



Digital Literacy and Empowerment among Young Muslim Women in Coimbatore

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Abstract

Digital world is the updated version of the current world. The latest version of the “Survival of the fittest” is happening real-time in the digital world. This also comes with some positive and negative effects. One positive thing is to attain knowledge through Digital literacy. Digital literacy is the ability to consume the positive usages of the digital technologies such as internet, smartphones, communication tools, etc., This paper focuses on the digital literacy and the empowerment that follows among young Muslim women in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The empowerment through Digital means is a gradual yet a powerful one especially for the women folks because it reflects on their livelihood, self-sustenance, education and resilience. This paper uses mixed- methods and derive possibilities through questionnaire and interview methods among young Muslim women from varied socio-economic backgrounds. This also ends with recommendations for future prospects.

Keywords: digital literacy, empowerment, young muslim women, coimbatore, digital threats, digital inclusion.

Introduction

Digital technologies is the updated version of the current world. 21st century is witnessing a mass exodus towards technology and it is obvious for everyone want to make use of it in the best way possible. The people who lack possibilities because of the global indifference towards them can make better use of it. Particularly women who are still marginalized and put into vulnerable situations because of gender disparities should make digital knowledge their weapon of defence. Thus, the knowledge and skill learned through digital platforms are recognised as ‘Digital literacy’. This study focuses on the empowerment among young

Muslim women through digital literacy using smartphones, communication tools, social media and other gadgets. The empowerment through Digital means is a gradual yet a powerful one especially for the women folks because it reflects on their livelihood, self-sustenance, education and resilience. The usage of digital gadgets has both optimistic and pessimistic results on people especially on women such as employment opportunities, entrepreneur through screens, economic benefits, and also digital threats such as privacy theft, cybercrimes against women, scams, etc., Coimbatore is an urban area in the state of Tamil Nadu, India and Islam is the second highly populous religion (Census, 2011).



There are numerous struggles for women to meet in Coimbatore regarding digital access, Muslim women in particular overcome, social and economic barrier to be able to access Digital gadgets which directly affects their growth, education and sustainability. The cultural taboo on social media platforms turns into digital restrictions on young Muslim women. The objectives of the paper include: To know the level of digital literacy among young Muslim women and to Evaluate how digital access influences education, employment and sustenance. This study will focus on the young Muslim women in Coimbatore and the empowerment forms they achieve through the digital platforms and will also evaluate the positive and negative outcomes of digital literacy. Paper concept was given interest because there are many researches conducted on empowerment and literacy of Muslim women but the concept of digital literacy among young Muslim women in Coimbatore is less-explored and needed attention. Further researches and involvement will raise awareness in the society about digital literacy and how it is important. This paper will bring out possible future insights for digital access and inclusive policies for women.

Material & Methods

Methods such as quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the making of this paper. The quantitative techniques such as structured questionnaire for knowing the digital literacy rates and empowerment among the young Muslim women in Coimbatore and qualitative techniques such as personal interviews and discussions among young Muslim women. Certain areas that have high concentration of Muslim population, were particularly selected in Coimbatore for the survey and interviews. The areas include Ukkadam, Karumbakkadai and Kuniyamuthur. The questionnaire surveys were collected from 30 young Muslim women respondents aging from 15 – 35. The questionnaire included sections on personal details, smartphone access, Internet availability, daily usage, comments on digital literacy, etc., The questionnaire survey was conducted online with the help of Google forms. The digital literacy criteria were measured by

UNESCO digital literacy framework and interviews were conducted with 10 individuals. The interview questions had personal experiences, empowerment aspects and digital access issues.

Findings and Results

The findings concluded from the questionnaire survey and interviews among 30 young Muslim women respondents on google form are organized below. Responses are given in the value of Percentage (%)

1. Age: Respondents age between 14 – 20 (53.4%), Respondents age between 21– 30 (36.7%), Respondents aging between 31 -35 (9.9%)
2. Education Level:
 - a. Higher secondary: 26.7%
 - b. Undergraduate: 33.3%
 - c. Postgraduate: 33.3%
 - d. Others: 6.7%
3. Current status:
 - a. Studying: 60%
 - b. Working: 13.3%
 - c. Homemaker: 20%
 - d. Other: 6.7%
4. Family's monthly income:
 - a. Below ₹10,000: 6.7%
 - b. ₹10,000–₹30,000: 40%
 - c. ₹30,000 - ₹50,000: 16.7%
 - d. Above - ₹50,000: 36.7%
5. Device Ownership:
 - a. Personal smartphone: 80%
 - b. No personal device: 20%More than 60% use mobile data for internet access in their devices.
6. Digital literacy levels – basic usage skills:

13. What do you primarily use the internet for? (Select all that apply)
30 responses

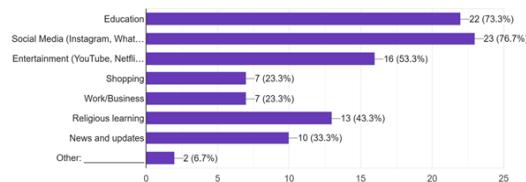


Figure 1: Tabular from the google form survey



7. Educational and economic Impact:

- a. 73.3% of the respondents use digital platforms like you-tube videos and e-certification courses for educational purposes.
- b. 23.3% of the respondents use digital communication and social media for earning an income.

8. Personal and Social Impact:

- a. 46.7% of the respondents feel confident and independent in using digital platforms and 20% of them feel not confident in using the same.
- b. 23.3% of the respondents don't feel safe using the digital platforms.
- c. 83.3% of the respondents believe that digital literacy is imminent in the empowerment of women especially Muslim women.

9. Limitations in Digital inclusion:

- a. 33.3% of the respondents face restrictions from family in using social media and other digital gadgets citing safety issues. It particularly affects young Muslim women because of the more rooted cultural values of Muslims following more culture than actual teachings of their religion.
- b. 86.7% of the respondents lack proper digital training.
- c. Safety concerns and online harassments is also a limitation in women using the digital devices.
- d. The expensive rate values for the devices, mobile networks and Wi-Fi also economically limit the usage of the same.

10. Case Studies and interviews conducted on Young Muslim Women has led to a series of findings on their individual scale: (The below mentioned are individual's own perspectives)

- a. Safa Sherin, 23, Law student. "She utilizes online resources and social media and gain knowledge about various cultures, she could even research and compare laws from different countries, gaining valuable insights to enhance and refine our own legal

framework. She shall also clear doubts regarding the above with particular natives using digital platforms. It also enables her to reach a wider audience, creating awareness about important issues and inspiring positive change".

- b. Sanofer, 27, M.Sc. Computer Science graduate. "She learned data science and Python using mobile apps. As a homemaker, she uses digital tools to stay updated and explore new knowledge. Digital media is the only way for her to stay connected to the current world".
- c. Benaseer, 23, B.sc Food Science and Nutrition graduate. "She learned Canva through GIO (Girls Islamic Organisation) and uses it for all purpose like creating posters and helping her father in his business and handles shop's Instagram account. Digital skills help her fathers' business by reaching it to the online world".
- d. Safeeka, 32, M.E final year student. "She is interested in coding like C++, Java and Python. Digital skills help her learn various AI methods for upcoming improvement to the world".
- e. Nasrin Fathima, 21, 1st year MA English Literature student. "She uses digital technology for creative writing such as poem and quotes and publish it in her social media handles. It is a tool to showcase my talent to the world".
- f. Shahanaz Syed, 22, final-year MTech student. "She uses online tools to build smart healthcare devices and simplify complex medical concepts. Says, Digital world gives life to my ideas".
- g. Anfra, 19, High School graduate and homemaker. "She learned video editing through mobile phone apps and you tube videos and uses it for her personal purposes. She helps her husband in his business by editing videos & making posters for his online promotions".



Interpretation & Discussion

The findings from the questionnaire survey and interviews are leading the research in a unique perspective different from what is often projected about Muslim women in the societal environment. The secondary sources and literature also show some insight into urban women, their digital literacy and empowerment. This part of the paper will interpret and discuss about the findings and dive deep into other prospects of empowerment through digital literacy using social, religion and economic means.

The interconnection between digital knowledge and empowerment is obvious through the findings from the survey and interview. Factually, the higher the usage of digital platforms, higher is the result of women inclining towards education, self-sustenance and empowerment. Muslim women with less access to the outer world connect themselves through online modes to pursue education, to earn income via online and they show considerably higher confidence levels. There are few young Muslim women online celebrities who predominantly make cooking videos. Though not completely empowered and feminist to show only cooking online, it is a gradual process towards empowerment and entrepreneurship. Digital literacy helps catalyzing the women education and same way it is women with higher education have access to more digital means. So, it is important to inculcate education and digital learning like google forms, zoom, google classroom for better use of the marginalized who lack physical education.

Though the use of smartphones has surged in recent years among Muslim women, the utility of digital services stays stagnant because of the rise in online harassment, scams, women involving themselves in scandals and cybercrimes. Often there are interference from the family in women's digital choices citing the above-mentioned issues. 80% of the respondents have access to personal smartphones yet the number of young women using it to empower themselves are lower. Access doesn't mean empowerment so, there should be enough advancements to ensure both. Even if the individual is willing to educate themselves on digital modes it is definite that they lack directions. So, community led

or societal based online and offline groups can lead women in the right tracks. Muslim women can also use the digital devices to learn their faith in its right form rather than being fed the wrong interpretations of Islam by some who are culturally driven.

The digital platforms are a luxury to many in even in Coimbatore let alone the minority women. Financial status also plays hindrance in young Muslim women's lives against them accessing digital platforms. Some women living in remote areas have limited access to networks and technological part plays vital.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This paper has studied the perspectives of young Muslim women on digital literacy and empowerment through questionnaire surveys and interviews. The results give a unique perception on the less-explored but need of the hour concept. The study shows that even though they have access to devices and internet it lacks direction and aim. There are also some cultural, economic and social stigma that hinder women in this stream. It is necessary that they are shown light on the possible prospects of digital literacy through awareness and community led programs. Government policies and awareness can raise the rate of digitally literate Muslim women in Coimbatore. The policy called such as PMGDISHA (Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan) is an Indian Government scheme to educate rural citizens in digital literacy. Though this scheme has officially ended on March 31, 2024, Policies like this can be reimplemented in places where young women lack digital knowledge. It is also the responsibility of the government to ensure lesser cybercrimes and online harassments against women and also ensure safer means for women to reach out to them in need. The Local minority run schools and Madrasas (Islamic schools) can educate Muslim children about digital literacy and offer them courses on it. Local libraries which also offer digital search mechanisms can be used by individuals in shaping themselves. Local Masjids/Mosques and religion-based organisations can help them in encouraging parents and young people in this regard. Further studies and



research on this topic will give deeper insight thus promoting digital literacy. The UNESCO Framework on digital literacy proves helping in direction. Digital literacy has proven critical for the empowerment factors such as education, sustenance, self-reliance and even survival but it is not necessary that empowerment comes from only access to digital arenas. It is important to have digital skills, opportunities, familial support and good socio-political environment. The young generation of Muslim women are clear in their perspective and shows resilience. The responses through interviews shows the will of women to strive in their circumstances and achieve big for their own self and the society.

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