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## **Bridging Urban-Rural Gender Disparities: A Case Study of Women's Empowerment in Pune District for Achieving Social Equity by 2047**

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**Hemangi Dhanke<sup>1</sup> & Mr. Mohit Kumar Shrivastav<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune

Corresponding Author – Hemangi Dhanke

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### **Abstract:**

*India's gender equity has a long way to go and faces arguably its greatest challenge in bridging the urban rural divide. Empowering of women in urban and rural areas still vary quite large number among women at national level. However, according to recent studies, although urban women have advanced very much regarding education, employment and digital literacy, rural women still confront immense impediments to empowerment. It is even clearer in terms of resource access, decision making and achievement outcomes. Knowing that gender empowerment varies in urban and rural women of Pune district, India is able to reach its goal of social fairness by 2047. The research is based on the digital ethnographic approach, an approach of how 25 women (12 urban residents and 13 rural residents) live their lives through multiple digital methods (including interviews and social media analyses of 25 participants). Looking at urban and rural areas, the research analyzes empowerment due to the availability of resources, the level of authority of decision making and the accomplishments in life realized. The study provides detailed, context-based results to its narrative and thematic evaluation about the hurdles and potentials that women face with respect to distinct geographical settings. It shows the factors which influence the empowerment of women through the factors between the internet accessibility and the societal expectations, and provides important directions for public actions. These findings will allow us to join ongoing development discussions and present an advanced method for studying similar instances of gender inequity from the same social and geographical area. By 2047, the study aims to help rural and urban women overcome online and offline obstacles to empowerment and empower women across India and advise developing custom solutions to support the same.*

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**Keywords:** *Women's Empowerment; Urban-Rural Disparities; Digital Ethnography; Qualitative Research; Social Equity; Pune District; Viksit Bharat Background and Introduction*

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### **Introduction:**

With its interesting mix of urban and rural life, the Pune district can be regarded as a microcosm of the greater problems that women face all across India. The urban areas are better endowed in terms of resources and opportunities, and rural regions are tied to the traditional norms, the lack of infrastructure and digital divides. Given the diverse demographic composition of both the district and the level to which different parts of the district are developed, the case is ideal for studying the complexities of gender disparities in both urban and rural settings.

In this research, the goal is to gain a better qualitative understanding of these disparities in terms of women's lived experiences in a variety of geographical and social settings. The digital ethnographic methods used in the research will record the subtleties that characterize women

empowerment, in a more digital era, and ever-changing social dynamics. The results will add to the larger discussion on achieving social equity and inclusive development, in line with India's vision of 2047.

The research is timely especially because India moves towards a centenary of its independence – marked by the pursuit of comprehensive social equity. Given the importance of understanding and working to close these urban–rural dimensions of women's empowerment, there is a need for developing tailored interventions and policies that result in closing the empowerment gaps.

### **Literature Review:**

For the past decade, there has been extensive research on gender disparity in different socio-economic dimension, particularly on women's empowerment. It is a well-known fact that urban setting provides better access to education, healthcare, employment and digital resources and therefore contributes much to empowerment of urban women (Kabeer, 2012; Sen, 2013). On the other hand, rural areas typically have a setback due to traditional social norms, the fragile infrastructure and the weak access to digital technologies (World Bank, 2015; UNDP, 2016). There are several reports emphasizing the significance of integrating the digital in closing the urban rural divide. The digital tools such as mobile banking, mobile education platforms shall be seen as the agents of change; more so, in the resource constrained rural community (Chakraborty, 2018). According to researchers, the technology does not only open up more access to information and services but allows women to overcome traditional gender norms and broaden their decision-making abilities (Nussbaum, 2017). Empowerment is also described as a multi facet phenomenon by the latter. However, empowerment is not merely about economic independence but also about social, cultural and psychological factors (2018 Malhotra and Schuler). We also know that interventions in the realm of digital literacy have the potential to greatly increase women's self-efficacy and their ability to participate in public and in private spheres of life (Banerjee, 2019). Most existing studies on disparities methodologically have used a quantitative approach by measuring disparities through large scale surveys and indices (Buvinic and Gupta, 2016). But qualitative methods that aim to garner in depth personal narratives are increasingly used as they can provide more rich insights of women's lived experiences in situations that are immensely culturally and socially complex (Creswell 2013). This emerging trend is the focus of the present study that uses the digital ethnographic methods that provide nuanced ways of understanding the empowerment landscape in the mixed urban and rural spaces. The second important theme among these works is social networks and community support systems. Many scholars have argued that women's empowerment is mediated through the family, community and digital networks that either reinforce or transform the existing societal norms of the country (Putnam, 2000; Bandura, 2001). The insights are key in building tailor made interventions respectful and practical in various settings. Although research on urban women's empowerment has made significant progress, however, less is known about that in the rural area. The fact that the literature remains mute on this is a testimony that studies need to be carried out that focus on highlighting the challenges that rural women face in the wake of rapid digitalization. This review reviews the evidence on women's empowerment by integrating findings from different study's outcomes, outlines the current state of the art, and articulates gaps that the present study attempts to address. Summing up, there is a sufficiently strong theoretical basis in the existing literature for investigating gender disparities in empowerment. With the digital technology blending beautifully with the traditional socio-economic variables, there is a great scope of further exploration of the potential risks across heterogeneous settings namely the

Pune district in this case. The purpose of this qualitative exploration is therefore to extend the literature by focusing on more nuanced and context specific experiences in making their contribution to achieving social equity in India by 2047.

### **Research Methodology:**

#### **3.1 Research Design:**

This study uses qualitative research design with an interpretative approach to investigate urban rural gender disparities in women's empowerment. The research employs digital ethnographic methods and enable in depth exploration within the research, beyond geographical and pandemic related imposed constraints. This allows rich data collection using several online platforms in a rigorous manner.

#### **3.2 Sample Selection and Size:**

25 women participants are purposively sampled from urban and rural areas of Pune district. It includes in the sample distribution: • Urban Areas (12 participants): 6 participants from core urban areas from Pune city, 6 from peri-urban areas • Rural Areas (13 participants): 7 participants from developed villages, 6 from remote villages. Criteria for participant selection include age group - 18 to 45 years of age; Digital literacy level minimum (ability to use smartphones) and residence in respective areas for at least 5 years.

#### **3.3 Data Collection Methods:**

The study employs four primary data collection methods:

1. • In depth Digital Interviews (IDIs): • Semi structured interviews over video conference • Duration of interview is about 60-90 minutes per participant • Personal narratives and experience
2. Digital Diaries: • Eight-week documentation period • Weekly entries through WhatsApp or email • Emphasis on daily experiences and challenges
3. Virtual Focus Group Discussions (VFGDs): • Two separate groups (urban and rural) • 6–7 participants per group • Discussion of collective experiences
4. Social Media Narrative Analysis: • Analysis of participants' social media content • Platform usage patterns and engagement • Digital expression assessment.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis:**

Thematic analysis is conducted following Braun and Clarke (2006) six phase approach to analyzing the collected data.

1. Familiarization with data through multiple readings
2. Initial coding using NVivo software
3. Theme identification and categorization
4. Theme review and refinement
5. Theme definition and naming
6. Final analysis and report writing

It involves the analysis of the patterns in terms of the experiences, challenges, and opportunities of empowerment that exists in urban and rural contexts.

#### **3.5 Ethical Considerations:**

The study adheres to strict ethical guidelines:

- Consents for all participants were informed.
- Maintained data confidentiality and anonymity.
- Secure storage of digital data
- Withdrawal of the right at any stage
- Cultural sensitivity in data collection and analysis

### 3.6 Limitations:

The study also recognizes the following limitations: (1) digital access may constrain some rural participants (2) there may be self-selection bias due to digital literacy requirement (3) it may be limited in generalizability due to sample size, and (4) the study utilizes technology dependent approaches to data collection.

### Results & Discussions:

Several key themes which differentiate urban and rural women's experiences in the Pune district were analyzed through the qualitative data gathered from 25 participants. The digital literacy and access to digital resource showed wide disparity was one of the most significant findings. Digital engagement was higher among urban participants who indicated that the availability of more advanced digital tools and facilities in cities enabled them to do that. Unlike rural participants, these individuals often had providers who lacked access to a smartphone or slow internet connectivity and therefore, could not participate in the digital form of it. The second big theme sprung from the role of social networks and community support as a mechanism through which one was potentially empowered. Formal and informal support systems that augmented women's access to information and opportunities were often cited by urban women. Nevertheless, rural respondents put great stress on community ties and traditional support networks but these sometimes restricted their embrace of digital practices. The virtual focus group discussions with mothers of different ages overemphasized that the empowerment landscapes were too complex. Both settings' participants found cultural norms, economic conditions, and social expectations to have bearing on the phenomenon. Yet, in the cities, the relationship between the two was more pronounced, and more digital resources were able to connect people to learning, financial services, and health. Though acknowledging the advantages offered by digital enhancement, rural participants of this study continued to battle in an environment where infrastructural problems prevailed. Pattern of digital expression by participants diverged from each other as shown by analysis of their social media content using narrative analysis. Urban women talked more publicly about empowerment and published their success stories online in order to contribute to a generalized digital discourse. Unlike rural women, who tended to talk about local issues in community forums and document them for discussion, they had a distributed platform to express their concerns. Thus, this digital divide comes from access to the technologies as well as the perceiving of digital media as a tool of empowerment. In addition, the meaning of empowerment was shown to be multidimensional along economic, social and psychological dimensions. In urban women, digital literacy, economic opportunities and access to formal financial institutions are closely tied to empowerment. For their part, rural women envisioned empowerment through traditional community role, support networks in the community and 'increasingly digital access'. While these differences existed, both groups wanted interventions that would target these divides and equalize them with regards to resource access. These findings suggest the need for digital literacy programs based on the rural communities' needs. Such interventions would allow more people to participate in digital platforms providing access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. Additionally, the study shows that though digital engagement does have the potential to empower women, it is not a panacea to women empowerment and needs to be supported by wider reforms in social and economic spheres along with infrastructural development. The results show that in general can have combined effect of digital access and supportive social structure while provide significant obstacles for rural women's empowerment. The insights of this examine reveal the necessity for contextualized strategies that take care of each digital and cultural repercussions of

empowerment. It posits that while technology is a catalyst for enabling empowerment, behind such a change are the underlying social and economic factors that need to be attended alongside for sustainable change. However, the shift in integrating digital tools into the daily lives, presents itself as a double-edged sword, marking possibility for advancement in economic as well as social status, yet also an aggravator of the existing inequalities and can enhance it to unacceptable degree if it is not accessible to all. The research points to the need for additional research on the part digital policy and development of infrastructure plays in leveling the playing field of empowerment, particularly in the rural areas where the traditional handicap still prevails. Overall, these results form part of a wider literature on digital empowerment, and also serve as a roadmap for future interventions to decrease urban-rural digital divides.

### Conclusion:

Overall, this study gives a qualitative insight into the difference of women's empowerment between urban and rural parts in the Pune district. The results indicate that there is a huge digital divide in the current society based on the extreme variations in digital literacy, support networks for socialization as well as access to basic services. Urban women enjoy support (both physical, such as information communication technologies, and social, such as support networks) where available as opposed to rural women who continue to encounter access problems while existing norms hinder their efforts. As such, policymakers and other community leaders ought to work together in order to design appropriate and targeted digital literacy programs and enhance infrastructure to suit the specific rural populations. The interventions should not only be limited to the technological access but also address the factors of socio economic and cultural importance in empowerment. Closing these gaps can serve to create a more inclusive, equitable environment for all women and therefore be contributing to the broader national vision of social equity in 2047. Future research should then investigate how empowerment can be viewed in its entirety and include how digital recommendations and traditional approaches work toward effecting sustainable change.

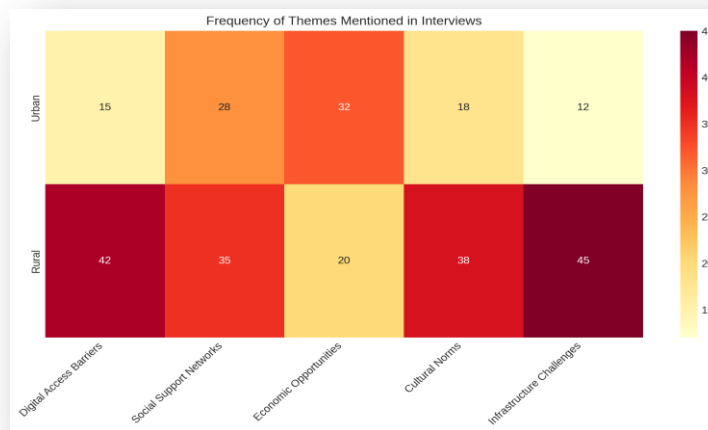
### Tables and Charts:

#### ➤ Key Findings Table

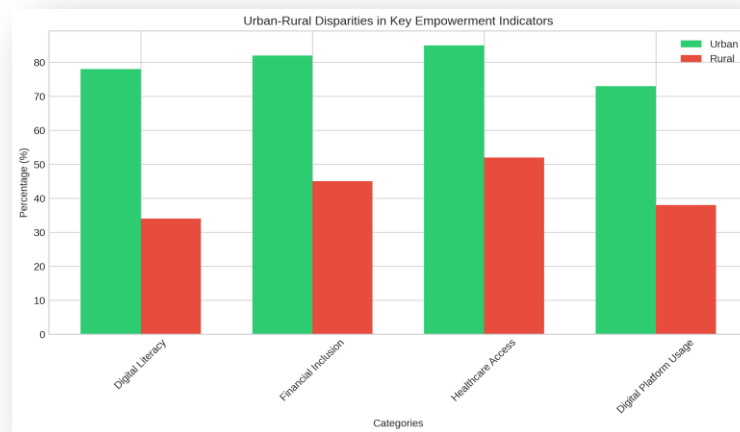
Domain	Urban Characteristics	Rural Characteristics	Implications
Digital Engagement	High smartphone usage, regular internet access	Limited connectivity, basic phone usage	Need for improved rural digital infrastructure
Financial Services	Access to formal banking, digital payments	Reliance on informal financial systems	Financial literacy programs are needed
Healthcare Access	Telemedicine adoption, online consultations	Traditional healthcare preferences	Hybrid healthcare delivery systems are required
Social Networks	Formal and informal support systems	Strong community ties, limited digital networks	The balance between digital and traditional networks



➤ Heatmap: Frequency of Themes Mentioned in Interviews



➤ Bar Chart: Urban-Rural Disparities in Key Empowerment Indicators



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