



Knowledge. Voice. Democracy.
PRIA

Toolkit

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PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH TO UNDERSTAND DIGITAL TRUST AMONG WOMEN

A TOOLKIT

Contents

1	What This Toolkit Offers.....	3
1.1	What is Participatory Research?	3
1.2	Purpose of the Toolkit	3
2	The Context of the Study : Understanding Digital Trust.....	5
3	Entering the Community.....	8
3.1	Deconstructing Digital Trust : Focus Group Discussions In the Community.....	8
3.2	Power Dynamics In a Group and Community.....	10
4	Probing Deeper : Using Participatory Tools.....	12
4.1	Daily Digital Clock	12
4.2	Meri Digital Yatra.....	14
4.3	Problem Tree Analysis	17
4.4	Mirroring.....	20
5	Participatory Research in the Field.....	22
	References.....	23

1 What This Toolkit Offers

Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), established in 1982, is a global hub for participatory research and training.¹ For over 40 years, the organisation has worked to expand the field of Participatory Research by building an inclusive knowledge base along with capacities to undertake Participatory Research. Participatory Research tools have been used to bridge deficits in governance and planning, promoting local, community-led solidarity actions, redesigning institutions which recognise diverse gender and knowledge systems, and capacitating active citizens.

1.1 What is Participatory Research?

Generally, the term "research" conjures up images of laboratories and scientific experiments, or of expert researchers wielding questionnaires and interview schedules when going to the field to collect data.

Participatory Research offers an alternative approach to traditional research. It entails conducting research with, rather than on or for, the community. At its core is the belief that ordinary individuals possess the capacity for critical reflection and analysis, and that their knowledge has value in any research, educational, or developmental endeavour.

The use of Participatory Research as a tool for empowerment promotes participation of poor, excluded and marginalised households and communities to critically understand their daily lives – and in doing so, both influence change in their own situation and also other actors in that context. Community members who choose to participate in any research or development endeavour are not passive subjects; rather, their diverse life experiences serve as rich sources of knowledge and data. Thus, in the use of Participatory Research tools, it is critical to start from the position: *What is in it for the community we are engaging with?*

In the process of engaging in Participatory Research, the community and the researcher learn together. Researchers can learn about ground realities when gathering knowledge from the community and communities learn to empower themselves from information and analysed data shared by the researcher.

1.2 Purpose of the Toolkit

Often, Participatory Research faces scrutiny from researchers who rely on traditional quantitative studies. The collaborative process of data collection, and the emphasis on learning can be

¹ To know more please visit: <https://www.pria.org/priatheme/promoting-participatory-research/8>

misunderstood as a process that is not “robust”. Documenting an individual’s and a community’s experience of an issue can be dismissed as information that is “inauthentic” and “inaccurate” as it is not “quantifiable”.

This toolkit has been written with the purpose of sharing how Participatory Research tools can be used to understand the lived reality of women in respect to using digital platforms – for whom policies are made, and who are expected to benefit from the implementation of digital platforms based on these policies. The toolkit describes the engagement with communities, specifically to study digital trust among women. It explores the collaborative nature of tools used in Participatory Research, the facilitation of safe dialogic spaces for collective problem-solving, and the reciprocal experiential learning between a researcher and communities. It concludes with highlighting some of the challenges of undertaking Participatory Research in the field.

The document is designed as an aid for individuals (practitioners, students) and organisations (social enterprises, think tanks, corporate social responsibility (CSR) teams, donor and research institutions) interested in conducting meaningful community engagement and devising strategies and policies that foreground what a community wants. Participatory Research tools provide a pathway to achieve this.

It is useful for a reader to also read the synthesis report of the research study, available on the PRIA website.

2 The Context of the Study : Understanding Digital Trust

Participatory Research tools were used in the study '*Drivers, Limiters and Barriers to Women's Trust in Digital Platforms*' (a collaborative research between PRIA, and Aapti Institute, supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation [BMGF]) to explore the factors influencing digital trust among women in India, the impact of gender on digital trust, and to suggest recommendations to bolster women's confidence in digital public infrastructures. In India, and globally, there hasn't been much research on this topic.

Extensive secondary research guided our preparation before setting foot in the field. We began with a major challenge — defining what digital trust is. Literature² suggested that trust is a subjective concept, with multiple perspectives among users who use the internet and access services on digital platforms.

We adopted the following definition:

Digital trust is an individual's expectation that digital technologies and services – and the organisations providing them – will protect all stakeholders' interests and uphold societal expectations and values.³

We began to understand that trust in digital platforms is related to trust in the reliability of essential services, and trust in the support systems that provided the services. Importantly, trust in the community and among community members was what sustained digital trust.

Gender adds another layer of complexity to the issue of digital trust. There is a persistent gender gap in accessing and using digital technologies and services. In low- and middle-income countries, while more women are using smartphones and accessing the internet than ever before, the rate of adoption among women has stagnated.⁴

Digital transformation offers substantial opportunities for both economies and societies, yet its benefits are not uniformly distributed among different societal groups and genders. Gender disparities arise from a set of vulnerabilities as access to, use of, and ownership of digital tools are not gender-neutral, leading to disparities in resources and capabilities to effectively utilise Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The term “digital gender divide” is

²Harwood, D. (2012). *The Logic of Trust*. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9848258.pdf>

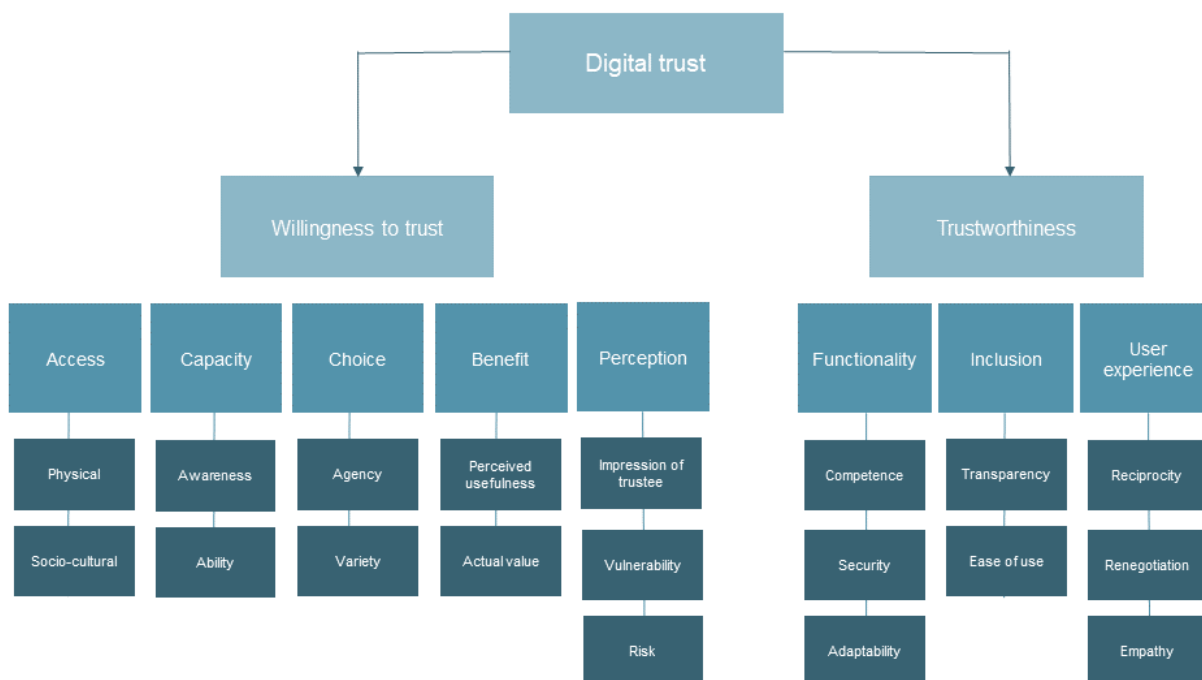
³ World Economic Forum. (2022). *Earning Digital Trust*. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Earning_Digital_Trust_2022.pdf

⁴GSMA (2023). *The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023*. Retrieved from https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2023.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=download-button&utm_campaign=gender-gap-2023

commonly used to describe these gender differences in various contexts, including within and between countries, regions, sectors, and socio-economic groups. These disparities arise from a variety of factors, such as hurdles to access, affordability, educational limitations, and a lack of technological literacy. Additionally, inherent biases and socio-cultural norms contribute to gender-based digital exclusion.⁵

We needed to bridge the knowledge gap between the abstract notion of digital trust, and the term “digital gender divide”, and the lived experiences of women who are able to access digital platforms in India. The use of participatory tools was an effective way to do this, to learn about the lived experiences of diverse women users of digital services in India – young adolescents and older adult women; and women living in rural areas and in informal settlements in cities in different states of India (Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Maharashtra). The Participatory Research also engaged with young adolescent males and adult males to delve deeper into the political and social barriers and enablers of women’s digital trust.

We created the ACCBP (Access, Capacity, Choice, Benefit and Perception) framework to gather the information and analyse it coherently.



The ACCBP Framework

The framework encompasses two elements – “Willingness to Trust” and “Trustworthiness”. Technology and design companies focus on trustworthiness when designing and developing

⁵ Adapted from OECD (2018), *Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Include, Upskill, Innovate*. OECD.

digital platforms. The Participatory Research process focused on willingness to trust – gathering information on the psycho-social experiences of women when they use digital platforms and the political and societal contexts in which they use public and private digital infrastructure.

A woman's willingness to trust was bound by:

1. **Access:** Defined as access to devices, technologies, and platforms enabling full participation. Going beyond physical access to mobiles phones and mobile networks, we were going to learn about the socio-cultural elements influencing engagement and establishment of trust. Questions and discussions related to device ownership, types and usage, with a specific focus on socio-cultural dynamics affecting women's access to digital services.
2. **Capacity:** Capacity to use digital infrastructure facilitates sustained service use, awareness of technologies and platforms, and continuous learning. The Participatory Research tools were used to understand individuals' awareness of digital platforms, confidence in using digital tools, their need for support, and their ability to learn skills to securely navigate digital services to fulfill personal needs.
3. **Choice:** Highlighting individual autonomy in device and platform selection, digital choice emphasizes independent decision-making regarding device purchases and platform engagement. It underscores the importance of individuals' freedom to select the devices and platforms that best suit their preferences and needs.
4. **Benefits:** This component examined what value communities attribute to a specific digital platform.
5. **Perceptions:** This delved into understanding how communities perceive the benefits and the extent to which they feel empowered and assisted by utilising the digital applications they choose to use.

Collating information gathered from the field and its analysis under these components shed light on the factors influencing willingness to trust among women and provided a more comprehensive understanding of digital trust dynamics in communities.

3 Entering the Community

The research team had a better grasp of the idea of digital trust and the digital gender divide. How were we going to communicate this to the community and foster discussions that shared the community's, especially women's, experiences of using digital platforms?

This involved choosing and contextualising Participatory Research tools to resonate with the experiences and social contexts of the communities. We would need to create spaces in which community members felt comfortable to participate in sharing information. We also needed to stay open to learning from the community, remain open to their voices, to link their experiences with the study's aim.

A question loomed large for the research team. Did the communities we aimed to engage with share the same understanding of digital trust as us? If not, what language was needed to explain it to and contextualise it for them? In communities where issues like sanitation, availability of water, employment and shelter were more immediate and pressing, would women be interested in discussing their digital experiences? After all, our community interactions were going to be with lower-income and marginalised groups.

3.1 Deconstructing Digital Trust : Focus Group Discussions In the Community

We decided to begin our discussions with what was familiar to the community – the mobile phone. Our preliminary recce of the context in which these communities lived told us that men and women, boys and girls knew how to use mobile phones, including smartphones.

A mobile phone instrument is an object used in the daily lives of communities. Talking about the benefits and drawbacks of using mobile phones brought a context that is familiar to the participants. The conversations sought to engage participants on how phones positively or negatively impact their lives, both at an individual level and as a society.

The discussions began by displaying two mobile phone instruments – one, a feature phone and the other a smartphone. Group members were asked to identify them and share what they knew to be some of the similarities and differences between the two types of phones. Those who used smartphones were able to talk about the advanced features, accessing the Internet, video calls, etc, as some of the advantages of a smartphone. Most of the women's personal devices though were feature phones; very few had a smartphone.

The conversation around the type of phone helped start the discussion and build comfort. The discussion was carried further by asking open-ended questions, such as, when did you first use a mobile phone? What did you feel the first time you used a mobile phone? How familiar are you

with a smartphone? Name some of the applications you know or use on your smartphone? How did you learn to use a smartphone? Women who owned feature phones were asked if they would prefer to make a change and buy/use a smartphone.

As participation in the discussion grew, we introduced words like *bharosa* and *vishwas* (in Hindi). To weave the concept of trust into the conversation we drew parallels between what trust looks like for them in their daily lives and how they see it linked with a phone/digital platform like Facebook, Instagram, Google Pay, etc, which they may be using. For example, we asked, what do you mean when you say 'bharosa'? What does it look like within your family? Whom do you trust the most in your family and friends? The relevance and significance of trust in their daily lives was then transferred to how and what they trust about the digital applications they use. Impacts of trust, or its absence, was also illustrated through shared experiences of online transactions, data privacy, and cybersecurity. For instance, if they used an app, participants shared what makes them feel "safe" to use that particular app. Women who were more hesitant to use online payment apps explained why they perceived these apps were "unsafe" for them to use.

All conversations were conducted in Hindi or the native local language (Odiya or Marathi). Since the researchers were all Hindi speaking, it was a challenge to explain the concept in different local languages. We sought help from our on-ground partners. This involved having to train them about the research study and our understanding of digital trust.

We tried to have as many of these focus group discussions as possible with the women in the community.

In conversation with the women of a self-help group in Bhubaneswar (Odisha), we learnt that of the ten women in the group, only four had a smartphone; all the others used a feature phone. Among those using a smartphone, only two were comfortable with using the device. These women had learnt how to use the phone from their children.

The learning journey of these women is fascinating. Growing up and most of their adult lives they had no access to nor had they used phones. And now, here they were, confidently making online payments, WhatsApp calls, and searching relevant YouTube videos. They had also become pillars of motivation for other women, who now sought their help and guidance in learning to operate a phone and the various digital platforms that help them with their work as members of the self-help group.

Guided by the gender expert in the research team, we realised the importance of also speaking with the men and adolescent boys in the community. While we followed purposive and convenient sampling,⁶ we undertook focus group discussions with women, men, adolescent girls and boys, persons with disabilities and the LGBTQ community. The choice of conducting discussions with adolescent girls and boys was to be able to highlight the transition on access, choice and capacity

⁶ Andrade, C. (2021). The Inconvenient Truth About Convenience and Purposive Samples, *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 43(1), 86-88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620977000>

from adolescence to adulthood. The interviews with persons with disabilities and the LGBTQ community gave scope to develop a common understanding of digital trust among the wider community, which was also a goal of the study.

In our interactions with the diverse members of the community (women, men, adolescent girls, boys, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ), we noticed that women were the most hesitant to participate in the discussions. Conversations often ended even before they could begin, with statements like, “We don’t have a phone, and we don’t see the need for one.” To address this reluctance among women, we used an ice-breaking activity designed specifically for women’s groups.

By starting with a tangible and relatable subject like phones, we created a comfortable environment for participants to share their thoughts and experiences, paving the way for discussions about the impact of technology on their lives and communities. Gradually transitioning the conversation from a surface-level discussion about the use of phones to more personal choices and the reasons for these choices (using the other participatory tools described in the next section) helped us explore how the community perceives and trusts the role of digital platforms in their lives.

The focus group discussions involving the community during the recce visits also helped the research team to further develop and refine the research design.

3.2. Power Dynamics In a Group and Community

Exploring the gender digital gap in India reveals a multifaceted interplay of societal norms that is reflective of power dynamics in communities. Traditional roles and expectations dictate behaviour, underscoring the intricate nature of power within society. Political anthropologists view power⁷ as a nuanced force, extending beyond mere coercion to encompass the reshaping of norms and narratives.

During group discussions, power is reflected in who initiates the conversation, in gestures, and body language. As participatory researchers we observe behaviours such as who is speaking the most, who is not getting a chance to put their point across, etc, and seek reasons for it. For example, a daughter-in-law may hesitate to speak if her mother-in-law is also present in the same group. These observations become crucial in mediating the discussions to ensure an inclusive dialogue, where all group members get an opportunity to speak freely.

Observing power dynamics⁸ between community groups sheds light on societal inequalities and hierarchies, which dictate access to resources and decision-making authority. For instance, under

⁷ Dahl, R. A. (1957). The Concept of Power. *Behavioral science*, 2(3), 201-215.

⁸ Andress, L., Hall, T., Davis, S. *et al.* (2020). Addressing Power Dynamics in Community-engaged Research Partnerships. *J Patient Rep Outcomes*, 4, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41687-020-00191-z>

the disguise of protection, females often face restrictions on digital device usage, contrasting with the freedom afforded to males, even young boys. Additionally, societal stigma attaches to women who spend time on phones, labeling them as neglectful mothers, daughters-in-law, daughters or wives, while men face no such scrutiny. These dynamics underscore the pervasive influence of cultural norms on decision-making and resistance.

Therefore, examining digital trust among women necessitates an examination of the sources and structures shaping local communities, as well as the relational power dynamics. This was done by understanding access and perceptions around smartphones and the Internet, using selected participatory tools.

4 Probing Deeper : Using Participatory Tools

Focus group discussions helped start conversations with the community, but it was hard to get everyone to share openly. Some women weren't interested in owning phones because they didn't feel confident using them. Teenage girls avoided talking about social media because they didn't want to be singled out. While men and boys were more forthcoming with their opinions, we wanted to understand their perspectives more fully. The use of participatory tools was effective in probing deeper.

4.1 Daily Digital Clock

To gain insight into the amount of time women spent on a phone in one day and the patterns of their phone usage, we used the **daily digital clock mapping** tool. Along with assessing access and time spent on phones, we sought to explore what were some of the physical spaces in which women would sit to use their phones. Additionally, through this method we compared the disparities in phone usage between women who possess personal phones and those who do not. Most of the women in the various groups we conducted this exercise with use feature phones. Of those who do use smartphones, they often rely on their husbands' devices or the ones that are used by everyone in the family.

Before using a participatory tool, try and ease the process by playing an ice-breaker game with the group. We played a game called land and sea with women's groups. It was amazing to see the women enjoying themselves and become comfortable with each other. "We hardly ever sit together as a group and have fun," one of the women said.

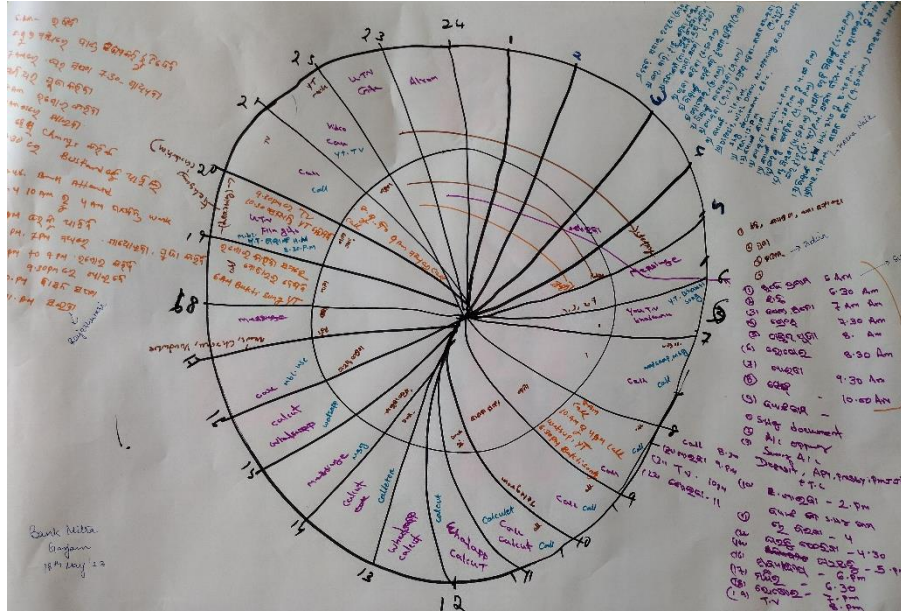
Women were asked to draw a 24-hour clock and fill in their daily routines, from the time they wake up in the morning till the time they go to bed at night. When drawing the clock, women are asked to highlight those hours of the day when they use their phone, or get access to one (if they don't own a phone). This tool helped women visualise how they spend their time, and reflect on how little time they actually have in a day to use their phones.

The daily digital clock tool was used with adolescents, men and LGBTQ community members. This allowed us to draw parallels between how similar or different the use of phones on a daily basis is between multiple groups.

It was not unusual to see from the daily digital clock that women remain engrossed in household chores. The time they have to use their phones is limited. On average, a woman gets to use her phone for a maximum of 2 hours in a day (in some locations the average went up to 4 hours). Though women who have access to a mobile phone, can use it anytime during the day, they usually to use it in the afternoon and late at night.

For men, phone usage was scattered through the day, when they were at work, or on a break, and after coming back home. Adolescents (both boys and girls) mostly used the phone in the

afternoon, after school. Adolescent girls spent as much time on the phone as adolescent boys; girls spent more time on the phone if it was primarily being used for online classes or to watch educational videos.



Daily Digital Clock made by bank mitras in Ganjam, Odisha

On aggregating our findings, we discerned distinct patterns in using a smartphone. Among all the groups, smartphone usage predominantly revolves around entertainment, learning, upskilling, and communication. Among women, communication with relatives and family takes precedence, followed by conversations over WhatsApp groups through voice notes or sending photos of reports related to their work, such as in self-help groups and frontline health workers. When not using the phone for work, women mostly use smartphones to watch YouTube videos for entertainment, and to learn new recipes, embroidery or stitching patterns.

Men have no restrictions attached to communicating. They would pick up calls from unknown numbers, openly post pictures on social media and access news updates, alongside using applications for online payments. Adolescents, on the other hand, heavily associate technology with social media engagement and online shopping. Boys mostly play games, while girls use it for watching movies. The digital clock of several adolescent girls showed they use the phone to support their studies, spending time watching YouTube channels to help understand concepts for different subjects.

Reflections with the women on the data visualised by them in their digital clocks highlighted how societal norms shape their tech usage. Examining their own daily routines, the women discovered that their packed schedules leave little room to learn how to use new technologies; they often exhibited a reluctance to know more than the basic functionality of making a phone call. They

perceive ownership of a phone for themselves as less essential since they can access their husbands' or children's phones for making calls. Women living in urban informal settlements (*bastis*), in particular, exhibit sparse digital footprints, primarily borrowing family phones for basic communication.

While boys enjoy unrestricted access, girls are often restricted from openly using social media platforms and are given specific guidelines regarding posting “appropriate pictures”. This restriction is also reflected in the spaces where women and girls can use their phones – they mostly use it inside the house. Boys and men, on the other hand, carry the device with them and use it everywhere. Several adolescent girls shared how they get up very early in the morning, before anyone else in the family, and use the phone sitting in a corner, quickly putting it away as the other family members begin to stir. Adolescent girls from Muslim communities have extremely limited personal phone access, relying on family members' devices for occasional educational app usage.

In the urban informal settlements of Nagpur, transgender/LGBTQ individuals actively embrace digital platforms throughout the day, with smartphones playing a pivotal role in their lives. Hearing impaired participants predominantly use smartphones for video calling, exhibiting limited morning engagement and more active usage in the evenings, particularly for males.

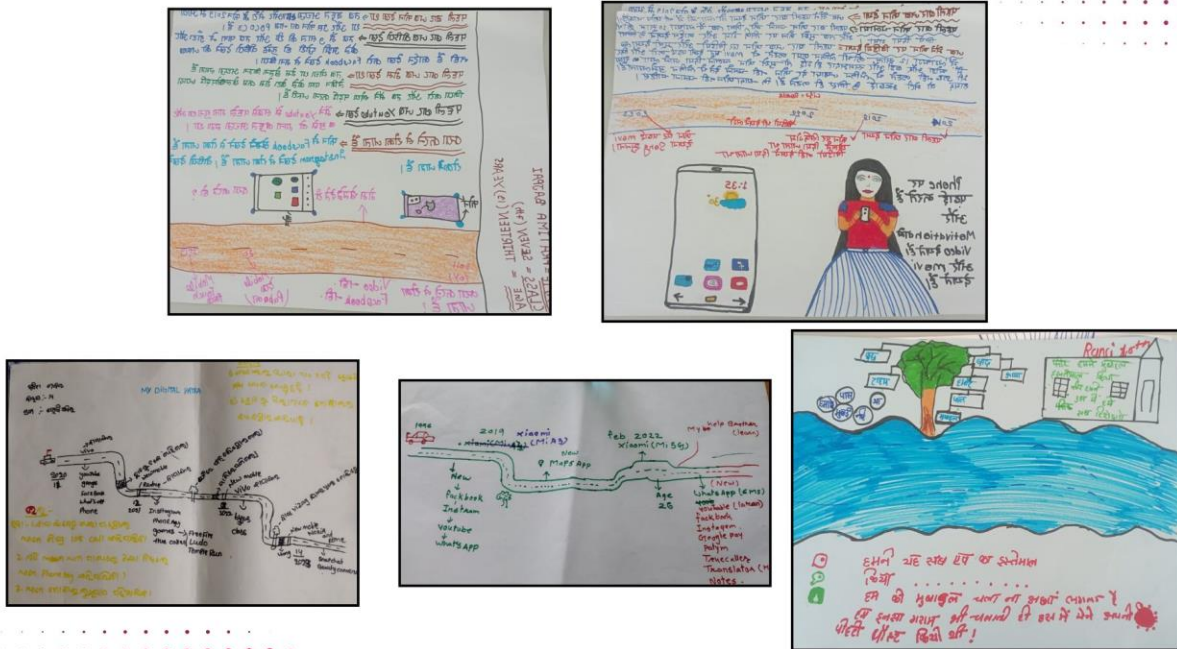
These contrasts illuminate the nuanced ways in which a complex interplay of socio-cultural and economic factors within marginalised communities shapes access to and utilisation of digital technology.

4.2 Meri Digital Yatra

While it was important to understand the spaces and time of usage of individual devices, it was equally important to assess the individual paths to technology adoption in our exploration of digital platforms and their relationship with the community. For this, we used the **Meri Digital Yatra (My Digital Journey)** tool, primarily with adolescent boys and girls, and adult women.

Meri Digital Yatra allowed us to delve into the nuanced motivations and barriers surrounding individual engagement with technology – why and when a woman might have access to a phone, or choose to upgrade to a smartphone, how a boy discovers new apps or video games, or why a girl associates education with phones but hesitates to seek or request her own device.

This arts-based tool can be used with any group, though it works best with adolescents as they are better able to creatively visualise and express themselves through art.



Meri Digital Yatra Drawn by Participants

“Hamein phone lena mana hai” (We are forbidden from using the phone)
 – Adolescent girl, Dubbaga, Lucknow

“Hamare pass phone hai, lekin bhai aur papa kabhi kabhi hamara phone check karte hain” (I have a phone, but my brother or father often check my phone)
 – 15-year- old girl from Deoghar, Jharkhand

“Mera phone mera friend hai” (My phone is my friend)
 – Adolescent girl from Ranchi, Jharkhand

The digital yatras revealed a nuanced transition in phone usage as girls matured into adolescence. While the younger girls enjoyed a degree of freedom in exploring digital spaces, older adolescent girls faced heightened scrutiny and limitations. Many adolescent girls in Ranchi, Jharkhand, when presenting their digital yatras, highlighted they are allowed to own a phone only after marriage. Before marriage, they have access to their brother’s or father’s phone. One girl, who got her own phone after she cleared her high school exams, recalled her excitement. Even though it was not a brand new phone (it was a hand-me-down from her brother, who got to buy the latest model phone), she would keep it safely. She learnt how to use the phone from her brother, who helped her create her own email id and took her through how to log in and check her emails.

For many families, the Covid-19 pandemic was the time they invested in smartphones, and girls were allowed freer access to the phone as schooling was online. Some families, however,

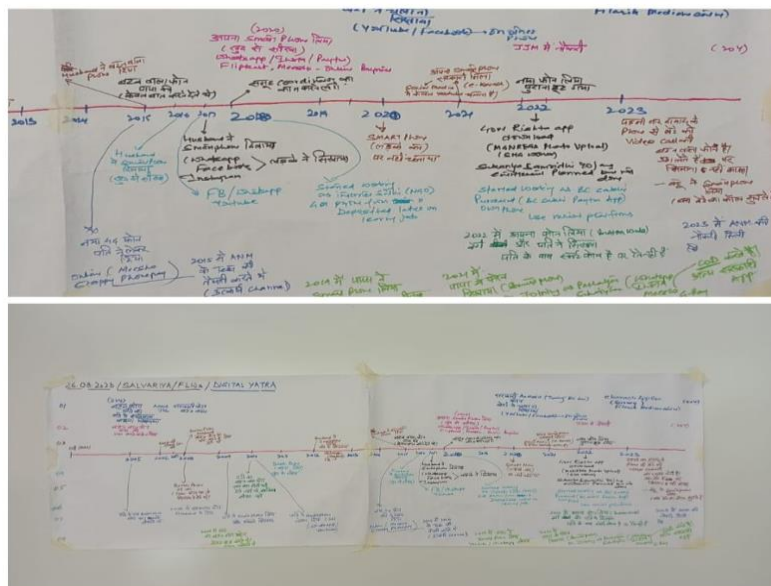
remained rigid and did not adopt technology, preferring to let their daughters' education suffer rather than give them access to phones.

“Recharge kafi mehenga ho gaya hai” (Topping up a phone has become expensive) – Adolescent girl from Kalhod, Deoghar

A major barrier to access and ownership of devices is financial constraints. With limited family incomes, women in the household sacrificed and did not ask for an individual phone. Also, many women feel they can't learn how to use technology, and hence avoid using a smartphone.

The Meri Digital Yatra tool used with the LGBTQ community in Nagpur revealed their strong embrace of digital spaces and use of smartphones for learning, entertainment, self-expression and forming relationships. LGBTQ members actively engage with social media, dating apps, and online payment apps. Many had received smartphones as gifts from romantic partners, highlighting the role of phones and online platforms in fostering connections within the LGBTQ community.

A variation of the tool was tried with frontline women workers. In some places, women shy away from writing or drawing. Thus, a facilitator can invite the women to share their journeys as a group – the women draw their individual journeys on a single chart paper using different colours. This activity done as a group helps the women relate individual digital journeys with each other's. Reflecting as a group, they share a dialogue around how their combined journeys have shaped the trust they have on digital platforms.



Meri Digital Yatra when done as a group

4.3 Problem Tree Analysis

The Digital Clock and Digital Yatra tools were useful in capturing an understanding of an individual's connection with their device (phone), usage and journey of adopting the technology. The Problem Tree Analysis is a tool that probes the reasons why adoption and use of technology varies for different members of a community. Our emphasis in using this tool was particularly to capture the reflections related to gendered differences. The community's reflections were collated and analysed as per the framework.

With women, the **Problem Tree Analysis** was used to delve deeper into the core issue of low usage and adoption of digital platforms. Guided questions acted as the prompts for participants to reflect on their role as individuals in perpetuating stereotypes and furthering community behaviours. This tool was invaluable for understanding the factors behind women's distrust of digital platforms.

“Mere husband bolte hain ki kuch bhi use karo but Facebook mat use karna”
(My husband says use the phone for anything, but do not use Facebook) –
Government schoolteacher, mid-thirties, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra.

“Hamare mama ke saath fraud hua tha ek baar. Uske baad se hamein dar lagta hai online paisa bhejne mein” (My uncle has been the victim of a fraud. After that, I feel scared to use online payment) – 28-year-old woman, Bhandewari settlement, Nagpur.

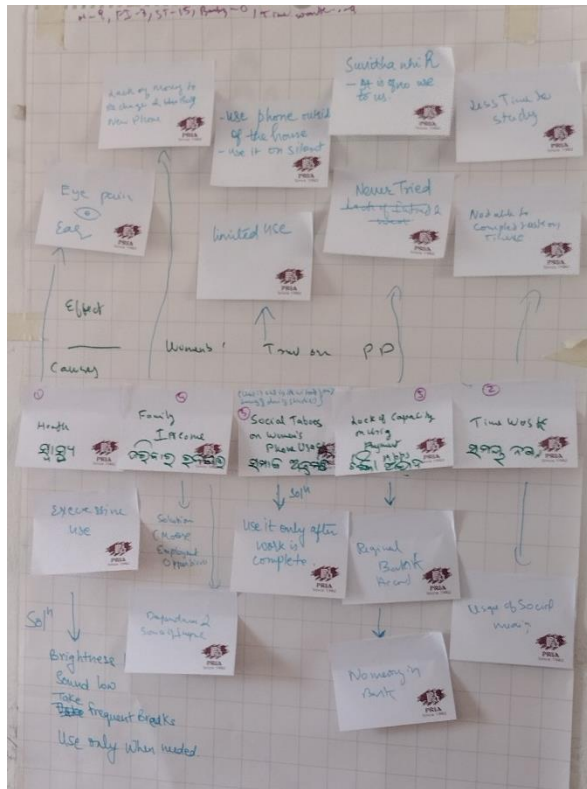
Women's “safety” (and how unsafe online experiences can be) was a recurring theme in the narratives women shared. They felt male members of the family keeping tabs on their digital footprints was a way of “protecting” them. They rarely objected when their husbands demanded to check their phones.

“Agar hamare husband hamara phone dekhna chahtein hain, toh humme dikhana chahiye. Agar nahi dikhayenge, toh unhe lagega ki hum kuch galat kar rahe hain.” (If my husband wants to see my phone, then I must show it to him. If I don't, he will feel that I am doing something wrong) – women in Salwariya, Shravasti, Uttar Pradesh.

Many women reported receiving insulting comments from strangers after posting photos on social media. Some even mentioned having received weird messages from unknown users. The women had sufficient digital literacy to block the number from which they were getting unwanted calls and messages. However, awareness of what constitutes harassment and how to report it was limited.

Women were concerned about the potential for fraud and identity theft, and were hesitant to share personal information online. They had heard of several cases, often among family, of online scams. Public service advertisements highlighting frauds and spam calls asking for OTPs and bank information had made them aware, but it also brought the fear of conducting financial transactions online. One participant shared her experience of how, after she had given her mobile number to avail of a scheme promoted by a private bank, she was now receiving calls from all

over India. “*Mera number aise kaise chala gaya itni door? Mein toh vahan kisi ko nahi janti*” (How did my number go to these unknown people, especially when I don’t know anyone from that region?). Had her personal data been sold without her consent, we wondered.



Problem tree analysis with women in Ollama, Ganjam, Odisha



Problem tree analysis with women in Deoghar, Jharkhand

“Bacche pura din phone par lage rehte hain. Usi ki wajah se unki aadatein kharaab ho jati hain”. (Children spend all their free time on the phone. This is why they are getting into bad behaviour) – 35-year-old woman, Nagpur, Maharashtra

The research team analysed the reflections from the community, using the framework to collate the issues into the buckets of Access, Capacity, Choice, Benefit and Perception. These issues were presented back to the community and participants were asked to rank and prioritise the digital trust issues on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as the least preferred. Ranking and prioritising as part of the Problem Tree tool underscores the need for collective responsibility to address societal norms that influence behaviours. When the most pressing problem has been identified, the community can then collectively decide how to solve it and allocate resources accordingly.



The Problem Tree Analysis from Odisha in the ACCBP Framework

4.4 Mirroring

The **Mirroring tool** works on the principle of how it is a natural tendency in society to mirror (repeat or adopt) what we hear and see, whether through the sharing of experiences, the use of words, or habits and behaviours. The more time we spend with others, the higher the likelihood that members of a group or community will have the same beliefs and attitudes, which influences and shapes the societies we create and maintain.

As we live busy lives, finding time to sit together as a community and reflect on our existing behaviours and attitudes, on how relevant they remain, and what is needed to change the current status quo is difficult. It is often easier to blame external factors, such as unresponsive institutions and unaccountable elected representatives, instead of looking to change ourselves, individually and as a community.

The Mirroring tool helps a community realise the power it holds to determine the pathway of change that is most beneficial to everyone in the community.

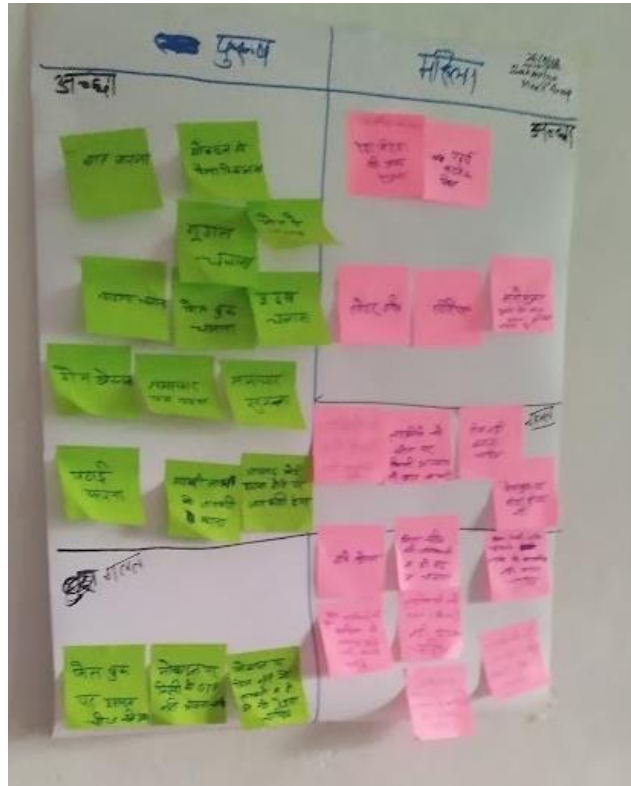
In the Mirroring tool, probing questions are asked to challenge a group's perspective(s) on an issue. For example, in the discussion with a group of young men aged between 20 to 25 years in Odisha, it was observed that they all shared a common belief that girls should not be given personal phones and that the phone usage of adolescent girls should be limited and monitored. When questioned about the rationale behind this belief, the only reason the young men could give was this was the "norm", and in their experience women's activities have always been monitored by the men in the household and community.

To challenge this perspective, the participants were asked to discuss how men and women use their phones. As they engaged with this question, they began to realise that there is no difference in the reasons why men and women use the phone – both make calls to stay in touch with family and friends, for entertainment, to post on social media, and use payment apps.

But, they continued with their discussion, girls were restricted from using their phones freely while boys were allowed to use it anytime, for anything they wanted. Was this not a double standard? Why were women and girls held to a different standard than men? By interrogating themselves, these young men were able to challenge their own beliefs and begin to see things from a different perspective.

They realised that most men do not trust women with a phone as they perceive a woman's mind was impressionable and/or they could be easily manipulated. Why would men have such a poor opinion of women? Probing further, they concluded it was because women faced more bullying and harassment online. They did not want women in their families and the community at large to face this harassment, and so they restricted women's use of phones and accessing the internet.

Men in Deoghar, Jharkhand revealed that they often felt intimidated by women using technology.



Mirroring exercise with a group of men in Shravasti, Uttar Pradesh

In a mixed group in Nagpur, both the men and women discovered they held similar perceptions regarding appropriate digital platform usage for women. While online activities like education, learning, business opportunities, and communication with family/friends were seen as acceptable for women, using social media, posting photos/videos, engaging with strangers, watching movies/serials excessively, playing betting games, and making online payments were viewed as risky or inappropriate for women by the group. For the men, the primary concerns were around women watching pornographic/inappropriate content and the trolling/abuse women receive online. All participants in the group were educated. While they acknowledged generational differences, they still displayed a deeply-rooted gendered attitude towards women's autonomy in the using digital space. Safety, preserving honor/reputation, and adherence to traditional gender roles remain important factors that determine women's access and freedom to use digital spaces.

5 Participatory Research in the Field

The use of Participatory Research tools is challenging, and requires patience. The tools cannot be used mechanically. As a researcher, one needs to connect with the community first, before gathering information. When a researcher puts in the effort to deeply understand a community, a community gives back by trusting and sharing information about their lives. This relationship of trust is central to using Participatory Research methods.

Creating a space in which marginalised groups like women feel comfortable is perhaps the most pivotal skill for a participatory researcher. In communities where women do not have a say or are rebuked for giving opinions, a participatory researcher spends the time to get to know them, before asking them to engage in a discussion that would meet the study's goals.

The process of conducting research with a community is not merely to disseminate information about a study's goals and objectives. The primary goal should be to facilitate spaces and opportunities for community members to come together to discuss their perspectives related to the research question.

Facilitating dialogues and discussions in which participants can share their views openly gives community members a sense of unity and mutual respect for diverse opinions. Such facilitation requires communication techniques that are contextualised, familiar, inclusive, and relatable. A tailored approach in the meetings to suit the needs of community members, such as timings for meetings, the language in which the discussion is conducted, using culturally appropriate analogies to explain the concepts, etc, fosters participation.

There is tremendous value in recording accurately what participants share in the discussions. Reading and reflecting on field notes after a long day is the best guide to replan and prepare for the next day. Carefully noting observations and statements help discern important themes and issues, which must then be shared back with the community.

Undertaking Participatory Research authentically has challenges. The biggest challenge is getting access to and entering the community. The digital trust study navigated this by relying on long-standing partnerships and relationships with community based organisations who hold trust and have a reputation for community work in the locations where we undertook field work.

Language can be a barrier to communication. Using a translator from the community is very helpful. Nonetheless, one may still feel that a lot has been lost in translation. Using visual and arts-based activities and asking for literal translations of what was said are some ways in which the language barrier can be overcome.

Ultimately, the integration of Participatory Research tools with the quantitative large surveys in this study has made the research process more meaningful with deeper insights and analysis. This is beneficial in making recommendations and suggesting strategies that are women-centric, community based and empathetic.

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