

## Chapter 16

# Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in India With ICT Applications

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### ABSTRACT

*In a developing nation like India where the “Gender Digital Divide” is still prevalent, ICT is emerging as a powerful catalyst for women’s economic, social and political empowerment. Empowering women entrepreneurs with ICT in this globally competitive environment can have a ripple effect in bettering the social fabric of the nation. Incorporation of ICT has created new opportunities for women entrepreneurs by contributing to knowledge sharing, networking and electronic commerce activities. This study investigates the factors which influence the women entrepreneurs to incorporate ICT in their business firms. It also provides an insight on the barriers towards adoption of ICT applications by these women entrepreneurs. It has been observed that both Government and Non-Government Organizations are working towards ICT awareness programmes, i.e., ICT-related education, training and technical support for the women entrepreneurs so that they can tap the benefit of the applications.*

### INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has contributed significantly to the social and economic upliftment of nations worldwide by generating greater employment and productivity to attain a better quality of living. ICT integrates electronic technologies and techniques to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information. ICT generates many affirmative effects on our daily lives – improved access for communities in rural or remote areas, upgraded health care system, data sharing, storage, interpretation and management. ICT develops business, education system and employment opportunities for countries. Furthermore, ICT enables communication between people, since it increases

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societal interaction. Information and communication technologies (ICT) provide new opportunities for employment and also create improved ways for expanding existing ones. With respect to small and micro enterprises, studies have shown that ICTs have not just helped the firms perform better but has also improved the living conditions of the people involved (USAID, 2005). Through networked economy, ICT has enabled to link the businesses with their suppliers and customers on a real time basis. ICT has also slashed the mammoth expenditure on coordination, communication and information processing (Ssewanya & Busler, 2007).

Women using ICTs for business has initiated a shift in perception about the role of women in the development of the society. ICTs are most useful tools at helping women owned firms in saving time and accessing new markets. Technologies like mobile phones permit women to eradicate travel, multitask and coordinate business with household responsibilities.

In the context of developing countries, ICTs have become very useful business tools especially for women entrepreneurs. ICT is an enabler in unlocking the potentials of women entrepreneurs. The innovative use of ICT can fasten the growth of the economy by providing the women with a various business opportunities and subsequently leading to their economic empowerment. E-commerce opportunities ushered in by modern ICT platforms can highly benefit women entrepreneurs. The fast development of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector has positioned India on the global platform by creating novel avenues and opportunities in the development process (OECD, 2010).

Although women have been engaged in different types of jobs in traditional sectors as well as in a number of self-employment activities, they are less likely to reap the benefits from existing or new technologies. The 'gender-divide' in accessing ICTs has pushed the women entrepreneurs far behind their male counterparts and addressing these bottlenecks have become very essential to uplift the status of the women entrepreneurs in the modern economy (Rahman, 2016).

There have been massive investments by the private and government sectors in the development of the communications industries in India (International Centre for Research on Women, 2012). For example, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India has integrated ICTs effectively into their on-going production and training activities and has derived benefits from more efficient and wider marketing through ICT platforms (Joshi, 2012). There are also a number of other cases where women's groups are utilizing ICTs for various types of business purposes successfully in a number of developing countries (Joshi, 2011; Maier & Nair-Reichert, 2007).

The objective of the chapter is to understand the importance of ICT in women empowerment, and the factors that induce the women entrepreneurs to adopt ICT in their businesses. The study has also highlighted the barriers that are being encountered to implement ICT by the women entrepreneurs and the role of Government and other institutions in promoting ICT tools amongst the women entrepreneurs.

## **PREVALENCE OF ICT IN INDIA AND GLOBAL ECONOMY**

Over the past two decades, ICT has played a revolutionary role in the socio-economic advancement of India. The ICT sector, which comprises of telecom operators, hardware developers, software developers, internet service providers, content developers, application providers and equipment manufacturers, now plays a very promising role in the development of the global economy today. Various researches across the world have consistently established the fact that investment in ICT positively affects GDP growth, jobs, productivity and innovation (Intel, 2010). Figure 1 outlines the benefits of ICT in economic development.

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