

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND INCLUSION: A STUDY OF TRIBAL AND NON-TRIBAL HOUSEHOLDS IN JHARKHAND

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The digital transformation is establishing itself as an important development engine, yet significant disparities in access, affordability, and ability create the conditions in which some groups benefit from India's digital transition and others do not. Located within the frameworks of digital inclusion, social stratification theory, and the multidimensional Access, Affordability, and Ability model, this paper examines the impacts of regional, social group, and socio-economic contexts on digital participation in Jharkhand. The study seeks to quantify digital inclusion and understand covariates associated with high and low digital abilities for tribal and non-tribal individuals. The purpose of the study is to generate insights about unequal digital participation using microdata from the NSSO 80th Round, which creates a Digital Inclusion Index (DII) through binary indicator coding and applies logistic regression processes to assess the role of socio-economic and demographic variables on digital participation. The study demonstrates significant inequalities in the area of digital participation – Tribal household individuals experience significantly less digital inclusion, rural households consistently have disadvantages, and older age groups and women have less digital inclusion. All regions consistently lag in the digital ability dimension. The findings suggest that digital inclusion in Jharkhand is not just a problem of technologies but of structures and social equity; as such, infrastructure, digital literacy, affordability, and tribal-focused policy designs must be presented as remedial digital inclusion programming. The study's central argument is that unless digital literacy policy captures social group, gender, geographies, and socio-economics in its population targeting, the risk is that digitalisation recreates and reinforces existing inequalities, rather than creating a better path for inclusive development opportunities.

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