

## Chapter 11

# Gender Aspects in the Use of ICT in Information Centres

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### ABSTRACT

*Technologies have entered libraries. Scientists in research institutions, for their research work, have to use technology-based information services, irrespective of their gender. With earlier studies reporting gender bias in the usage of technology, this chapter makes an attempt to study if gender has a role in the use of Information and Communication Technology. The chapter further analyses if cultural, family, or educational background can change this generalized notion.*

### INTRODUCTION

Today, most professionals need information for carrying out their work, be they scientists, engineers, doctors, managers, economists etc. As the number of professionals requiring information has increased tremendously, the nature of demand for information has also changed. Research now being done in more number of countries, the demand now is for a wider geographical coverage, and a wider cross-discipline and cross-specialty coverage. The increase in demand and change in the nature of demand, has called for an increase in supply of information.

At this juncture, it is also noticed that there is an acceleration in the growth of literature, due to increase in research. In the field of library and information science, unlike others, the increased supply of information has not solved the problem. Rather, it has aggravated it. It is at this juncture, that the Libraries and Information Centres play a major role in Information Transfer Cycle. The main reason for libraries being known in many circles as information centers is that their role is no more limited to stocking and issuing books and journals, but ensuring that the information needs of the users is met either by its own resources or through other resources accessed either through on-line access or internet.

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Information Centers identify the needs of the users, collect the information and information bearing documents on the basis of the needs, process, organise, store the information collected, and disseminate the information through various services.

At the same time, it was also experienced by the Libraries and Information Centres that the conventional or traditional methods are unable to handle the voluminous information and provide successful access. Consequently, the technologies entered the libraries. These technologies have helped the Information Scientists in conquering space and time and rendered it possible to retrieve information from any corner of the world, instantaneously, and provide it to the users efficiently and effectively. For the user, the electronic media assists in efficient, specific and exhaustive retrieval of information. Thus, Computer Mediated Communication has become integral part of the society. Libraries today introduce many new services, either by converting existing services into e-services, or by developing and implementing entirely new services for search, delivery and use of information. Such new or converted services include online delivery, portals, personalized services, online teaching modules, online reference, digitized collections, or electronic publishing.

Any services introduced in a library are meant to serve the user of the library. The success of any change in the library has to be measured in terms of how much this change has benefited the user and also by how much the user is using these newly introduced services and how much the user is satisfied by these changes. This would also help assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the new technologies and how responsive it is to the needs of the users.

## **WOMEN AND PROFESSION**

Women have entered different professions. Professionals, be they scientists, engineers, doctors, managers, economists etc need information for carrying out their work,. This need for information has to be satisfied by the libraries / information centers. Thus, technology based services are to be used by all the users, irrespective of their gender, to get access to the information required. But, the history of Computer Science presents a totally different picture, when it comes to the use of IT by female users. Following paragraphs have been culled out from different studies to present the gender differences in the use of IT.

### **Background**

A gender gap exists between the males and females in the use of technology. In a 1994 study, it was found that in a group of Fourth through sixth graders, who were defined as “Heavy” computer users, the ratio of girls to boys using computers was 1:4. (Sakamoto, 1994). Although this indicates the initial stage in an individual’s life, many studies reveal that this gap persists and increases with the grade level. The gender gap in computer interest and skills begins in the early grades (Becker and Sterling, 1987), persists in the home environment, and continues into adulthood (Giaquinta, Bauer & Levin, 1993).

The attitude towards computers are different among girls and boys. Girls tend to see computers as means of achieving a concrete goal. They conceptualise computers as a tool, be it for email or word processing. On the contrary, boys conceptualize computers differently than girls. They are more likely to play games, to program, and to see the computer as a playful recreational toy. (Giaquinta, Bauer & Levin, 1993). Considering recreational, boys treat computers as toys and play with computers and explore it with ease. This

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