The Influence of Social Media on Tribal Empowerment: Critical Review

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Abstract

This study explores how social media and the Digital India initiative empower tribal communities in India, especially in culture and education. With India's growing diversity and technological progress, access to information is key for empowerment. Younger members of tribal groups tend to gain more from these digital platforms than older generations, owing to their greater ease and adaptability with new technologies. Since social media allows learning to occur flexibly—anytime and anywhere—tribal youth feel more comfortable utilizing these methods compared to traditional classroom-based education. However, the tribal community of India still experiences limited telecommunication infrastructure and connectivity relative to other parts of the country. However, regions like many areas of the tribal region in India face connectivity challenges, highlighting the need for improved digital skills. Social media also promotes communication, collaboration, and global exposure for tribal talents across diverse cultures.

Keywords: Social media, education, e-services.

Introduction

The tribal sub-plan, established under Article 275(1) of the Indian Constitution, allocates dedicated central government funds aimed specifically at the development and welfare of tribal populations. This financial support is crucial for addressing the unique socio-economic needs of tribal communities. Complementing this effort, the National e-Governance Division plays an important role by assisting the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in implementing flagship digital initiatives such as Digital India and e-Kranti. These programs are particularly focused on enhancing governance and service delivery in regions like Northeast India, where tribal communities are concentrated. The Digital India initiative emphasizes collaborative learning and the use of innovative technological approaches to tackle challenges that are often specific and complex in nature. Since the emergence of the Internet in the early 1990s, social media platforms have become deeply embedded in everyday life, engaging a wide array of participants, including citizens, activists, NGOs, telecommunications companies, software developers, and government bodies. This diverse ecosystem has made social media a powerful tool for communication, information sharing, and community building.

Through its IT services, Digital India has significantly impacted tribal youth living in remote and underserved areas by providing access to digital resources and connectivity. This has helped bridge gaps in education, skill development, and social

participation. The program highlights that digital infrastructure elements such as broadband connectivity, optical networks, and other communication technologies are now as vital as traditional infrastructure like roads, schools, and electricity for the progress of tribal regions.

Moreover, Digital India leverages interactive tools such as surveys and online polls to raise awareness, encourage community engagement, and collect valuable feedback that can inform policymaking and program implementation. These mechanisms ensure that tribal populations have a voice in the digital space and benefit from inclusive, participatory governance. Overall, the integration of targeted funding, strategic digital initiatives, and community-focused tools underlines a comprehensive approach to empowering tribal communities in India through technology and infrastructure development.

Objective

a. To study the influence of social media on tribal culture.

b. To study the influence of social media on tribal education.

c. To study the influence of social media on tribal e-services.

Review of literature

Gaurav, K., & Shukla, A. (2025). Studied on "Analyzing rural tribal entrepreneurship in SMEs in the state of Jharkhand." Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in shaping India's economy and driving its growth. Tribal entrepreneurs operate in both urban and rural settings, with a significantly larger presence in rural areas. Most of these entrepreneurs are involved in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This study evaluates tribal-owned businesses across various SME sectors by applying the WASPAS and AHP methods, which are multi-criteria decision-making techniques known for their precision and reliability. The research ranks different types of SMEs based on tribal participation, revealing that among seven sectors analyzed, enterprises related to Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) are the most favored by tribal entrepreneurs in Jharkhand, whereas manufacturing ventures are the least preferred.

Raj, N., & Pal, D. (2025). This research examined the digital literacy status of artisan tribes in Jharkhand, specifically focusing on the Lohra, Karmali, and Chik-Baraik groups. It emphasized digital literacy's role in transforming the artisans' economic opportunities by facilitating digital adoption, expanding markets, boosting incomes, and encouraging innovation. By utilizing digital platforms, artisans can reach global customers and increase their earnings. The study used a mixed-method approach, conducting structured surveys with 50 artisans and detailed interviews with 10 stakeholders, including community leaders and NGO representatives. Findings showed that only 18% of artisans had basic digital literacy skills, and just 12% owned digital devices like smartphones or computers. Major obstacles to digital adoption included poor internet connectivity (noted by 78% of participants), insufficient formal training (65%), and financial limitations (57%). Despite these challenges, 82% of artisans were eager to learn digital skills to improve marketing and income. A strong link was found between digital literacy and income growth; artisans with basic skills such as using smartphones, e-commerce, and online payments were 2.5 times more likely to see income increases than those relying solely on traditional methods. The study highlighted the urgent need for targeted digital skills training, better digital infrastructure, and supportive policies to close the digital gap among tribal artisans. It recommended enhancing infrastructure, expanding literacy programs, offering financial aid for digital tools, and promoting e-commerce partnerships to support inclusive economic growth. This research adds to the larger discussion on fostering

inclusive digital transformation and economic empowerment for marginalized communities in India.

Gore, B. (2025). E-governance has become an essential mechanism for advancing rural development by improving access to government services, increasing transparency, and curbing corruption in rural India. This research examines the implementation of e-governance in Sonipat and Jind districts of Haryana, focusing on how rural communities engage with these digital services. Surveying 400 participants across both districts, the study uncovers key insights into the availability, awareness, and utilization of e-governance initiatives. Results indicate progress in both areas, yet challenges persist, including unstable internet connectivity, limited digital literacy, and insufficient technological access. About 67.5% of respondents found e-governance services to be easily accessible, but nearly one-third still face obstacles that hinder full participation. Internet quality was rated higher in Sonipat, where 36.25% considered it fairly good, contrasting with only 20% in Jind who viewed it as satisfactory. Awareness of e-governance services was also somewhat greater in Sonipat, with 38.75% reporting higher knowledge levels, while 42.5% in Jind expressed similar awareness levels. Statistical analyses, such as t-tests, confirm notable differences between the two districts in how effectively e-governance supports rural development and engages citizens, with Sonipat perceived as more successful in-service delivery. Findingsndings highlight the urgent need to enhance digital infrastructure, boost digital education, and raise awareness to reduce the digital gap and provide fairer access to e-governance services for rural populations.

Sharma, R., & Khatik, S. K. (2024). This research examines how social media use influences the advancement of e-Governance aimed at tribal development in five districts of Rajasthan—Banswara, Dungarpur, Udaipur, Pratapgarh, and Sirohi. The study analyzes data from 360 participants using Smart-PLS methodology to explore the connections between social media engagement, e-Governance implementation, and development outcomes within tribal communities. Results indicate that social media significantly enhances both e-Governance effectiveness and tribal development by increasing government transparency and encouraging community involvement. It specifically helps tribal populations gain better access to government services and stimulates their active role in development programs. Furthermore, e-Governance acts as an essential link driving progress in tribal areas, demonstrating how digital governance can transform marginalized groups. The findings recommend focused policy measures to harness social media's potential for strengthening e-Governance and improving developmental results in tribal regions. Overall, this study deepens understanding of how digital technologies support sustainable growth and provides actionable guidance for policymakers seeking to improve tribal welfare through innovative governance approaches.

Gond, S.K., and Upadhyay, A. (2024) studied "Challenges and Opportunities of Digital India Program in Rural Tribal Development", offering a critical exploration of how the Digital India initiative intersects with the socio-economic realities of tribal communities in rural India. It highlights the transformative potential of digital technologies in improving access to education, healthcare, governance, and financial services for marginalized tribal populations. At the same time, the authors underscore persistent challenges such as poor digital infrastructure, limited internet connectivity, language barriers, and low levels of digital literacy that hinder effective implementation. The study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive digital content, localized strategies, and inclusive policy frameworks to ensure that tribal communities are not left behind in the digital revolution. By balancing optimism with grounded critique, the paper contributes valuable insights for policymakers, development

practitioners, and researchers aiming to harness digital tools for equitable tribal empowerment and sustainable rural development.

Rashid, E., & Mastorakis, N. E. (2024). A study conducted on "Impact of Stepping Up Digital Literacy on Increased Representation of Tribals in Employment" presents a compelling analysis of how enhancing digital literacy can significantly improve employment outcomes for tribal communities. Published in the *International Journal of Computers*, Volume 9, the study explores the direct relationship between digital skill acquisition and increased participation of tribal individuals in formal and informal job sectors.

The authors argue that digital literacy acts as a gateway to broader socio-economic inclusion, enabling tribal populations to access online job portals, government schemes, skill development programs, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Through empirical data and case studies, the paper highlights how targeted digital education initiatives—especially those tailored to local languages and cultural contexts, can reduce barriers to employment and empower tribal youth to compete in the digital economy. Importantly, the study emphasizes the need for sustained policy support, infrastructure development, and community-based training models to ensure long-term impact. It also calls attention to the role of public-private partnerships in scaling digital literacy programs across tribal regions. Overall, the paper contributes valuable insights into the intersection of technology, education, and employment, offering practical recommendations for improving tribal representation in India's evolving workforce.

Raj, N., & Priya, P. (2023). A study conducted on "Sustainable and inclusive strategies for tribal development in Jharkhand." The tribal communities in Jharkhand, India, have historically endured a range of difficulties such as social isolation, economic disadvantage, and environmental harm. This research highlights the urgent requirement for sustainable and inclusive approaches that focus on improving the socio-economic conditions of these tribal groups. It investigates the distinct socio-economic factors influencing their lives, including challenges related to land ownership, education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and access to essential services. By utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data, the study illuminates the deep-seated obstacles faced by these communities and uncovers the underlying causes that maintain their vulnerability. Ultimately, the research emphasizes the advantages of adopting sustainable and inclusive development strategies to support the progress of tribal populations in Jharkhand.

Sharma, A., & Mir, A. Q. (2022) studied "Identifying the Impact of Digitalization on the Society and Culture of Tribal People of J&K", which offers a focused exploration of how digital technologies are reshaping the lives of tribal communities in Jammu and Kashmir. It examines both the positive transformations and the cultural tensions introduced by digitalization. On one hand, the study highlights how access to digital platforms has improved communication, education, and awareness among tribal populations, contributing to social inclusion and economic participation. On the other hand, it raises concerns about the erosion of traditional practices, values, and communal bonds due to the influence of mainstream digital culture. The authors underscore the dual nature of digitalization: while it empowers tribal youth and connects remote communities to broader networks, it also risks diluting indigenous identities and customs. The paper calls for culturally sensitive digital policies and localized content to ensure that modernization does not come at the cost of cultural displacement. Overall, the study contributes valuable insights into the intersection of technology, tradition, and tribal identity, urging policymakers to balance innovation with cultural preservation in tribal regions of J&K.

Nayak, K. V., & Alam, S. (2022). Studied on "The digital divide, gender and education: challenges for tribal youth in rural Jharkhand during Covid-19." The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly intensified existing educational disparities around the world. Yet there remains a limited understanding of how the digital divide has further strained traditional education systems and deepened gender inequalities, especially among historically marginalized communities. This study investigates the combined impact of the pandemic and digital divide on education within socially disadvantaged groups, specifically tribal or indigenous populations known as Adivasis, placing them at a greater disadvantage. The research highlights how the pandemic reshaped longstanding educational inequalities and how the digital divide has disproportionately affected young tribal girls. Through semi-structured interviews with tribal students, parents, and teachers in remote areas of Jharkhand, India, the study captures their experiences transitioning to online learning. Beyond challenges of access and infrastructure, cultural and social factors—such as beliefs about the value of girls' education and attitudes toward digital learning held by parents and teachers—exacerbate the digital divide faced by tribal girls in these regions. Drawing on these insights, the paper calls for a fundamental re-examination of the digital education system and offers policy suggestions aimed at bridging the digital gap and reducing educational inequities among marginalized groups.

Khan S. and Hasan Z. (2020) challenge the common belief that tribal women have traditionally held a higher social status within their communities compared to women in broader Indian society. While women do play important roles in tribal cultures, they face challenges similar to other groups, including reproductive health problems, economic hardships, and limited educational opportunities. This study examines the negative effects of gender inequality among tribal women by analyzing Gender Development Index (GDI) factors such as literacy rates, health, workforce participation, poverty levels, and access to economic resources. Using a combination of primary and secondary data—ranging from existing literature and preliminary research to government reports—the study identifies persistent disparities rooted in tribal communities. Factors like lack of awareness, illiteracy, land dispossession, and social isolation contribute to these issues. The primary aim of the research is to highlight critical gender-related challenges affecting the social conditions of tribal women and to explore the root causes of these inequalities in depth.

Das RR and Mahapatra P (2017) highlight that empowering tribal women remains a major global development challenge, involving multiple complex aspects. Empowerment means increasing women's influence over decisions in their families, communities, society, and at the national level. However, tribal women face significant difficulties due to deep-rooted cultural and psychological tendencies among men, including tribal men, to dominate women. Social and cultural norms often prevent indigenous women from breaking free of traditional roles. Additionally, widespread illiteracy and lack of awareness further hinder their empowerment. Developing effective strategies to enhance knowledge, awareness, and progress for tribal communities—especially women—is a significant and ongoing challenge for governments and NGOs alike.

Sharma, S. R. (2016). A study was conducted on "Impact of social media on tribal youth." This paper examines how social media, through the Digital India program, influences tribal youth in Northeast India, impacting their culture and education. With India's growth in population, diversity, and technology, information access has become vital for empowerment. Tribal youth, more comfortable with digital media than adults, gain new learning opportunities. However, connectivity in the Northeast remains limited, requiring focused efforts on digital skills. Social media fosters

communication and collaboration and provides a platform for tribal youth to showcase their talents globally.

Barik (2013) identifies several reasons for student dropouts, such as the school's geographical location, feelings of homesickness, inadequate infrastructure, health problems, and the influence of family and social circles. Additional factors include inconvenient school hours, the nature of the curriculum, the language of teaching, the suitability of teachers, availability of hostel facilities, poverty, high rates of parental illiteracy, significant economic costs borne by children, and cultural barriers that especially hinder girls from attending school.

Sindhi S. (2012). The progress in tribal development in India can be attributed to agrarian tribes in remote rural areas educating their children and improving their living standards. Beyond government efforts, non-governmental organizations have played a significant role in providing training and fostering development across various economic sectors, especially for tribal populations. As part of the ERT International initiative, the ERT India team conducted a survey to explore opportunities and pathways for individuals in isolated tribal settlements to acquire essential knowledge and skills for their livelihood. The project placed special emphasis on women's skill development, offering training in areas such as farm forestry, papad making, sewing, cooking, and sanitary pad production. However, tribal women often face violence including physical and mental abuse, sexual assault, and other mistreatments. Due to domestic responsibilities and societal prejudice, women frequently encounter resistance to participating in training programs. To address these challenges, government agencies and NGOs support the formation of women's self-help groups that empower them to address their issues independently. The report showcases examples of marginalized women in Gujarat who have achieved self-empowerment through education and skill-building initiatives.

Conclusion

Digital technologies are reshaping tribal development across India by enhancing access to governance, education, employment, and social inclusion. Social media and e- Governance have proven effective in increasing transparency and community participation, while digital literacy empowers tribal youth to engage in the formal economy. However, persistent challenges—such as poor infrastructure, cultural barriers, and risks to indigenous identity—require inclusive, localized, and culturally sensitive strategies. Sustainable tribal development demands balanced policies that integrate technological innovation with respect for traditional values and socio-economic realities.

Tribal entrepreneurship, especially in sectors like Non-Timber Forest Products, plays a vital role in Jharkhand's rural economy, while manufacturing sees less tribal participation. Digital literacy among tribal artisans remains low but is crucial for expanding market access, boosting incomes, and fostering innovation. E-governance initiatives show promise in improving rural service delivery and transparency, yet challenges such as internet connectivity, digital literacy, and technology access continue to limit full participation. Strengthening digital infrastructure, targeted skill development, and supportive policies are essential to bridge these gaps and promote inclusive economic growth and rural development.

Student dropouts are influenced by multiple factors, including geographic, social, economic, and cultural challenges, with girls facing particular barriers. Tribal development in India has advanced through education, skill-building, and empowerment efforts led by both government and NGOs, despite ongoing issues like violence and social resistance, especially against women. Social media and digital

initiatives are increasingly important for tribal youth, offering new educational and cultural opportunities, though infrastructure limitations remain a challenge. Overall, holistic support addressing these diverse factors is essential for sustainable progress in education and empowerment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified educational disparities for tribal youth, especially deepening the digital divide and gender inequalities affecting tribal girls in rural Jharkhand. Despite their important roles, tribal women face persistent challenges such as limited education, health issues, and economic hardships, undermined by cultural norms and social isolation. Empowering tribal women remains a complex global challenge due to entrenched patriarchal attitudes, illiteracy, and lack of awareness. Addressing these layered issues requires comprehensive policy reforms and targeted strategies by governments and NGOs to bridge digital gaps, enhance education access, and foster true empowerment within tribal communities.

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