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# Digital Space and Women Empowerment

## 1- Introduction

Digital space has the potential to be a powerful tool for women's empowerment. It provides them access to information, education, and economic opportunities. However, there are challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the digital space is truly inclusive for all women.

## 2- An Overview of role of Digital Space in Women Empowerment

### 3- Potential of Digital Space to Empower Women

3-1) Increased access to education and information

i- Helps in learning new skills

ii- Attain better lifestyle

3-2) Improved communication and networking

i- Stay informed and connected with world

ii- Diversity in tech field, gives better experience

3-3) Social inclusion and collaboration

i- Helps to amplify their voices on important issues

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3.4) Ensures women's political participation.

i- Assists them to share their say

ii- Useful for women's political campaigns

3.5) Voice and advocacy of marginalised

i- Social media platforms raise awareness

### entrepreneurial

3.6) ~~Intrep~~ Provides entrepreneurship opportunities

i- online business are suitable for women

3.7) Offers flexible work options

i- Helps to fulfil dual responsibilities of home and work

3.8) Bestows equal wages

i- Online platforms operate beyond gender lens

## 4- Challenges in the way of digital space to acquire Women Empowerment

4.1) Digital illiteracy of women

i- Restrict women's digital participation

ii- Only 20% of Pakistani females explore internet

4.2) Cultural and ethnic constraints

i- Gender role of women is to take care of family

4.3) Online harassment and violence

i- Cyber-bullying, hate-speech, doxing etc.

## 5- Way Forward to confront Challenges and promote Digital Space to Empower Women

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5.1) Promoting digital education  
i- Helps to upskill themselves

5.2) Ensuring enhanced access to technology  
i- Eliminating cultural barriers  
ii- Making technology women friendly

5.3) Combating online harassment  
i- Strict policy of social media  
ii- Role of Law Enforcement departments

## 6- Conclusion

### ESSAY

"Women don't need to find a voice, they have a voice, and they need to use it, people need to be encouraged to listen", writes Meghan Markle. Women constitute half of world population. They have same potential as men, but their force is paralysed. As it is said, they don't need to find a voice, rather they have to make people listen to it. Digital space provides them with this opportunity to spread their voice and unleash their potential. It provides them with increased access to technology and improved communication with the world. It ensures social and political

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inclusion of women, and make sure the advocacy for marginalised voices of women. Digital space also render equal financial chances and flexible work timings for women. There are also certain challenges for digital space to ensure women empowerment. Women do not have equal digital literacy as men. They also face cultural and societal constraints. Online harassment and violence is ubiquitous in digital sphere. These challenges need to be addressed with women centered efforts. Promoting digital education, and <sup>women's</sup> access to technology is mandatory. Along with that, efforts to combat cyber violence should be made. Digital space has the potential to be a powerful tool for women's empowerment. It provides them access to information, skills, and financial opportunities. However, there are challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the digital space is truly inclusive for all women.

The current era is era of digitalisation. Digital technology is all-pervasive in all sectors and spheres of the world. The force of digitalisation is inevitable.

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Like other fields, gender inequality is also present in digital domain, but unlike others, it has very diversified mechanism to eradicate this inequality. An international conference for 'women in tech' was held at Hong Kong in May 2023. Many of the issues were discussed. Answering the question: "why do we want women in <sup>digital</sup> tech industry?", Guest Speaker, Sherry Shek said; "a women's perspective is needed since consumer of products are not men alone, also considering its perspective women presence is important for their empowerment."

Digital space has potential to empower women, mainly through increased access to education and information. Digital technology over the years have become so advanced that, it is easily accessible to everyone. All the other means of acquiring education and attaining information have constraints and challenges for women, but digital technology is beyond gender, racial and cultural divide. The internet provides women with access to a wealth of information and educational resources, which helps them to learn new skills, start businesses, and improve their lives.

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It gives them hand on such new educational resources, that may not be available otherwise. It is beneficial for women particularly in remote or marginalised communities. Thus, digital technology proffers easy and refined education for women to empower them.

This enhanced access to information is helpful for women to improve their communication and networking. This helps them stay informed, make right decisions and connect with others. They manage to have connectivity with women, all across the globe. They share their views and experiences. The diversity in tech field ensures their inclusion and participation. They are acknowledged and welcomed by other women regardless of their location. Anna Radulovsk, an executive women in tech network says; "to create a more diverse and inclusive tech field, we need to inspire and empower women of next generation to pursue and develop their career in tech". This help them connect with the world. So, digital technology helps women made communication all across the world.

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to empower themselves.

Similarly, digital technology guarantees social inclusion of women.

Women are regarded as minority, and they have not given their share to say in social affairs.

Their voices get suppress pertaining to sociocultural barriers.

Digital technology gives them the opportunity of social inclusion.

"Muna Khan, a Pakistani writer says: "women, being physically weaker and socially marginalised are more dependent on digital technology to have their voices heard"

The use of social media and other alike methods help them to contribute in social issues. They have online groups and organisations, to partake in social legislation. It is important to address and point out their problems. Hence, it supports women to create community favor and amplify their voice on important issue.

Not just social, it ensures political participation of women too. Digital technology provides them with platform to contribute in political sphere.

It is helpful, particularly for women, who face cultural and societal constraints, and cannot

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participate openly. A 2019 research study focusing on 107 countries from across the world shows that; "more than 85 percent of female legislators make use of social media, with level of use higher during the campaign period". Social media is although effective in political campaign for everyone, but is more beneficial for women candidates. They use social media, and efficiently approach to everyone, which otherwise is difficult for women. It is advantageous for women, whether as voter, representative or candidate. Thus, digital technology is instrumental in political empowerment of women. Likewise, it provides advocacy for voices of marginalised and suppressed women. They have online forums to share their stories and find support. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow women to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and share their stories directly with global audience. This raises awareness about issues they face and develop solidarity across communities. Women create their own online spaces, writes blogs and publishes



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their experiences and views. This is helpful, especially for isolated and discriminated women. The world is now more connected, thanks to digitalisation. The hashtags and online trends spread the news of discrepancies happening anywhere to whole of the world. This is like the way a drop of colour can tint the whole jug of water, the news reach all over same way. Therefore, the digital technology is fruitful for marginalised women of community. Moreover, digitalisation is worthwhile to offer women with entrepreneurship opportunities. Women have very little representation in economic sphere. The reason for this includes gender norms, societal barriers and many more. ~~Digital space is panacea to all woes.~~ "Female labour force participation is lowest in muslim countries, which is only 22 percent" [Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's other Crises, September 2023]. Digital space is panacea to all the woes. Online businesses are suitable for women, because they often require less upfront investments compared

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to traditional brick-and-mortar stores. Online platforms also assist women to reach customers beyond their local communities, expanding their market reach and potential growth. In this way, digital space is valuable to empower women in economic arena.

Also, digital technology offers women with flexible work options. Women have less saturation in workforce mainly because of their gender roles. They have dual responsibilities, of work and home simultaneously. This ~~also~~ hinders their contribution in workforce. A survey by 'Macro Pakistani' reveals that: "83 per cent of Pakistani women who do not work outside the home cite housework as reason". Digital space has provided them with solution to this problem. Online work platform, Freelancer, Fiver, Amazon and many others do not put restrictions of time limit. They have freedom to work in day or night, in their spare time. Also, it is free from the tension of job displacement. Thus, digitalisation allows women easy work services through online jobs to empower themselves.

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Besides that, online jobs bestow equal wages to women. Most of the online tasks are not concerned with, who the doer is, or how one is performing the task. All they need is to get their work done. The wage is same for the same work, no matter who the doer is. They operate beyond the racial, gender and cultural barriers. On the other hand, in traditional work field women do not earn equal as compared to men, for the same work. According to United Nation Human Development Report; "women still earn 23 percent less than men globally". Therefore, online works pays women equally as men. This eradicates pay gap and ensures parity.

In the above paragraphs, we have discussed how digital space results in women empowerment. Now, we will discuss the challenges to women in digital sphere.

Digital literacy is ubiquitous among women. They are not equally capable as men. It is the major hinderance in women empowerment through digitalisation. The reason is obvious that, women

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do not have equal access to technology as men. The literacy gap exacerbates further in developing countries, where women have very little knowledge of digitalisation. For example, take the case of Pakistan. The internet penetration in young women of Pakistan is woefully low at 25 percent only" [Muna Khan, We're worth it, December 2023]. In such cases, where one-third of women do not have access to digital technology, their empowerment is impossible.

The access of women is significantly low because of cultural and ethnic constraints. Societal gender norms and their cultural roles limit women from accessing and using internet. In some of the cultures, women are expected to prioritise their family over personal development, restricting their ability to participate in the digital world. According to Alina Khan, an eminent writer; "In Pakistan, 38 percent women are less likely to have smartphone as compared to men". Their gender roles restrict them to boundary of house.

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They spend most of their time in domestic labour. Thus, they cannot unleash their potential in digital world.

Those present in digital domain, often face online harassment and cyber violence. Online harassment to females poses significant challenges. With the advancement of digital world, this issue has also get worse, and there seem no easy solution to it. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence takes many forms including cyberbullying, online harassment, hate speech, doxing, intimate image abuse, trolling or deep fakes. This is not limited to any particular region or group, but women all over the globe face such issues. According to reports, "9 in 10 women in European Union Countries face ~~to~~ online harassment once or more in their life-times". So, women empowerment is not achievable, until their online security is not ensured.

Although the challenges are glaring, but certain measures are useful to confront these challenges. These measurements to ensure women empowerment in through digital space are following.

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Firstly, digital education must be imparted to women. Empowerment begins with education. Digital literacy of women is necessary for their valuable contribution. Digital tool provides access to vast amount of information and educational resources. They allow women to upskill themselves, explore different fields and pursue further education. Without balance of digital literacy, empowerment of women is not attainable, and they would continue to lag behind their male counterparts. Multi-faceted approach is required in this regard to address the problem of women digital education.

Secondly, the access of women must be ensured into digital world. This includes eliminating social and cultural barriers, and making technology user-friendly for women. First step was to make women ready for digitalisation, while this focuses on making the technology use-able and reliable for women. It will validate their presence in all the key sectors of the society, ensuring empowerment of women. Women's access to

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digital technology leads to their economic independence, which in long run is beneficial for society. It is estimated that: "achieving gender equality in digital economic participation in Pakistan will result in 20 per cent of country's GDP". Hence women access to digital technology is essential for their empowerment. Lastly, efforts must be made to tackle online harassment. Harassment can silence women's voice and discourage them from expressing themselves online. Most of the women does not participate in online activities; pertaining to the fear of cyber-violence and online harassment. This limits their participation in important decision-making processes. The fear of feeling unsafe online has led women to less rely on online education, employment, and entrepreneurship. In this regard, social media platforms must have anti-harassment policies. Law enforcement departments contribute to punish culprits. By tackling it down, women can participate with full vigour. In a nutshell, one may say that digital technology is vital for women empowerment.

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IT has capability of achieving parity for women. Digital technology helps them learn new skills and stay informed with the world. IT assists them to share their say in social and political sphere. IT advocates for marginalised women of society. Digital technology is also valuable for economic participation of women, by providing them flexible routine and equal wages. There are certain challenges in this regard, such as digital illiteracy of women, cultural barriers, and online harassment. Women centered efforts are required to tackle such issues. They must be equip with digital literacy. Also technology needs to be more women friendly. Strict policies are required to combat online harassment. However, technology must be promoted in women for its positive outcomes, as this is an easy way for their empowerment. Vidya Duthaluru says, "If there is one thing I have done right is to stay true to my passion for technology. That is what I encourage the younger girls to do, stay passionate to technology, as it is fastest and easiest method of empowerment"

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