

Tribal Women's Views Of Social Media In Healthcare: A Comprehensive Study

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The adoption of social media among tribal women in the Visakhapatnam District represents a significant shift in the digital landscape, highlighting both opportunities and challenges in bridging the digital divide. This research paper examines the factors influencing the adoption and usage of social media by tribal women, focusing on the socio-economic, cultural, and technological barriers that persist in this marginalized community. The study analyzes the extent to which tribal women in Visakhapatnam District engage with social media platforms, their motivations for use, and the impact on their social and economic empowerment. Findings suggest that while social media serves as a vital tool for communication, information sharing, and community building, several impediments, such as limited digital literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural restrictions, hinder full participation. Moreover, the research highlights the positive outcomes of social media usage, including increased awareness of rights and resources, enhanced self-expression, and greater opportunities for economic activities. However, it also points to potential risks, such as exposure to misinformation and privacy concerns. The paper concludes with recommendations for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to implement culturally sensitive digital literacy programs, improve digital infrastructure, and create supportive environments that foster safe and meaningful engagement with social media. By addressing these gaps, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on digital inclusion and gender equality among tribal communities in India.

Key Words: constitution, digital, gender equality, health care, scheduled tribes, social media.

Introduction

Tribal communities, often identified as indigenous or Adivasi populations in India, represent some of the oldest and most culturally distinct groups within the nation's diverse social fabric. These communities, officially recognized as Scheduled Tribes (ST) under the Indian Constitution, have been acknowledged for their unique socio-cultural characteristics and historical marginalization. According to the 2011 census of India, Scheduled Tribes constitute approximately 8.6% of the country's total population, underscoring their significant yet often overlooked presence in the broader demographic landscape (Deb & Mukherjee, 2024). Geographically, tribal populations are predominantly concentrated in specific regions, notably

in Indian states such as Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and parts of the northeastern states. These regions are often characterized by dense forests, hilly terrains, and areas rich in natural resources, aligning with the deep-seated connection that tribal communities have with their ancestral lands (Bora & Mahanta, 2024). This connection is not merely a matter of residence but forms the foundation of their identity, culture, and socio-economic practices. Tribal communities are distinguished by their traditional lifestyles, which are closely tied to the environment and natural cycles. Their subsistence often relies on agriculture, hunting, gathering, and the sustainable use of forest resources. The intimate relationship with their natural surroundings has fostered a rich cultural heritage, encompassing a diverse range of languages, dialects, customs, rituals, and religious practices (Leuthold, 1998). For instance, many tribes have their own oral traditions, folklore, and art forms, which have been passed down through generations and are integral to their cultural identity.

Furthermore, the religious practices of tribal communities are often animistic, with a profound reverence for nature and the worship of various deities associated with natural elements like rivers, mountains, and forests. These practices reflect a worldview that emphasizes harmony with nature, community solidarity, and respect for ancestral traditions. However, despite their rich cultural heritage, tribal communities in India have historically faced socio-economic marginalization and exclusion from mainstream development processes (Shah, 2007). This has led to significant challenges in areas such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The preservation of their cultural heritage, alongside efforts to integrate them into the broader socio-economic framework, remains a critical area of focus for policymakers and scholars alike. In a nutshell, tribal communities in India are not only a repository of ancient cultural practices but also represent a vital aspect of the nation's diversity. Their unique ways of life, profound connection to the land, and distinct cultural practices offer valuable insights into sustainable living and cultural resilience.

As India continues to develop, it is crucial to ensure that the rights and cultural heritage of these communities are respected and preserved. Tribal women in India, who form a significant portion of the country's indigenous population, play a crucial role in their communities' socio-economic and cultural fabric. These women are not only the custodians of their communities' traditional knowledge and practices but also the backbone of their economies, particularly in agriculture, forest-based activities, and artisanal crafts (Singh et al., 2010). Tribal women are often more economically active than their counterparts in non-tribal communities. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs reports that nearly 40% of tribal women are engaged in agriculture, either as cultivators or labourers, compared to about 30% of non-tribal women. Additionally, they contribute significantly to the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), which is a primary source of income for many tribal households (Shah et al., 2022).

A study by the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) found that tribal women in states like Odisha and Madhya Pradesh are responsible for up to 60% of the household income derived from NTFPs (George & Sharma, 2023). Despite their vital role, tribal women lag significantly behind in educational attainment. The literacy rate among tribal women stands at 49.4%, compared to the national average of 64.6% for women (Ramachandran & Reddy, 2022). This gap is even more pronounced in remote areas, where

access to education is limited. For instance, in states like Rajasthan and Jharkhand, the literacy rate among tribal women is below 40% (Singh, 2020). The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) further highlights that only 10.7% of tribal women aged 15-49 have completed 10 or more years of schooling, compared to 35.7% of non-tribal women in the same age group (Sinha, 2022). Despite their significant contributions, tribal women often face substantial challenges, including lower literacy rates, limited access to healthcare, and socio-economic marginalization. Yet, their resilience and strength remain central to the survival and continuity of tribal cultures and communities. Tribal women also face unique social challenges, including gender-based violence, which is often underreported due to social stigma and isolation.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) indicates that cases of violence against tribal women have been increasing, with a 10% rise in reported cases between 2015 and 2024 (Bhargavi et al., 2023). However, the actual figures are likely higher, given the difficulties in accessing justice in remote tribal areas.

Tribal Socio-Economy and Culture Interventions:

Recognizing the need for targeted interventions, the Indian government has implemented various schemes aimed at improving the socio-economic status of tribal women. Programs like the Jan Dhan Yojana, which promotes value addition to forest products, have empowered tribal women by enhancing their incomes and ensuring better market access (Srivastava, 2022). Additionally, initiatives like the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) aim to improve educational outcomes among tribal girls. Tribal women in India embody resilience and strength, yet they continue to face systemic challenges that hinder their full participation in society. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and legal protections. With sustained efforts, there is potential for tribal communities. In terms of Digital literacy, it is increasingly recognized as a critical tool for the empowerment of marginalized communities, particularly tribal women, who often face systemic barriers to social, economic, and political participation.

In a rapidly digitizing world, the ability to access and effectively use digital technologies can transform the lives of tribal women by opening up new opportunities for education, employment, and civic engagement. By bridging the digital divide, tribal women can gain greater autonomy, connect with broader networks, and advocate for their rights more effectively. The broader implications of enhancing digital literacy among tribal women extend beyond individual empowerment to promote social equity and justice. As tribal women become digitally literate, they can challenge entrenched gender norms, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to the economic development of their communities. Moreover, digital literacy can catalyze social change, enabling tribal women to preserve their cultural heritage while navigating the complexities of the modern world. Thus, fostering digital literacy among tribal women is not only a matter of technological access but also a crucial step toward achieving a more inclusive and just society. The study strongly emphasizes the need for digital literacy among the tribal woman population and highlights the fact that despite the huge boom in the technology industry, the outlook of the marginalized section is still backward. Henceforth the paper finds out the awareness and usage of technology in the Visakhapatnam District. Especially emphasizing the women population as how they have broken the shackles

of traditional tribes accepted technological advancement and secured it as a part of their livelihood.

A revolutionary digital environment has been created due to India's explosive social media growth, fuelled by more internet access and reasonably priced smartphones. This increase, however, draws attention to the digital gap, particularly for marginalized communities like Indigenous populations. To address this gap, digital inclusion is crucial, and supportive policies, better infrastructure, and digital literacy are required. Addressing these obstacles will encourage economic involvement and provide communities with advocacy, education, and self-expression resources, especially for tribal women. (Mishra, 2017) the study 'Social Media Revolution - The New Digital Frontiers of Journalism' emphasizes how social media has revolutionized journalism by making it possible for news to be disseminated quickly and interactively.

Economic and Social Media Adoption Among Tribal Women

Socioeconomic hurdles, which stem from a complex interaction of financial, educational, infrastructure, and cultural variables, provide significant obstacles to tribal populations' use of social media. One of the main obstacles is a lack of funding since many tribal households make little money and cannot buy digital gadgets, internet connections, and continuous upkeep. This disparity in income makes the digital divide worse, making Cultural attitudes and hesitancy toward social media use also play a significant role. Because maintaining their distinct cultural identities is sometimes a top priority for tribal people, embracing new technologies may be viewed with caution or skepticism. Social media may be seen by certain tribal members as an outside force that could upend customs, which would make them reluctant to participate. These socioeconomic restrictions are also influenced by gender, with tribal women experiencing particular limitations because of conventional gender roles, low literacy rates, and a lack of financial independence. For women in Indigenous areas, who may already have obstacles to accessing education and technology, this makes social media use especially difficult.

Theoretical Framework

The digital divide in tribal communities is a complex issue characterized by structural, economic, educational, and socio-cultural barriers. In Visakhapatnam District, where diverse tribal populations reside, this divide is particularly evident. Infrastructure limitations, high costs of digital devices and internet services, and a lack of digital literacy among tribal communities, particularly women, further exacerbate the issue. Traditional gender roles and societal norms often restrict women's access to technology, leading to resistance from families or the broader community. Despite some efforts, the digital divide remains wide. To effectively bridge this gap, comprehensive digital inclusion strategies are needed that address socio-cultural barriers, promote digital literacy, and create affordable pathways to technology adoption. Empowering tribal women through digital inclusion holds transformative potential, enhancing their access to critical information, expanding their opportunities for education and economic participation, and fostering greater social inclusion. This requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy-level interventions, community-based programs, and ongoing research. Drawing from global best practices and tailoring them to the specific needs of India's tribal populations, particularly in regions like Visakhapatnam,

could lead to more effective frameworks for digital empowerment. Culturally sensitive efforts must ensure that technology respects and integrates into tribal traditions and social structures while promoting greater equity in digital access.

Social Media Adoption

By creating avenues for communication, education, and self-expression, social media adoption in tribal groups, especially among women, has the potential to revolutionize socio-economic empowerment. Through platforms to interact with larger communities, share experiences, and access previously unobtainable knowledge and possibilities, social media helps Indigenous women overcome traditional seclusion. But since many indigenous women have limited access to technology and lack the skills needed to use digital platforms effectively, the digital divide and low digital literacy remain major obstacles. In rural and isolated tribal regions, these difficulties are exacerbated by sociocultural norms and infrastructure restrictions, which make technological integration challenging. When social media is used properly, it may empower tribal women by giving them access to health information, educational materials, and business opportunities. Social media, when used effectively, can empower Indigenous women by giving them access to advocacy tools, health information, educational materials, and business opportunities that can strengthen their voices and promote communal growth. Comprehensive approaches are needed to overcome these obstacles, such as programs that promote social media usage in a good way, enhanced network infrastructure, and digital literacy campaigns. Tribal women will be able to interact with larger networks, improve their socioeconomic status, and advance a more inclusive digital society if this digital divide is closed. This will lessen inequalities in tribal areas and support sustainable development.

Conclusion

Tribal women, who sometimes stay disadvantaged because of socioeconomic limitations and a lack of digital literacy, might benefit greatly from social media as a platform for networking, information sharing, and economic activity. A multifaceted strategy is needed to close this gap, including community-based support networks, investment in accessible infrastructure, and culturally specific digital literacy initiatives. Tribal women can participate in broader socio-political processes, improve their social networks, and access new economic opportunities by being given the skills and information necessary to navigate digital areas. Reducing the digital gap is a step that goes beyond a technical problem. Reducing the digital divide is a step toward equitable socioeconomic status and goes beyond a technical problem. For these women, digital inclusion could open doors to entrepreneurship, healthcare information, education, and professional training—all of which are critical for long-term community development. To carry out focused interventions that acknowledge and honor the distinct cultural and socioeconomic dynamics of tribal groups, policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and local community leaders should collaborate.

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