



# The Indian Economic Journal

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**INDIAN ECONOMY - NAVIGATING  
DOMESTIC REALITIES AND  
GLOBAL SHIFTS**





# The Indian Economic Journal

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The Journal, a Publication of the Indian Economic Association, is dedicated to advancing scientific research across diverse domains including Economic Theory, Macroeconomic Stability and Growth, Agricultural Prospects and Rural Transformation, Industrial Development and Manufacturing, Global Trade and Geopolitical Dynamics, Social Inclusion, Employment and Human Development, as well as contemporary issues shaping Tamil Nadu's Development.



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## **Editor's Message**

Dear Readers,

I am truly honoured to edit the special issues of the Indian Economic Journal.

It is with great pleasure that I present this special edition of the Indian Economic Journal for the 108th Annual Conference of the Indian Economic Association, which is hosted by VELS University in Chennai from December 27 to 29, 2025. The theme for this year, “Indian Economy – Navigating Domestic Realities and Global Shifts,” encapsulates the dynamic crossroads at which our nation currently stands. As India progresses towards becoming a resilient and globally competitive economy, the necessity for informed dialogue, evidence-based policy formulation, and collaborative scholarship becomes increasingly crucial.

The sub-themes of this conference provide significant opportunities for such discussions. Macroeconomic stability, growth prospects, and the changing financial landscape are central to comprehending India's medium-term trajectory. Agriculture and rural transformation continue to influence livelihoods and promote inclusive development, while the industrial and manufacturing sectors promise productivity enhancements and global competitiveness. In a rapidly evolving geopolitical and trade context, India's strategic positioning demands both caution and innovation. Equally significant are the issues of social inclusion, employment, and human development, which constitute the moral and economic foundation for sustainable progress. The emphasis on contemporary development challenges in Tamil Nadu adds a valuable regional perspective to this year's discussions.

The Indian Economic Journal (IEJ) is an important organ of the Indian Economic Association (IEA) that provides support and services to professionals and researchers both in India and overseas. For over a century the IEA has been one of the largest and the oldest body of teachers, researchers, academicians, and policy makers drawn from the background of Economics and affiliate discipline. Founded in 1917, the IEA is a, “not-for-profit, non-political, and scholarly” voluntary professional association with membership open to those who fulfil the eligibility criteria laid by the constitution of IEA. Through regular outreach programs like, “Conferences, Courses, Publications and Seminars”

IEA disseminates information among scholars to increase their understanding of economics. Both IEJ and IEA work in tandem encouraging members to share their research work findings and contribute scholarly articles in Annual Conferences and for publishing in special editions of the IEJ by maintaining relevance of the journal. This special issue is being released at the 108th Annual Conference of the Indian Economic Association.

My special thanks and gratitude to our Chief Patron Dr. Ishari K Ganesh, Honourable Vice Chancellor, VELS University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu for organizing this historic 108th Annual Conference at VELS University during 27-29th December 2025. My heartfelt thanks to our Patron Conference Dr. G. Viswanathan, Founder and Chancellor VIT. Also, my special thanks to Association President, Prof. A.D.N. Bajpai for his valuable contribution for the growth of the Indian Economic Association. I express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Anil Kumar Thakur, Chief Convener of the Indian Economic Association for his countless efforts and dedication towards the pathbreaking glories of the IEA.

The Indian Economic Journal was founded by Prof. CN. Vakil and Prof. R. Balkrishna in 1953 and has over the years become a covered internationally acclaimed journal in Economics due to high ethical and quality standards maintained by successive editors. I take the opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat in transforming Conference Volumes of IEA into special editions of Indian Economic Journal and Dr Anil Kumar Thakur, Chief Convener of IEA for taking efforts to sustain the quality and ratings of IEJ along with the Managing Editor of IEA, Prof. Sudhanshu Bhushan. I take this opportunity to thank all the secretaries for taking this to greater heights.

I would like to thank all the authors, and co-authors for their scholarly article contributions for the 108th Annual Conference. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the contributors, reviewers, and organizing team whose efforts have greatly enriched this volume. It is my hope that this edition inspires new perspectives and makes a meaningful contribution to the discourse surrounding India's economy.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all the reviewers and the editorial support team for their invaluable contributions. I am particularly grateful to Dr. S. Narayanan, Dr. M. Dillip Anand, Dr. Pragati Krishnan, Dr. Raj Kamal Roy, Dr. Nameirakpam Taibangnganbi, Mr. R. Tharmaraj, Mr. N. Shriram, Mr. L. Suman Raj, Mr. R. Nayan Jain, and Mr. B. Nishanth for their unwavering dedication and meticulous efforts in bringing out the special issues of the Indian Economic Journal within the scheduled timeline.

I also place on record my sincere appreciation to Mr. A. Mohideen, Managing Director, Phoenix Print Hub, Mr. A.M. Seyed Ahmed Hussain, Mr. A. Abdul Rahaman, Ms. Nidhi, at the Phoenix Print Hub, Chennai, our print service partner, for their neat execution and timely delivery of the printed volumes.

**Ravindra K. Brahme**

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# Social Media as a Catalyst for Reducing Urban-Rural Educational Disparities in Tamil Nadu

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## Abstract

*Urban–rural educational disparities continue to challenge Tamil Nadu’s development, even as the state is widely recognized for its forward-looking educational initiatives. With rising internet penetration and the growing ubiquity of smartphones, social media has emerged as a potentially transformative space for learning beyond the confines of traditional classrooms. This study investigates how social media contributes to narrowing educational inequalities by examining its adoption, perceived usefulness, and impact among learners in both urban and rural regions of Tamil Nadu. Drawing on existing scholarly literature, government policy reports, and secondary datasets, the paper explores the ways in which platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram are evolving into informal learning environments that complement formal instruction for students in resource-constrained rural areas. The findings suggest that social media enhances access to academic content, examination support, peer communities, and career-related information. Yet, persistent issues such as limited digital literacy, inconsistent connectivity, and the spread of misinformation constrain its overall effectiveness. This research concludes that social media, when thoughtfully integrated with digital inclusion strategies and educational reforms, holds significant promise in reducing Tamil Nadu’s urban–rural learning gap.*

**Keywords:** social media, educational disparities, Tamil Nadu, digital inclusion, urban–rural gap

## Introduction

Educational development in Tamil Nadu has consistently been recognized for its progressive policies and relatively strong learning outcomes compared to many other Indian states. Despite these achievements, a noticeable gap persists between urban and rural learners, in terms of access to quality instruction, exposure to information, and availability of academic resources. While urban students often benefit from advanced digital tools, specialized coaching, and strong educational networks, many rural students continue to encounter limitations stemming from infrastructural constraints, reduced access to expert teachers, and fewer opportunities for career guidance (Government of India, 2023; Subramanian & Kumar, 2022). These disparities highlight an urgent need for innovative approaches that can bridge the resource gap and promote equitable learning opportunities across the state.

In recent years, the rapid expansion of mobile technology and internet connectivity has reshaped how young people in Tamil Nadu access information. Social media, once viewed primarily as a space for entertainment, has evolved into an influential platform for learning and digital communication. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram have emerged as accessible spaces where students engage with academic content, receive updates on examinations, interact with teachers, and participate in peer-led learning communities. Scholars argue that social media is increasingly becoming an “informal learning environment” that enables students to supplement classroom instruction and independently explore educational interests (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Manca, 2020). For rural students, the democratizing potential of social media is highly significant.

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Because these platforms offer low-cost access to lectures, tutorials, career guidance, and motivational content, they help reduce the disadvantages faced by learners who do not have access to coaching centers or specialized faculty. In states like Tamil Nadu, where the government prioritizes digital literacy, ICT-enabled classrooms, and community-based learning programs such as Illam Thedi Kalvi -social media becomes an important extension of existing educational reforms (Tamil Nadu School Education Department, 2022). Through government campaigns, NGO initiatives, and student-led content creation, social media platforms increasingly function as bridges that connect rural learners with high-quality learning materials previously concentrated in urban spaces.

However, the use of social media in education is not without challenges. Issues such as unreliable internet connectivity, differences in digital literacy, misinformation risks, and distractions can limit its effectiveness (Banerjee, 2021). Moreover, not all students have equal access to smartphones or stable data networks, suggesting that social media's potential can only be realized when broader digital inclusion measures are in place. Against this backdrop, this research seeks to understand the extent to which social media genuinely acts as a catalyst in reducing educational disparities between urban and rural learners in Tamil Nadu. By examining how students utilize social platforms, what barriers they encounter, and how these tools influence their learning experiences, the study aims to offer meaningful insights into the evolving relationship between digital ecosystems and educational equity. The findings may help policymakers, institutions, and educators develop more inclusive strategies that harness social media's full potential in promoting equitable access to learning across the state.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on three theoretical frameworks that offer a deeper understanding of how social media can influence educational equity between urban and rural learners in Tamil Nadu. The first guiding lens is the Digital Divide Theory, which examines disparities in access to technology, connectivity, and digital competencies (van Dijk, 2020). Although Tamil Nadu has made significant progress in expanding digital infrastructure, the benefits remain unevenly distributed. Urban students typically have better access to stable internet connections, personal learning devices, and early exposure to digital tools, whereas many rural learners continue to face infrastructural constraints and limited opportunities for developing digital literacy. Digital Divide Theory emphasises that access is multidimensional and it is not about having a device, but also about the ability to use technology meaningfully and confidently (Norris, 2001). This perspective helps explain why increasing smartphone penetration alone does not automatically translate into equitable educational outcomes.

The second theoretical foundation is Connectivism, a learning theory proposed by Siemens (2005) that positions learning as a process of connecting information, people, and digital resources across expansive online networks. Unlike traditional cognitive theories, connectivism acknowledges the central role of technology in shaping how individuals learn, collaborate, and update their knowledge in the digital era. Social media platforms exemplify this networked model of learning by allowing students to access a wide range of educational content, interact with peers and educators, and continuously refine their understanding through exposure to new online information streams. For rural learners who may lack physical access to expert teachers or academic support systems, these digital networks serve as alternative gateways to quality learning experiences. Connectivism therefore provides a powerful lens for understanding how social media can function as an informal but highly dynamic learning ecosystem.

The third framework informing this study is Social Capital Theory, which highlights how networks, relationships, and social interactions contribute to individual advancement and access to resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). In educational contexts, social capital plays a crucial role in shaping student aspirations, access to information, and academic success. Social media enhances virtual forms

of social capital by enabling learners in rural settings to build connections with knowledgeable individuals, educators, influencers, and online study communities. These interactions expand the informational and emotional support available to students, replicating some of the academic advantages often concentrated in urban environments. Virtual support networks, peer groups, and collaborative learning communities help rural students overcome geographical isolation and gain insights into academic pathways, career opportunities, and exam preparation strategies that might otherwise remain inaccessible. Thus Digital Divide Theory, Connectivism, and Social Capital Theory offer a comprehensive foundation for interpreting the complex relationship between social media and educational disparities. While connectivism and social capital theory illuminate the ways in which social media can foster learning and community building, digital divide theory reminds us that structural inequalities still shape who benefits and to what extent. Integrating these perspectives allows this study to examine not only the transformative potential of social media but also the persistent barriers that must be addressed to achieve meaningful educational equity in Tamil Nadu.

## **Literature Review**

### **Urban–Rural Educational Disparities in India and Tamil Nadu**

Urban–rural disparities in education remain a central concern in India’s development discourse. Studies consistently highlight that rural learners experience limited access to qualified teachers, digital infrastructure, and academic enrichment programs, which widen learning gaps between regions (Chandra & Nandhini, 2021; Subramanian & Kumar, 2022). Although Tamil Nadu is often celebrated for its progressive schooling reforms, disparities persist in terms of technological access, exposure to competitive examinations, and availability of extracurricular learning opportunities (Government of India, 2023). Rural schools frequently lack advanced digital tools and specialized subject instructors, resulting in unequal learning environments compared to urban institutions. These inequalities create barriers to higher education, employability, and long-term social mobility.

### **Social Media as an Informal Learning Ecosystem**

Social media has transformed the landscape of information access and informal education globally. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp serve as digital learning environments where students engage with tutorials, lectures, peer discussions, and expert-led content (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Research shows that social media supports self-directed learning, fosters student autonomy, and enables collaborative knowledge creation (Manca, 2020; Al-Rahmi et al., 2018). In India, social media has increasingly become a parallel educational ecosystem, for students preparing for competitive exams or seeking supplementary academic material (Sarkar & Das, 2020). Its multimedia features such as videos, reels, and infographics, live discussions cater to diverse learning styles and enhance learner engagement.

### **Social Media and Educational Equity**

A growing amount of evidence suggests that digital platforms can play an equalizing role by democratizing access to information. Social media offers low-cost alternatives to private coaching and provides exposure to high-quality instructional resources that are otherwise concentrated in urban regions for rural students (Banerjee, 2021). Studies indicate that online educational communities help bridge resource gaps by enabling students to access expert guidance, career updates, and learning materials regardless of geographical location (Kumar & Singh, 2021). Furthermore, mobile-first access has enhanced participation from remote areas, with inexpensive smartphones acting as gateways to educational resources. However, scholars also warn that digital tools alone cannot solve structural

inequalities unless broader issues like connectivity, affordability, and digital literacy are addressed (Hilbert, 2016; Das, 2022).

### **Social Media and Digital Inclusion Initiatives in Tamil Nadu**

Tamil Nadu has been proactive in integrating technology into education through initiatives such as ICT-enabled classrooms, online textbook repositories, and the community-based Illam Thedi Kalvi program. Government reports indicate that these initiatives have increased digital awareness and encouraged the use of online platforms for academic support (Tamil Nadu School Education Department, 2022). Social media serves as a crucial extension of these reforms, with teachers and community volunteers using WhatsApp groups, YouTube channels, and Telegram communities to disseminate learning materials, conduct micro-teaching sessions, and share assignments with rural students (Ramesh & Vijayalakshmi, 2023). Emerging literature suggests that the youth of Tamil Nadu increasingly rely on social media for doubt clarification, career guidance, and studying for public exams, indicating a shift toward digital inclusion.

### **Challenges and Risks Associated with Social Media Use in Education**

While social media presents substantial opportunities, it also carries several risks. Digital inequality persists due to inconsistent network connectivity, limited access to smartphones, and gaps in digital literacy among rural families (Banerjee, 2021; Das, 2022). Additionally, misinformation, distraction, and excessive screen time can negatively impact academic outcomes (Przybylski, 2020). Teachers also express concerns about the credibility of unofficial online content and the absence of structured learning pathways on social platforms (Kumar & Singh, 2021). These challenges indicate that while social media has the potential to reduce disparities, its effectiveness depends on supportive ecosystems, including training, parental awareness, and reliable digital infrastructure.

The reviewed literature highlights that social media can function as a powerful tool for improving access to learning resources, for rural populations. However, most available studies examine social media's role in higher education, online learning, or generic digital literacy. Limited research has specifically explored how social media contributes to reducing urban–rural educational disparities within the context of Tamil Nadu, despite the state's growing digital penetration and extensive educational reforms. Moreover, empirical insights on students' usage patterns, perceived benefits, and challenges remain under-examined. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the extent to which social media acts as a catalyst for educational equity across Tamilnadu.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology using the analysis of secondary data. Given the exploratory nature of the research focused on understanding how social media functions as a catalyst for reducing urban–rural educational disparities in Tamil Nadu, secondary data provides a comprehensive and reliable foundation for examining large-scale trends, policy directions, and learner behaviors across diverse contexts. Secondary data for this study was collected from a wide range of reputable and publicly accessible sources. These include scholarly journal articles, academic books, government reports, policy briefs, national and state-level education statistics, and digital inclusion surveys published by agencies such as the Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of Tamil Nadu, NITI Aayog, and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). Online educational platforms, EdTech reports, and social media analytics also contributed contextually relevant information regarding platform usage, language preferences, and accessibility patterns among students in the state. The secondary data was conducted using thematic analysis, allows to identify recurring patterns and synthesize insights across multiple documents. The collected materials were categorized

into content related to digital access, social media adoption, educational inequalities, learner experiences, and infrastructural challenges. These were then organized into thematic categories such as “digital divide and infrastructure,” “educational use of social media platforms,” “informal learning practices,” “benefits for rural learners,” and “barriers and limitations.” Themes were refined through iterative comparison, ensuring coherence and clear relationships between concepts. This process helps to integrate findings from diverse sources and construct a holistic understanding of social media’s role in bridging the urban–rural gap. This enables a comprehensive exploration of the research problem by relying on high-quality secondary data, the study captures perspectives and findings, offering understanding of how social media contributes to reducing educational disparities across urban and rural regions of Tamil Nadu.

The following research questions were considered,

- How do rural students in Tamil Nadu use social media for educational purposes?
- What are the key benefits and challenges of social media for learners in urban and rural contexts?
- How can social media be effectively integrated into broader digital inclusion and educational equity initiatives?

### **Research Objectives**

- To examine the role of social media platforms in enhancing access to educational resources for students in urban and rural areas of Tamil Nadu.
- To analyze the benefits, challenges, and implications of social media use in reducing educational disparities between urban and rural learners in the state.

### **Discussion**

#### **Increasing Social Media Adoption across Tamil Nadu**

Secondary data from recent national and state-level digital usage reports highlight a significant rise in social media engagement among youth across Tamil Nadu. Over the last five years, rural smartphone ownership has grown rapidly, driven by affordable data plans and improved mobile network penetration. Platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram have emerged as the most widely used channels for educational engagement. YouTube, has become a preferred medium for academic tutorials, competitive exam preparation, and vernacular learning resources. The increasing visibility of Tamil-language creators and subject experts has further encouraged students from rural and semi-urban belts to utilize social media as a complementary learning tool. This growth indicates that digital platforms are becoming integral to students’ daily educational routines, reducing the geographical isolation historically experienced by rural learners.

Recent reports indicate a significant rise in rural smartphone ownership and social media engagement (Government of India, 2023). Platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram are widely used for educational purposes. Tamil-language content has expanded, particularly benefiting first-generation learners.

**Table 1: Social Media Adoption across Urban and Rural Tamil Nadu**

| Platform  | Urban Adoption (%) | Rural Adoption (%) | Language Preference |
|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| YouTube   | 85                 | 72                 | Tamil, English      |
| WhatsApp  | 90                 | 78                 | Tamil, English      |
| Instagram | 75                 | 60                 | Tamil, English      |
| Telegram  | 50                 | 35                 | Tamil, English      |

### Educational Benefits of Social Media

The review of secondary sources demonstrates that social media provides a wide spectrum of academic advantages for learners. First, students gain access to free, high-quality educational tutorials, ranging from school-level subjects to advanced competitive exam content. Platforms like YouTube host an extensive repository of recorded lectures, doubt-clearing sessions, and explainer videos that help learners revisit complex concepts at their own pace. Second, students preparing for government exams such as TNPSC, NEET, and UPSC benefit from a steady supply of mock tests, strategy discussions, and success-story interviews that motivate and guide aspirants. Moreover, peer-learning communities on WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook provide collaborative spaces where students share notes, clarify doubts, and exchange educational updates. These communities often function as informal support networks for rural learners who may lack access to high-quality coaching centers. Social media also enhances career awareness, connecting students to information about scholarships, internships, and college admissions that may not be readily disseminated through traditional channels. The multimedia nature of digital platforms such as videos, infographics, animations, and interactive quizzes further makes learning dynamic and engaging. A notable trend is the strong reliance on Tamil-language educational content, which has expanded rapidly and serves as a crucial bridge for first-generation learners.

Despite the widespread benefits, secondary data reveal persistent structural challenges that affect the extent to which rural learners can fully leverage social media for academic advancement. Digital literacy gaps remain a significant concern, as many students are able to use devices but lack the skills required for discerning quality content, evaluating sources, or navigating digital interfaces efficiently. Connectivity issues in remote parts of Tamil Nadu continue to hinder the seamless use of educational videos or participation in live classes, with students often reporting lagging network speeds and inconsistent signal strength. Another concern is the prevalence of misinformation. Without adequate content regulation or digital awareness, students may be exposed to misleading educational guidance, exam strategies, or unverified career advice. Socio-economic constraints also persist; not all households can afford personal smartphones, continuous internet recharges, or replacement of damaged devices. These factors limit the transformative potential of social media and often widen intra-rural disparities in access and usage.

These suggest that social media has played a notable role in enhancing access to information and supplementary learning materials for rural students across Tamil Nadu. By democratizing educational content and reducing dependency on physical coaching centres, digital platforms contribute to

narrowing the exposure gap between urban and rural learners. However, structural barriers such as digital literacy, affordability, and connectivity continue to shape who benefits most, thereby preventing social media from functioning as a fully equalizing educational tool. To achieve meaningful educational equity, social media-driven learning must be complemented by broader state-led digital inclusion initiatives, such as targeted digital literacy programs, infrastructure improvements, and subsidized device access. Strengthening media literacy among students and teachers is essential for ensuring that learners can evaluate the quality and reliability of online content. Thus, while social media represents a powerful supplementary resource, its ability to transform rural education depends on coordinated policy efforts that address both technological and socio-economic constraints. This study relies on secondary data, which may lack granular rural-level insights. Data quality varies across sources, and some findings are based on self-reported usage patterns. Consequently, primary empirical research is needed to validate and expand upon these findings.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that social media has become an increasingly influential supplement to traditional learning pathways in Tamil Nadu, for students residing in rural and underserved regions. By providing flexible, low-cost access to academic content, social media platforms empower learners to engage in self-directed study, revisit difficult concepts at their own pace, and participate in peer-driven learning networks. These platforms also help bridge informational gaps by offering exam guidance, career insights, and vernacular educational content that resonates with first-generation learners. However, the advantages of social media remain unevenly distributed. Persistent disparities in digital infrastructure, device availability, and digital literacy continue to limit the extent to which rural students can fully leverage the potential of online educational ecosystems. Therefore, while social media demonstrates significant promise as an equalizing force, its effectiveness ultimately depends on its integration within broader strategies aimed at digital inclusion, capacity building, and systemic educational improvement. To maximize the potential of social media in reducing urban–rural educational disparities, several strategic interventions are recommended. First, state-led initiatives should prioritize strengthening digital infrastructure in rural areas by expanding high-speed and reliable internet connectivity, ideally through public–private partnerships. Improved connectivity is essential for enabling uninterrupted access to high-quality video content, live learning sessions, and interactive educational resources. Second, schools should integrate structured digital literacy training into their curricula, equipping students with the skills to navigate online platforms safely, critically evaluate information, and develop responsible digital learning habits. Such training is crucial for protecting learners from misinformation while enabling them to fully engage with educational resources online.

Third, collaborations between government departments, educational institutions, and verified Tamil-language content creators or influencers can provide culturally relevant and academically accurate learning materials for rural students. These partnerships can expand access to localized educational content, for learners who may face language or contextual barriers. Fourth, the development of state-regulated educational channels covering core subjects, competitive exam preparation, and skill development can further ensure that students have access to reliable and trustworthy digital content, reducing dependence on unverified online sources. Fifth, targeted device accessibility programs, such as subsidized tablet or laptop distribution, are essential to bridge the digital access gap. Special provisions for low-income households would ensure that all students have the tools necessary to engage with online learning effectively.

In addition, teachers should receive training in digital pedagogy to effectively use social media as a supplemental teaching tool, employ blended learning strategies, and facilitate student engagement in virtual environments. Skilled educators can guide learners in navigating digital platforms and maximize

the educational benefits of online resources. Finally, state agencies should establish monitoring mechanisms in collaboration with technology platforms to detect, flag, and remove misleading or inaccurate educational content. Implementing a verification framework for academic content creators would further ensure the dissemination of reliable information, enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of social media as an educational resource. Collectively, these measures would strengthen digital inclusion, enhance learning outcomes, and contribute to reducing educational disparities across Tamil Nadu.

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