GENDERED DIMENSION OF THE USE OF INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE:
A Study Based on the Students of Burdwan Town

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Information and communication technologies like mobile phone and internet have left a huge impact on the way we live and operate in this world. They have now become an inevitable part of our life. Our dependency on these technologies is slowly but surely escalating day by day as they continue to serve us with multi-faceted functions to ease some of our mundane activities. Accordingly mobile as a mere technological device got transformed into a social device by the virtue of its increasing level of acceptance by the people of the society. A part of the people's communication is mediated through mobile phones as they use these devices for communicating and maintaining relationships, co-ordinating everyday life activities, for obtaining information as well as for entertainment purposes. The rigorous use of these technologies has left enormous impact on various social groups, including gender. They have created and recreated gender roles and gender stereotyping. It is widely considered that men have a greater affinity towards technology than female. But the technologies of everyday life like mobile phones and internet which are our pivotal points of consideration have been widely accessed by both the genders. This paper ventures to find out the pattern of use of mobile phone and internet among the males and females. The study is conducted by following sampling method and 60 college students are chosen by following the method of purposive sampling.

Index Terms – Communication technologies, gender identity, gender stereotyping, women life-world

1. INTRODUCTION- Technologies are invented or discovered to make mundane activities of human beings easier and comfortable. Following Koeber (2000), technologies are "tools, devices or systems designed to help users carry out specific tasks, life activities, bridging the time space constraint and enabling new ways of connectivity". Technologies are generally 'value free' in nature. Gradually their mass consumption generates a cultural pattern which makes a significant impact on the interrelationship among discrete sections of society. With the passage of time technologies are added with social values which metamorphose them into social tool, the phenomena customarily regarded as social shaping of technology. An instance of social shaping gets its manifestation through the association of men with technology. Wajcman (2010) states, "The very definition of technology is cast in terms of male activities". But the impact of the technologies of everyday life, where men and women have equal access has the potential to alter the historical inter connectedness of men with technology. The necessary condition required here is the mass consumption of the technology by both the genders. Among all such types of technologies, the crucially significant technologies in the contemporary era are the information and communication technologies like mobile phone and internet. These wireless technologies were initiated to enhance communication. The adoption and domestication of these technologies have left enormous impact on the social actors and on various socio-cultural categories like gender. The mass consumption of these technologies have destabilised certain stereotypical concepts and threatened or modified the patriarchal domination. This paper seeks to identify the pattern of use of mobile phones among college students with a sole emphasis on difference in the consumption pattern between the female students and their counterpart. Another principal aspect of this paper is to observe the changes that these technologies have brought in the lives of women. The entire research is based in the place of Burdwan where a conglomeration of students from different regions, class, caste, and educational backgrounds come and pursue their academic career.

2. Literature review- Carlo Ganito regards mobile phones as "new media as technology of gender" because he finds that through various activities gender construction and transformation takes place. His study shows that computer and mobile phones have provided equal opportunities to both men and women. Hence they have the capability of blurring the gender differences. At the same time he also sees that through the use of these devices often traditional gender roles are reinforced or newly constructed. Judy Wajcman states that a glimpse of history reveals the association of males with technology as well as masculinity is identified with technical competence which ultimately confirms the patriarchal authority. Wajcman dismissed the concept of technology as inherently patriarchal. He is pessimistic in his approach as he believes that new technologies, especially communication technologies have the capacity to transform gender identities. Donna Haraway, an eminent feminist also notes that technology has a great power in creating new meanings. She also believes that technology has the potential to empower women or at least can bring gender transformation. Minute differences are found regarding the usage pattern of mobile phones and internet between males and the females. Bailur, Masero and Tachhi view that girls use mobile phones to construct their unique identities. They state that when empowerment of women through internet is considered they believe that simply access to internet and mobile phones are not enough to empower women. This is to be backed by change in formal laws and policies as well as through informal norms present in the cultural framework of that society.

Roux and Dalvit have investigated the similarities and differences in mobile phone use among the gender from a critical cultural perspective. They agreed that mobile technology brings about "digital divide" between those who have access to these

information and communication technologies and those who do not. The access to these technologies simply does not depend on income and class but on a cluster of factors such as gender, age, technological knowledge, language etc. they have found that these technologies have disrupted the gender inequalities which persisted through time immemorial. Goswami and Dutta in their work reveal that there is more or less no difference in using social network sites. Only it is found that females are more interested in maintaining the existing relationship while males are engaged more in forming new relationships. Their research also brings forth the fact that in case of e-learning application, online shopping and online stock trading females suffer through high risk in using the technology. Economides and Grousopoulou stated that some of the traditional differences between genders are no more. Yet some gender differences like attitude towards technology, intensity of internet use, preference of online implications are still present in open air. Males mainly use these devices for recreational facilities and females use it more for communication purpose.

3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY- The fundamental aims of this paper are - (i) To find out how young people use internet and mobile phones in their everyday life. (ii) To identify the gender differences in the usage pattern.(iii) To trace how the traditional gender identities are constructed and reconstructed through the use of mobile phones and internet, and (iv) To sketch the impact of these technologies in the life-world of women.

This research is partly qualitative and quantitative in nature. Primary data for this research is obtained by following random sampling method. The college students of Burdwan are regarded as the population and 60 college students are taken as sample of which 30 are males and the remaining are the females. Burdwan is an agriculture based town in the state of West Bengal. It is the town which is educationally very rich. It has different reputed colleges and is a perfect conglomeration where students from different regions of the country come and pursue their higher studies. Data from the students are obtained through focus group interaction and in-depth qualitative interview. Purposive sampling procedure is followed in the entire procedure. For secondary data, books, journals and internet are followed.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS-

4.1Diffusion and Adoption and Gender- Based on its perceived functions, a technological innovation gradually gets diffused in the society. According to Rogers' (1962) theory on diffusion of innovation, the adoption of a technology involves gaining knowledge of the innovation, forming an attitude towards it and finally to make a decision whether to adopt it or not to adopt it. The new communication technologies, mobile phones and internet have diffused into even in remote areas based on its perceived and real uses. The diffusion process is being shaped by some other factors like status, location i.e. rural or urban, level of education etc. The diffusion process is also marked by the dominance of the male, especially by those who are the college goers.

The Technology Acceptance Model proposed by Davis et al (1989) depicts some factors that affect a user's acceptance of a new technology. The elementary factor, he believes, is an individual's attitude towards that technology. These factors are again affected by some key variables. These variables are institutions and capabilities. Institutions are the established rules and norms that guide the behaviour and interactions of an individual in the society. The primordial institution that plays a crucial role in the adoption of mobile phone is the family. The students belonging to higher income and upper middle income-group families can procure their personal mobile device very easily while this may not be the cases for the middle class or below it. In some poor families mobile phones become a shared device. An urban rural contrast is detected based on gender differences. Female students' from remote areas reported that their parents denied them from having mobile phones and are permitted to have these devices when they do get married. The patriarchal norms have a defining role to play in the adoption of mobile devices, especially in some villages in India. Females who possess mobile phones are seen to pose a threat to this patriarchal norm which prevails in interior places of India. This norm is challenged by those who are able to gain capabilities. Capability here is regarded as the ability or the skill required for operating mobile phones and internet. This adaptation of this skill depends especially on the level of education and the economic background of the individual's family and on the particular individual as well. The general consensus in our society is that students' life is a phase where they are only supposed to study. Nowadays some individuals of both the gender have a tendency to earn some economic capital either financially supports their personal expenses. In this arena also these mobile and internet technologies play a crucial role.

4.2. Male –female preferences in respect to certain choices related to mobile handsets and network providers - Individual preference can be explained as the process of choosing the best among the available goods and services based on real or perceived utility. Individual preferences in the context of mobile phone and internet are manifested through individual choices of mobile handset, network provider, mobile and internet accessories. The data so obtained reveals that a great number of respondents possess mobile phone of a medium cost ranging from rupees 5000 to rupees 10,000. Their basic concern is about having the features like social media application, high quality camera and other entertainment related features. The trend so observed confirms that they are interested to have even low budget phone only when they have these particular features. Brand, design and look are the secondary concern that even among few of the respondents. In case of network connectivity it has been found that the girls are found to use the Vodafone network the most followed by Jio, Airtel, Idea, Aircel and finally BSNL. The inter linkage of the colour pink with feminine character loses its connotation in this context. Pink colour handsets, though in very few cases are preferred by few female respondents while the boys regard that colour as very feminine and prefer other colours instead of that. Girls show a higher level of inclination towards the presence of both front and back camera and the quality of the cameras while boys have but they are more concerned with the technical part that is about the operating system, processor, memory capacity etc. This does not demonstrate that girls have lack of knowledge related to the technological components of the phone. Good numbers of female respondents do have that knowhow but males are spotted to outnumber them.

4.3 Elementary use of mobile phones and internet- Mobile handset, with time underwent continuous sophistication. These devices provide numerous features which can be utilized and as such difference in their uses are based on an individual's personality and preference. The information obtained from the data collected for this research suggest that both male and female respondents regard mobile device as an important device which is very necessary to communicate and very helpful to obtain information regarding any issue under the sky. Besides, the device has become an item to utilize leisure in whatsoever an individual choose to do so. Many have started to regard it as a friend with whom they can spend ample of time in their phase of loneliness and to keep oneself aloof from a less friendly environment. It is also worth mentioning that the rudimentary reason behind the very adoption of mobile phone, for both the genders, is communication. They have unanimously agreed that the device has helped them to remain connected with the family and friends. Simultaneously, when they are asked about the specific task for which they utilize their phone the most- a contrast came into the forefront between the two genders. Among the two options provided to them, which are entertainment and communication, boys are more inclined towards the entertainment part while girls are more on the communication part. About 56.67 per cent of the female respondents revealed that they use the device more for communication than for downloading whereas the maximum numbers of male respondents i.e. 66.67 per cent are more prone to downloading functions. Dissimilarity also persists related to the search items. Boys are very passionate to watch online cricket matches, movies whereas girls are more fascinated to watch cookery and beauty related videos, serials and motivational videos. In the context of online surfing it is of vital significance to mention that girls use this technology more for educational purposes than the boys whereas the boys use it more for entertainment purposes. The paramount distinction between these two genders is visualized while scrutinizing the impact of these technologies on individuals' social capital. The result shows that boys are more inclined to take risk in relationships by trying to make friendship with unknown friends while girls are more interested in maintaining their existing relationships. Boys can easily take risks in accepting strangers but girls remain very sceptical in this case.

Use of technology also brings anxiety and mobile phone and internet are not exceptions to it. There are few features which, if misused can lead to distress in people's life. This may include instances where a person's communication is being recorded and revealed in places where that were not to be revealed. Individual's profile may be hacked, pictures may be downloaded and use for mischievous purposes. Even when the devices are sent for servicing, girls are found to report that from such centres pictures and information are unscrupulously used. These sorts of anxieties are specially found among the young girls. They do their best in order to keep themselves away from becoming victims of fraudulent activities. Social network sites are kept as much secured as possible in order to prevent strangers to trespass through their accounts. Boys show a little bit carefree attitude towards these attributes related to the security aspects. Both genders are equally concerned about the safety of the phone i.e. how to prevent the device from pick pocketing or forgetting where it was being kept etc. Both the genders agree that this device play a crucial role during emergency. Girls feel themselves more secured with that device especially in a strange situation or in unknown places.

4.4. Mobile phones and female life-world- From time immemorial the association of technology has been a common phenomenon in every society. Only reason behind this was the fact that men enjoy a mastery over the use of technologies, especially with the technologies of war and industry. The technologies of everyday life where the opportunities of the male and female use is equal, is sure to bring changes in the existing norms and practices of the society. Information and communication technologies have these sorts of potential to regard women as power users of these technologies when compared with their counterpart. Gender roles, gender stereotyping and other patriarchal norms are sure to be moulded by these technological activities of women which can bring changes in the immediate experiences and activities of women.

4.4.1 Feminization of mobile phones and internet- Women perceive their cell phones as safety tools. They feel themselves secured if they have this powerful technology in their hands. Considering this special attribute, mobile handset manufacturing companies and other public servants are coming up with mobile applications that satisfy this specific need of the women. Applications like 'Safety pin', 'Vithu', 'Raksha Women Safety Alert' , 'Himmat App' etc. Safety pin is such an application in which the location of a girl can easily be traced as well as she can be given the idea related to nearby safe places. In Vithu application, whenever the power bottom is doubly clicked, the selected numbers receive message regarding the location of the girl. Raksha Women Safety Alert is quite similar to this .application, only volume key is to be used instead of power button. The Himmat App is made by Delhi police where the location including video and audio will be sent to the police control room whenever the application is used. This will assist the personnel to move for immediate help. Even if these applications are not rapidly used among the respondents but they all agreed that mobile phones have helped them to make notorious people understand the fact that they are not alone. They have their mobile phones which have the capacity to provide them immediate help.

4.4.2 Construction of new gender identity- New meanings are constructed through media activities which have an inevitable impact in the everyday life of the 'second gender'. The traditional link between men and technology is being gradually eroded as girls are also becoming power users of technology. They are also building up intimate relationship with technology, especially with the information and communication technologies like mobile phones and internet. A new cultural paradigm is created with girls having their own dimension of interpreting and using the device. Girls also possess the interest to have new mobile handset with desired configuration. The feminine preference of pink colour is losing its meaning. Aatchi Peril (2000) stated that the general consensus of associating pink with feminine character has become secondary in nature. Following Saatchi and Saatchi, "the rest feel 'patronised 'and 'offended' by the pink wrapping choice of most brands.

4.4.3 Female Empowerment- The role of mobile phones in empowering women is a must needed point to be highlighted while discussing the gendered dimension of their uses. Empowerment can also be defined as the ability to make decisions. Here decisions may be related to these factors – self purchase, price of the handset, the choice of network and recharging phones. In this regard it is important to examine whether any role is being played by patriarchy and gender stereotyping. The individual

choice in buying mobile phones, if highlighted, renders the functioning of patriarchy. Girls demonstrate quite an insignificant role in the matter of purchasing phone. They are accompanied by their fathers or brothers while purchasing mobile phones. In case of choosing any particular model of mobile handset, information is obtained from male experts within or outside the family. Among the 30 female respondents, 21 out of them went to purchase their phones with their fathers or their fathers have purchased for them. The reasons that respondents gave forward are that they have less information regarding the configuration of the mobile phone or they think that their fathers are the best persons to deal with this issues as they are the financers or some of them were not even consulted before purchasing process. They were given what have been purchased. In case of the boys, a little bit difference is observed. They are been consulted by their fathers before buying the mobile handset because they are assumed to have a better understanding of this technology than that of their parents. Hence they play a decisive role in this aspect. The age-old association of men with technology can be seen here. Besides, the interplay of 'power relations' between the genders is also required to be examined here. A little bit of bargaining is also evident between the boys with their fathers related to the purchase of mobile handset. The power of bargaining is negligible in case of the girls. They calmly settle with their parents. It is a part of social stereotyping that makes fathers rely more on boy child than female child because the social consensus states that men have better understanding of technology than men. The interplay of come bio-socio-economic categories like age, level of intelligence, caste, rural-urban background and income of the family play determining role in this context.

The above discussion cannot be generalised or would be an exaggeration even if it is to be accepted as a mass consensus. It prevails but it cannot also be denied that girls have also acquired the power to exercise in choosing the handset. This is one instance which can be a reason for the bipolar reactions of feminists towards the information and communication technologies. Some of them regard these technologies as weapons either reinforce traditional gender roles (Lemish and Cohen, 2015) or reconstruct them. The following discussions bear the testimony about how construction and reconstruction gender identities as a result of the mass use of mobile phones and internet among the college students.

4.4.4. Challenge to patriarchal domination- Patriarchy imposes certain norms to regulate the desires of women, especially those which are related to their bodies. It restraints free geographical mobility in several point of time and tries to confine them into household boundaries. In doing so it restricts the sexual behaviour which is beneficial for the continuity of the patriarchal system. The advent of the mobile technology along with the internet facility has posed a constraint to the patriarchal domination. Mobile phone and internet have provided the girls the opportunity to expand their social relationship. They have now the chance to explore new relationship which was once a patriarchal restriction. Social media works as that platform through which girls can explore and experiment with brand new relationships. All these activities can be carried by maintaining a high level of secrecy. This newly gained freedom has an enormous impact on the individual decision making ability of women.

4.4.5. Cultural norms- Our cultural norms associate women as the protectors of nature. They are the one who handle the grave responsibility of bearing and rearing children. Adoption of technology by them is considered as a threat to the law of nature. This study finds out that some female students from rural areas reported that their parents do not support their use of mobile phones and internet. The parents believe that can become eligible to use these technologies only after they get married. The view may be based on certain security issues but it leads to marginalization of girls related to the use of these technologies. This perspective is peculiarly a rural phenomenon which does not have any significance in the urban life.

4.4.6. Selfie and self-representation- Self representation of women in the social media can be seen as a way to come out from the domination of male. This is an instance where women empower herself by identifying an image of herself, strictly defined by her own choice and preferences. Her own world view, her own desires and her own way of preserving individual rights are all represented through her unique portraying herself in the social media.

4.4.7. Women's issues in social media- Social media are also offering women the ground to criticize the sufferings and pains that the women go through as a consequence of male domination. This is the politics of patriarchy that it always attempts to suppress the voice of women when she speaks against the malice behaviour and activities of men against women. Social media has given the opportunity to the females to disclose the story of her sexual abuse during her childhood, the consequences of such villainous activities and the characteristics of the perpetrator. Issues like this are often discussed freely where male and female equally participate and try to ascertain ways in which such activities can be condemned. They criticise about the household environment, sketch the behavioural features of the perpetrator, suggest measures to protect children and seek punishment for the perpetrator. Rising of consciousness through these virtual media is definitely one significant stride to violate patriarchal system of suppression and oppression. Recently the 'Mee Too' movement has made an enormous impact in the Indian society whereby women started to discuss harassment in their professional lives in the social media. Such movements are expected to bring better life for women in their work life, and gradually in other spheres of lives too.

4.4.8. Technology and domination of women- Tracking of locations of the intimate partners was once a typically male dominated phenomena with a very few exceptions. The basis of this activity is to trace the social activity and the relationship of the partner. Nowadays women have also started to trace the whereabouts of their partners. The contribution of the social media is enormous in this context. They visit the profile of their partners in the social media and analyse their activities. In short they keep an eye on the activities of their partners. A power to control and monitor is enhanced through these media which has given women the ample of opportunity to keep themselves aloof from fraud people. This indeed is a great power which can be enjoyed by women.

4.4.9. Technology and women exploitation- The other side of the coin is also necessary to be spotted. This fragment consists of the impact of these technologies in perpetuating men's age old struggle to dominate women. New meanings are created, patterns of domination are sketched and new forms of harassment are initiated. This creation of gender identities had its root in the socialization process where an understanding of gender roles is developed. This process inculcates the idea that the feminist

is strongly about physical attractiveness and male gaze. Boys in turn demonstrate masculinity through their sturdy body and adventurous activities. The social media sites where images are uploaded and shared bear a quite resemblance to the traditional gender identity sketched by the patriarchal society. The freedom of females in their online activities, on the one side, poses a challenge to the patriarchal authority and on the other hand it brings forth a new sort of exploitation of women. Many female respondents argued that pictures are downloaded, profiles are hacked, and texts containing vulgar vocabularies are sent with or without any reason. Carole Sheffield (1989), labelled these activities as "sexual terrorism", these are carried out by the males against their counterpart. Following Sherry Turkle (1984, p.216), "though hackers would deny that there is a macho culture, the preoccupation with winning and of subjecting oneself to increasingly violent texts make their world peculiarly male in spirit, peculiarly unfair to women". Besides girls with a huge number of friend lists, especially if these numbers of friends outnumbers as males then she can easily be regarded as 'slut'. On the contrary, if a boy is seen to have more number of female friends in his social network site, he is regarded as a 'cool dude'. Incidents such as capturing pictures unethically, use of applications like photoshop for mischievous purposes and then uploading those in the web etc. are some of the new sort of 'sexual terrorism' brought about by these technologies. The perpetrators are the males and the victims are the females. Incidents like threat to disclose personal video containing intimate pictures and other sots of blackmailing activities have quite become common issues of female exploitation by their male counterpart. Sexual violence, which remained as one of the issues of the radical feminist, has now become a big phenomenon with no hope of its complete removal from the society.

5. Conclusion

Inventions and discoveries of technologies are inevitable for the development of human civilization. Whenever a new technology is initiated it leaves an impact on social categories and gender being one of them. We are now living an era of information and communication technologies where the prosperity of an individual is based on the access and skill related to the use of these technologies. This study is based on the adoption and usage of mobile phones among the college students and undoubtedly this section of population is one of the massive users of these technologies. While examining the gender differences in the use of these technologies, especially mobile phones and internet among the college students of Burdwan, only minute differences can be detailed in the usage pattern. For instance, boys have a greater inclination of deploying these technologies more for entertainment purposes and for building up of new relationship while girls utilize them more for communication and sustaining existing relationship. They have unanimously agreed that these technologies have increased their social capital though contradictory responses exist whether the expansion of social capital is only quantitative or both qualitative and quantitative. The study stresses the impact of these technologies in constructing and reconstructing gender identity in patriarchal society. In this respect it can be stated that the age-old association of masculinity is being threatened as girls are gradually becoming the power users of these technologies. Women empowerment has also been enhanced as girls take decisions regarding the purchase and use of phones and network connectivity and latently this attitude electrifies their decision making abilities in other spheres of life. Some girls are using these technologies for their small business ventures. Besides, they can conveniently represent themselves in social media based on their choice and preferences, thereby dethroning some of the patriarchal norms. In addition to this, it is also seen that mobile phones and network providing companies have built some features to cater the safety needs of the girls and this can be referred to as the feminization of technology. All these are witness of the fact that digital divide based on gender differences are gradually eroding though it has not eroded completely. Poor and rural female students are seen as having less access to these devices which simply perpetuates the existing inequalities of the society. Besides all girls, irrespective of any social category run the equal chance of being harassed online, one of the most prominent evidence to indicate the sustenance of patriarchal norms. Even after the presence of such impediments the girls are making small strides to utilize these technologies for their empowerment, development and progress. The 'Me Too' movement indicates that in the future these communication technologies can bring more opportunities for women to liberate them from male domination and harassment.

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