

## Use of Telephone for Participation and Empowerment by Rural and Urban Women in India

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'More than at any other time in history, the world is poised to leverage innovation to improve the lives of poor women and empower them to realize their potential'.  
- International Center for Research on Women, 2009

Placing women participation and empowerment on priority is considering them to be the integral thrust in the engines of development. Since the 1990's women have been identified as key agents of sustainable development and women's equality and empowerment are seen as central to a more holistic approach towards establishing new patterns and processes of development that are sustainable. The World Bank has suggested that empowerment of women should be a key aspect of all social development programs (World Bank, 2001). Since the 1980's the Government of India has shown increasing concern for women's issues through a variety of legislation promoting the education and political participation of women (Collier, 1998). This article is an attempt to study why women depend on telephones to use it as their ready-to-use tool of communication. Wilbur Schramm (1964) defines communication as the process of 'sharing'. We live together by sharing our ideas, awareness, and experiences and to a larger extent our culture. The technological innovations have brought a sea change in inter-personal communication media. Telephones are used for socializing, which leads to commonality. Commonality is collective understanding, which is established by communication. It promotes participatory attitude that fosters empowerment which is achieved when

laser sharp priorities are identified and implemented collectively. Telephones are potentially an invaluable economic asset to any nation and an important tool for strengthening social ties. They have not only reduced anxieties and improved socializing but increased their participation towards empowerment.

### Telephone in India

Supported by recent deregulation and liberalization of telecommunications laws and policies, India has emerged as one of the fastest growing telecom markets in the world; with more than 13 million subscriber additions per month. In terms of the number of subscribers, India is the second largest telecom market in the world, with about 937.7 million subscribers as of September 2012. The sector continued its growth even in the difficult times of the global economic crisis in 2008 and witnessed a continuous subscriber growth in the past years. As of September 2012, India had a teledensity of 77 percent, hinting at the significant market potential yet to be tapped. The next phase of growth in subscriber base is expected to come from rural areas, as the urban teledensity has reached about 161.13 percent as against the rural teledensity of 40 percent.

**Table – 1: Highlights on Telecom Subscription Data as on September 2012**

Particulars	Wireless	Wire line	Total
Total Subscribers (Millions)	906.62	31.08	937.70
Monthly Growth (%)	-0.19%	-0.40%	-0.20%
Urban Subscribers (Millions)	571.70	23.99	595.69
Monthly Growth (%)	-0.60%	-0.31%	-0.59%
Rural Subscribers (Millions)	334.92	7.10	342.01
Monthly Growth (%)	0.51%	-0.72%	0.48%
Overall Teledensity*	74.49	2.55	77.04
Urban Teledensity*	154.64	6.49	161.13
Rural Teledensity*	39.52	0.84	40.36
Share of Urban Subscribers	63.06%	77.17%	63.53%
Share of Rural Subscribers	36.94%	22.83%	36.47%

Source: TRAI Report 2012.

### Women in Indian Society

The place of women in society is one of the fundamental aspects of any civilization because it concerns half the number of human beings constituting any social group. The relationship between society and woman is so vital that it affects almost all other aspects of human activity. Above all, woman is the mother of the race and the liaison between generations. It is the women who sustain the growth of society and mould the future generations. In the emerging social scenario, women are needed to be considered as the source of power and symbol of progress. Indian culture attaches great importance to women, who constitute almost half of its population. Therefore, India has been symbolized as “Mother India”, keeping in view the exemplary qualities of women, viz. patience, love, affection, endurance, sympathy and generosity.

The Indian woman, unlike her western counterpart, has many faces and moods. She can be elitist, bold,

assertive, rejected, dejected and exploited. She should be liberated from the shackles of exploitation, subjugation, superstition, degradation, illiteracy and injustice. The three issues of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) are vital for the uplifting women.

The status of women in India had undergone many changes down the ages. In the Vedic times, the women enjoyed a high status in society. According to the ancient Hindu texts and tradition, until about 500 B.C. women in India enjoyed considerable freedom in choosing their mates and taking part in public functions. Especially the upper class women enjoyed equal rights with men in religious matters. They were well educated and married late. Divorce and widow-remarriages were acceptable. But during the next thousand years, the position of women position deteriorated gradually. Educational and religious parity was denied to them and widow-remarriage was forbidden. Depicting the laws of Manu, the famous Hindu philosopher, regarding the

role of women, Basham (1959) said, “she should do nothing independently even in her own house. In childhood she should be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her husband is dead to her sons, she should never enjoy independence“. Keeping these observations in mind, Sherry Ortner

Beauvoir (1974) suggested, “Women have everywhere been devalued in relation to men and that such devaluation is linked to a universal association of women with inferior nature in contrast to the association of men with superior culture”.

**Table – 2: Growth of Female Population in India 1901-2011 (in millions)**

Year	Total Population	Female population	Females as % of total population	Females Per 1000 males
1901	203	117	49.2	972
1911	252	124	49.2	964
1921	251	123	49.0	955
1931	279	136	48.8	950
1941	319	155	48.6	945
1951	361	175	48.5	946
1961	439	213	48.5	941
1971	548	264	48.2	930
1981	685	331	48.3	933
1991	838	407		927
2001	1027	495	48.2	933
2011	1210.2	586.5	48.6	940

Source: Census of India, 2011

It must be noted that female literacy has made great strides in the twentieth century. From 0.6 per cent in 1901, it came up to 65.46 per cent in 2011 (see Table – 3).

**Table – 3: Trends in female literacy in India 1901-2001 (per cent)**

Year	Males	Females
1901	9.80	0.62
1911	10.6	1.1
1921	12.2	1.8
1931	15.6	2.9
1941	24.9	7.3
1951	25.0	7.9
1961	34.4	13.0
1971	39.5	18.7
1981	46.9	24.8
1991	64.1	39.3
2001	75.85	54.16
2011	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India, 2011

Note: The literacy rate is percentage of literates to total population, exclusive of population in the age group 0-4 years. The rate up to 1941 is for undivided India.

Males literacy has also progressed but at a much lesser rate. As a result the percentage of male literates, which was more than 16 times than that of female literates in 1901, is less than twice in 2011.

**Table-4: Literates 2001-2011**

	2001	2011	Difference	% Growth
<b>Persons</b>	56,07,53,179	77,84,54,120	21,77,00,941	38.82
<b>Males</b>	33,65,71,822	44,42,03,762	10,76,31,940	31.98
<b>Females</b>	22,41,81,357	33,42,50,358	11,00,69,001	49.10

Source: Census of India, 2011

Jawharlal Nehru (1958), the then dynamic and progressive Prime Minister of India highlighted the values of educating woman when he had declared at a conference on community development by saying - "in order to awaken the people, it is the woman who has to be awakened. Once she is on the move, the household moves, the village moves, the country moves and thus we build the India of tomorrow".

### **Women and Development**

After India gained independence our constitution-makers granted equality of status to women, besides giving them the right to vote. Despite all these efforts, women still do not enjoy full equality of status in the society. Development cannot take place in the absence of the participation of educated and socially conscious woman. Hence, education is essential for all, more so for women, who are the agents of socialization and trainers of the future carriers of culture. History hears testimony to the facts that heights of patriotism, selflessness, fearlessness and determination are imbibed in children only through the persistent efforts of mothers. No socio-political system can ignore their vital contribution in nation building, as they are the

nucleus of the most vital social institution called the family.

Finding differences in the status of women from legal, economic, social and political point of view, the United Nations General Assembly had declared 1975-1985 as United Nations Decade for Women. Prior to this, in India also a committee was formed in 1970 to report on the status of women. As a result on the eve of International Women's Year, a document "Towards Equality" was produced on Jan 1, 1975.

The publication of the Report on the Status of Women in India (1980) – the first highly comprehensive and informative report on women in India– stated that women had been left out of the development process and that greater efforts have to be made to move women into the main stream of development. The commission on 'The Status of Women in India' - (1970), has expressed its grave concern over continuing discrimination against women and infringement of their rights. Later, the Government of India specially incorporated a chapter titled- "Women and Development at the time of the formulation of the Sixth Five Year Plan(1980-85). Efforts and plans were ever-since

initiated for the women's involvement and participation. It was promoted in the desired direction to bring social change, adopt science and technological developments and to foster national development. In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, "where, after all, 20 universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world... such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination, unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere".

### Research Objectives

The paper aims to study the factors for the use of telephone by the women in India for their empowerment and development. It also focuses on the role the telecom sector shall play in implementing policies and initiatives to achieve women empowerment in the country. The other objectives are:

1. To study the factors which are influencing women to use telephone for interpersonal communication.
2. To study telephone as the channel of communication among women.
3. To study the role of telephone as a medium of communication among women.
4. To study the differences in the utilization of telephone among the rural and urban women.
5. To evaluate to what extent telephone has been successful in offering an alternative to other means of communication.
6. To study whether the expectations of the government in implementing communication facilities have become successful.
7. It is to investigate whether the telephone acts as a socializing agent.

### Related Literature Review

**Kiran Devendra** (1974), in her outstanding study "*Changing Status of Women in India*", attempted to look at the changes brought about in the status of an Indian woman after 1947. She examines the effectiveness of the legal reforms, which were enacted from 1829 to 1992 and she observed that education has made it possible for women to adopt a career and the law has given her protection. And she expressed her deep examination of the society by saying that the changes have failed to penetrate into the layers of the society.

**Nirmala Banerjee** (1991), edited a book called "*Indian Women in a Changing Industrial Scenario*", was sponsored under the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development (IDPAD). In this book the author assessed the implications of the progressive liberalization of Indian industrial and trade policies since 1980 for women. The findings provide necessary data to enable a comparison of the Indian situation with the recent world wide trends in women's share in influencing social change

The book entitled '*Women and Technology*' edited by **S.C.Jain** (1985), throws light on how the fruits

of technological developments have not yet reached to the Indian women effectively. This work opens a discussion on a communication gap between scientists, academicians, social workers and women beneficiaries. Often scientists invent technology without the consideration of its acceptability by women folks. Therefore, the author opines that it is high time to develop 'Appropriate Technology' for women to improve their conditions.

The book entitled "*Women & Development: The Indian Experiences*" written by **Mira Seth** (2001), is a comprehensive and analytical account of women's development programmes since India's independence. The writer discussed the historical position of women Indian society and points out the key issues, which have affected women's lives. The abysmal situation with regard to non-participation of women which handicaps them in gaining access to development activities is dealt with.

An interesting study in the field of interpersonal communication, "*The Process of Interpersonal Communication*" has been reported by **Fred E. Jandt** (1976) et al., The study dealt with interpersonal-attraction, socialization, small group communication and socialization among women. The author declares that women do not tend to participate in roles that threaten their important social relationships. It is because; in those relationships they find most of their feelings of esteem and identity.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the factors influencing women to adopt telephone as an

interpersonal communication tool, which is bringing them together to participate in activities towards empowerment. For the purpose of this study primary and secondary data are collected and analyzed. In analyzing the data, different statistical techniques are used apart from tabular analysis. To begin with, tabular analysis with averages and percentages are used to explain different variables pertaining to the sample women respondents. Independent variables help to distinguish each woman respondent while the dependent variables are measured based on the independent variables. In analyzing the nature of the difference in the factors, which influenced the women respondents to adopt telephone as their interpersonal communication tool, the Chi square statistic was used. The documentary sources are used as an authentic source of data collection. It includes published and unpublished materials viz. reports, articles, governmental reports, reviews, books and journals on telephone, development, participation and on Indian women. Besides these, survey reports have been used.

The study is purely based on empirical data and the researcher has developed an interview questionnaire for obtaining information regarding the socio-economic background and about the factors that influenced them to adopt telephone. The investigator had taken a sample of 300 women telephone users for the present study, spreading in three mandals in Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh. They are -Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu. Among these 150 are situated in rural areas whereas the remaining 150 are located in urban areas.

Table – 6: Locality wise (Rural & Urban) analysis of opinions of women and their  $\chi^2$  values

Sl. No	Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Chi-square value
1	Anyone can have access to telephone at any time	32(21.33)	84(56.00)	29(19.33)	5( 3.33)	37.27**
		11( 7.33)	128(85.33)	6( 4.00)	5( 3.33)	
2	Telephone helps to overcome the barriers of distance	27(18.00)	87(58.00)	35(23.33)	1( 0.67)	23.03**
		43(28.67)	95(63.33)	11( 7.33)	1( 0.67)	
3	Through telephone we can interact with others from where we happen to be	37(24.67)	98(65.33)	12( 8.00)	3( 2.00)	6.42
		25(16.67)	114(76.00)	8( 5.33)	3( 2.00)	
4	Telephone is a great help to women, in view of their constricted movement	61(40.67)	78(52.00)	7( 4.67)	4( 2.67)	29.00**
		33(22.00)	79(52.67)	24(16.00)	14( 9.33)	
5	Telephone is needful to speak to people we don't meet/see regularly.	33(22.00)	84(56.00)	27(18.00)	6( 4.00)	28.44**
		20(13.33)	118(78.67)	5( 3.33)	7( 4.67)	
6	Telephone is helpful to obtain advice or to gather support	69(46.00)	73(48.67)	4( 2.67)	4( 2.67)	16.72**
		36(24.00)	106(70.67)	5( 3.33)	3( 2.00)	
7	Telephone does give us a great deal of motivation in times of need	24(16.00)	64(42.67)	42(28.00)	20(13.33)	
		42(28.00)	71(47.33)	30(20.00)	7( 4.67)	

\*Significant at 0.05 level; \*\* Significant at 0.01 level

### Major Findings

Majority of the women have said that telephone is very easy to use and hence- “Anyone can get access to telephone at any time”. It is evident that the awareness of the telephone usage is reaching to all categories of women. Most of the women are required to obtain a lot of information on various

issues for which they depend on telephone. A majority of women in all categories have agreed that illiterates/uneducated also can use telephone. It is evident that women depend on telephone to interact with others. So, talking on telephone while alone, gives them a sense of security and company. The awareness regarding accessibility through telephone is reaching out to the women in different

sections of society. Women have their limitations in meeting people in distant places. For such women telephone is highly dependable. Telephone allows women to interact from where one happens to be. Telephone is the right medium for women pass through a wide spectrum of situations both in the family front and in the society.

Information can be gathered on telephone very immediately. This is another important factor which has been found that women largely depend on telephone. Women in all categories have accepted that "Telephone is useful to gather information immediately". Either because of their work or because of their confinement to home some women do not find time and chance to meet / see people regularly. For such people telephone helps to keep in touch with others. Hence, many women respondents support the statement- "Telephone is needful to be in touch with people we do not meet / see regularly". Majority of the respondents have accepted the fact that they depend on telephone to get up-to-date knowledge on day-to-day happenings. Most of the women depend on telephone to get advice or support from their near and dear, in times of need. In view of this, majority of the respondents strongly agree with the statement- "Telephone is helpful to get advice or support". Communication establishes and enhances mutual understanding. Most of the women from all categories have strongly said they can fill gaps between persons through telephone as it is an effective medium of communication. It acts as a bridge to mediate messages.

Social security is one of the most important needs for many respondents to adopt telephone. It enables them to get a timely help to gather to make decisions and participate in action collectively.

Hence, all categories of women have very strongly agreed that telephone connection can give them empowerment and social security. Telephone is used for sharing knowledge. Most of the women from different categories strongly agree that they interact with others to equip themselves with the know-how of doing various things. Especially, in a country like ours where large number of people live in all sorts of backwardness, information passage is possible only through interaction. In view of this, most of the respondents strongly agree with the statement- "Telephone is essential for the achievement of country's social and economic development".

### Conclusion

People interact for the purpose of understanding. The need is to be understood and the suitable solution to it also requires to be understood. This develops mutual understanding. Ultimately it makes people become inter-dependent, which increases their interaction to share ideas, beliefs, awareness and knowledge. This strengthens them to stand united to participate in developmental activities and thereby attain empowerment. Communication technologies like telephone acts as an effective instrument to transfer information and thereby yield social cohesion among the groups of people. These communication technologies which ushered in information revolution have virtually demolished the geographic, cultural and social boundaries across the entire globe, shrinking time and distance, resulting in a global village. It is evident that we are passing through this revolution. To have its hands in the pie of this revolution, the Government of India is taking up several measures to enable its people to take part in the process.



The study shows that there is perceptible dependency on telephone by women in rural and urban areas of India. Value added services such as information pertaining to railways, hospitals, municipal services, horoscope, entertainment etc...are provided to the telephone subscribers in the urban areas. The government must extend such a facility in remote areas with rural orientation. The information may be provided in the areas of whether, agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, sericulture, handicrafts etc. Especially, participation by women in any developmental project requires support from voluntary agencies, service organizations and research bodies. These should be associated with the beneficiaries both at the level of planning and implementation.

It is shocking to read that of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty around the world, 70% are women (UN Database, 2010). There is a yawning gap in their condition between the women of urban areas to that of rural areas. Since women tend to be excluded from higher education in rural areas, they lack better paid jobs and overall, these poor working women in Indian villages occupy menial positions related to agriculture, construction, domestic service, vending, low-status clerical work, nursing and prostitution. Today, women are proving their mettle in aeronautics, medicine, space, engineering, law, politics, education, business and one can just name the profession and they are there. Twenty-seven laws have been enacted so far to protect women from various crimes. However, women must be cognizant of the dangers lurking if they do not participate collectively to achieve complete empowerment, which can settle the scores of the society for generations to come. Men must not pamper the women and make them hesitant to rise up to the

occasion, when it comes to guard their collective goal of empowerment.

The above suggestions postulate that proper planning and implementation of telephone services effectively in a broader framework of a growing economy should be able to alter the present situation most significantly. Planning must have the face of women orientation, as their role in the development of family, society and nation is indispensable.

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