

The Technology Acceptance Model in Collective Societies

A study of ICT adoption by rural women entrepreneurs in India

Research Plan

submitted by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The vast majority of India's poor are dependent on informal sectors, like agriculture, small, micro and household enterprises etc for their employment and incomes. Like in other developing nations, uneducated and untrained women in India face significant challenges and social barriers in providing for themselves and their families or in efficiently developing independent enterprises as a means of financial security. Disadvantaged by both geography and gender, women who set out to be entrepreneurs have to overcome many socio cultural constraints and other societal barriers in honing their traditional skills and accessing and creating markets for their produce. While Information Technology (IT) was hailed as a powerful enabler for advancing economic and social development through the creation of new types of economic activity, employment opportunities and the enhancement of networking and participation, the advantages it bestowed on the urban Indian woman were not seen by her rural sister on the other side of the digital divide. This failing could be attributed to several factors. Using and benefiting from IT required education, training, affordable access to the technology, information relevant to the user and the building of an enabling environment most of which the rural women did not have. IT required these women to adapt to the technology and not vice versa.

The mobile revolution in India over the past two decades has been phenomenal. Its acceptance at every level of society has even ensured that the vast majority of the country's illiterate, including women, have become number literate just to be able to use the ubiquitous cell-phone. However, its use in most rural geographies is still limited to social interactions. With convergence in mobile and Information technologies and phones becoming increasingly "smarter" Information and Communication Technology (ICT) seems to have the potential that ICT did not. The question then is can ICT go from a medium of social interaction to a livelihood enabler for these rural women entrepreneurs in the unorganized sector engaged in traditional areas of livelihood?

The original Technology Acceptance Model, a widely studied and researched model, attributes the adoption of a new technology by a user to two factors i.e. the perceived ease

of use of a technology and the perceived benefits that can accrue from its use. This research will attempt to study if the adoption of ICT as a livelihood enabler by rural women entrepreneurs (non-farm) in India validates/will validate the Technology Acceptance Model? Rural Indian society can be regarded as truly collectivist, as defined by Hofstede, with all lives intertwined and the development of society inexorably connected with the success of individual entrepreneurs and vice versa. Does then the Technology Acceptance Model require modifications to be applicable in such collectivist societies where the actions of the individual are influenced by various concepts such as the opinion of one's family, extended family, work group and other such wider social networks in the ecosystem that one has some affiliations with? Has this aspect been researched and included in any of the expansions of the original Technology Acceptance Model? And lastly, would this "collective" dimension have policy and marketing implications vis-à-vis the introduction of ICT as a livelihood enabler for women entrepreneurs in rural India?