

## **Abstract**

The primary objective of the study is to find out the types of effective access to technologies that women have at home and in community settings. The study attempts to find out the empowerment of women facilitated by the access and the extent of acceptance and use of mobile phone correspond to situations where meaningful use/engagement with communication technologies arise. Basic amenities available in villages have been tracked to identify how resourceful a village is to build social capital for collective action by the women community. The study employs multi-method approach that includes survey method and case study. The study carried out field survey and picked out cases across the fields of Assam, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The study choose 640 households from the rural urban spatial contexts of Sonitpur District of Assam and 65 beneficiary households of select villages of Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand state of India.

The study administered questionnaire, focus group discussion that include women and men of the villages and personal in-depth interview with a few women, members of Gaon Panchayat, personnel from telecommunication industry, private mobile company, NGO chairperson and representatives. By employing these techniques on field, the study attempts to find data on socio-economic context such as income, consumption, changing livelihood strategies, productivity, credit, access to services and infrastructure as well as safety and security, social capital etc.

The questionnaire includes questions on work and 'leisure' patterns of male and female members of household; current daily routine of work, income; women's social contact and contact with kinfolk, friends; participation of women in local community organizations; factors that leads to acceptance to mobile phone by women, barriers in accepting mobile phone and other communication technologies; competence and uses patterns of mobile phone by the individual members of a household in various social contexts and so on. The study investigates a few cases on various schemes of select NGOs of the states, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand besides Sonitpur District of Assam to empower women and to make them participate in community activities. These case studies have given insights on

the transformative capacity of women members of households after accepting digital technology e.g. mobile phone and participating in intervention programme of NGOs via SHGs. The identity of women is explored from the neoliberal perspective while discussing various neoliberal trends and challenges to women in specific, i.e. decreasing fertility; competing identities of women at home; feminization of the labour force due to economic restructuring and so on. The third world feminist reading is used to analyze the findings.

The study starts with the general overview of the situational analysis of the policy paradigm on the access to mobile phone and periodical growth stats of telecommunication in India. It examines the Mobile Readiness Status of the rural Assam and of India by evaluating the status of telecommunication in India, intersecting with universal access dynamics and policies and regulations of Government of India.

The study applies two theoretical frameworks, technology acceptance model and communication infrastructure theory by investigating the existing village amenities and its access and meaningful uses in select villages. The findings on existing gender division in access and uses of different communication technologies including mobile phone have provided experiential contribution to gender and technology studies. Contribution of my thesis to the problems addressed in the literature (Chapter 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6) is stated largely in Chapter 7 (Summary of Findings) and Chapter 8 (Discussion and Conclusion) by explaining its relation to the acceptance of mobile phone, transformative capacity of women and community engagement. I have drawn certain capability indicators for women at home after using a mobile phone and simultaneously participating in community groups/enterprises especially in SHGs. This has further contributed to define the rhetoric of Women Empowerment.

The study has examined the phenomenon of empowerment from the perspective of home-maker or housewife at home and outside home. The narratives of the personal changes when they experience with increased self-esteem and self-respect, increasing decision making capacity at home and more managerial power in the community since their participation in village SHGs and other community organizations. The ‘empowerment’ is examined with respect to everyday practice of meaningful use of mobile phone which could provide women scope to act as an agent of transformation and could challenge the ‘power over’ by actively

participate in village SHGs and other community organizations in the villages. At different space home-private and community-public space, uses dynamics of mobile phone technology could make women aware of their 'power from within'. Women residents after using a mobile phone could realize their capabilities or 'power to' pursue financial independence. Simultaneously, the study examines different narratives on meaningful uses of mobile phone technology through everyday practices and the transformation that access to mobile technology has brought in women's life.

The study discusses the existing line of development related intervention programs by the government and private bodies towards telecommunication for development. Various existing infrastructure such as bandwidth, transmission capacity and interfaces, network services in relation to renting and management of quality of services, value added services or various delivery channels of access to information, or content services as related to mobile telephony ecosystem in the context of Women Empowerment have been identified and analyzed.

Analysis involves the acceptance and uses of mobile phone technology and mobile phone enabled services by women of household in the context of locational and geographical endowment. The analysis addresses the challenges that the neo-liberalism brought to household structure and composition, over the duties of the members of the household, exposure to women households to labour market opportunities, impediments towards woman's access to technologies, responses and strategies of household members towards acceptance of mobile phone technology, empowerment of women after accepting and using mobile phone and through participation in village community organizations.

The breadth of empowerment can be best described by the extent to which women members of a group experience change in personal agency, increasing self-esteem and confidence; increasing access to information; economic independence; improvement in cognitive and imaginative capabilities; ability to take important decision at home and in community. An assessment of household structure and the possession of household assets help to identify degree of deprivation of material possession (basic and luxury), basic minimum education and health facilities by the rural poor women of Sonitpur District of Assam. Third world feminist perspective is used to analyze the findings of the study.

The study contributes to the existing literature by examining how mobile phone is an indirect tool and an essential and convenient means of communication to connect people to infrastructure and services that are not easily accessible. The study probes the beneficial changes to woman's capacity after participation in neighborhoods, in local community organizations. Locally organizing capacity could really work as a therapeutic experience as women get the desired space to realize their desire for change. Acceptance of mobile phone could facilitate this transitional space and to help women to relive the youthful humor, companionship, occasional freedom from social bonds and obligations.

The study highlights the importance of an organizational apparatus with an appropriate institutional strategy to function efficiently and effectively, and which could draw in bulk of women and to elicit voluntary compliance from the majority of women. The thesis contributes to theoretical literature by providing a conceptual model (Connected Infrastructure Model) that describes hypothetically of a complex process, a representation of an interface between housewives and community of women. The conceptual model was built on TAM, institutional theory and communication infrastructure theory by theorizing SHGs or local community organizations as a unique constituent in a communication infrastructure which facilitate connectivity and communicative capacity for the essential community components of a rural local environment.

The significance of the involvement of local self-government in Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement to make mobile phone easily accessible to rural women is incorporated in the Conclusion Chapter. The thesis identifies several thrust areas e.g. livelihood enhancement, capability building of women where progress could be made through the community intervention in order to create communication infrastructure in village community organizations which can further facilitate women participation and aid to empower women.