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Digital Exclusion and Caste in India: A Meta-analytical Study

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Abstract: *During the COVID era, almost every field got better because of the use of digital technology. It filled almost all social gaps. Many people have adopted technology because it meets their needs, but there is also a digital divide between different ethnographic. In this study, the digital divide between different social groups in India was looked at. A meta-analytical study was used to find out what the results were. Researchers used information from different reports and findings from the COVID-19 era. The study looked at the first-level digital divide (access to computers and the Internet) and the second-level digital divide (soft skills to use computers and the Internet) between disadvantaged caste groups and others. Using a method called "nonlinear decomposition," this paper also shows how the digital divide between these groups is caused by differences in socioeconomic factors that are based on caste. The results show that there is a big first-level and second-level digital divide in India between the lower caste groups and the rest of the country. The results of the non-linear decomposition show that the caste-based digital divide in India has its roots in the social and economic neglect of lower-caste groups in the past. More than half of the digital divide based on caste is caused by the fact that people from disadvantaged caste groups have less education and make less money than people from other caste groups. The results of this study show how important it is to fix the differences in education and income between India's different castes in order to close the digital divide.*

Keywords: Digital Exclusion, COVID-19, Castes, Social Exclusion

Introduction

The digital divide has detrimental societal consequences. Lack of access to technology has the ability to increase already existing social exclusions and rob people of essential resources. As a result of our increasing reliance on digital technologies and the internet, the digital divide affects every aspect of life, including education, health, mobility, safety, financial inclusion, and every other imaginable sector.While numerous government initiatives, including the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan and the National Digital Literacy Mission, have been established to encourage digital literacy, more has to be done. For different socioeconomic groups to have physical access to ICT, it is critical to update the current digital infrastructure. Poor populations need to be encouraged to use technology in their daily lives and provided with access to digital skills in order to make this shift possible.

Digitalization and Digitization

Digitalization and digitization are two conceptual words that are frequently used synonymously in a variety of literary works. The conversion of analogue data (especially in subsequent uses of photos,

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video, and text) into digital form is referred to as digitization. Alternatively, the term "digitalization" describes "the adoption or increase in usage of digital or computer technology by an organisation, industry, country, etc." Digital information is necessary for any big data-based solution, hence "digitalization involves digitization" and "digitalization is the first step to realising digitalization" Digitalization is the transition to a digital business; it is the use of digital technologies to alter a business model and offer new revenue and value-producing options. depiction of the digital economy the time is ideal for Indian businesses to explore digitalization, which involves turning digitised resources—like cloud-based software and equipment with digital sensors—into fresh, lucrative revenue streams. Several elements of India's digital ecosystem, including the digitised consumer, the production of digital data volumes, e-commerce, and tech-savvy workforce pools, are anticipated to mature within the next few years (Kaur Narula & Rana, 2017).

Digitalization of India

The Digital India programme aimed to equip India with the necessary technology know-how to ensure unlimited growth. It has aided government initiatives that can address the requirements of the populace. A vast array of factors has an impact on how popular Indian languages are on digital platforms. The two most important ones are the rise in smartphone use and the trend of increasing internet penetration. The use of relevant technology and its effects have had a significant impact on entertainment, news, digital payments, and e-business. Social commerce has grown in popularity by utilising technology to provide a virtual platform for productively carrying out neighborhood-based trading. By depending on community and content, brands can now immediately engage with their audience. The expansion of online shopping could create new opportunities for the social commerce sector. The growth of e-business has been made possible by the increased use of the internet. A common platform for many different devices has been created as a result. This has contributed to an increase in online shoppers. The way Indian merchants offer their items has seen a significant transformation with the rise of alternative commerce. The concept of alternate commerce was created by combining the omnichannel strategy and aided commerce. So, it is accurate to argue that Digital India has substantially benefited Indian industry. A considerable boost has been provided to general economic and social initiatives that can encourage responsibility and interaction among people and the government for a brighter future (Arup Roy, 2018).

Covid-19 and Digital Transformation

COVID-19 has changed how organisations in all sectors and geographies do business for years. According to a McKinsey Global Survey of executives, their organisations have advanced the digitization of customer and supply-chain interactions and internal operations by three to four years. The share of digital or digitally enabled products in their portfolios has risen 7 years. Nearly all respondents believe their organisations have built at least interim solutions to satisfy new needs considerably faster than they imagined possible before the crisis. And COVID- 19 epidemics accelerated a decades-long digital revolution this year. Children with at-home Internet access started attending class remotely; many employees started working from home; and many organisations adopted digital business strategies to maintain operations and income. Mobile apps were built to "track and trace" the epidemic, and researchers used AI to learn more about the virus and find a vaccine. After the epidemic, Internet traffic in certain nations jumped 60%.

Digital Exclusion

Internet and digital technology sustain public, economic, and social life. We work, interact, consume, study, entertain, and access public services differently now. Digital exclusion persists due to uneven access and use. Exclusion prevents full social participation. The gap between connected and unconnected people risks increasing. Who is digitally excluded and how the internet and digital skills

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affect people's life depends on how much and how often they use the internet (Robert Sanders, 2020). Socially isolated people have less internet, gadget, and online service access. Poor people have restricted access yet are more likely to use libraries. Those in both categories suffer most and have little or no use.(Helsper et al., 2008).

Caste Based Digital Exclusion in India

The digital caste divide becomes relevant in India, where caste groups have huge socioeconomic discrepancies. India doesn't study digital caste disparity. This study uses nationally representative survey data to examine the first- and second-level digital gaps between impoverished caste groups and others. This article analyses caste-based inequalities in socioeconomic characteristics that contribute to the digital divide. In India, underprivileged caste groups have a big digital gap. Non-linear decomposition results demonstrate that India's digital divide is rooted in socioeconomic hardship. Education and economic differences account for almost half of the caste-based digital gap. This report emphasises the need to address educational and financial inequality across India's caste groupings to close the digital divide (Rajam et al., 2021).

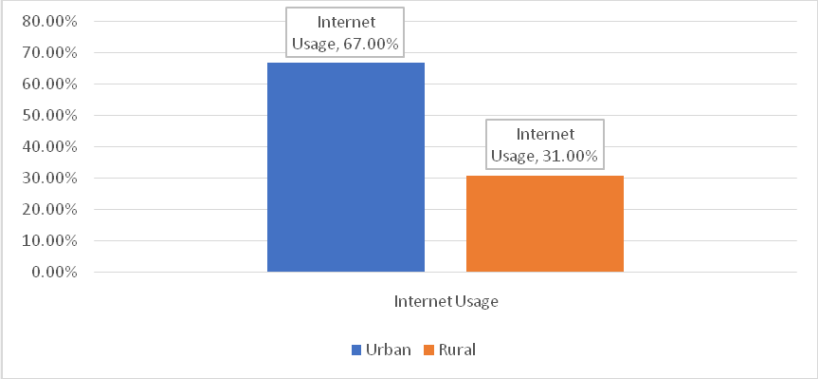
Material and Methods

In this study, the digital divide between different social groups in India was looked at. A meta-analytical study was used to find out what the results were. Researchers used information from different reports and findings from the COVID-19 era. The study looked at the first-level digital divide (access to computers and the Internet) and the second-level digital divide (soft skills to use computers and the Internet) between disadvantaged caste groups and others. Using a method called "nonlinear decomposition," this paper also shows how the digital divide between these groups is caused by differences in socioeconomic factors that are based on caste.

Research Findings

Mobile Owning in India: Digital space has become inescapable. Technology has enhanced access to basic services, knowledge, and markets. This is just one side of the story—the fortunate who have gadgets and uninterrupted internet at home and on their smartphones to benefit from being online. The marginalised are those who aren't online. The technologically disconnected are left behind by this change. Technology and digitalization enrich the privileged but create a digital gap.

Figure 1: Geographical Wise Distribution of Internet Usage



The result clearly explored that; household income played a major role in order to explore the internet usage. And also, network availability is another important factor regard to usage of internet.

Caste based digital usage by the respondents

Most people lack computer access. General and OBC categories are more likely to have computer access than SC and ST. Between 2018 and 2021, the gap between general and ST is 7 to 8%.

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The percentage of SC and ST without computers hasn't changed much, while the percentage of General and OBC has (India Inequality Report 2022, 2022).

The push for online classrooms and digital technologies in elementary, secondary, and higher education precedes the pandemic, but it has gained more prominence due to influenza-induced limits on physical gatherings and venues. National Sample Survey Office reports a "Digital Divide" among student castes and income levels. It was identified that only 9.0% of the respondents were accessed online classes using computer/laptop with internet, and 25.0% of the respondent's used internet with other than computer devices, viz., mobile phone, tab etc.,

The percentage of respondents who did not own a computer or laptop was 93.5 percent during the period of January to April 2018, and it grew to 96.6 percent by the end of 2021, showing a pandemic-induced deprivation of digital services. Only 2.7% of households that are in the bottom 20% in terms of income have access to a computer, while 8.9% of households that are in the top 20% in terms of income have access to Internet facilities. These percentages compare to 27.6% and 50.5 %, respectively, in the top 20% of households in terms of wealth. A person with a post-graduate degree or a PhD is forty percent more likely to own a computer than an individual who has not completed any level of post-secondary education. Patriarchal norms, in addition to other forms of social discrimination, prevent women from gaining access to digital services. The more important trend in the data is also reflected in recent incidents in the news, such as reports that girls and women face prejudice while trying to access phones and computers. The percentage of men who have phones is higher than the percentage of women who do; by the end of 2021, 61 percent of men will have a mobile device, compared to 31 percent of females; this is a gap of 30 percent and indicates a significant gendered digital divide.

The highest percentage of respondents who have access to a phone are salaried permanent workers at close to 94 percent, whereas the percentage of jobless people who have access to a phone is less than 50 percent. Education is a constitutionally protected right, but in today's world, where education is increasingly delivered digitally, those who lack access to digital resources are at a greater risk of falling behind in their studies. According to the findings of the study, more than 56 percent of children with impairments were having difficulty attending their regular lessons. It was reported that only 4% of households belonging to SC/ST were regularly using the internet for educational purposes, whereas this number was 15% among households belonging to other castes. Additionally, 57.6% of adolescent girls believed that boys had easier access to digital facilities in schools and colleges.

The process of digitalization cannot be postulated as the solution for the inherent issues of the physical world in a nation that is beset by significant levels of socio-economic inequality. When half of the population needs access to devices, the internet, and technological know-how in order to transition to a digital world, this becomes a particularly troublesome situation. The digital divide in India is contributing to the country's already rising socioeconomic disparities. The growing inequality that may be traced back to factors like as gender, caste, religion, social class, and geographic region is also reflected in the digital domain. People who lack access to electronics and the internet are further excluded from society since it is more difficult for them to obtain education, health care, and other public services. This cycle of inequality that never seems to end must be broken.It is imperative that the government invest in digital infrastructure to reduce the cost of Internet connection and work toward expanding access to mobile phones, particularly for marginalised castes and women. This would entail making digital services accessible to the general population and considering the internet as a public utility, as opposed to a luxury amenity reserved for the wealthy.

"Alarmingly, India's increasing disparities based on caste, religion, gender, social status, and geographic location are being replicated in the digital realm," According to a research, in 2021, 95

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percent of salaried permanent workers will have a phone, whereas just 50 percent of the unemployed (willing and looking for employment) will have a phone. Contrary to popular opinion, the results suggest a decline in rural areas' use of digital gadgets. Before the outbreak, only 3% of rural residents owned a computer. "Since the conclusion of the epidemic, this number has reduced to 1%. In metropolitan areas, just 8% of residents have access to a computer "mputer." The use of digital technology in the delivery of essential services such as education and healthcare is indicative of the digital divide and its impact on the nation. Oxfam India's chief executive officer, Amitabh Behar, stated: "The digital divide exacerbates India's growing inequality. The digital environment reflects inequality based on caste, religion, gender, socioeconomic class, and geographic location. The inability to access education, health care, and public services exacerbates the marginalisation of those who lack access to technology and the Internet. It is necessary to break this cycle of inequality."

The study advised that the government's attempts to minimise India's current income inequality by improving the incomes of the poor become effective and meaningful. This can be achieved by instituting a competitive minimum wage, decreasing the indirect tax burden on residents, and providing universal health and education services. Availability is the most important factor in bridging the digital divide, according to the report, which observes that internet connectivity in remote and difficult-to-reach areas is inconsistent, poor, or nonexistent. Providers must ensure accessibility via public WiFi/Internet access points and community networks. It was mentioned that community networks are a subset of crowdsourced networks that are intended to be open, free, and unbiased, and frequently rely on shared infrastructure as a shared resource.

Social exclusion and digital divide

The revelation that a ninth-grade student allegedly committed suicide for this reason has shocked the state.The government of Kerala has declared that immediate action will be done to offer resources to the excluded. However, Dalit and tribal activists, scholars, and many others who have worked closely with historically oppressed communities warn that the occurrence is a terrible example of how the digital divide extends social exclusion.Despite being hailed for its efforts to tackle the pandemic, Kerala has been criticised for neglecting to prioritise kids from marginalised areas despite its rush to begin schools on June 1. Devika faces government discrimination.

A large percentage of students lack the resources to participate in virtual sessions. Most students are Dalit or Adivasi. Inconsistently, the state government says these kids' problems can be corrected gradually. The digital divide has become a kind of social exclusion, as students from marginalised groups and castes are left behind (Neethu Joseph, 2020). Another case was found, it was reported in The Hindu, on the title of "'No end to tribal students' struggle with digital divide, Online classes with little access and poor awareness affect academic development of tribal youth" (Praveen MP, 2021). Vijeesh K., 22, from Sulthan Bathery in Wayanad, was blocked from online lessons for about a month last year. With his mother's meagre daily wager, he couldn't recharge his phone. Additional admission meant he missed classes.

Conclusion

The present investigation looked at a number of studies in order to get to the bottom of the facts surrounding digital exclusion on the basis of caste. According to a number of publications, a significant proportion of respondents were unable to purchase digital technology due to the economic circumstances of their homes. This was especially true for respondents from economically disadvantaged classes, who faced significant barriers to access. As a result of the shutdown of COVID, which turned the entire nation of India into a digitalized learning environment, many students who belonged to scheduled tribes were unable to access online classrooms. This was due to the lower socioeconomic level that these

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students possessed. Platforms for online education receive assistance from both the public sector and the business sector. The conclusion that can be drawn from the debate up until this point is crystal clear: individuals of underprivileged castes have difficulty enrolling in online classes. Students who were enrolled in higher education institutions in India and the state of Karnataka were eligible to get a free laptop through a variety of programmes that were launched in 2016 and 2017. Nevertheless, during the years that followed, these programmes were not carried out in an adequate manner. Those who had access to their own computers participated actively in the e-learning platform. On the other hand, the government of India has launched a variety of programmes in an effort to bridge the digital divide that exists between the country's many social groups. Those with lower socioeconomic level and those who reside in more rural locations will continue to be excluded from the coverage region.

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