

# Introduction

In the era of globalization and profusion of data, there is paradoxically a dearth of books discussing globalization, technology diffusion, and gender disparity and their social impacts. It is of serious concern that the new information and knowledge society, rather than close the development and poverty gap, might in fact aggravate this gap. The cultural construction of knowledge exacerbates the North – South divide, the class divides, the ethnic divide, and the gender divide, and ICT has only added to this. However these divides are devoid of meaning if the material context and the production relations are not taken into account or side-stepped. It is therefore imperative that the emerging pictures from the growing use of Information and Communication Technology and its social impact are shared widely. This is an area of immediate concern.

While the accepted understanding of ICT and globalisation largely focus on the issues of technological diffusion, other aspects essentially view ICT as an elitist agenda with a top down focus. Other issues, like that of digital divide, also affirmed this position making people look at ICT through the prism of elite subaltern the North south divide. Recent interventions stemming from contextual studies on the use of ICT as a tool of empowerment and change have displaced this view. However it cannot be said in totality that ICT is elitist, nor is it emancipator. For the real actors, corporations, people, and civil society constantly mediate between these elements and add new meanings. Therefore, a number of discourses, ranging from new forms of oppression in the realms of work to the criminality of future, are beginning to receive attention. Another area of scholarly enquiry has been to look at the rapid changes affecting every part of our lives, which on the surface many seem innocent and at the same time trivial, like virtual tourism, e learning, et cetera.

In a medium that is changing fast there are few constants as the subject itself morphs daily. This informs the academic world very late long after the arrival of new issues that have already impacted society. A case in this point is the study of call centres that were earlier viewed as a means of gender upliftment, but a nuanced and sophisticated analysis had moderated this understanding. Such issues and concerns have seen the light of the day in newspapers, web sites and blogs, and other media only to be recognised after some time by the academic world. In such a study, the decision action cycle is of prime importance since the field that we are mapping is itself constantly changing at a pace beyond recognition.

The book begins with a survey of the fundamental issues that try to locate rapid technological changes caused by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) that have a strong impact on societies world-wide and how this has lead to a change in the traditional role patterns. The other chapters in this section also substantiate this theoretical narrative by looking at the rural scenario in India with more empirical inputs. This is further strengthened by revisiting the debate on globalization, information and communication technologies, and women's lives.

Proceeding from this base, the second section seeks to unravel the role of culture and the link with policy. Here a focus is on the policy issues concerning gender, culture and ICT use followed by gendering professionalism in the internationalization of information work. The section is further enriched by enquiries on social networking technologies and their hidden assumptions, as well as the international institutional responses to the global digital agenda

In the third section, a sequel to the earlier themes, we see the theme of digital divide with a focus on gender in their various aspects. The classical question in this field is again analysed such as Exclusiveness versus inclusiveness in software-development followed by access to the Internet through a micro study. This section also sums up the works in this area through a literature review on gender symbolism and technology uptake.

In the fourth section, access and use of ICTs among women and the relevance of e-learning in the current period are being questioned. This section logically leads to the nature of work, and more precisely, women's work, which is the focus of investigation in the next chapters. The question of women's work, career, and choices in the ICT sector is followed by the challenges faced by women in the BPO sector and the condition of women working in Indian call centres.

The next section is thematically different, focusing on the flip side of development with the focus on cybercrimes ranging from virtual tourism to cyber sexualities to cyber spying, all of which have transformed the way we live in a very negative sense and disseminating a sense of power.

Two case studies, one on Western work worlds and altering approaches to marriage, and the second on gender gaps and information and communication technology conclude the book, with a focus on situating the theoretical formulations and testing them in real life settings. This is backed by empirical field work and detailed analysis.

We hope that such a resource will aid those researching, teaching, and studying in the area of globalization, ICT, and digital equity. We hope that this comparative case book will provide a strong foundation that can be of use for a broad audience comprising students (in disciplines of Computer & Information Science, behavioural studies, gender studies, etc.), researchers, and policy and decision makers. Great care has been taken in the choice of topics that encompass a wide range of geographical and social backgrounds spanning four continents in diverse settings. As technology is changing at an unprecedented pace, whatever is taught to the students of technology in the first year becomes outdated by the time they graduate. This book is just the beginning and we hope that this dialogue will be continually enriched by further studies.