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Women's Voice, Participation and Power in AI-Mediated Communication: Towards a Gender-Responsive Framework

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Abstract

AI now sits inside much of everyday communication, from search, recommendation and moderation to tools that write, translate and generate images. For women, the question is whether wider access to these tools gives them any more say over how they speak, who hears them and how the systems around them are run. This paper looks at that question through three ideas: voice, participation and power. It is a conceptual study built on peer-reviewed research, reports from UNESCO, UN Women and the GSMA, and national survey data from India. The evidence points to real gains, such as cheaper content production and, in India, a sharp rise in women's internet use between 2019–21 and 2023–24. It also shows persistent problems: gendered bias in language models, unequal access, uneven AI literacy, and technology-facilitated abuse that pushes women out of public communication. The paper proposes a five-pillar framework (representation, safety, AI literacy, accessibility and participatory governance) and sets out in a matrix how each pillar relates to voice, participation and power and what future studies could measure. The framework has not been tested empirically and is offered as a starting point for that work.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, women's digital agency, AI-mediated communication, gender, voice, participation, power, gender-responsive framework

1. Introduction

Most people now communicate through systems that make decisions on their behalf. A search engine ranks what they see, a recommendation feed decides what travels, a moderation tool removes a post or leaves it up, and a generative model will draft, translate or illustrate a message in seconds. Hancock, Naaman and Levy (2020) named part of this shift AI-mediated communication: messages that an intelligent system modifies, extends or writes for the communicator. This paper uses the term more widely. It covers the platform systems that rank, filter and deliver messages as well as the tools that help write them, because for a woman online it is the whole chain that counts.

The consequences for women are mixed. Cheap production tools let women publish without waiting for an editor or a broadcaster, and in India the numbers are moving fast: the National Family Health Survey reports that the share of women aged 15–49 who had ever used the internet rose from 33.3 per cent in 2019–21 to 64.3 per cent in 2023–24 (IIPS & MoHFW, 2026). Men's figure in

the latest round is 80.5 per cent, and the survey asks only whether a woman has ever used the internet. It does not ask whether she can say what she wants, whether she is heard, or whether she can challenge what a platform does to her posts. The wider literature shows the same pattern of gain and loss: gender bias in AI systems (Manasi et al., 2022; UNESCO & IRCAI, 2024), abuse directed at women who speak in public (Posetti et al., 2020), and uneven access to devices and skills (GSMA, 2026). Wajcman, Young and FitzMaurice (2020) make the general point that digital change opens some doors for women while carrying older inequalities through others.

The central question is simple to state. Does access to AI-mediated communication give women more agency? The paper looks at agency through three dimensions. Voice is the ability to express oneself and be heard. Participation is taking part in digital communication on reasonable terms, including in the places where its rules are made. Power is the ability to influence the systems, meaning the design, moderation and governance decisions, that shape communication. A woman can own a phone, have a



connection and even a large following, and still find her posts buried, find herself abused for writing them, and have no route to complain about either.

Research on these problems is growing, but usually one problem at a time: bias in one body of work, safety in another, access and skills in a third. This paper puts them into a single framework of five pillars: representation, safety, AI literacy, accessibility and participatory governance. The contribution is conceptual. The paper ties the pillars to voice, participation and power and proposes indicators that later empirical work could use.

The paper has three objectives:

- to examine how AI-mediated communication can expand or constrain women's voice, participation and power;
- to identify the social, technological and ethical conditions that shape women's digital agency in these settings; and
- to develop a gender-responsive framework that can inform the design and governance of AI-mediated communication.

They are addressed through three research questions.

RQ1. In what ways does AI-mediated communication create opportunities for women's voice, participation and digital agency?

RQ2. What forms of algorithmic bias, structural exclusion and technology-facilitated harm limit women's digital agency in these environments?

RQ3. Under what circumstances can AI-mediated communication become more inclusive, safe and equitable for women?

Section 2 reviews the literature and Section 3 sets out the theoretical perspective. Section 4 describes the method. Section 5 analyses the material through voice, participation and power, Section 6 presents the framework, and Section 7 discusses implications for policy, media practice and education. Sections 8 and 9 give the limitations and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 AI and the changing communication environment

Hancock, Naaman and Levy (2020) define AI-mediated communication as interpersonal communication in which an intelligent system modifies, augments or generates messages on a communicator's behalf. Their examples sit close to the message itself: suggested replies, rewritten profiles, automatic translation. The research agenda they set out is general and does not concentrate on gender. The term is used more broadly here because a woman's message is shaped at several points. A model may help her write it, a ranking system decides whether anyone sees it, and a moderation tool decides whether it stays up.

Users control very little of that chain. Recommendation and ranking systems influence what is seen and what attracts attention, while generative tools have made text, images and translations available to people with no technical training. Wajcman, Young and FitzMaurice (2020) argue that digital change of this kind

creates opportunities for women while carrying older inequalities into the new arrangements, especially where access and participation are uneven. Producing content is therefore only a first step towards having a voice. What happens to the content afterwards matters at least as much.

2.2 Gender, digital access and participation

Access is the best-documented barrier. The GSMA's Mobile Gender Gap Report 2026 finds that women in low- and middle-income countries are 12 per cent less likely than men to use mobile internet, which amounts to around 200 million fewer women users, and that more than two-thirds of the 810 million women still offline live in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (GSMA, 2026). The gap in South Asia stands at 25 per cent, and across these countries it is two to three times wider in rural areas than in urban ones. India shows both the progress and the shortfall. In the latest National Family Health Survey, 64.3 per cent of women aged 15–49 had ever used the internet, against 80.5 per cent of men. Among women the figure was 77.3 per cent in urban areas and 58.6 per cent in rural areas, and 63.6 per cent said they had a mobile phone that they themselves use (IIPS & MoHFW, 2026).

These figures are useful, but they measure presence. Having ever used the internet says nothing about the terms on which a woman uses it: whether the device is hers, what she can do with it, or whether she feels able to post under her own name. Skills and confidence matter too. Manasi et al. (2022) connect gender inequality in AI to the small number of women in technology fields and to biases that enter through data, and Shah (2024) treats digital literacy as one part of the response. Ferreira and Silva (2025), reviewing work on gender and digital technologies, point to persistent access gaps, especially in low- and middle-income settings. Literacy cannot make up for the price of data or the lack of infrastructure. Access and skills are best read as what makes participation possible, and not as proof that a woman has agency.

2.3 Algorithmic bias and gendered representation

Bias enters AI systems through training data, design decisions and the settings in which systems are used (Manasi et al., 2022; Shah, 2024). For communication, the effect shows in what the systems produce. A UNESCO and IRCAI (2024) study of GPT-2, ChatGPT (GPT-3.5) and Llama 2 found female names linked to words such as family, children and husband, and male names to career, executive and business. Women were also written into domestic roles far more often than men, four times as often in one model.

The technical failure is only half of the problem. The other half is who is consulted when systems are built and evaluated. Women can be the subjects of AI-generated content without any say in the systems that generate it, so representation and participation overlap without being the same thing.

2.4 Technology-facilitated violence and the limits of voice

In a UNESCO and ICFJ survey of more than 900 journalists in over 125 countries, of whom 714 were women, 73 per cent of the women respondents said they had experienced online violence in the course of their work, and one in five said they had been attacked or abused offline in incidents that began online. The study

also documented self-censorship and withdrawal from visibility as consequences (Posetti et al., 2020). A follow-up UNESCO survey in 2025 found that 75 per cent of women journalists responding had experienced online violence. Among all respondents, who included human rights defenders and writers, 24 per cent reported AI-assisted online violence, and the figure was 19 per cent among women journalists and media workers (UNESCO, 2026).

Chowdhury and Lakshmi (2023) examine technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the era of generative AI and highlight its potential for producing harmful gendered content. Where speaking in public carries a high risk of harassment, impersonation or abuse, women may speak less, or stop. Safety is therefore a condition of voice and cannot be treated as an add-on to it.

2.5 Synthesis and research gap

Read together, the literature identifies four problems: unequal access, biased outputs, exclusion from decisions and abuse. Each has its own body of work, and they seldom appear in the same analysis. That is the gap this paper addresses. The paper does not suggest that any single problem has been neglected. The claim is narrower: without a common frame it is hard to see how access without safety, or literacy without any influence over design, leaves a woman's agency where it was.

3. Theoretical Framework

The paper draws on two perspectives to understand how gender, technology and communication relate.

The first is feminist technoscience, and in particular technofeminism. Wajcman (2004) argues that technology and gender shape each other. Technologies carry the assumptions of the people and institutions that build them, and they are used and remade in gendered social settings. For AI, this means that data, design choices and applications need to be examined as social products. The useful questions concern who builds the systems, whose experience is counted and whose interests are weighed in decisions about design and governance.

The second is digital and communicative agency. The researcher defines digital agency as women's ability to act, communicate, take part and exercise influence in digitally mediated settings. The definition draws on Kaber's (1999) account of empowerment, which separates the resources people have from the agency they can exercise and the achievements that follow. The separation matters here, because access to AI tools is a resource, and resources do not turn into agency automatically. Communicative agency is the part of digital agency that concerns expression and being heard. Communication is central to putting ideas across, taking part in public and digital spaces, and influencing others.

The researcher examines agency through three connected dimensions. Voice concerns the ability to express and circulate ideas and experiences and to have them recognised. Participation concerns taking part in digital communication and in the spaces where its terms are set. Power concerns influence over the systems and decisions that shape communication, including technology design, moderation and governance.

Together these perspectives treat AI as part of a communication environment shaped by social as well as technological conditions. They also explain why agency depends on more than access to tools. Women differ by caste, class, religion, disability, language and place, so the pillars proposed in Section 6 will not work in the same way for every woman.

4. Methodology

This is a qualitative, conceptual study. It collected no primary data. It rests on documentary analysis of scholarly work and institutional sources on AI, gender and digital communication, and it uses the results to build a framework, not to test one.

Sources were selected purposively. The researcher included scholarly and institutional material that dealt directly with AI, gender and digital communication or participation, whether peer-reviewed or issued by an established international body, national statistical programme or government. Empirical and policy sources come mainly from 2020 to 2026, so as to reflect generative AI, and older theoretical works were included where they supply concepts the analysis needs. The set covers digital access, algorithmic bias, representation, participation, technology-facilitated violence and governance, together with the theoretical works described in Section 3. It is a documentary review and not a systematic one, and it does not claim to cover all the literature. Survey figures from the GSMA and the National Family Health Survey are used as context and were not re-analysed.

The researcher read the material thematically. The first pass sorted it under voice, participation and power. Issues that recurred across all three (access, representation, safety, bias and governance) were then identified from the material, and they became the pillars presented in Section 6. Because the study is conceptual, it makes no claim to statistical generalisation, and the framework has not been tested. It should be treated as a proposal that needs refining in different social, cultural, linguistic and technological settings.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The reviewed material supports a cautious reading. AI expands communication in some respects and leaves basic inequalities in place, and visibility does not amount to agency when it exposes women to bias or abuse.

5.1 Voice

Generative tools have lowered the cost of producing text, images and translations. For a woman writing in a second language, or running a small business without a designer, that is a real gain, and nothing in the reviewed material suggests it should be dismissed. Three things still stand between producing content and having a voice.

The first is what the tool does with her. If systems associate women with family and domestic work and men with careers, as the UNESCO and IRCAI (2024) audit found in several widely used models, a woman asking a tool for help may be handed a version of herself that she did not choose. The second is circulation. Ranking and recommendation decide who is seen, and users have little

control over them. The third is safety. Where speaking in public leads to abuse, the survey evidence describes women pulling back through self-censorship and withdrawal from visibility (Posetti et al., 2020). Voice therefore depends on being able to say something, being represented fairly when saying it, being seen, and being able to carry on.

5.2 Participation

Participation is often counted as presence: an account, a connection, a first login. The Indian data show why that count is incomplete. Between 2019–21 and 2023–24 the share of women who had ever used the internet nearly doubled, yet women remain about 16 percentage points behind men, and more than a third of women aged 15–49 do not have a mobile phone that they themselves use (IIPS & MoHFW, 2026). A woman who shares a phone with her family and uses it mainly for messaging takes part differently from one who has her own device and the confidence to use it for work, study or complaints. Counting both as ‘users’ hides the difference.

Participation also has an upper level. Platform rules and algorithmic systems govern what happens to a post, and women, like other users, can rarely see or change how those rules operate. Participation that ends at the point of posting gives women a place in the conversation without a say in its terms.

5.3 Power

Power concerns who decides. Decisions about design, data, deployment, moderation and governance are taken in institutions where women are underrepresented (Manasi et al., 2022). Underrepresentation does not by itself explain algorithmic bias, which also enters through data that reflects historical patterns and through the way systems are evaluated. But a narrow group of decision-makers draws on a narrow range of experience when deciding what to test for, so the pattern is worth treating as one cause among several.

On this view women should be counted as more than users and subjects of AI. They should be among those who design, audit and govern it. This is the sense in which power is understood here: the ability to question, influence and change the systems, and not only to use them.

5.4 Cross-cutting tensions

Three tensions run through the discussion.

Visibility and vulnerability. Being online gives women a route to an audience and also makes them targets. The platform that carries a woman journalist’s reporting carries the abuse aimed at her, and the 2025 UNESCO survey suggests that AI is now part of that abuse (UNESCO, 2026).

Access and bias. New users arrive in systems they did not build. Getting online does not remove the stereotypes and associations those systems produce.

Representation and power. Being in a dataset is not the same as having a say in how the dataset is built or used. A group can be

heavily present in outputs and absent from the room where decisions are made.

Five areas follow from this analysis: representation, safety, AI literacy, accessibility and participatory governance. Section 6 sets them out as a framework.

6. Towards a Gender-Responsive Framework

6.1 Overview

The framework treats women’s digital agency as the outcome to be explained and places five pillars around it (Figure 1). By gender-responsive, the researcher means an approach that asks how a system works for women in their different circumstances, and does not assume that a design is neutral. Voice, participation and power run through all five pillars, and Table 1 shows how. The table also lists indicators that future empirical work could use and the actors best placed to act. The indicators are illustrations and do not form a validated measurement scale.

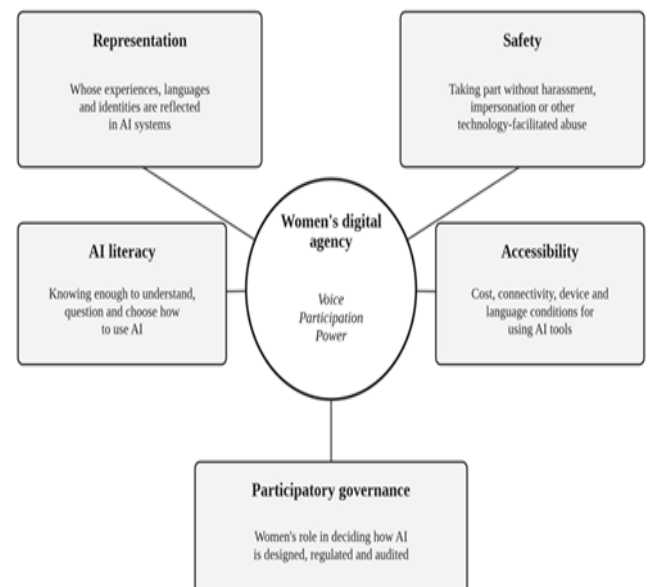


Figure 1. Five-pillar gender-responsive framework for women’s digital agency in AI-mediated communication.

Table 1. Pillars of the framework, their links to voice, participation and power, and illustrative indicators.

Pillar	Core question	Link to voice, participation and power	Illustrative indicators for future work	Key actors
Representation	Whose experiences, languages and identities do AI systems reflect?	Voice: whether women's accounts are recognised and rendered accurately. Power: who decides what counts as representative data.	Gender gaps in training and evaluation data; stereotyped associations in outputs; performance across languages and across groups of women	Developers, dataset curators, auditors, researchers
Safety	Can women take part without harassment, impersonation or synthetic abuse?	Voice: whether speech can continue. Participation: whether women stay in public spaces.	Reported incidence of abuse, including AI-assisted abuse; time taken to remove content; share of complaints resolved; women leaving platforms or professions	Platforms, regulators, employers, media organisations, police
AI literacy	Can women understand, question and choose how to use AI?	Participation: informed use. Power: ability to contest outputs.	Ability to recognise AI-generated content; awareness of privacy settings and reporting routes; range of tasks for which tools are used	Schools and colleges, civil society, media educators
Accessibility	Can women afford, reach and use AI tools in languages they know?	Participation: whether women can enter and stay.	Personal versus shared device use; cost of data; availability of tools in regional languages; rural–urban and gender gaps	Governments, telecom operators, tool developers
Participatory governance	Do women have a role in deciding how AI is designed, regulated and audited?	Power: influence over the systems and rules that shape communication.	Women's presence in design teams, ethics bodies and consultations; existence of complaint and appeal routes; publication of audit results	Governments, companies, regulators, women's organisations

6.2 The five pillars

Representation asks whose experiences, languages and identities a system reflects. It covers training data; the assumptions built into design and the way systems are evaluated. Being visible is not enough if the portrayal is narrow or stereotyped. Evaluation should look at different groups of women, for example by language, caste, religion, disability and region, and should not treat women as one category.

Safety is a precondition for participation. It covers harassment, impersonation, manipulated content and other technology-facilitated gender-based violence. It has to be designed in from the start: reporting routes that are easy to find and use, provenance information for synthetic media, clear procedures for responding to abuse, and accountability where the same content or the same abuser keeps reappearing. Most of the survey evidence drawn on

here concerns journalists, so how far these measures reach other women is an open question.

AI literacy here means the knowledge needed to understand what AI systems do, to judge their outputs and to decide how to use them, including awareness of privacy and safety risks. It builds on general digital literacy, which Shah (2024) identifies as important for addressing gender inequalities in AI, and goes beyond operating a particular tool. A woman with this knowledge is better placed to spot a stereotyped output, to doubt a generated claim and to know where to report abuse. Literacy does not remove the other barriers, which is why it is one pillar of five.

Accessibility covers the material and social conditions under which women can use AI: the cost of data and devices, connectivity, language, and whether a device is personal or shared. The NFHS and GSMA data show that these conditions differ sharply between rural and urban women. A tool that is free to download but needs

fast data, or works poorly in the language a woman speaks at home, will serve some women and not others.

Participatory governance concerns who have a role in shaping AI systems. Women are usually treated as users or beneficiaries. Participatory governance would place women, and organisations that represent different groups of women, in design teams, advisory and ethics bodies, platform policy consultations and regulatory processes, with a real route to contest decisions. Women are not a uniform group, so no single seat or committee can stand for all of them.

6.3 How the pillars depend on one another

The pillars are interdependent. Representation counts for little if women cannot take part safely. Literacy is hard to use without an affordable device and connection. Better access brings more women into systems whose bias remains. And progress on any of these can stall if women have no say over design and governance. Voice depends most directly on representation and safety, participation on accessibility and literacy, and power on governance, though each pillar touches all three.

Existing work tends to take one or two of these issues at a time: Posetti et al. (2020) on safety, Shah (2024) on literacy, the GSMA (2026) on access, and UNESCO and IRCAI (2024) on bias. What the framework adds is a way of looking at them together in relation to communication, and a set of questions to put to any AI-mediated setting: who is represented, who is safe, who understands, who can reach it and who decides. Each question should be asked separately for different groups of women.

7. Implications for Policy, Media Practice and Education

7.1 Policy and regulation

Gender should be assessed within general AI governance and not handled as a separate concern. In India, the 2026 amendments to the IT Rules bring synthetically generated information, including deepfakes, within the due-diligence duties of intermediaries, with labelling and provenance requirements and shorter takedown timelines (MeitY, 2026). These bear directly on the safety pillar. What they mean for women in practice remains to be studied: whether women can use the complaint routes easily, and what happens after they do. Consultations on AI policy should also include women's organisations that speak for different groups of women, which gives the governance pillar a practical form.

7.2 Media organisations and platforms

Media organisations and platforms shape whether women can take part safely. That means reporting mechanisms that work, prompt responses to manipulated content, and firm action against repeated harassment. Women journalists and creators are most exposed where these mechanisms are weak. Greater transparency about how recommendation and moderation systems work would also help users understand how their communication is shaped, and clear procedures for non-consensual synthetic media belong in the same package.

7.3 Education and AI literacy

Colleges and universities, including women's colleges, can build the knowledge that the literacy pillar describes. AI literacy taught only as tool use will not do the job. Students also need practice in questioning outputs, recognising bias, judging generated content and thinking about privacy, safety and accountability. In media and communication programmes this can include examining how AI affects visibility, representation and public discourse, so that students use these tools with confidence and also question the systems behind them.

7.4 From access to agency

Across all three areas the same point holds. Access is an important starting point, and the Indian figures show that it can grow quickly. It does not create agency by itself. Women also need safe places to communicate, the knowledge to engage critically with AI, and some influence over the technologies they use.

8. Limitations

The study is conceptual and rests on existing literature and documents, not on primary data. It offers an interpretive account of women's digital agency and supports no statistical generalisation. Several limitations follow.

The sources are mostly English-language scholarship and internationally circulated reports, which may not capture differences across regions, languages and cultures. Women's experiences of AI also vary by caste, class, religion, disability, geography and income, and although the framework points to these intersections, the paper could not examine them in depth. Much of the survey evidence on abuse concerns journalists, whose situation is not typical of all women. The statistics come from surveys that use different measures and populations, such as ever using the internet in the National Family Health Survey and current mobile internet use in the GSMA reports, so the figures are not directly comparable. The bias audit cited here covers GPT-2, GPT-3.5 and Llama 2, and the systems in use have since changed.

Generative AI, platform policies and forms of technology-facilitated harm are all changing quickly, so some of the evidence will date. Finally, the five-pillar framework and its indicators have not been tested empirically.

9. Conclusion

Women's digital agency depends on whether AI-mediated communication lets women speak, take part and have some influence over how it works. Access to AI can create new opportunities, as the rise in Indian women's internet use shows. Whether those opportunities turn into agency depends on representation, safety, AI literacy, accessibility and governance.

The five-pillar framework relates these to voice, participation and power and offers a set of questions and indicators for looking at any AI-mediated setting. It is not a fixed model, and its usefulness will depend on how it performs in different social, linguistic, cultural and technological contexts.

Empirical work is the obvious next step. Surveys and interviews with women in different regions and language communities could test whether the pillars describe what women themselves experience. Audits of AI systems in Indian languages could examine representation. Studies of how the 2026 IT Rules work in practice for women could examine safety. Comparisons between women's access to tools and their control over the systems behind them could show how far access alone gets them.

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