The evolution of society requires women to keep up with it in order to avoid falling behind. Being technologically savvy has a wealth of advantages, but it also gives you more control. The ultimate goal is to empower women and help them understand their value, which can only be attained by discovering one's own hidden skills. As men and women are viewed as the wheels of a car and both need to be properly balanced, both sexes must be in balance in order for society to function.

- Access to information  
The smartphones are like themagical wand, only a blink and the problem is solved. Similarly the smartphone have a large amount of information and answer to ever question that too in your accessibility. One can be self-dependent and make use of the internet and can hunt n for any information required.
- Connectivity and security  
The new generation technology are very useful in terms of their usability. The options of tracing and getting live locations with a one click safety mode which enables confidence in a person and removes the constrains on the women's' mobility
- Closer to the world  
The face-time or the new calling feature has made the whole world a small place to live in. The connectivity has increased and thereby decreasing the physical distance. The technology is a boon to the society only if one makes use of it.
- Hassel free services  
The world is on our hand as the services are available in our hand. The use of such technology can gain control

over our services and the services which were once too difficult to avail have become easier through the online channels available.

- Cultural taboos  
The taboos that are attached with the women using the phones have to break down to pieced and this could be only done when women themselves will hold their command in their hands. The change is needed the society and the vision has to change which keeps men and women in a single frame.
- Gaining control over lives  
Once women are self-dependent, they will not have to wait for any external assistance. This makes them self-capable and build their courage and confidence. Decision making ability is induced in the women and make them self-empowered in an overall dimension.
- Inclusion  
The social stigmas and the notions prevalent in the society needed to be challenged through these participation of the women in the arena. This will thereby make the social inclusion stronger into the society physically and virtually both.
- Financial powers  
The financial services have become more accessible thus giving more financial power in the hands. This help them gaining control over the monetary matters and which will increase the women say in the financial handling not only in the family but also the society.
- Generating livelihood opportunities  
The pool of information available on the doorstep through the Smartphone leaves no loopholes in the sense to avail the resources. The change in mind set is induced and making them more self-reliant. This paves way for them to make them more futuristic and goal driven which will not only bring financial empowerment but empowerment in a real sense.

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