Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a tool for Marketing Self Help Groups Products

DR. HANMANT G SAPKAL*, Mrs Akanksha Kherdikar**

Research Guide*, Research Scholar**

RamkrishnaParamhansa Mahavidyalaya, Osmanabad*

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad**

Abstract

In this era of Technology and recent launch of Digital India Program by Government of India which is well supported by Tata Trust and Google with launch of initiative named "Internet Saathi", has triggered women empowerment in rural area by making them internet literate. Rural women especially associated with Self Help Groups can be benefited with such initiatives. In India, most of the SHGs are following their traditional marketing policies and practices. This is mainly due to lack of awareness of currently available marketing trends.

Information and communication technology (ICT) tools have been widely used by all the levels of enterprises to effectively and economically market their products. SHGs can also leverage the power of these ICT tools. Apart from basic ICT tools like Television and Radio, Smart phones with internet connectivity have also reached all the corners of rural areas.

Many SHGs (Rural and Urban) are supported by NGOs and other private organizations which provide various ICT related training and awareness program for them, but still there is gap in ICT enabled marketing techniques and marketing techniques adopted by SHGs.

In view of this, the present paper focuses use of ICT tools to promote products produced by SHG.

It proposes use of various ICT tools which can be used for different marketing functions by various levels of stakeholders of SHGs.

Keywords: Information and communication technology (ICT), Marketing, Self Help Groups (SHG).

Introduction

ICT refers to Information and Communication Technology that provides access to information through telecommunication. ICT tools mainly include radio, television, Internet, e-mail, computer, mobile phones, IT services, hardware, software, application and other communication technologies (Moursund 2005, 4).

Due to massive growth of ICT in India, the means of communication, shopping, marketing, travelling and different activities have changed. (Kotable & Helsen 2000) Information and communication technology (ICT) becomes an essential means in every type of business whether small or large. It creates various opportunities for business development. Use of effective ICT based marketing tools can help to promote and expand the business.

One small Business setup by Women below poverty lines is called as Self Help Groups. Self Help Group is a homogenous group of poor women voluntarily come together for common cause to raise and manage resources for the benefit of the group members. These groups are formed in rural areas as well as urban areas. Self Help Groups are supported by its stakeholders like Banks, NGOs, Government, Panchyayat Raj institutions. (Dr. S.Ally Sornam, 2007)

These groups produce variety of products on small scale. Most of the group's products are sold to market through traditional ways like exhibitions (Jatra), Outlets, door to door marketing. Now a days Information and communication technology (ICT) and e-business applications provide many benefits across a wide range of businesses.

This paper deals with conceptual knowledge of using Information and Communication Technology as a marketing tool to Advertise and Promote products produced by Self Help Groups.

SHGs Product-Marketing using ICT tools

Self Help Groups are producing array of products. At present, with growing awareness and spread of education, women have ventured into business to engage themselves in productive activities; women are increasingly seeking to become entrepreneurs in various fields.

It is now recognized that women have vast entrepreneurial talents and that have transformed them from jobseekers to job givers. Initially women"s activities in business were confined to making papad, pickles, jam, masala, squash, weaving embroidery, spinning and handicraft. Now their business has shifted towards non-traditional activities like engineering, and other technical fields. This is due to spread of technical education among women. (Kothakalla, 2011)

Information and communication technology is rapidly growing as most important tool for rural development in third world countries where most of the people are adopting these technologies for agriculture and education development. Furthermore, these communication technologies are spreading among small business Information and communication technologies have provided facilities in different organizations of economic activities. In this context the importance of this technology is such as application of computer networking and sharing information among communities is also main tool of communication technology. (Abdul Razaque Chhachhar Har Bakhsh Makhijani, 2013)

The basic aim of this paper is to recommend ICT tools which can be used by SHGs in marketing their products. Following diagram illustrates the model for the same.

Figure 1:-

Conceptual Model-Applying ICT tools on Marketing functions for SHGs Products
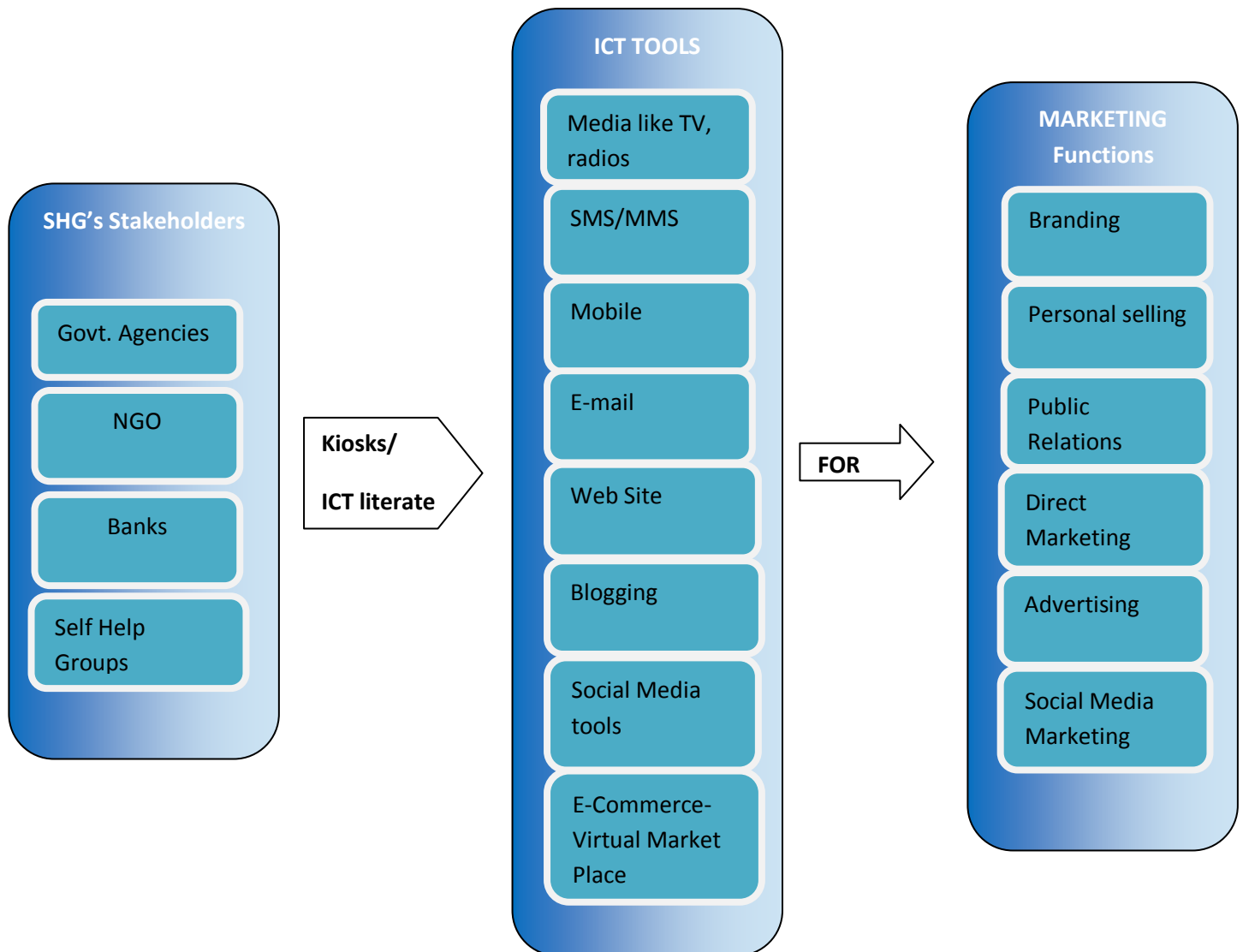
PC/Mobile Phone Kiosks

Rural PC kiosks and telecenters are perhaps the most-discussed form of ICT4D, or "information and communication technologies for development." Rural kiosks are shared-access computer centers, run either as community centers or as businesses that seek to deliver services to support socio-economic development of rural areas. (Kentaro Toyama)

A Monthly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories

International Journal in Management and Social Science

http://www.ijmr.net.in email id- irjmss@gmail.com   Page 260

This paper proposes that Rural kiosks centers can be effectively used by Self Help Groups as a mediator to promote or market SHGs products.

ICT tools used for Marketing functions

The ICT tools can be categorized as voice calls, SMS and information delivery platforms to integrated market facilitation systems. These include donor, NGO, government and private sector backed programs some focus on one community, others expanding regionally and globally. Devices used may include basic phones, Smartphones, tablets and other customized ICT software and/or systems. (Using ICT to Enhance Marketing for Small Agricultural Producers, 2013)

After Studying Literature this paper presents following ICT tools and the ways in which it can be used for Marketing SHGs products.

TELEVISION/RADIO

In India, there has been exponential rise of televisions, almost every home have it. Television advertisements have great impact in persuading the people (rural or urban) to join hands with the national goals in achieving social some cause. Research has shown that non commercial social TV advertisement, sometimes endorsed by celebrities like polio vaccination campaign; Anti Smoking etc. have great impact in changing mindset of common people.

These kinds of advertisements can be used by Government or NGO's to promote Self Help Group products. These advertisements have potential to attract public towards these products.

SMS/MMS

SMS Marketing, type of digital Marketing is one of the most effective and immediate and result oriented marketing system. It is user friendly, cost effective and is direct form of marketing. Effective and affordable Bulk SMS is significantly faster, more effective and less expensive than email or any other medium of marketing. It is the most versatile channel for companies to communicate with customers and targeted prospects.

Government Agencies and other organizations have successfully used SMS for various awareness and other social campaigns like Women's Association of Socio-Cultural Awareness (WOSCA) which devised a strategy using SMSes to spread awareness about government policies and schemes. Their awareness initiatives have resulted in large number of tribal families receiving government assistance, without any trouble. (Mohul Ghosh, 2014)

Kisan Sanchar also created awareness about fertilizers using SMS service, by informing and updating the farmers from time to time. (Mohul Ghosh, 2014)

With the help and assistance of text based messages along with voice and SMS based services, SHGs stake holders can use this as a effective marketing tool to promote their products and reach to

new customers, corporate people and other organization. SMS Services can be used for advertising SHGs products or send updates to existing customers.

SMART PHONE

The telecommunications market in India is booming, with subscriber additions being at an all time high. The mobile phone has become an integral part of every one's life. It has been able to reach out to a segment of population including rural areas, which have been earlier unreachable through other forms of distribution or media. (Sullivan, 2010)

Research says that there is Massive increase in the usage of Mobile phones and handheld devices such as Tablets, iPads, which has led to exponential growth in usage of Mobile apps. Mobile applications are widely used for entertainment, education, for social networks and for increasing productivity. (Salagar, Kulkarni, & Gondane, 2013)

The mobile phone is now being featured as an additional medium of advertising, in conjunction to traditional marketing media, such as TV and radio, as well as online marketing.

These apps have also been successfully used for social awareness campaigns such as An app developed to fight corruption--after the furor over anti-corruption by Anna Hazare--gives the users the latest news, real streaming videos, polling, Q&A and events. The app has had about 10,000 installs till date. (SiliconIndia, 2011)

An android Mobile Phone application 'Helping Faceless' allows users to upload photo of street children and helps to find if such children are victim of kidnapping which helps to stop child trafficking.(Ghosh,2014)

On the similar grounds and as a part of social revolution in India, Mobile Phone Apps can be developed for benefit of SHGs. Common people and other organizations and stake holders of SHGs can use this application for various purpose. SHGs product and its information can be made available on application so that it can each to potential customers.

One most effective technology in the world of Mobile Application is Instant Message Marketing using Applications like WhatsApp, Hike, Line messaging etc. which can also be used effectively by Self Help Groups in as a direct marketing tool for promoting and Marketing their products.

E-MAIL MARKETING

E-mail marketing is a form of direct marketing which uses E-mail as a means of communicating commercial or fund-raising messages to an audience. In its broadest sense, every E-mail sent to a potential or current customer could be considered E-mail marketing.

Government of India is now a day's using Email for sharing their plans with citizen. They provide people with an option for subscription. Subscribed members receive updates regarding government strategies, plans and schemes. Greetings and wishes also comes as part of email campaign (Bruce D Keillor, 2007)

For Government agencies and non-profit organizations, cost can be the concern. Some email marketing service providers provides specialized email marketing suites at affordable rates. SHGs Stakeholders like governments and non-profit organizations can promote SHGs products. (E. Fariborzi, 2012)

SHGs members themselves can use their own smart phones or PC Kiosk for marketing their products using email as a tool for direct marketing. SHGs can use **Email marketing** for both advertising and promotional marketing efforts via e-mail messages to current and prospective customers.

BLOGGING

Blog (short for Web log) is a Web site where entries are posted and displayed in reverse chronological order. Most of the blogging sites are free to use. Blogs range from the personal to the political, and can focus on one narrow subject or a whole range of subjects.

On the professional side, a blog for marketing can give any organization an identity and a "voice," gaining visibility on the Web. It can generate word-of-mouth interest and display current work. It is a way for organization to write about their work and tell the story behind it. It allows people to get involved with work by leaving comments. (Piscopo)

Blogging means a communication tool, a marketing technique, a listening device and a way to interact directly with customers one to one on a global scale. (Wright, 2006) Realizing this potential and cost effectiveness of blogging, Swayamsiddha Foundation and NGO has already created a market blog to display SHGs products.

On the similar grounds, SHGs with help of other stakeholders can own and maintain Blogs to promote their products.

WEBSITE

A website is a collection of web pages (documents that are accessed through the Internet). A web page is kind of document which can contain any type of information, and can include text, color, graphics, animation and sound.

Having a website is crucial for small businesses for a number of reasons. Primarily, it's an opportunity to connect with customers where they are looking - online. It also helps to build an email list, to create and control your web presence, and to take advantage of search engines which are beginning to skew search results in favor of local results.

Building a web presence is an opportunity for SHGs to maintain their public relations, Advertise and promote their products. NGOs like Chaitanya, sevasahayog, Drishti have been benefitted by their web presence and they have increased their reach to maximum people.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection,

A Monthly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories

International Journal in Management and Social Science

http://www.ijmr.net.in email id- irjmss@gmail.com   Page 263

and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (boyd, 2007)

Social networks have come a long way since the implementation of the idea several years ago. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and MySpace all had a big part in making social networks what they are today. (Roeder)

Research says that Social networks are used as a marketing tool for many different purposes. Large companies use these sites to gain information on their target market, and Customer feedback. Small businesses use these sites to promote their brand.

The most valuable part of marketing using social networks is that it allows people to market their services to a large market at no cost. Thousands of people enter these sites daily. Therefore they are able reach a mass market free of charge.

The popular network Facebook offers a free classifieds section where people are able to post things such as job listings, items for sale, or services available. Companies of all sorts are able to place advertisements for their products or services, as well as post job opportunities. People are also able to market themselves by listing their skills and abilities for employers to view.(WebNox)

There are number of successful social campaign like Ice bucket challenge, Rice bucket challenge which was initiated and promoted by social networking sites (Pillandi, 2014). Also Many SHGs have started using these social networking sites to connect with people and each other. SHGs like Mahila Bachat Gat Mahamandal, Savitrichya leki Mahila Bachat Gat, Vighnaharta Mahila Bachat Gat and many more have are using facebook effectively.

Twitter also successfully hosted "Twestival", bringing twitter community together for charity. (Chaudhuri, 2009)SHGs like Gayatri Mahila Bachat gat has already its presence on Twitter. They can use this medium for promoting products by a way of Twestival.

Social networks can be used as valuable marketing tool to advertise and promote SHGs product. With the recent growth in popularity of many of the networking websites, SHGs stakeholders can use social networking as a mass market without having to invest the time and money that they would by marketing through other means.

E-COMMERCE

Electronic commerce, commonly known as e-commerce or e-commerce, consists of the buying and selling of products or services over electronic system such as internet and other computer network. E-commerce is showing tremendous growth in India. Increase in Internet users have added to this growth. (Mitra, 2013)

Electronic commerce is also impacting business to business interactions. It facilitates the network form of organization where small flexible firms rely on other partner, companies for component supplies and product distribution to meet changing customer demand more effectively.
Devkate, Balaji N. E-commerce: problems and prospects in Maharashtra (Doctoral dissertation) retrieved from http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in

A Monthly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories

International Journal in Management and Social Science

http://www.ijmr.net.in email id- irjmss@gmail.com   Page 264

People have started shopping online. E-commerce websites like FlipKart, Snapdeal, Amazon, LocalBaniya and many more websites has caused revolution in the way people shop.

E-commerce facilitates extended reach of business by bringing in customers from previously untouched regions without incurring additional expenses of opening up branch offices or expensive advertisement campaigns.

On the similar lines, SHGs can form networks in the similar way as proposed under the government of India's program called Indira Mahila Yojana. They can work collaboratively to use single platform to showcase their products.

This paper proposes an E-Marketplace an E-commerce platform for SHGs products which can be developed and maintained with support of any or all of the SHGs stakeholders. This will need interactive user friendly e-commerce website with shopping cart and secured payment gateway. This will also need well planned supply chain management so that products can be reached at right time to right people.

Many professional Website development companies like Indiafin, SevenBoats, NGOBOX provides subsidized rates for providing various kinds of services to NGOs. Also cloud platform can satisfy the technical needs in cost effective way.

Thus SHGs E-Market will facilitate new type of business processes for promoting SHGs Products which can reach and target new customers.

CONCLUSION

ICT and e-business applications provide many benefits across a wide range of business. It presents unique opportunities to empower all the SHGs stakeholders by strengthening their capabilities in marketing their products.

Having a strong online presence is important for any non-profit organizations, whose cause rely heavily (sometimes entirely) on their supporters. Since many non-profits already have to deal with tight budgets and limited staff, Use of ICT in marketing and promoting their cause will a cost effective way to reach to the masses.

There are individuals or Corporate (under CSR program), who want to help for social cause but are not aware about many social initiatives or they don't know the way of doing it. With the use of ICT tools especially social media marketing, SHGs can reach and Connect with them instantly.

With the initiative of SHGs Stakeholders by providing appropriate services and training to the SHGs members required for effective use of ICT will definitely help in empowering women with increased sales and in turn the revenues.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdul Razaque Chhachhar Har Bakhsh Makhijani, G. M. (2013). Information and Communication Technologies for Rural Development in Developing countries. *Journal of American Science* , 83-88.

Archana.G.Gulati. (2010). Using ICTs to M-power Women's Self Help Groups in Rural India. *Social Science Research Network* , 1-11.

Boyd, d. m. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* , 210-230.

Bruce D Keillor, L. M. (2007). *Marketing in the 21st Century.* Westport: Praeger.

Chaudhuri, S. (2009, August 26). *Tweeting for a cause*. Retrieved June 7, 2015, from http://www.livemint.com: http://www.livemint.com/Industry/D4Gfwz9pVLij7CTtsGJWiJ/Tweeting-for-a-cause.html

Dr. S.Ally Sornam, B. P. (2007). Information needs of women self help groups: An assessment. *e-LIS* .

E. Fariborzi, M. Z. (2012). E-mail Marketing: Advantages, Disadvantages and Improving Techniques. *InternationalJournal of e-Education,e-Business e- Management and e-Learning* , 232-236.

Ghosh, M. (2014, November 20). *4 Case Studies Where SMSes Are Bringing A Social Revolution in Rural India*. Retrieved June 28, 2015, from http://www.trak.in: http://trak.in/tags/business/2014/11/20/4-case-studies-sms-social-revolution-rural-india/

Ghosh, M. (2014, August 14). *Use This Mobile App To Bring A Social Change In India: Stop Child Trafficking Now!* Retrieved June 28, 2015, from http://trak.in/: http://trak.in/tags/business/2014/08/14/mobile-app-social-change-child-trafficking/

Kentaro Toyama, R. K. (n.d.). Review of Research on Rural PC KIOSKS. *Information Technology and Communications Resources for Sustainable Development* .

Kothakalla, D. R. (2011). ROLE OF MICRO ENTERPRISES IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT - A CASE STUDY OF ANDHRA PRADESH. *International Journal in Multidisciplinary and Academic Research (SSIJMAR) Vol. 2, No. 2* , 1-16.

Mitra, A. (2013). E-COMMERCE IN INDIA- A REVIEW. *International Journal of Marketing, Financial Services & Management Research* , 126-132.

Moursund. (2005). *Introduction to Information and COmmunication Technology in Education .* Eugene.

Odhiambo, C. A. (2012). *SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL OF MARKETING AND CREATING BRAND AWARENESS.* VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES.

Pani, P. (2015, July 3). *Tata Trusts, Google team up to get more rural women on Net.* Retrieved July 4, 2015, from http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/features/smartbuy/tech-news/tata-trust-google-india-join-hands-to-bring-rural-women-online/article7382714.ece

Pillandi, R. (2014, August 29). *Hyderabad woman's rice bucket challenge becomes a boon for poor*. Retrieved June 5, 2015, from http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Hyderabad-womans-rice-bucket-challenge-becomes-a-boon-for-poor/articleshow/41143311.cms

Piscopo, M. (n.d.). *Blog as a Marketing Tool.* Retrieved July 4, 2015, from http://www.commarts.com/: http://www.commarts.com/Columns.aspx?pub=1814&pageid=498

Roeder, L. (n.d.). *14 Reasons You Should Join a Social Network*. Retrieved June 7, 2015, from www.personalweb.about.com: http://personalweb.about.com/od/easyblogsandwebpages/a/whatsocialnetwo.htm

Salagar, M., Kulkarni, P., & Gondane, S. (2013). Educating and creating social awareness for sensitive topics using mobile applications, 2013 IEEE International Conference in. *MOOC Innovation and Technology in Education (MITE)* , 335,339.

SiliconIndia. (2011, August 31). *Mobile Apps To Give A Facelift To Social Awareness*. Retrieved June 28, 2015, from http://www.siliconindia.com: http://www.siliconindia.com/shownews/Mobile_Apps_To_Give_A_Facelift_To_Social_Awareness-nid-89913-cid-100.html

Sullivan, F. &. (2010). *Advertising goes Mobile.* Growth Consulting.

(2013). *Using ICT to Enhance Marketing For Small Agricultural Producers.* United states Agency International Development.

Wright, J. (2006). *Blog Marketing: The Revolutionary New Way to Increase Sales, Build Your Brand,and Get Exceptional Results.* The McGraw-Hill Companies.

A Monthly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories

International Journal in Management and Social Science

http://www.ijmr.net.in email id- irjmss@gmail.com   Page 267