



Digital Empowerment: Transforming Rural Women through Digital Marketing Skills in the District of Fatehgarh Sahib

Diksha Makkar¹, Konica Jai Singh², Hema Panesar³, Robin Gupta⁴, Thakur Singh Mejie⁵, T.P.Singh⁶

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, ²Post Graduated,

Department of Public Administration, Arts Block-III,

Punjab University, Chandigarh

³Program cum Finance Manager, Mehar Baba Charitable Trust Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab

⁴General Manager, Mehar Baba Charitable Trust, Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab

⁵Mehar Baba Charitable Trust, Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab, India

⁶Associate Professor University of Utah, USA,

ABSTRACT

Women empowerment means giving equal power and opportunities to women as men without any kind of discrimination. The role of NGOs has shifted from merely 'gap-filling' to 'capacity building and empowerment'. Mehar Baba Charitable Trust, Bassi Pathana, Punjab, India has been selected by CFLI¹ for the project. This project has helped women in many ways to lead from the front and be part of decision-making at the local level. This project aimed at empowering rural women in Fatehgarh Sahib through the acquisition of digital marketing skills. The study is based on primary and secondary sources of data collection. The present study analyses and evaluates the implementation of the project and its impact on the society. The findings highlight that involving stakeholders from the mobilization to follow-up processes has a long-term impact on society as a whole. Women broke the chains of their traditional roles and stepped out of their four walls to learn new skills and set an example for other women in society. By assessing the current knowledge and challenges faced by these women, a tailored training program was developed and implemented. Additionally, it explored the role of mentorship and support networks in sustaining their success. The findings from this research will inform future scalability and replication of the project in other regions.

Key Words: Empowerment, Digital Marketing, Capacity Building, Rural Women.

1. INTRODUCTION

"To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves." -Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

For every nation, development has broad perspectives. Intervention for the social inclusion of weaker sections is one of the parameters of the nation's development. Ensuring gender justice and empowering women at the forefront of national development is also an important factor in the nation's development. Because of their ability to perform various duties with ease throughout the day, women are regarded as the foundation of any civilization. Women in India continue to make progress in all fields of human endeavour, including politics, science, medicine, and agriculture, but a large proportion are inadvertently left behind due to lack of digital literacy. Awareness of women in families is considered an elixir for future generations. Women must shed their role of 'passive beneficiaries' and strive hard to become active partners with men to achieve the goal of women empowerment in totality. Once a famous Chinese person pointed out that "if you want to plan for a year' plant wheat, if you want to plan for 10 years, grow trees but if you want to plan for 100 years educate your women." Women empowerment is not limited to urban,

Canada fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) - Funded by High Commission of Canada in India, New Delhi

Empower Rural Women through Digital Marketing Skills" by Mehar Baba Charitable Trust, Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab

working women but women in even remote towns and villages are now increasingly making their voices heard loud and clear in society. Regardless of their educational level, women are making a difference and standing out for their social and political rights.

Mehar Baba Charitable Trust, Bassi Pathana, Punjab, India was selected by the High Commission of Canada in India, New Delhi for the CFLI project 2022-23 "Empower Rural Women through Digital Marketing Skills" in Rural Punjab. The project aimed at increasing women artisans' economic empowerment by educating local artisans, small business owners, and individuals on digital tools in Rural Punjab. This project covered 105 village clusters in the district of Fatehgarh Sahib. So, this study enroutes the road to development to reduce the gender gap and burst myths related to women being at the forefront.

1.1 The Driving Force

2019 was the first year that more than half of the world had access to the Internet. This increase in internet availability has been accompanied by an increase in the use of computers, laptops and smartphones. As a result, we have seen remarkable growth in digital channels, and India, with its high population and huge technological advancements, has transformed this medium into a fully developed market. According to Digital Marketing Statistics, India's digital marketing and advertising industry is growing at an annual rate of 25-30%. It is no longer enough to have a website or run some untargeted advertising campaign. Every commercial enterprise desires a clear, virtual advertising plan. However, there is a huge gap in access to resources between urban and rural populations, creating an urban-poor divide. Another aspect here highlights the importance of handicrafts among rural women, so digital marketing can be beneficial in their lives by promoting their culture and the essence of handmade creations. As the internet becomes intertwined with everything, the importance of digital marketing becomes crystal clear for a variety of reasons:

- i. 3Es- Efficiency, economy, and effectiveness reach your doorstep.
- ii. Highly flexible and personalized.
- iii. Making services available to the public in an anonymous, paperless and cashless mode.
- iv. Providing connectivity and simplifying standards and processes.
- v. Develop an inclusive citizen-centric framework for service delivery and grievance redressal mechanism.
- vi. Precise targeting of recipients and reduction of recipient theft and duplication.

Artificial intelligence plays a major role in the implementation of services provided by the government. Attracting and retaining new talent has become an integral part of the development of the 21st century. Technology paves the way for innovation. 76.5% of trainees are satisfied with the use of digital technologies (according to the project survey report). 76% of people believe that it is important to do business online and therefore digital marketing is a must. Digital marketing training can be the backbone of existing and future high-growth businesses with both foreign and domestic companies investing in the 'Make in India' initiative. Today, when talking about digital marketing at the local level, this promotes the Mahatma's vision that the essence of India's development is village industries and sustainability.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: IGNITING THE PROWESS OF WOMEN

This paper is based on the 4 tiered models shown in figure 1 (author's compilation):

- i. Foundation: The first tier focuses on creating awareness about digital marketing opportunities among rural women. This was achieved through workshops, community events, and awareness campaigns that highlighted the benefits and potential of digital marketing.
- ii. Empowerment: The second tier involves providing comprehensive skill development programs to equip rural women with the necessary digital marketing skills. This included training sessions, online courses, and mentorship programs to enhance their knowledge and expertise.
- iii. Transformation: The third tier focuses on ensuring that rural women have access to the necessary resources for digital marketing. This involved providing them with affordable technology devices, internet connectivity, and access to relevant tools and platforms.
- iv. Impact: The fourth tier aims to support rural women in establishing their digital marketing ventures. This included providing mentorship, and networking opportunities to help them start and grow their businesses.



Figure 1 Tired Model

The key to increasing women's access to resources and their capacity to make wise decisions in life is women's empowerment. The Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution all uphold the idea of gender equality.

3. LOCALE OF THE STUDY

A city and important Sikhism pilgrimage location, Fatehgarh Sahib is located in Punjab, a state in northwest India. The district's economy is largely dependent on agriculture, industry, and related sectors. Fatehgarh Sahib has earned a noteworthy place in history. The study has covered 105 village clusters in the district of Fatehgarh Sahib of North-East and South-West regions and impacted over 1000+ rural women and men artisans/small business entrepreneurs.

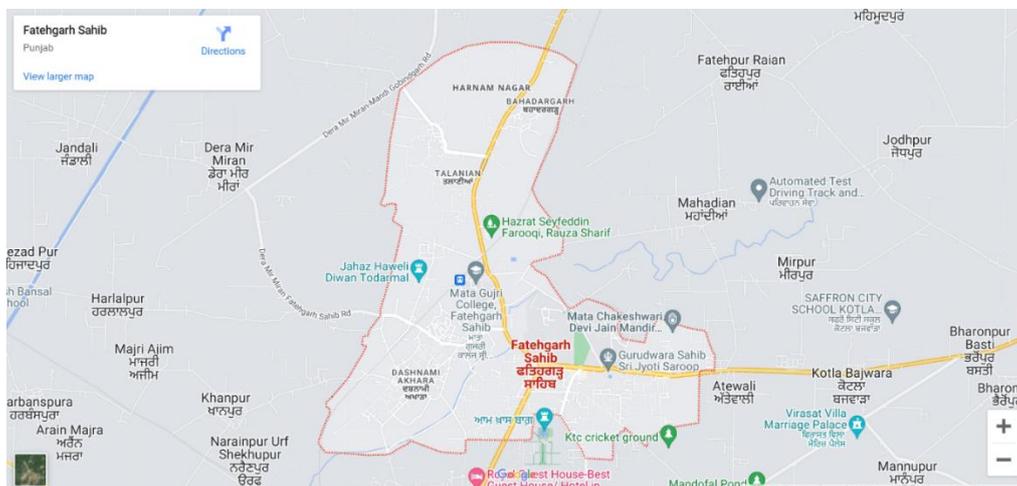


Figure 2: Map of Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab

Source: Map of District, Fatehgarh Sahib, Government of Punjab.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present paper attempted to analyze the status of women empowerment in District Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab, and evaluate and expand the impact. The highlights are-

- i. Assessing the current digital marketing knowledge and skills of rural women in Fatehgarh Sahib.
- ii. Identifying the specific challenges and barriers faced by rural women in accessing and utilizing digital marketing opportunities.
- iii. Developing and implementing a tailored digital marketing training program for rural women.
- iv. Evaluating the effectiveness of the training program in enhancing the digital marketing skills and confidence of participants.
- v. Examining the impact of digital marketing skills on the economic empowerment and socio-economic well-being of rural women.
- vi. Exploring the role of mentorship and support networks in sustaining the digital marketing success of rural women.
- vii. Investigating the potential for scaling up the project to reach more rural women in other districts or regions.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the entire study, Participatory research was used which includes research designs, methods, and frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by an issue being studied for the action or change. The stakeholders were involved in the entire process from mobilization to evaluation. Mixed-method research approach was used. Qualitative Data Analysis included one-to-one interaction, discussions, observations, focus group studies, research studies, field visits, interviews, case studies, record keeping, decoding data, ethnographic research, documentation, and interpretations. Quantitative Data Analysis was done through questionnaires by techniques of data collection and data processing for cross-sectional study. The focus was to know the “What and Why” of the social phenomenon. Hand holding as a follow-up evaluation technique was undertaken to trace the impact brought during the training. The data was analysed through a simple percentage method using Excel. Transparency and ethical concerns were kept in mind while dealing with the people of rural areas to ensure that the values of social work were upheld.

5.1 Sampling

This study examined sustainable digital development, gender equity, and access to capital in rural areas of district Fatehgarh Sahib. The sample size of this paper was taken as 1,195 (1,111 women; 84 men) respondents both from North-West and South-East regions and the training of trainers (TOTs) strategy was built a pool of competent instructors. 18 TOTs (14 women + 4 men) from the North West and 13 TOTs (12 women + 1 men) from the South East trained other people using a participatory learning approach. The trainers were also evaluated in this study.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

- i. Entrepreneurship among Rural Women- Women in today’s time are realizing their worth in every way and demanding gender equality and justice both at home and in the workplace. 79% of women think that they are no longer confined to the four walls of the house.
- ii. Enhanced Use of Digital Tools- 61% of participants are more aware of the digital tools that can help to strengthen business online. 93% of people feel more confident after the usage of digital tools.
- iii. Breaking Stereotypes among rural women- Women in every nook and corner have immense talents hidden in them and it's about recognizing them and giving wings to their dreams. TOT allowed the women leaders from community members to take training initiatives. This motivated other rural women to visualize themselves in better roles as community leaders.
- iv. Reduced Gender Gap- The road to development cannot be travelled without women and men walking together. It is pertinent to note that 86 percent of participants feel that women have equal opportunities concerning business. Rural women are acting as change agents to mobilize the community and lead from the front. Ensuring gender justice and empowering women is at the forefront of national development.
- v. E-Participation at Grassroot level- The United Nations has defined eight pillars of good governance- consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsible, equitable and inclusive, effective and efficient, rule of law, and participatory. 86% of trainees are involved in using e-initiatives by the government.
- vi. Awareness about government schemes- The government introduces the schemes for the marginalised sections and the irony is that they fail to reach the beneficiaries due to lack of awareness. Government job opportunities websites were also introduced to the youth as India today enjoys the demographic dividend and this power should be unleashed so that the nation surges ahead. 57% of trainees are of about government initiatives.
- vii. Good governance is a cornerstone of development. - 96% of trainees believed that they have learned about e-governance initiatives and have started getting benefits from e-governance schemes for their personal, familial, and community development which is the ultimate goal of their growth.

7. RESULTS

i. Foundation: Building Digital Skills

Outreach and building awareness for the training of trainers: Announcements and visits were made in 33+ villages of the North-west and South-East region of dist. Fatehgarh Sahib. Reached out to 180-200 rural women and men from

33+ villages. 32+ Sessions were conducted on the digital tools, E-Governance, Digital Marketing, and strategies required to grow business; 4+ workshops by Guest Speakers/ experts.

12+ meetings with the Govt. officials Deputy Commissioner, SDM Bassi for project introduction. 125+ meetings with the Sarpanches, Panches, Asha workers, Anganwadi Workers, and social workers for mobilization, support, and delivery of the program in 33 villages.

ii. Empowerment: Unlocking Opportunities

Training the Trainers: Enrolment and shortlisting of 43 participants for the Digital Marketing Training, trained 31 out of which, 18 (14 women/girls; 4 Men/boys) for Part A- North-West region and 13 (12 women/girls; 1 Men/boys) for Part B- South-East region became professional master trainers.

Outreach and building awareness for field training: Identification and registration of 1,500+ local women for digital marketing training in 80+ villages of district Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab

iii. Transformation: Shaping a Brighter Future

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by world leaders in 2015, embody a blueprint for progress that is sustainable and leaves no one behind. Every one of the 17 goals includes empowering women and achieving gender equality.

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. 73.73% of trainees understand that digital literacy is a must to help build a solid foundation for achieving a sustainable future.

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Goal 5 is known as a separate gender goal because it is dedicated to achieving these goals. 79.3% of respondents think that the Internet will open up more opportunities for women.

SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work. 45% of trainees are aware of digital strategies for business growth, highlighting the need to inform people about digital strategies to support their business, and 75.3% of trainees are willing to learn more about e-government initiatives.

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and between countries. 74.4% agree that women and men have equal opportunities when it comes to entrepreneurship, which is a positive sign for achieving Sustainable Goal 10.

SDG 12: Ensure sustainable patterns of consumption and production. 77.3% strongly believe that digital literacy will help women in self-employment.

SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. 73.73% of students understand that digital literacy is a must. 76% believe that doing business online is important in this digital age. 82% of trainees agree that it is important to commercialize the product for better sales.

iv. Impact: Amplifying Success

Expanding the Impact: Impacted 1226 people (1195 trainees + 31 trainers) from 105 village clusters to grow their businesses on e-commerce platforms of Digital Marketing, from Part A North West region 620 participants (585 women; 35 men) in 50 village clusters & 575 participants (526 women; 49 men) Part B- South-East region in 55 village clusters.

Handholding of Participants: Handholding of 1000+ of participants to assess the impact of the training imparted.

8. BARRIERS

- i. One major barrier is the limited access to technology and internet connectivity in rural areas. Without proper access, it becomes challenging for rural women to fully engage in digital marketing activities.
- ii. Another barrier is the lack of awareness and familiarity with digital marketing concepts. Many rural women may not have prior knowledge or experience in this field, which can make it difficult for them to grasp the concepts and apply them effectively.
- iii. Additionally, cultural and social norms may pose barriers. Some communities might have traditional gender roles or restrictions that limit women's participation in certain activities, including digital marketing.
- iv. Lastly, financial constraints can also be a barrier. Investing in technology, tools, and resources for digital marketing can be costly, and many rural women may not have the financial means to afford them.

9. POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS

- i. Infrastructure Development: Implement policies that focus on improving technology infrastructure and internet connectivity in rural areas. This could involve expanding broadband access, setting up community digital centres, or providing subsidies for technology devices. For instance, Startup India, Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)
- ii. Education and Training Initiatives: Develop policies that prioritize digital literacy programs and training opportunities for rural women. This could include collaborations with educational institutions, NGOs, or government agencies to provide comprehensive and accessible training programs.
- iii. Financial Support: Introduce policies that offer financial assistance or grants to rural women interested in pursuing digital marketing ventures. This could involve creating microfinance programs, offering low-interest loans, or providing financial incentives to support their entrepreneurial endeavours. For example, Self Help Groups, Self-Employment Loan Schemes, and Support for women's education and employment programmes.
- iv. Gender Equality and Empowerment: Implement policies that promote gender equality and challenge social norms that limit women's participation in digital marketing. This could involve awareness campaigns, advocacy for women's rights, and creating safe spaces for women to learn and thrive.
- v. Collaboration and Partnerships: Foster collaborations between government agencies, private organizations, and local communities to create a supportive ecosystem for rural women in digital marketing. This could involve partnerships with industry experts, mentorship programs, and networking opportunities.
- vi. Learn and Earn is the New Mantra: The "learn and earn" approach emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and leveraging acquired skills to create economic opportunities. By embracing this mantra, a culture of empowerment and self-sufficiency is fostered.



Figure 3: Key Recommendations

10. CONCLUSION

“If you educate a man, you educate one person. If you educate a woman, you educate a nation.” The first step towards entrepreneurship, innovation, and change is access to the right information and knowledge. Stepping out, facing a challenge, and overcoming fear is victory in itself for the rural people especially women who have been deprived of basic opportunities to work for themselves since ages. **“If you are loath to take the first step, you will never get anywhere.”** According to the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, women constitute 14% of the total number of entrepreneurs in India, 66% of women remain untapped in rural India. With the digital world available in many regional languages, using the English language is no longer a barrier to using the Internet.

The Internet has changed the way we perceive literacy. Rural women can embrace technology even if they cannot read and write beyond basic literacy. A smartphone, low-cost data, and training in digital skills are all rural women would need to become entrepreneurs today. Digital technology can be a game changer for women entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas. Digital skills were already seen as a great complement to existing skills, but this pandemic has proven that digital skills are no longer just another skill; in fact, it is now one of the essential skills to have in all aspects of life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supported by the Mehar Baba Charitable Trust (MBCT), Bassi Pathana and INUS Global Charity, USA and Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) for their contributions to the completion of the project titled “Empower Rural Women through Digital Marketing Skills” in Rural Punjab. This work was undertaken under the guidance of Prof. Ramanjit K. Johal². The Author(s) would like to express special gratitude to the project team of MBCT and the village community of District Fatehgarh Sahib.

The author(s) received financial support for the research by CFLI.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amin, S. (2014). Social freedom among women in Punjab. 5(6), 745–747.
- Azid, T., Khan, R. E. A., & Alamasi, A. M. S. (2010). Labor force participation of married women in Punjab (Pakistan). *International Journal of Social Economics*, 37(8), 592–612. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03068291011060643>
- Cai Li, Naveed Ahmed, S. A. Q. (2019). Impact of Gender-Specific Causes on Women Entrepreneurship: An Opportunity Structure for Entrepreneurial Women in Rural Areas *Journal of Entrepreneurship & Organization Management*, 8(1).
- Dandona, A. (2015). Empowerment of Women: A Conceptual Framework. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 2(3). <https://doi.org/10.25215/0203.044>
- Dasaria K., Rani, M.S. (2017). *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*. 6(4), 54-69.
- Goel, R., Sahai, S., Krishnan, C., Singh, G., Bajpai, C., & Malik, P. (2017). An empirical study to enquire the effectiveness of digital marketing in the challenging age with reference to Indian economy. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 25(4), 1569–1584.
- Herman, C. (2003). *Becoming Digital: Empowerment, Identity and Community ICTs*. 237–250. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/id/eprint/5638>
- Jayanthi, M. A. (2023). A Study On Women Entrepreneurs Challenges in Digital Marketing Technology. 2(2), 7–12.
- Kapila, M., Singla, A., & Gupta, M. L. (2016). Impact of microcredit on women empowerment in India: An empirical study of Punjab State. *Lecture Notes in Engineering and Computer Science*, 821–825.

- Linda, M. (2000). Micro-finance and empowerment of women: a review of the key issues. In ILO Social Finance Unit. Retrieved from <http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&btnG=Search&q=intitle:Micro-finance+and+the+empowerment+of+women+A+review+of+the+key+issues#9>
- Kaur, M. (2023). A Study of Women Empowerment in Urban and Rural Area. In Biplab Auddya (Eds.) Research in Multidisciplinary Subjects (pp. 55-59). The Hill publication, West Bengal
- Lin, D., Li, X., Wang, B., Hong, Y., Fang, X., Qin, X., & Stanton, B. (2011). Discrimination, Perceived Social Inequity, and Mental Health Among Rural-To-Urban Migrants in China. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 47(2), 171–180. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-009-9278-4>
- Makkar, U. (n.d.). Achieving Sustainable Strategic Advantage. www.bhartipublications.com
- Roscigno, V. (2007). *The Face of Discrimination*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, United Kingdom.
- Sharma, P., & Nagaich, S. (2014). Is Literacy a Cause of Increase in Women Work Participation in Punjab (India): a Regional Analysis? *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Science (IMPACT: IJRANSS)*, 2(February), 49–56. www.impactjournals.us
- United Nations Development Programme (2023). How Digital Technology and Innovation are advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved on October 20, 2023. from https://feature.undp.org/digital-goals/?gclid=CjwKCAjwp8OpBhAFEiwAG7NaErSbASYLKrGDkiuzqfgudfEpvj_VXbImgxNmDCHfmLMgBixcmHWmhoCEKIQA_vD_BwE
- World Bank Group. (2019). Sustainable Development Goals. United States. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/106391567056944729/pdf/World-Bank-Group-Partnership-Fund-for-the-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Annual-Report-2019.pdf>
- World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global Gender Gap Report*, Switzerland. 1-382.
- Yeasmin, M. (2018). Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Vision for Women Empowerment. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 6(2), 1.