Technology Divide and Gender

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Digital technology has become critical to our lives. Online experiences and opportunities are also important for children's and young people's development across a wide range of areas, including : online education, health and well-being, creative and cultural practices, leisure, play, and connecting with peers, employment, career information, entrepreneurship opportunities. However, there is a gender digital divide: girls are disadvantaged when it comes to digital adoption, have lower levels of access to and use of digital technology than boys, and often they are not benefiting from digital technology in the same way as boys.

In news: The gender technology gap has to end
Placing it in syllabus: Society
Dimensions

   ▪ What is Gender Technology Gap ?
   ▪ Impact of such a Gap
   ▪ Steps Taken
   ▪ Suggestions

Content:

What is Gender Technology Gap ?

   ▪ The **digital divide, or technology gap**, is the difference between groups with access to technology and the internet and those without.
   ▪ Girls and women often have less access to technology and the internet compared to boys and men. This difference in access to digital technology in gender groups is called Gender Technology Gap.
   ▪ Particularly in developing countries, girls and women struggle to afford technology and internet access.

- In addition, stereotypes around technology being 'for boys' and fear of being discriminated against stop girls from using digital tools.
- According to **Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA)** estimates, over 390 million women in low- and middle-income countries do not have Internet access.
- South Asia has more than half of these women with only 65 percent owning a mobile phone.
- In **India, only 14.9 percent of women were reported to be using the Internet**.
- Around the world, information and access to health care have largely moved online, and those left behind face grave disadvantages.

Reasons for Gender Technology Gap:

- **Gender-based digital exclusion has many causes**. Hurdles to access, affordability, (lack of) education and skills and technological literacy, and inherent gender biases and socio-cultural norms, are at the root of gender-based digital exclusion.
- When families share a digital device, it is more likely that the father or sons will be allowed to use it exclusively.
- In part, this is due to **deeply held cultural beliefs**: it is often believed that women's access to technology will motivate them to challenge patriarchal societies. In India around one-fifth of women were found to believe that the Internet was not appropriate for them, for a number of cultural reasons.
- There is also a **belief that women need to be protected,** and that online content can be dangerous for women/expose them to risks. As a consequence, girls and women who ask for phones face suspicion and opposition.
- Women and girls using the Internet can be exposed to additional risks, including cyberstalking, online harassment or even sexual trafficking, and it thus

become crucial to develop measures to protect and prevent gender-based violence online.

- In India, around 12 % of women report not to use the Internet because of the negative social perception associated to its use, and 8% due to the lack of acceptance by family members

Impact of such a Gap:

Unequal Participation:

- Without equal access to technology and the internet, girls and women are not able to equally participate in our ever more digital societies.
- Holding back girls and women in this area affects every aspect of their lives, including their ability to speak out and campaign on issues that affect them.

Worsening existing Inequalities:

- Moreover, if girls and women are not involved in creating digital tools and online content, they may exacerbate existing inequalities.

Slower Economic Growth:

- The gender technology gap also negatively impacts countries' potential for economic growth and development.
- If 600 million more women are connected to the internet in 3 years, this would translate to a rise in global GDP of between US$13 billion and US$18 billion.

Fewer Employment Opportunities

- Digital literacy has become almost as important as traditional literacy.
- Over 90% of jobs worldwide already have a digital component and most jobs will soon require sophisticated digital skills.

Poor Health Outcomes:

- This divide is deepened by earlier mandates to register online to get a vaccination appointment.
- Recent local data revealed that nearly 17 per cent more men than women have been vaccinated.
- In India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, for example, fewer women than men received the necessary information to survive COVID-19.
- Vaccine registration usually requires a smartphone or laptop. Men and boys are thus more likely to get timely information and register than women and girls.

Steps Taken:

- Various international organisations and national governments have taken steps to address the gender digital gap.
- Digital empowerment programmes and partnerships such as **EQUALS and International Girls in ICT Day celebration** across the region led by UN Women and the International Telecommunication Union.
- This is to encourage more girls to choose STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) as their academic focus, enter digital technology careers, and aspire to be the next leaders in digital technology.
- Additional governmental and business programmes are complementing existing endeavours aimed at overcoming barriers for women with respect to the lack of technology literacy.
- The provision of information in video format instead of text formats as well as initiatives as **Internet Saathi** ("Internet Friend") (which was developed by Google and the Tata Trust), and Google's voice recognition function have contributed to decrease illiteracy and improve technical literacy for women in rural India.
- The **Internet Saathi** initiative trains young female digital instructors to show women in rural villages

basic digital skills of Google-provided smartphones, including different Internet or chat applications such as Google Chrome and WhatsApp . Internet Saathi has reached more than 2.6 million women in over 60,000 villages.

- Empowered with basic digital literacy and Internet access, those women were able to access government programmes, including welfare programmes and subsidised meals, and this has increased access to education, and female entrepreneurship.

- In regions that are less well-connected and have a variable electricity network, women are able to use special "feature-phones" that have more basic functions but extended battery life.

- The **"Fightback" app i**s a mobile application that is contributing to address issues related to sexual harassment, and to improve security for women in India. The app allows sending global positioning system coordinates to pre-selected contacts by pushing an SOS button on the mobile phone. Since its development, it has been downloaded more than a million times.

- The **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana** programme is recent governmental initiatives that aims at improving the financial inclusion of women at the national level, including the promotion of mobile wallets, based on mobile transactions through telecom operators, and the development of Cash Out Point centres

Some of the initiatives of the Indian Government to remedy the problem include:

National Mission onEducation Using ICT (NMEICT):

- NMEICT has been envisaged as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to leverage the potential of ICT, in teaching and learning process for the benefit of all the learners in Higher Education Institutions in any time any where mode.

- It is a landmark initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to address all the education and learning related needs of students, teachers and lifelong learners.

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA):

- PMGDISHA is a scheme to make six crore persons in rural areas, across States/UTs, digitally literate, reaching to around 40% of rural households by covering one member from every eligible household by 31st March, 2019.
- It aims to bridge the digital divide, specifically targeting the rural population including the marginalised sections of society like Scheduled Castes (SC) / Scheduled Tribes (ST), Minorities, Below Poverty Line (BPL), women and differently-abled persons and minorities.

Suggestions:

coordination among different initiatives, scaling up, learning from successful and unsuccessful programmes and building on lessons learned may go a long way in improving the equitable sharing of the benefits of digitalisation

Design Gender Equal Technology:

- What we see today is that most technologies that are available to the layperson are created by men, for men, and do not necessarily meet everyone's requirements.
- Digital solutions, products and content tend to be designed for a 'default' user and fail to consider, for example, the connectivity and data limitations, devices girls have access to, the digital platforms they are on, their digital literacy levels, or content girls find relevant and want to see.
- Digital products and services need to be designed with and for girls to meet their realities. Companies should not look at gender-equal technology solely from an

altruistic perspective, but from a pragmatic one.

Compulsory Digital Education

- Compulsory education helps to eliminate the digital gender divide.
- Compulsory schooling is crucial to ensure that individuals gain the basic skills and competences needed for full participation in labour markets and society

Promoting FemTech:

- Feminist technology (sometimes called "femtech") is an approach to technology and innovation that is inclusive, informed and responsive to the entire community with all its diversity.

Changing Gender-specific expectations about the future:

- At 15 years of age, on average across OECD countries, only 0.5% of girls wish to become ICT professionals, compared to 5% of boys. Twice as many boys as girls expect to become engineers, scientists or architects.
- Changing gender-specific expectations about professions is key, including by fostering female role models in STEM.

Mould your thought: Why is the Gender Technology Gap a serious problem? Discuss the reasons for such a gap and suggest measures to overcome the challenges.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Define Gender Technology gap
- Explain the effects of technology gap
- Give reasons for such gap
- Mention present initiatives and suggest further measures
- Conclusion