A Sociological Study of Gender Inequality in the Cyberspace: With Special References to District Satara

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Abstract

The concept of the global village has come into existence with the development of computer and internet technology in the 21st century. The Internet and computer technology have changed the face of human culture as well as the traditional way of life. Mobile, smartphone, and internet technologies play an important role in our daily lives. Social media is the most popular and powerful platform for our daily life in cyberspace as it can reach a large number in any part of the world. It has broken down barriers to political, social, and cultural boundaries around the world. We can have social contacts, social relationships, friends with people, and talk to them, however, we can express ourselves through social media on the internet. You can share your thoughts, ideas, opinions, feelings, research, social and cultural events, knowledge, and various other information through social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) all over the world.

This paper outlines the gender gap between the Internet and social media in the digital realm. The present research is based on an online survey of 500 selected social media users from rural and urban areas of the Satara districts research concludes is that social media and the internet can be great tools for women's empowerment, but lack of opportunities for internet usage, patriarchal culture, computer illiteracy, low computer skills, fear of online sexual harassment, increase in cyber-violence and cyber inequality are the main reasons behind gender gap in digital space.

Keywords: Gender inequality, cyberspace, digital space internet technology, computer illiteracy

1. Introduction

Sociology is a logical science that studies human society as well as explores new trends and currents in the global community. Sociology focuses on the study of how people affect society and how society affects people. Today, in the 21st century, computer and internet technology have become an integral part of social and cultural life. Computer technology led to the emergence and development of the Internet culture. Internet culture has crossed the political, economic, educational, and socio-cultural boundaries of global human life. Computer and internet technology have transformed the world into a small global village. The use of smartphones and social media in India has grown exponentially over the last decade and these digital technologies have become commonplace in both rural and urban areas. YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat are popular online platforms for teenagers and young adults. Social media has played an important role in creating and developing the Global Village in the 21st century. The rise of Internet technology and social media has removed barriers to political, social, and cultural boundaries around the world. Social media is the most popular and powerful platform for our daily life in cyberspace as it can reach a large number in any part of the world. We can have social contacts, social relationships, friends with people, and talk to them, however,

we can express ourselves through social media on the internet. We can spread our thoughts, ideas, opinions, feelings, research, social and cultural programs, knowledge, and various other information through social media. (Facebook WhatsApp, Snapdeal, Instagram, Twitter, etc.). Social media services like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tick-Tock, etc. are virtual environments where people make their groups and express themselves. To be present in modern culture is to be present on social media. In short, cyber technology has changed the face of human culture as well as the traditional way of life. The internet and social media are now a daily part of our modern life.

The development of digital communication technology in India has created a new wave of sociological excitement among young researchers and thousands of years of social interaction. According to the Global Digital Report, digital, smartphones and social media have become an essential part of modern human life, in the 21st century. The report says that almost seventy percent of the world's population is connected to the internet. Worldwide, more than almost six billion people now use mobile phones. Almost five billion people now use the Internet daily live, also social media users have crossed almost the figure of four billion. The report says that more than 60 percent of the world's population is connected to the Internet and social media. With over four billion Internet

users, an annual growth rate of up to 9%. The report estimates that by 2020, more than five billion people will use the Internet.

The following table shows the global annual digital growth current 3 years.

- **Digital around the World 2018 to 2020**

Table 1: The table shows the global annual digital growth for the three years 2018 to 2020.

Year	January-2018	Annual Digital Growth	January-2019	Annual Digital Growth	January-2020	Annual Digital Growth
Total Population	7.59 billion	-	7.67 billion	+84 million +1.1%	7.75 billion	82 million +1.1%
Mobile phone Users	5.1 billion	+218 million +4%	5.13 billion	+100 million +2%	5.19 billion	+128 million +2.5%
Internet users	4.21 billion	248 million +7%	4.38 billion	+367 million +9.1%	4.54 billion	+301million +7.1%
Social media Users	3.19 billion	362 million 13%	3.48 billion	+288 million +9%	3.80 billion	+321 million +9%
Mobile Social media users	2.95 billion	360 million +14%	3.25 billion	+ 297 million +10%	--	+304 million 8.75
Mobile share Total internet times	--	49.5%	--	48%	--	50%

Source: based on static information to global digital report 2020

2. Methodology

In this research, an online survey was conducted to check the authenticity of the use of social media, and approximate statistics were applied to find gender differences in the sample size involving 500 respondents. The research is based on a convenient online survey of 250 Males and 250 Women from selected social media users in 5 cities and 5 villages. By sending the questionnaire through Google Form Link. Most of the respondents are citizens, who are daily users of social media and the internet. The questionnaire is designed to understand the gender gap between the Internet and social media use.

The following table shows the list of respondents from each city and village in district Satara. Google forms included questions about gender inequality in digital space. The respondents were selected from common citizens. 250 male and 250 female citizens were studied, who are active social media users.

Table 2: The table shows selected important cities and villages of the Satara district.

| S. No.	250 Urban respondents		250 Rural Respondents	
1	Satara	50	Koparde	50
2	Karad	50	Shahapur	50
3	Phaltan	50	Shamgaon	50
4	Patan	50	Govare	50
5	Umbraj	50	Koregaon	50

Secondary data is based on statistical information from Kantar-IMRE & IAMAI, GSMA report, and web index reports.

3. Gender Inequality in Cyberspace

India has a population of 1.37 billion and almost half of the population is women. Social reform and the efforts of the Indian Constitution have improved the status of women in our country in terms of equal rights. The Internet and social media are the most important and powerful tools for women's empowerment in the 21st century. Today, Internet technology and social media directly impact women's development, and their voices can be heard and reached globally. In modern society, the internet and social media are strengthening the empowerment of women, however, the digital economy is creating various employment and job opportunities for women and girls equal to men. Digital education has captured the world's entire knowledge in our mobiles, resulting in the acceleration of women's movements. Social media is an amazing and effective tool for the movement and activists of women human rights defenders around the world. It can bring thousands of people together on an issue, it can help educate another group of people about an issue they never knew about. The use of social media by women brings great opportunities for gender equality, rights, and women's empowerment.

However, in today's evolving interconnected modern world women are being left behind. Especially in developing countries, Asian countries have less use of technology for women than men, especially mobile and social media. The table below shows that in Central, East, and West Africa, there is a big difference in the ratio of gender gap among social media users. However, in South Africa and Central America, the proportion of men and women social media users is similar. The proportion of men and women using social media in Central, South, and East Asia is not much different, however, it is felt in West Asia. Even in the United States, countries with advanced technology have 9% gender inequality. (Global Digital Report-2020) [23]

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- **World-Wide Gender Gap in Digital Space**
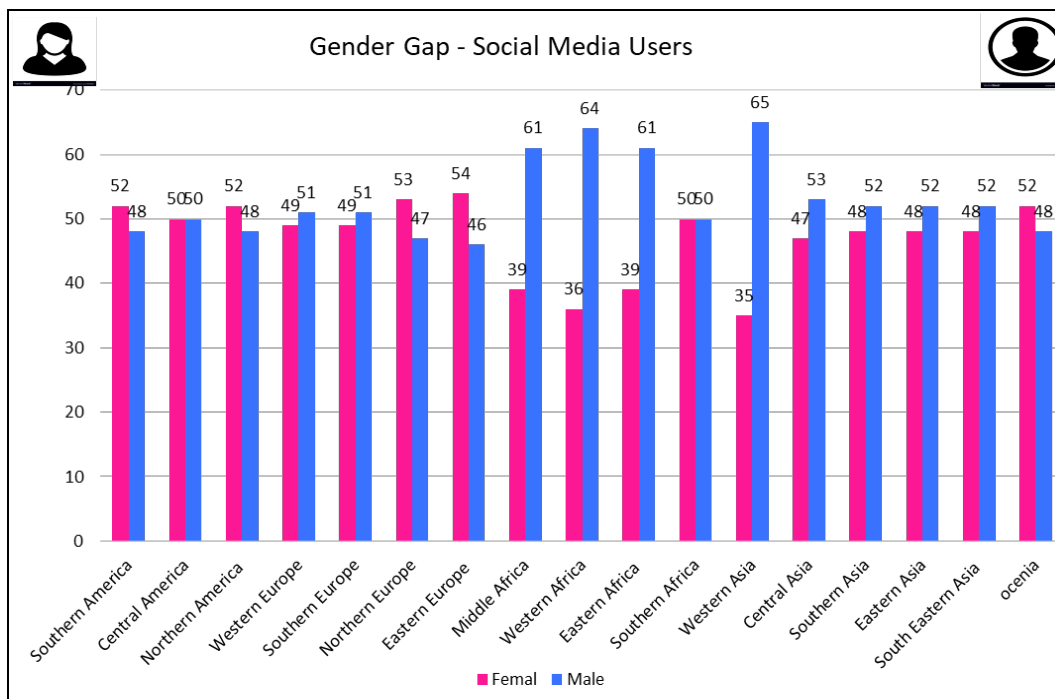
Source: based on statistical information to Global Digital Report-2020

Fig 1: Gender gap of social media users.

According to the World Wide Web Foundation, gender inequality is a major component of the digital divide. The foundation says the data available shows disparities in the content on Wikipedia, from bias and activity to visibility and interaction inequality on Twitter, and gender inequality within the professional gender gap on LinkedIn. (World Wide Web Foundation, the Web, and Rising Global Inequality) [24]. This report suggests that the way genders are represented on social media creates clear distinctions, for example, ambitions, prospects, life expectancy, sports, articles, activities, etc.

The following table shows the gender distribution of social media users around the world by July 2021 through the platform. The Statista Report 2021 found that Snapchat had more female users than male users, accounting for about 56% of the platform's audience. Males constitute 56.4% of the total Facebook users and females 43.6%. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter represented the majority of male users, while Instagram reported that male and female users had the same proportion of their users as of July 2021 [24].

Table 3: Table shows the percentage of using social media according to gender.

Gender	Snapchat	Instagram	Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter
Women	56%	51.4%	43.6%	43..1	31.9%
Men	43%	8.6%	56.4%	56.9%	68.1%

Source: based on static information from Statista 2021

3.1 Gender Inequality in the Cyberspace of India

India has a lower number of female internet and social media users than male internet users. Female internet users are half of the 2.58 million male internet users and the digital gender gap is more pronounced in rural India. This paper outlines the gender gap between the Internet and social media in the digital realm. In Asia-Pacific, India has had the highest sex gap in recent years, with a 40.4% gender gap and only 15% of women users of the Internet and social media, compared to 25% of men users (GSMA-2021) [25]. Indian women use the internet at 18% and social media 05% less than men. 19% more women than men do not have a mobile phone. About 50% of women in India are not online and 19% less active than men online. According to this report, 81% of Indian women are not aware of safety and security, so Indian women are a soft target by cyber-criminal. The categories of online crime targeting women have expanded and the wave has neither left India alone. The Constitution of India guarantees women equal rights to life, education, food, health and work, and free speech but digital space is a very dangerous area for women, especially Indian women. Some research suggests that women may be at greater risk than men due to the negative aspects of social media. Women, especially young girls, with limited ability to regulate themselves, family pressure, and sensitivity to peer pressure, are at risk of experiencing bad and ugly experiences online that can negatively affect the development of their healthy adults and lead to depression and anxiety disorders.

The report says that gender inequality is a reality in India. 64:36 Male-female is the ratio of Internet users in rural India. The percentage of female internet users in India is 29%, with 114 million more men having mobile handsets and 25% more having SIM cards. Women often need to get permission for a handset, which is a sign of their limited autonomy. The report concluded that while more than one billion Facebook users use it through mobile, 81% of Indian women never used the internet on their phones. The report states that the 24.3 million female users on Facebook are the most active in the 18-24 age group compared to 73.8 male users.

The following table shows the current digital activity of women and the gender inequality in online digital India.

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* **Mobile Ownership and Online Activity of Mobile Internet Users in India-2018**

Table 4: Table shows the percentage of mobile ownership and online activity according to the gender in India.

S. No.	Mobile ownership & Online Activity	Men (in %)	Women (in %)	Gender gap (in %)
1	Mobile ownership.	84%	65%	19%
2	Mobile internet users	26%	8%	18%
3	Use mobile internet	31%	13%	18%
4	Online activity	70%	51%	19%
5	Send receive SMS/MMS	46%	35%	11%
6	Make receive calls	77%	78%	01%
7	Use internet messaging	70%	51%	19%
8	Use social media	54%	49%	05%
9	Browse the internet	53%	51%	02%
10	Download/use the App	42%	44%	02%
11	Make/receive video calls	57%	57%	00%
12	Awareness of safety and security	41%	19%	22%

Source: Based on statistical information from GSMA Report-2019.
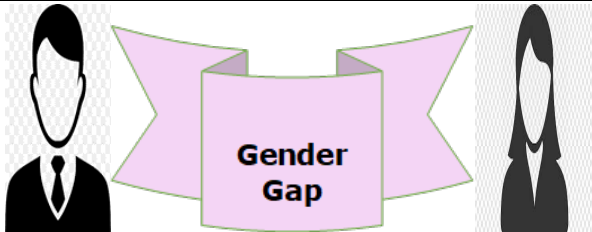
3.1.2 Gender Ratio of Rural & Urban India and Metro-Cities

Rural India still lags far behind in terms of digital infrastructure, online purchasing power, and use of social media. The Kantar-IMRE and IAMAI report state that one-third of Internet users in urban and rural India are male. In rural and urban India, the number of women using the internet and social media is lower than that of men. Urban women use social media more than rural women. 40% of female internet users are in urban India and 33% of female internet users are in rural India. The difference between rural and urban female internet users in 2019 is about 7%. Rural men and women use the Internet 7% less than urban men and women. The report states that by 2020, the majority of social media users in India were male and in rural areas. About 58% of rural Internet users that year were men, while only 42% of rural users were women. In comparison, urban areas have more female social media users, with 43% and 57% of urban male users. The majority of social media users in India are male and rural. About 58% of rural social media users were male, while only 42% of rural users that year were female.
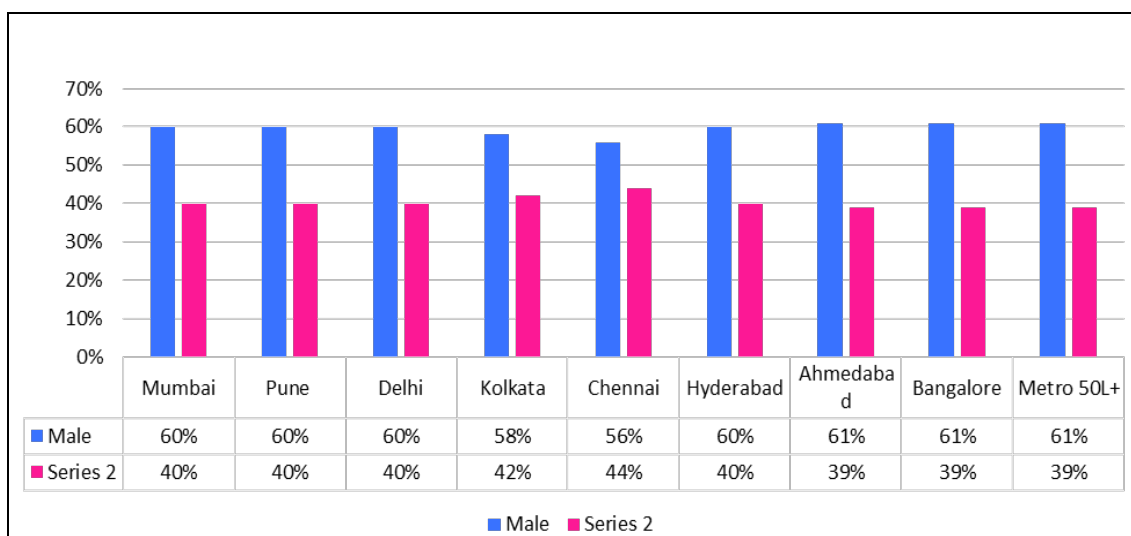
Table 5: The table shows the digital gender inequality in rural and urban India.

Gender	Rural India	Urban India
Male	60%	67%
Female	33%	40%

Source: *Based on statistical information to Kantar-IMRE & IAMAI-2019.*

The following table shows gender-wise internet and social media users in Metro-Cities of India.

	Mumbai	Pune	Delhi	Kolkata	Chennai	Hyderabad	Ahmedabad	Bangalore	Metro 50L+
Male	60%	60%	60%	58%	56%	60%	61%	61%	61%
Series 2	40%	40%	40%	42%	44%	40%	39%	39%	39%

Source: *Based on statistical information from Kantar-IMRE & IAMAI*

Fig 2: Gender wise internet users in Metro-Cities

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The number of Internet users in India is around 80 crores. Even though only 40% of Internet users in India are women, masculinity is still manifesting itself in the virtual world where women are frequently targeted and stigmatized. A survey found that 76% of women under the age of 35 face online harassment and 1 in 10 women under the age of 25 are targeted for pornography and/or sexual abuse in return (sextortion). The table below shows the gender inequality among Indian women in the digital society, social media platforms represent the public, open space in which they can escape, where they can exist beyond persecution, and in which they feel able to express and build friendships. However, the online participation of women is restricted by criteria that allow cultures of sexual violence to be maintained offline and online, while online acts of gender-based violence are severely growing.

Table 6: The table above shows the digital gender disparity on Facebook, a popular app in India.

Age group	Female	Male	Not using Facebook
13-17 years	5.5%	19.5%	75.00%
18-24 years	23%	73.8%	04.00%
25-34 years	18.5%	62.6%	19.89%
35-44 years	6.0%	22.6%	71.04%
45-54 years	2.6%	8.6%	88.08%
65 years and older	0.6%	1.8%	97.65%

Source: *Based on statistical information from Kantar-IMRE & IAMAI*

Digital gender inequality is a sociological fact in India, it also appears on social media. Today, 1.14 million more men have mobile handsets and 25% more SIM cards than women. There are only 23.4 million female users on Facebook's popular social media site, compared to 73.8 million men in the most active age group of 18-24. Analyzing 23,350 tweets on the topic of a ban on Hijab in eight days, it was found that only 7.72% of tweets were made by women and 46.15% by men. This ratio shows the gender gap on Facebook and Twitter of men and women users (The Tribune-Tuesday, 22 March 2022) [26]

In short, Gender equality is not only the right to freedom for women, but also it is a concept of civilized social prosperity, which is intended for a society that provides sustainable and inclusive development for women. Digital technology is opening up the possibilities of freedom and rights for women and girls. In just two decades, the Internet has revolutionized and is considered a major force for women's empowerment; However, digital access is not shared equally. According to a 2017 UNICEF report, in India, the sexual problem on the Internet is serious and only 29% of all social media users are women. 42% of the "digital gender gap" in India is beyond the global divide. Gender inequality is a sociological fact in cyberspace. In digital culture, they feel insecure because it is virtual and they have to deal with strangers who can attack them physically and mentally. Virtual sexuality, online sexual harassment, online defamation and bullying, online stalking, online grooming, and fear of morphing are the main causes of gender inequality in cyberspace.

4. Data Analysis and Findings
In the modern era, digital transformation offers new opportunities for women's social and economic empowerment and can contribute to greater gender equality. Internet, social media platforms, mobile phones, and digital financial services provide women with various opportunities. Social media can help women to express themselves, find employment opportunities, fight for their freedom, earn extra income, gain knowledge and general information and involve themselves in the global women's movement.

However, the benefits of internet technology and social media are currently not evenly balanced between social groups and gender. There are many root causes of digital gender inequalities, including internet access barriers, the capacity of internet cost, lack of technological and computer education, as well as underlying prejudice and pressure from socio-cultural norms, fear of cybercrime, and online sexual violence. For gender-based digital exclusion. Women are much less active on social media than men because they engage in domestic work. in India, especially in rural India internet cost or expensive internet services is a major barrier to the online entry for women and girl Also, the sophistication and efficiency of the technology increase, and the digital gender segmentation increase with the cost of ownership. Another important reason women do not use the internet or social media more than men is that women are in their daily family life. Women think "what needs its ". In India, almost a fifth of women believe that the Internet is not suitable for them, due to various cultural reasons. In India, around 12% of women report not using the Internet due to negative social perceptions.

Digital illiteracy creates more problems for women and girls in their ability to use social media. Most women use straightforward and simple online platform services, which are more familiar with their use and usage such as WhatsApp, Skype, and YouTube. Most women do not use Twitter and Facebook because the process of access is very difficult and faces unknown persons, which can be good or bad. For women and girls in India, security-related issues are the main reason for not using social media because, women and girls who use the Internet may be exposed to additional risks in

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cyberspace, including cyber stalking, online sexual harassment, cyberbullying, sextortion, and online harassment. This paper outlines the gender inequalities on the internet and social media internet and social media users in district Satara. In this research, an online survey was conducted to detect the use of social media, and approximate statistics were applied to find gender differences in the sample size involving 500 respondents. The research is based on an online survey conducted for the convenience of 125 male and 250 female respondents from selected social media users in 5 villages and 5 cities in district Satara. 250 male and 250 female citizens were selected from the respondents in each college by sending the questionnaire through a google form link. The questionnaire is designed to understand the gender gap between n Internet and social media use.

The following table shows that, the gender gap in cyberspace in urban areas in district Satara.

Table 7: Table shows the digital gender disparity in rural and urban areas of the Satara District. Most of the women in Satara urban areas do not have mobile phones.

Internet and social media users	Satara		Karad		Patan		Umbraj		Phaltan	
M= Male-125 F=Female125	M-25	F-25	M-25	F-25	M-25	F-25	M-25	F-25	M-25	F-25
Mobile Ownership	25	21	25	19	25	17	25	14	25	13
Internet Users	25	11	25	14	25	08	25	06	25	11
Social, Media Users	25	19	25	19	25	17	25	09	25	07
Online Activity	21	07	25	21	24	07	22	11	21	09
E-mail & Gmail Accounts	24	17	22	13	19	11	22	06	19	04
SMS/MMS	25	09	25	07	22	08	21	11	19	07
Phone calling & receiving	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Video calling	19	03	18	07	17	04	22	06	17	05
Entertainment	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Facebook	21	13	18	11	16	04	15	03	19	02
WhatsApp	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Instagram	21	20	24	23	19	11	18	11	12	07
YouTube	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Twitter	13	04	17	03	22	01	06	00	07	00
Online Dating	09	02	07	01	02	00	04	00	01	00
Online Shopping	17	21	20	17	21	18	15	18	21	18
Purpose of Education	21	19	24	17	14	04	13	03	12	06
Purpose of Business	29	00	13	00	24	00	21	00	14	00

Source: https://forms.gle/d3jdF8GemunzksBY8

The following table shows that, the gender gap in cyberspace   in rural areas in district Satara.

Table 8: Table shows the digital gender disparity in rural and urban areas of the Satara District. Most of the women in Satara urban areas do not have mobile phones.

Internet and social media users	Koparde		Shahapur		Shamgao		Govare		Koregaon	
M= Male 125 F=Female 125	M-25	F-25	M 25	F-25	M-25	F-25	M-25	F-25	M-25	F-25
Mobile Ownership	25	19	25	21	25	17	25	14	25	11
Internet Users	25	13	25	07	25	04	25	06	25	01
E-mail & Gmail Accounts	11	03	18	09	19	03	08	00	04	00
Social, Media Users	25	16	25	14	25	09	25	04	25	03
Online Activity	11	03	11	00	05	00	13	00	05	00
SMS/MMS	14	00	11	00	12	00	09	00	05	00
Phone calling & receiving	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Video calling	07	00	09	00	04	00	05	00	08	00
Entertainment	12	01	16	04	15	01	16	04	18	00
Facebook	04	01	05	00	03	00	01	02	02	00
WhatsApp	25	12	25	09	25	11	23	17	25	04
Instagram	03	00	12	00	06	00	05	00	11	00
YouTube	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Twitter	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
Online Dating	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00

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Online Shopping	15	00	14	00	11	00	12	00	11	00
Purpose of Education	10	03	11	01	05	00	05	00	05	00
Purpose of Business	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00

Source: https://forms.gle/d3jdF8GemunzksBY8

Table 7 and Table 8 above shows the digital gender disparity in rural and urban areas of the Satara District. Most of the women in Satara urban areas do not have mobile phones. Female respondents said that they use the phones of close relatives. Internet usage is low and phones are used only to contact relatives. It is the same situation in rural areas. Social media use of Facebook and Twitter is low among Satara urban women as most of the women said that it is difficult to use the app, while some women answered that Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are unsafe for them. In rural areas of Satara, women said that Facebook and Twitter are not in use. Very few women use this app. WhatsApp usage is high among urban women because people they know are on WhatsApp. WhatsApp is mostly used by women in rural areas. Most urban women feel insecure during video calls. Rural women do not use video calls. Most urban women watch YouTube for entertainment. Even in rural areas, women use the internet the most to watch YouTube. Instagram is a popular app in rural and urban areas but the proportion of women is less than men. Online dating is few and far between in Satara and Karad cities. But rural and urban women are not online dating. Most of the women answered that they don't know about online dating. Online shopping is more prevalent in urban areas. Women only order clothes and cosmetics. Women in rural areas do not shop online.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to know the actual status of the gender gap in cyberspace and to evaluate the reasons for it. These research findings that_

1. Digital gender inequality is higher in rural than urban areas. People in rural areas mostly use the internet for WhatsApp. Digital illiteracy is high in rural areas. Facebook and Twitter are not used. The amount of online shopping is very low. Internet and social media use by women is very low.
2. Girls and women are allowed to use their mobile and social media devices at home, but women's online activities and mobile usage are often controlled by male (husband, father, brother, etc.) family relatives. Most rural women do not own a smartphone.
3. Rural women are busier with their traditional daily work than urban women, so they don't have time to use social media and the internet. Digital gender inequality is visible in urban and rural areas as women are busy with family and child-rearing.
4. Poverty is a significant cause of digital gender inequality. In rural areas, women cannot afford mobile phones and expensive internet services. The cost of smartphones or expensive internet services is a challenge for women, unaffordable for more women and girls, and a major barrier to access.
5. The attitude of rural women towards social media is negative. Most urban and rural women consider the use of smartphones and social media as a means of entertainment and do not see it as a necessity.
6. Lack of digital literacy and confidence is an important cause of digital gender disparity. Most urban and rural women do not understand how to use Facebook and Twitter. Rural women find it difficult to do online activities on the Internet. There is a fear of financial fraud in online shopping. WhatsApp is very popular among women because it is very accessible. Most rural women do not know the use of e-mail or do not feel the need for it. Lack of digital literacy is a major cause of the gender gap in the digital space.
7. Patriarchal social structures are the cause of gender inequality in cyberspace. Rural women are very obstacles to using social media and smartphones. In rural areas, women using social media are viewed with suspicion. Prevailing social norms and social restrictions prevent women and girls from using their phones and online activities in public.at home due to prevailing social norms and public decisions.
8. Most rural and urban women turn away from social media to avoid stress in primary relationships (husband, parents) and family. Most family men don't like their women to be on social media. Women do not access social media to avoid family conflicts.
9. Women and girls in urban areas feel vulnerable in cyberspace as women and girls who use the Internet may face additional risks in cyberspace such as cyber stalking, online sexual harassment, cyberbullying, sextortion, and online harassment. Most women consider being on social media dangerous.

The research concludes that girls and women are less likely to use technology and the Internet than boys and men in cyberspace. Gender discrimination, lack of self-confidence, language difficulties, low literacy, and lack of time and money are the main reasons for the gender gap in cyberspace. Most women and girls use social media less because they feel insecure in cyberspace. The number of Internet users in India is around 80 crores. Even though only 40% of Internet users in India are women, masculinity is still manifesting itself in the virtual world where women are frequently targeted and stigmatized. A survey found that 76% of women under the age of 35 faces online harassment and 1 in 10 women under the age of 25 are targeted for pornography and/or sexual abuse in return (sextortion). Women and girls are more likely to be at risk online, they are more likely to be injured online. Most girls fear sexual harassment on social media. The rise in cybercrime and sexual harassment on social media like cyber morphing, cyber defamation, cyberstalking, cyberbullying, cyber pornography, etc. is one of the main reasons for the low access of women and girls on social media. Lack of freedom to use social media is one of the reasons why women have less access to social media. In short, with the increasing reach of the internet and mobile technology and the use of social media, cyber violence has emerged as a growing global problem, especially in the digital realm, where girls and women struggle to use social media. Social media and the internet are a new power for women but empowerment lack of opportunities, lack of independence, cybercrime, online sexual harassment, poverty, computer illiteracy, low computer skills, and fear of discrimination make many girls and women fear social media. Women feel insecure in cyberspace.

In short, this research suggests that Policies related to the use of ICTs should consider the intersection of various factors

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that hinder the implementation of policy objectives to achieve gender equality and enable them to demonstrate and develop their potential by including women and girls. ICT can be a tool for women's empowerment, but empowerment through ICT will be maximized if considered as an individual and collective condition.

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