



PARENTING IN THE DIGITAL ERA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AMONG MARGINALISED GROUPS IN BALLARI CITY

Dr.Ashwini S

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, VSK University, Ballari

Abstract

The digital revolution has reshaped how children learn, communicate, and access knowledge, creating new possibilities but also widening social inequalities. In India, where socio-economic disparities persist, marginalised families face significant obstacles in accessing and using digital tools for education and daily life. This paper explores how parents from low-income and informal sector backgrounds in Ballari city navigate the digital era while supporting their children's educational and social development. Using qualitative data collected through interviews and focus group discussions with parents from marginalised communities, the study examines issues of access, literacy, and parental mediation in children's digital engagement. Findings reveal that despite barriers such as affordability, limited digital literacy, and inadequate infrastructure, parents exhibit resilience through creative adaptation and community support. The study concludes by highlighting the importance of parental agency in bridging the digital divide and offers recommendations for policies that promote inclusive digital empowerment in urban marginalised contexts.

Keywords: Parenting, Digital Divide, Marginalised Groups, Digital Literacy, Ballari City

1. Introduction

Digital technologies have become integral to contemporary life, shaping education, work, and social interactions. For children, the digital environment provides access to vast information resources and new modes of learning. However, the advantages of digitalisation are unevenly distributed. Many families, particularly those from marginalised socio-economic groups, struggle to access or effectively utilise digital tools. This digital divide not only mirrors



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existing inequalities but also reinforces them, affecting children's educational opportunities and social inclusion.

The context of Ballari city in Karnataka presents a compelling case for examining these dynamics. Ballari, a growing urban centre with stark socio-economic contrasts, includes communities of daily-wage labourers, street vendors, and domestic workers who represent the city's marginalised population. These families often live in informal settlements with inconsistent electricity, poor connectivity, and limited awareness of digital resources. Their children, however, are increasingly expected to engage with technology in schools and society. The resulting gap between institutional expectations and household capacity forms the core concern of this study.

In this paper, *marginalised groups* refer to those sections of the population who are systematically excluded from full participation in social, economic, and political life due to structural inequalities such as poverty, limited education, caste discrimination, or insecure employment. These groups face cumulative disadvantages that restrict access to basic services, including technology and education. Within the urban context of Ballari, this study defines marginalised families as those belonging to the informal labour sector and living in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods with limited digital infrastructure.

2. Review of Literature

Scholarly work on the digital divide emphasises that inequalities in technology access are deeply rooted in socio-economic hierarchies. Warschauer (2003) argued that access to technology involves not just physical devices but also social resources such as skills, literacy, and supportive networks. Similarly, Selwyn (2010) highlighted that digital inclusion depends on broader educational and cultural capital. In India, studies by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI, 2023) show that rural and low-income urban households lag behind in internet access, with gender and education significantly influencing usage patterns.

Research on *parenting in the digital age* has examined how parents mediate children's online experiences. Livingstone and Helsper (2008) identified three main types of mediation—restrictive, enabling, and co-use—depending on parents' confidence and understanding of technology. In marginalised contexts, however, parents' capacity for mediation is often



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constrained by digital illiteracy, limited time, and competing economic pressures (Kumar & Prakash, 2020).

In the Indian context, digital inequality intersects with class, gender, and geography. According to the National Sample Survey (2020), only 24% of Indian households had internet access, and urban slum areas recorded the lowest rates of connectivity. Parents from such backgrounds often depend on shared or low-cost mobile phones, using data sparingly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this inequality became visible as children from low-income families struggled to attend online classes (Nayar, 2021). Studies in states like Karnataka and Maharashtra have shown that mothers, especially those with limited schooling, face challenges in guiding children's online learning due to lack of exposure and fear of misuse (Srinivasan, 2022).

Sociologically, marginalisation is understood as a process through which certain groups are pushed to the periphery of society, denied access to opportunities, and subjected to systemic disadvantage (Silver, 1994). It encompasses economic exclusion, lack of voice in decision-making, and limited access to information and technology. Within this framework, digital marginalisation represents a new dimension of inequality, where exclusion is mediated through technology rather than solely through traditional social structures.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To explore how parents from marginalised communities in Ballari perceive and experience digital technology in their children's education and daily lives.
2. To identify the major challenges faced by these parents in accessing and using digital devices and the internet.
3. To examine the strategies and coping mechanisms employed by parents to support their children's digital learning.
4. To suggest policy and community-level interventions that promotes digital inclusion among marginalised families.



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4. Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative design to capture the lived experiences of parents navigating digital realities in marginalised urban settings. The study was conducted in **Ballari city**, Karnataka, between February and July 2025.

Sample and Participants

Participants were 25 parents (17 mothers and 8 fathers) from low-income households engaged in informal work such as construction, domestic labour, and petty vending. Most families lived in informal settlements near the steel and market zones of Ballari. The participants' educational levels ranged from no formal education to completion of high school.

Data Collection

Data were collected through **semi-structured interviews** and **two focus group discussions (FGDs)**. The interviews explored themes such as access to digital devices, parental knowledge, involvement in children's education, and perceptions of digital risks. FGDs encouraged participants to share collective experiences, revealing community-level coping mechanisms.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and gave verbal consent. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts to protect identity.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Patterns and themes were identified around three domains: (a) access and literacy, (b) parental mediation, and (c) adaptation and support networks.



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5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Access and Affordability

A major challenge for parents was the cost of digital devices and data. Most families owned only one smartphone, typically used by the father for work. Mothers often reported limited access to the phone and depended on older siblings or neighbours for information about schoolwork. A mother interviewed shared,

“When school asked for homework on WhatsApp, I didn’t know how to open it. My daughter showed me, but the phone is with my husband most of the time.”

Internet connectivity in informal settlements was irregular. Public Wi-Fi was almost nonexistent, and mobile data was expensive relative to family income. This economic constraint led to prioritising communication and work over educational use of technology.

5.2 Digital Literacy and Parental Confidence

Limited digital literacy among parents constrained their ability to guide children. Many participants equated digital learning with screen entertainment, expressing anxiety about misuse. Some mothers felt inadequate when comparing their knowledge to that of their children. Yet, a few showed curiosity and willingness to learn, attending informal sessions organised by local NGOs. This reflects what Selwyn (2010) calls *situated learning*, where digital skills evolve through everyday practice rather than formal instruction.

5.3 Parental Mediation and Concerns

Parents employed varying strategies to manage children’s digital use. Restrictive mediation—limiting screen time and monitoring content—was common. However, enabling mediation (discussing online content or helping with searches) was rare due to parents’ limited confidence. Concerns about exposure to inappropriate material and online safety were frequently expressed. Mothers particularly worried about social media influences on adolescent behaviour. This mirrors findings from Livingstone et al. (2011), who noted that digital parenting practices reflect broader social anxieties about childhood and morality.

5.4 Adaptation and Community Support



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Despite challenges, parents demonstrated resilience and innovation. In several cases, families shared devices among neighbours for children's online classes. Some parents formed informal study groups supervised by a literate youth in the locality. Local NGOs and Anganwadi workers occasionally facilitated digital awareness sessions. These practices highlight the role of community solidarity in mitigating digital exclusion. The findings resonate with Sen's (1999) concept of *capability enhancement*, where collective action expands individuals' ability to access opportunities.

5.5 Gendered Dimensions of Digital Parenting

The study revealed a gendered digital divide within households. Mothers, often less educated and confined to domestic work, had fewer opportunities to use technology. Fathers controlled the primary device, reinforcing gender hierarchies. However, women's participation in NGO-led sessions showed that when given exposure, they became more active in supporting their children's education. Empowering mothers with digital literacy could therefore have a multiplier effect on children's learning outcomes.

5.6 Opportunities and Aspirations

Parents recognised that digital learning could provide their children with opportunities unavailable to them. Even with limited means, they viewed technology as a path to social mobility. Some saved money to buy second-hand tablets, while others encouraged children to watch educational videos on YouTube. This optimism illustrates parents' *aspirational agency*—the capacity to envision a better future despite structural barriers.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that parenting in the digital era among marginalised groups in Ballari is characterised by both constraint and creativity. Economic hardship, limited literacy, and infrastructural gaps restrict digital access. Yet, parents actively engage in bridging these divides through community sharing, informal learning, and prioritising children's education.

To reduce digital inequality, the following measures are recommended:



1. **Community-based digital literacy programs** targeting parents, especially mothers, through local schools and NGOs.
2. **Affordable digital access initiatives**, such as subsidised internet plans or device-sharing hubs in low-income neighbourhoods.
3. **Integration of parental digital education in school outreach programs**, enabling schools to act as bridges between families and technology.
4. **Policy support** from local government for inclusive digital infrastructure in informal settlements.
5. **Collaborative partnerships** among government, civil society, and private sectors to promote equitable digital inclusion.

Ultimately, the findings affirm that parents, even when marginalised, play a pivotal role in mediating children's engagement with technology. Their experiences underscore the need for digital inclusion policies that are not only technologically focused but also socially grounded, addressing the intersecting dimensions of class, gender, and education.

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