

EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The participation of women work force in business, trade and industries has upgraded the economic health of developing country like India. Rural women entrepreneurship has been recognized as an untapped source of Rural economic growth during the last decade. With the digital technology and innovation, Rural women entrepreneurs are moving away from the traditional business approach to non traditional or digitally advanced approach to business. Digital technological development has provided rural women entrepreneurs with an access to valuable business information and has also enhanced their future endeavors and credibility. Digital technology has been rapidly adopted throughout the pandemic to overcome previously unheard-of economic shocks like the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. The digital literacy of the rural women entrepreneurs has improved their use of digital plastic as e-commerce, digital marketing and digital payment services are a way for expanding customer base and growth of business especially in remote and isolated rural areas. The present paper focuses on parameters of digital transformation to enhance the entrepreneurial skills of rural women and in turn their socio economic empowerment in society.

Keywords: Empowerment, Women Entrepreneurship, Digital Transformation, Economic Growth.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays an important role in developing and contributing to the economy of a country. Entrepreneurship, being a difficult undertaking, it involves innovative ideas, risk-taking, strong business acumen and effective leadership in all domains of business. It is therefore, a challenging role for women traditional Indian rural society. However, it become possible because of positive attitude of women and their desire to be financial independent. Women in rural areas have put their footsteps in the business world not only as job seekers but also as job givers. Women have finally plunged into the rural business and have become an Entrepreneur.

The phrase "women entrepreneurs" refers to a person or group of women who start, plan, and run a business. Indian women are evolving in this day and age, and they are becoming more and more prospective business owners. Women in non-traditional business sectors should serve as role models to challenge preconceived notions about who belongs in certain areas. Women entrepreneurs in rural areas who select businesses based on their expertise and available resources. Doing business doesn't require specialized expertise and requires little risk or investment. The process of encoding data in computers by switching from analog to digital format is known as digitization.

The primary focus of the procedure is gathering data that will later be utilized by digital technologies. Digitalization, on the other hand, focuses on information processing, or the ways in which digital data can be used to streamline workflows by automating manual procedures. In order to improve engagement and provide new value, digital transformation ultimately revolves around utilizing knowledge and integrating it across all business domains. Even in rural areas, digitization and digitalization are the first steps toward the digital transformation of businesses.

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Changes in socioeconomic situations are influenced by technology and digital revolution. The proliferation of entrepreneurial endeavors in the digital age is greatly aided and encouraged by digital literacy and usability. However, very few Indian women—especially those who live in rural areas—have access to the internet. In terms of internet users in 2021, India will have over 750 million users, making it the second largest country in the world. Still, women make up barely 35% of India's internet users. The percentage of female internet users falls to 15% in rural India. While digital technology and mobile phones allow women entrepreneurs to secure a better economic and business life. The development of digital technology makes it easier to contact rural women entrepreneurs with target clients, seek guidance for trade and business ideas, and improve communication.

Objectives and Data

The major objective of this article was to establish the linkage between rural women entrepreneurship and digital transformation in emerging rural economy in India. The present article is purely based on secondary data collected through literature survey. All the facts and problems discussed in this article are opinion of the respective authors. However, the present author makes analyses based on the observation and experiences regarding rural women entrepreneurship and digital transformation in India through government schemes and initiatives.

Government Initiatives for Digital Transformation of Rural Women Entrepreneurs

Launched in 2015, Digital India is a government-led program with the goal of digitizing all identifying documents and administrative forms. Rural women lose out on services that could enhance their lives when they are unable to access the internet. Women suffer social obstacles in their pursuit of education, health, land rights, and technology, despite being the backbone of rural communities and generating 60 to 80 percent of India's food products. Rural cultures tend to be culturally wary of technology. Women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship have the potential to alleviate poverty and unemployment in emerging nations such as India. The problem of women's access to the internet has gained prominence as a result of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It emphasizes the need of closing the digital divide in particular through its aims pertaining to gender equality and the necessity of developing infrastructure in less developed nations.

In following different ways digital India is on the way of empowering rural women:

- **"AROGYASAKHI"** assists rural women in forming their own identities so they can offer healthcare services to the rural community. A mobile application assists female rural entrepreneurs in providing preventative healthcare directly to rural residents. Women visit homes with tablets and portable medical equipment, such as blood pressure monitors and glucometers, to gather information from the village women. Physicians can access this data from anywhere in the world and treat patients remotely. In a similar vein, a number of apps have been released to help farmers obtain precise and fast information about crops, market pricing, and analytics to increase their output and financial success.
- **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA):** In order to promote digital literacy in rural India, the government has approved a new program called Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)," which will benefit 6 crore rural families (one person per home). Out of the 6.63 crore candidates who have enrolled, 5.69 crore have received training, and 4.22 crore have received certification.
- **Common Services Centres (CSC)** – In rural locations, CSCs use Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) to provide digital government and business services. These CSCs provide more than four hundred digital services. At the Gram Panchayat level, 4.14 lakh of the 5.21 lakh CSCs that are currently operational nationwide—including in urban and rural areas—are CSCs. There are 23,035 CSCs operating in the state of Rajasthan, with 18823 of them operating at the Gram Panchayat level.
- **Digital Village:** Additionally, MeitY launched the "Digital Village Pilot Project" in October 2018. The initiative covers 700 Gram Panchayats (GPs)/Villages, with at least one GP/Village per District in each State/UT. The digital services being provided include business-to-business (B2C) and government-to-citizen (G2C) services, as well as digital health, education, finance, skill development, and solar-powered street lights.
- **W2E2** Wireless Women for Entrepreneurship and Empowerment, or W2E2, provides internet access, e-learning opportunities, and digital tools to rural women. An initiative to teach rural Indian women how to utilize computers and the Internet to their full potential is encouraging

them to start their own enterprises. The goal of Wireless Women for Entrepreneurship & Empowerment (W2E2) is to support women-driven ICT micro-enterprises and entrepreneurs in underdeveloped areas of India by providing wireless internet access. Additionally, the program aims to foster an internet environment that is supportive of gender inclusion and women's empowerment. The initiative supports Internet Society's objective, which is to encourage the free development, evolution, and usage of the Internet for the benefit of all individuals living in remote locations. The initiative is in line with internet society's objective, which is to support free and open Internet growth, evolution, and use for the benefit of all people, including those living in distant locations. Five regions—Tura in Meghalaya, Ranchi in Jharkhand, Chanderi and Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh, and Baran in Rajasthan—were the focus of the program's May 2014 start. It is an extension of the work supported by the Wireless for Communities (W4C) program, a collaborative effort between the Internet Society and the Digital Empowerment Foundation that offers high-quality, reasonably priced Internet access to rural, remote, and unconnected parts of India. Internet-based projects in areas such as rural health and sustainable agriculture are typically undertaken by women. Some are opening their own stores and kiosks to offer internet services to the neighborhood, and yet others have started working as local trainers for digital literacy.

- **Aadhaar:** Aadhaar offers a 12-digit, unique, online, genuine, biometric, and demographic identity based on demographics. On March 26, 2016, notification of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 was issued in order to provide Aadhaar with legal support. There are currently more than 135.5 crore enrolled citizens.
- **Internet Saathi:** Ratan Tata, Chairman Emeritus of Tata Sons, has unveiled the "Internet Saathi" program, which is part of his long-term vision. This attempts to go deeply into Indian rural women's usage of the internet. In order to facilitate widespread internet access for women in rural India, Ratan Tata has partnered with Google and Intel. He believes that rural women would benefit from the internet by being more informed and prepared for the future. It appears that this program will help women who haven't been able to discover a way to make money advance in their careers. In urban India, the number of women using the internet has surpassed that of men, but in rural India, very few people have access to the internet.

Various Schemes Offered by Banks to Promote Digitalisation and Growth Among Rural Women Entrepreneurship

- **Annapurna Scheme:** The State Bank of Mysore is offering this program to women entrepreneurs who are starting food catering businesses to sell packaged meals, snacks, and other items. The funds provided as a loan under this program may be utilized to meet the business's working capital requirements, such as purchasing kitchenware and other appliances. In order to qualify for this loan, the business's assets must be offered as collateral security, coupled with a guarantor. Additionally, the maximum amount approved is ₹50,000, which must be repaid over the course of 36 months in monthly installments. The lender is exempt from paying the first month's EMI after the loan is approved. The interest rate is established in accordance with the market rate.
- **Stree Shakti Package For Women Entrepreneurs:** The majority of SBI branches provide this program to women who have participated in state-run Entrepreneurship Development Programs (EDP) and control 50% of a company or business. In the event that the loan amount exceeds ₹2 lakhs, the scheme additionally provides a lower rate of interest by 0.50%.
- **Bharatiya Mahila Bank Business Loan:** This loan is intended to serve as a support network for aspiring female business owners who want to launch new projects in the retail, MICRO, SME, and loan against property sectors. The manufacturing industry is eligible for a maximum loan amount of ₹20 crores under this loan program. Additionally, a 0.25% interest rate reduction is offered, with interest rates typically starting at 10.15% and rising. Furthermore, for loans up to ₹1 crore, collateral security is not needed under the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE).
- **Dena Shakti Scheme:** Women entrepreneurs who work in retail, manufacturing, microcredit, agriculture, or small business and require financial support can apply for this program offered by Dena Bank. With a maximum loan amount of ₹20 lakhs for retail trade, education, and housing, and ₹50,000 for microcredit, the interest rate has also been lowered by 0.25%.

- **Udyogini Scheme:** With the help of this program, Punjab and Sind Bank is able to offer flexible terms and low credit rates to women entrepreneurs operating small businesses, retail stores, and agriculture. The maximum loan amount under this policy for women aged 18 to 45 is ₹1 lakh, although family income is also taken into account, with the annual maximum loan amount for SC/ST women being ₹45,000.
- **Cent Kalyani Scheme:** The Central Bank of India is offering this program to help women who want to establish a new business or grow or change an existing one. Women in retail trade, government-sponsored programs, self-employment, small and medium-sized businesses, village and cottage industries, agriculture, and related fields are eligible to apply for this loan. There are no processing fees associated with this program, and no collateral security or guarantor is needed. Additionally, Rs. 100 lakhs is the maximum amount that can be awarded under the policy.
- **Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme:** Through the provision of soft loans with ten-year repayment terms, Punjab National Bank established this initiative with the goal of assisting women entrepreneurs operating small businesses. A variety of programs are available under this scheme for the purchase of auto rickshaws, two-wheelers, autos, beauty salons, and day care centers. This plan allows for a maximum grant of ₹10 lakhs, and interest rates are determined by the market.
- **Mudra Yojana Scheme for Women:** The Indian government has launched this initiative to assist individual women who wish to open modest new businesses such as beauty salons, tailoring shops, tutoring centers, etc., as well as groups of women who wish to start a venture together. The loan is available via three schemes and does not require collateral security. i. Shishu: Businesses in their first phases are eligible to apply for a loan sum of up to ₹50,000. ii. Kishor: Applicants with a well-established business can apply for loans with a maximum value of ₹5 lakhs and a maximum amount of ₹50,000. iii. Tarun –well-established firms who need additional funding for expansion can apply for this ₹10 lakh loan. If the loan is approved, the recipient will receive a Mudra card that works similarly to a credit card but has a 10% cap on the total loan amount available.
- **Orient Mahila Vikas Yojana Scheme:** Women who own 51% of the capital either alone or jointly in a proprietary firm are eligible for this program offered by Oriental Bank of Commerce. Loans between ₹10 lakhs and ₹25 lakhs for small-scale companies are available without the need for collateral security, and the repayment period is seven years. Up to 2% in interest rate concessions are offered.

Challenges and Difficulties in Empowering Rural Women Entrepreneurship through Digital Transformation

- **Lack of Education:** Lack of education: In our country, with special reference to the villages of our nation there is lack of the education. Specially this lack of education is greater for women. Women in the rural area are less educated because the preference is given to the male child for education. Due to the lack of proper education women don't know about the technology and other developmentalskills.
- **Male Dominating Society:** Although there are equal rights for men and women in our constitution, equality does not actually exist in rural areas. In every area of life, women are being overlooked. Women and men are not treated equally. People in rural areas tend to believe that women should solely be used for household tasks. Their request for permission to enter the business is made to the family head. Historically, it has been believed that men should pursue careers in entrepreneurship. The development of female entrepreneurs was severely hampered by all of them.
- **Less Awareness about Advanced Technology:** One of the major issues facing rural women entrepreneurs is their lack of technology capabilities. Nowadays, with technology and competition rife, rural women entrepreneurs confront numerous challenges. Inadequate training programs and inadequate infrastructure pose a challenge to the growth of female rural entrepreneurs.
- **Legal Formalities:** Every business must comply with a number of legal requirements, which can be a burden for women entrepreneurs due to the prevalence of dishonest government office practices and the lengthy application processes for permits, utilities, water, and shed allocations. Women business owners find it difficult to concentrate on the efficient operation of the company in such circumstances.

- **Lack of Entrepreneurial Skill:** The potential of women to launch their own businesses is enhanced by their entrepreneurial talents. However, the entrepreneurial abilities of rural women entrepreneurs are lacking because of their poor educational attainment and lack of exposure. For rural women entrepreneurs, lacking entrepreneurial skills is a big concern.
- **Lack of Self Confidence in Using Online Technology:** In addition to their innate lack of self-confidence, which is necessary for effectively managing a business utilizing cutting-edge technology, rural women entrepreneurs.

Advantage of Digital Transformation for Rural Women Entrepreneurship

- The growth and competitiveness of rural enterprises greatly depend on the digitalization of rural women entrepreneurs. Digitalization is a highly effective strategy for business growth in emerging markets around the world. There is also strong evidence that improving the entrepreneurial activities of rural women entrepreneurs is seen in many countries as a way to increase national productivity and create jobs, which in turn increases their economic independence. Agribusiness and SMEs are currently viewed as mechanisms for economic growth and equitable development in that they create labor-intensive, capital-saving initiatives that guarantee the creation of many new jobs. Entrepreneurial endeavors also strengthen personal and collective capabilities among local communities.
- Women entrepreneurs can play a more independent and survival role for lower-class homes thanks to the digital transition.
- Digital technologies have raised the productivity and profitability of rural women's industries and agribusiness.
- Women entrepreneurs are better able to help impoverished homes become self-sufficient and survive.
- Agribusiness manufacturing projects are accelerating.
- The ability to access international markets, which expands the client base;
- The empowerment of female indigenous businesses;
- The simplicity and accessibility of marketing links for female rural entrepreneurs.
- Greater acknowledgment and a broader distribution of customer service enhancements;
- Improved and effective business transactions;
- Time-saving speedy procedures and;
- Minimization of business costs.

Conclusion

Women entrepreneur are one of the main pillars for the economic development. There are numerous schemes provided to assist women entrepreneurs by the government, scheduled and non scheduled banks in our country. But the government should focus to act as facilitator and create a awareness programme on various schemes imposed by them for empowerment of ruralwomen effectively and efficiently to implement them. Development of rural women entrepreneurs does not mean development of women in rural areas but it mean development of entire society with economic growth. Present scenario is rapidly changing with technological development, modernization, digitalization, digital transformation, industrialization, urbanization, education and development. In such conditions, employment opportunity increased drastically for rural women entrepreneurs. Digital transformation leads to improved entrepreneurial skills among rural women, which in turn improves the wealth of the nation in general and of the family in particular . Women need encouragement and support from the family members, government, society, male counterparts etc., with the right assistance from varied groups mentioned above, they can join the main stream of national economy and thereby contribute to the economic development. Government initiatives have drawn plans for digitally advancement an empowerment of Rural women entrepreneurs through training and capacity building programs. Women's economic empowerment can be achieved through encouraging women entrepreneurship in rural economy. Empowering women could reduce poverty for everyone in the society. In order to achieve it, we need to first fix the current broken economic model which is undermining gender equality and causing extreme economic inequality.

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