**Profile of participant 1**

**Personal Information**

* **Name:** Rohan Gupta
* **Age:** 19 years
* **Gender:** Male
* **Class:** Second-year undergraduate student pursuing a Bachelor’s in Sociology

**Family Background**

* **Family Income:** ₹1,50,000 per year (Low-income group)
* **Family Status:**
  + Parents: Father works as a daily wage laborer; mother is a homemaker.
  + Siblings: Two younger siblings, both studying in government schools.
  + Residence: Lives in a semi-urban area in a rented one-bedroom apartment.

**Educational Background**

* **Schooling:**
  + Attended a government school with limited digital infrastructure.
  + Medium of instruction: Hindi
* **Current Institution:** A government college in the city, commuting daily from home.

**Conversation between an Interviewer (I) and a Participant-1 (P) about socioeconomic inequality, digital lives, and adolescents in college.**

**Interviewer (I):**

Thank you for joining me today to discuss this critical topic. Let’s begin with a broad question: How do you think socioeconomic inequality impacts the digital lives of adolescents in college?

**Participant (P):**

Thank you for having me. Socioeconomic inequality plays a significant role in shaping digital experiences. Adolescents from affluent backgrounds often have access to high-speed internet, advanced devices, and supportive environments for digital learning. In contrast, students from low-income families frequently face barriers like unreliable connectivity, outdated devices, or even a lack of digital literacy, which limits their ability to engage effectively online.

**I:**

That’s a valid point. Would you say these disparities directly influence academic outcomes?

**P:**

Definitely. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to online learning highlighted these issues starkly. Students with poor internet connections or shared devices found it challenging to attend online classes consistently or complete assignments on time. This created a gap not just in academic performance but also in confidence and self-esteem. The effects are long-term, as digital skills are crucial for both higher education and the job market.

**I:**

That’s concerning. Beyond academics, how do you see these digital disparities affecting adolescents’ social lives?

**P:**

The social implications are just as significant. Social media has become an integral part of adolescent life. It’s a space where they form connections, express themselves, and even build their identities. Those who lack access may feel excluded from conversations and trends that define their peer groups. This exclusion can lead to feelings of isolation and a sense of being left behind.

**I:**

Social media can be a double-edged sword, though. How do you think its overuse or misuse interacts with socioeconomic factors?

**P:**

That’s an interesting point. Overuse of social media often stems from a lack of awareness about its potential harms. Adolescents from privileged backgrounds might be better equipped to understand and manage these risks because they are more likely to receive guidance from parents or schools. On the other hand, adolescents from underprivileged backgrounds might lack this guidance and use social media excessively as an escape from their challenges. This can lead to issues like cyberbullying, anxiety, or even addiction.

**I:**

That’s true. Shifting gears slightly, do you think digital platforms themselves perpetuate socioeconomic inequality?

**P:**

Yes, they do, albeit indirectly. Algorithms on platforms like Instagram or YouTube often prioritize content that requires significant resources to produce—high-quality videos, expensive equipment, and professional editing. This skews visibility towards those who can afford these resources, sidelining creators from less privileged backgrounds. Additionally, online advertising tends to target wealthier demographics, reinforcing existing disparities in exposure to opportunities.

**I:**

You’ve raised some compelling issues. Let’s talk about mental health. How does unequal access to digital resources affect adolescents’ psychological well-being?

**P:**

Unequal access can exacerbate mental health issues in two ways. First, adolescents who lack access may feel inadequate or envious when they see their peers thriving in digital spaces. This can lead to feelings of inferiority or low self-worth. Second, those who are excessively online, especially without proper guidance, may experience anxiety or depression from constant comparisons with idealized portrayals of life on social media.

**I:**

It sounds like there’s a delicate balance to strike. What role do you think educational institutions can play in bridging this digital divide?

**P:**

Educational institutions are pivotal. They can provide resources like free or subsidized laptops, Wi-Fi hotspots, and access to computer labs. Beyond that, schools and colleges should incorporate digital literacy programs into their curricula to ensure students not only use technology effectively but also critically evaluate the content they encounter. This would empower all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, to participate equally in the digital world.

**I:**

Do you think policymakers and tech companies have a role to play as well?

**P:**

Absolutely. Policymakers should prioritize digital equity by funding initiatives that provide affordable internet and devices for low-income families. For example, some governments have already launched programs that distribute free tablets or laptops to students. Tech companies, on the other hand, could make their platforms more accessible—for instance, by offering educational discounts or designing low-data versions of their apps. Collaboration between these entities is essential for meaningful progress.

**I:**

Those are great suggestions. Let’s turn to the adolescents themselves. What can they do to navigate these challenges effectively?

**P:**

Adolescents should cultivate a balanced relationship with technology. This includes setting boundaries for social media use and focusing on activities that promote their well-being, like physical exercise or real-world interactions. They should also take advantage of free online resources, such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), to develop their skills and knowledge. Finally, they can advocate for digital equity by voicing their concerns to school authorities or participating in community initiatives.

**I:**

You’ve shared some insightful thoughts. As we wrap up, what would be your key takeaway from this discussion?

**P:**

My key takeaway would be that while technology has immense potential to bridge gaps, it also risks widening them if not used inclusively. Addressing socioeconomic inequality in digital lives requires a collective effort—from policymakers and educators to tech companies and adolescents themselves. By working together, we can ensure that digital spaces become platforms for empowerment rather than exclusion.

**I:**

Thank you for such a thoughtful and comprehensive discussion. Your insights will undoubtedly contribute to ongoing efforts to address these critical issues.

**P:**

Thank you for the opportunity. It’s been a pleasure to share my thoughts on such an important topic.