



Internet Society
India Mumbai

WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY
LEADERSHIP SPEAKER SERIES

LEARNING AND
THRIVING IN THE
DIGITAL AGE

ISOC INDIA MUMBAI CHAPTER

DATE: 16TH JANUARY, 2021
TIME: 11:00 AM-12:00 PM IST

LEARNING AND THRIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE: WEBINAR REPORT

ABOUT THE WEBINAR

Women in Technology Leadership (WITL) series is an initiative by ISOC India Mumbai Chapter to celebrate the women who have been creating a mark for themselves in technology leadership space. Aligning with this vision of ISOC India Mumbai to further promote the women leadership in the technology sector, the chapter organised its third webinar in the WITL Series on the theme "Learning and Thriving in the Digital Age". The third WITL webinar saw two enterprising and successful co-founders of upcoming start-ups and their journey as women leaders-in-tech.

SPEAKERS

Charu Noheria is the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Practically. In 2018, she co-founded Practically, an experiential learning app for STEM and has been working to revolutionize the education landscape for the last seven years. Practically's constant innovation to improve the rate of retention of concepts among students has helped the platform raise \$9M so far. Charu has a bachelor's degree in engineering (Computer Science) from R.V. College of Engineering, Bangalore, and an MBA from the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign. She has over 12 years of corporate experience in operations, technology, strategy and managing global teams. She began her career as a software engineer at Samsung and later worked as Director-Technology Partnerships at Lumeris Inc.-one of the largest value-based healthcare IT firms in the United States. Most recently, she was chosen to be part of Entrepreneur India's 35 under 35 class of 2021. She was featured in the coveted ORF-GP report on Women in Technology, 2020. Charu shuttles between Hyderabad and San Francisco Bay Area and enjoys stargazing, hiking, cooking among other things.

Swati Sharrma loves to describe herself as a logophile, thriving to create a multimillion-dollar impactful ecosystem. A distinguished alumna of London Business School and driven by an entrepreneurial mindset, Swati, has been carving out a niche for herself in the technologically driven consumer allegiance segment. She co-founded "Thriwe- Consumer Benefits Marketplace" with an ambition to create an organisation that reinvents the rules of consumer/stakeholder engagement. She is a chief architect of business performance who interknits sustainability and scalability into the company's fabric. At Thriwe, Swati has led the operational and strategic initiatives and has scaled-up the company from a start-up to a multimillion-dollar global organisation. Swati envisions to create an organisation that brings large scale value to the entire ecosystem of employees, customers, partners, suppliers, investors and society at large. Swati has previously worked in corporate planning across her past stints at KPMG and InspireOne Consultants. Spanning over a decade, Swati's strategic experience and entrepreneurial journey holds many nuggets of wisdom for budding and established entrepreneurs.

DISCUSSION

With digital technologies shaping markets, product development, workforce behaviours, consumer perspectives and pretty much everything else, entrepreneurs need to adapt to the changing times. The ongoing pandemic has further unearthed that technology is where further innovation, creativity, entrepreneurial engagement and future will lie. The technology of the future to be both innovative and inclusive will need more contribution from the women-in-tech.

The discussion began with the moderator and ISOC India Mumbai volunteer Prateek Pathak, asking the speakers how technology has changed their lives and the different challenges that the speakers faced as women in tech.

Charu shared how her team at her organisation aimed to bring back joy to classroom learning. They wanted to find a solution to make, certain subjects and concepts more experiential while catering to students' needs. They felt that existing modes of learning needed to be changed. Swati shared that as in the west, the Internet helps bring transparency, in operations across various service providers. She added that the main challenge, her company faced, was the resistance on the part of their prospective clients to change and adapt to the company's technological model. To achieve its goals, the company changed its strategy and created value additions that improved client business. This changed strategy, led to clients successfully accepting the change. Therefore, "Tech was the challenge but tech was the solution."

Diving further into the discussion, the moderator asked speakers to talk about their life journeys and motivation behind setting their tech start-ups.

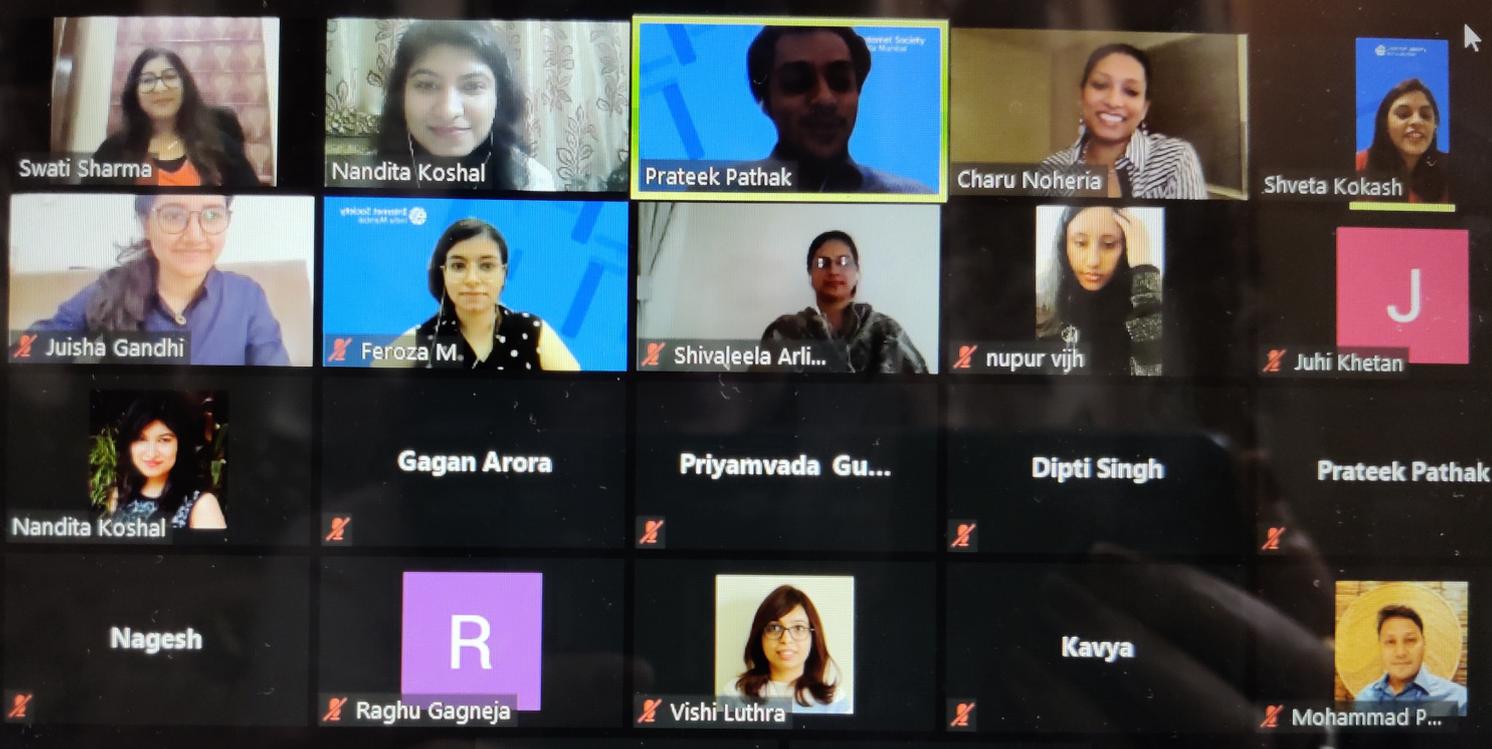
Charu, a computer science engineer, shared that when she graduated from Bangalore working for a technology company was de-facto. Her journey began as an application developer at Samsung, where her initial training entailed converting ideas into actual products. Coming from a tech background, Charu firmly believed in the potential of technology in producing quick results. The case-in-point being the transformation of the education sector by technology during the Covid pandemic. She commended the expeditious adoption of technology by the education sector, while avoiding the actual loss of an academic year during the pandemic.

While for Charu technology was a natural choice, Swati confessed how she was an 'Accidental Techie' and entrepreneur. She was a literature graduate and started her career as a Human Resource representative. She reminisced how her professional journey was very different from her anticipated career based on her family upbringing. Her entrepreneurial journey started thanks to the vision of an enthusiastic partner and her meticulous self. Their company grew as both complemented each other in achieving a balance in terms of the risks they undertook.

As an entrepreneur, you are never off duty. One is continuously working towards your goal and overcoming challenges. In the same vein, Prateek asked the speakers to elaborate on the day-to-day difficulties they face and how they overcome them.

Charu declared that being an entrepreneur is a 24/7 job. The range of challenges varies from personal to financial to market conditions. Every day, there is a new lesson to learn. She shared one such challenge where her team realised that their product efficiency was getting affected by the bandwidth at the end-user side, especially, in tier-2 and tier-3 cities and rural areas and they had no control over it. This problem inspired her team to modify their products to cater to these challenges. In furtherance, Prateek asked her about the growing concern of Data privacy in schools and their way of dealing with the same. Charu responded that privacy was of paramount importance, and any engagement as per different policies would remain private. Creating a safe learning environment was the main focus.

Swati agreed with Charu and added that there is a pattern to the challenges faced by an entrepreneur. She opined that the nature of the challenges varies over a period of time. She quoted a line of a poem she recently read which translates as 'On the path to success the scorching sunlight helped us a lot, had we found shade then we would have probably rested.' Swati discussed, coming from a non-technical background, they did face a few technical issues. The team was able to overcome them with the support and guidance from industry leaders and mentors.



One of the Moments from the Webinar

After the insightful discussion, the floor was thrown open for an audience Q&A session. Shveta Kokash, ISOC India Mumbai President and volunteer, asked the speakers if there is any advantage or disadvantage in the tech world of being a woman entrepreneur, considering the limited woman presence in this field?

Charu shared how sometimes she would find herself to be the only female in various situations. While her opinions were always valued, she realised that it was a lonely journey. She believes that women are better communicators and better managers. She is optimistic about the future prospects for women in the technology field over the coming decade. She further feels that the changing mindset will play an instrumental role in changing the status quo.

Swati agreed with Charu that women seem to bring a unique perspective and have a unique style. She believes that as female tech leaders, the advantage and disadvantages are the same as women in the corporate world. Not caring about what people think makes the journey simpler. She wants more women to be a part of the tech world and hopes that the number of women joining this sector will increase in the coming years.

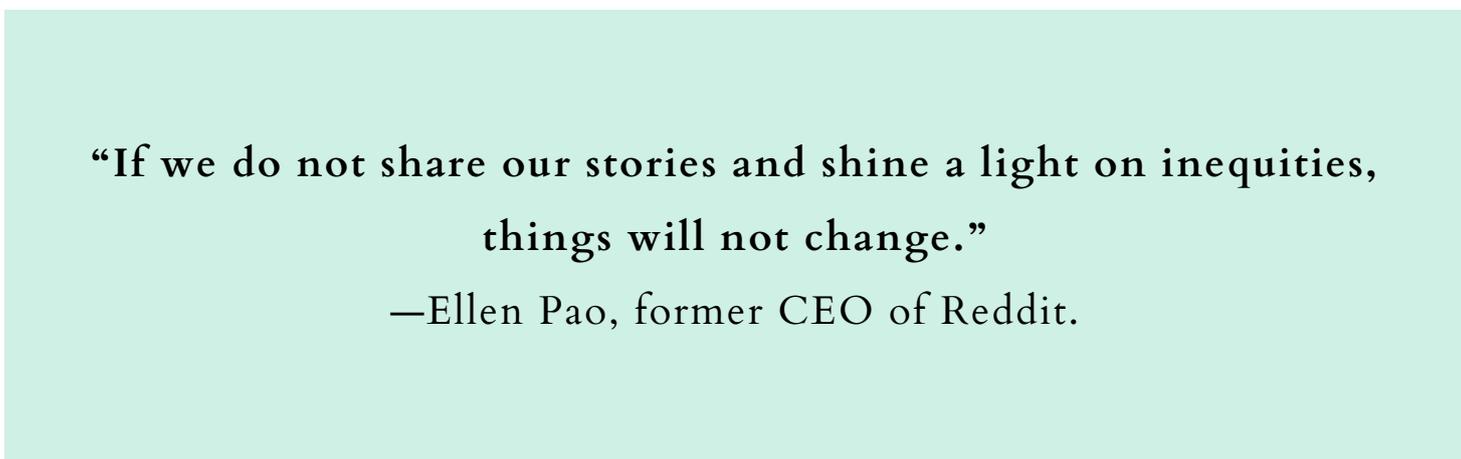
The next question from the audience came from Priyamvada Gupta, a Senior Manager at a Fortune 500 company with 10+ work experience in Analytics. She asked the speakers about the difficulty in finding a business partner who shares a similar vision and is willing to convert that vision into a business venture.

As an entrepreneur, Charu advised her to not give up on her current job but work for her vision in parallel. Charu had faced a similar dilemma and had chosen not to give up her then job for an uncertain future. She also mentioned her co-founders were colleagues who shared a passion for making a change in the education sector. Some ways to look for co-founders could be to start working on the idea and reaching out to communities, professional networks, batch mates, colleagues and people who share the same passion.

Swati mentioned that start-ups require taking multiple decisions on a day to day basis that can lead to conflict. Therefore, having a compatible co-founder, with emotional maturity and understanding is imperative. Her advice was not to rush to find a co-founder but to look for a team that complements the founder's skills and acts as a great support system. There is no sure shot success formula when launching a company; it is a leap of faith. She opined that start-ups work better when you give them your all with tremendous courage.

The discussion came to an end with the sage advice from Charu, "the entrepreneur is married to the problem and not to the solution".

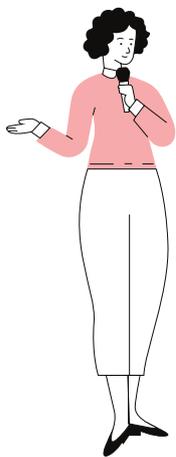
The webinar concluded with Shveta Kokash, President of ISOC India Mumbai delivering a vote of thanks. She thanked speakers for sharing their insights and motivating others to join the world of entrepreneurship. She expressed gratitude to the audience for their participation; chapter volunteers Feroza Mody and Ankita Muddalkar for their creative efforts; Juisha Gandhi for acting as the rapporteur for the session; and Nandita Koshal, Treasurer, ISOC India Mumbai Chapter for overall coordination of the event, and the collective effort of the team in making the webinar a success.



**“If we do not share our stories and shine a light on inequities,
things will not change.”**

—Ellen Pao, former CEO of Reddit.





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SPEAKERS:

SWATI SHARRMA
CO-FOUNDER & COO

CHARU NOHERIA
CO-FOUNDER & COO



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