

Challenges Faced by Marginalized Communities in Accessing Digital Resources

Digital access is a key driver of empowerment in the 21st century. However, in India, marginalized communities—rural populations, women, low-income households, linguistic minorities, and persons with disabilities—face multi-dimensional barriers in accessing and benefiting from digital resources. These challenges go beyond connectivity and involve issues of affordability, literacy, inclusivity, and governance.

1. Infrastructure and Connectivity Barriers

- India has around 954 million internet subscribers (TRAI, 2025), but access remains uneven. Urban internet density: 112.7 per 100 population vs rural: 44.9 per 100.
- Poor electricity supply and limited broadband infrastructure restrict digital use in remote villages.
- Government Initiatives: BharatNet (2.14 lakh GPs connected), PM-WANI (public Wi-Fi hotspots), National Broadband Mission (universal access).

2. Affordability and Economic Constraints

- Smartphones and computers remain unaffordable for many low-income households.
- Even with low data prices, regular recharges are costly for poor families.
- Only ~60% of rural households have access to a smartphone (NSSO).
- Initiatives: Common Service Centres (CSCs), PM-WANI, Digital India for affordable access.

3. Low Digital Literacy and Awareness

- Many marginalized citizens lack basic digital skills.
- Only ~38% of rural users can perform basic tasks (IAMAI, 2024).
- Initiative: PMGDISHA trained 6.39 crore rural citizens; yet, device scarcity remains a challenge.

4. Language and Content Barriers

- Over 90% of internet content is in English; regional language content is limited.
- Initiatives: UMANG and DigiLocker support multiple Indian languages.

5. Gender Divide

- Women are 20% less likely than men to use mobile internet (GSMA, 2024).
- Initiatives: Women-led CSCs, PMGDISHA drives, Mahila e-Haat.

6. Disability and Accessibility Issues

- Many websites, apps, and services lack accessibility features.
- Initiatives: Sugamya Bharat (Accessible India), GIGW (WCAG compliance).

7. Education and Digital Divide Among Students

- During COVID-19, millions lacked devices/internet for online learning.
- Only 24% households had internet access (NSO, 2021).
- Initiatives: DIKSHA, PM e-Vidya, tablet distribution programs.

8. Exclusion from Digital Welfare

- Aadhaar-linked schemes sometimes exclude due to biometric/OTP failures.
- Solutions: Strengthen grievance mechanisms and provide offline alternatives.

9. Privacy and Trust Deficit

- Fear of fraud and data misuse discourages digital use.
- Initiative: Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023).

Conclusion

Digital access is no longer a luxury—it is a right for inclusive growth. While India has made significant progress through Digital India, BharatNet, and PMGDISHA, deep-rooted inequalities persist. To truly empower marginalized communities, India must focus on affordable access, local language content, continuous literacy, accessible ICT, and trustworthy governance. Bridging the digital divide is essential for equitable social and economic development.