

Digital Democratization and the Evolution of Social Consciousness: A Quantitative Study on the Impact of Post-2016 Internet Proliferation on Dogmatic and Communal Boundaries in India

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Abstract

This study examines how the post-2016 proliferation of low-cost mobile broadband in India has shaped individual epistemic autonomy and attitudes toward inherited dogmatic and communal boundaries. Drawing on Information Democratization Theory, the digital extension of Intergroup Contact Theory, and Epistemic Self-Determination Theory, a structured questionnaire covering four constructs — Digital Access and Fact-Checking Behaviour (DA), Exposure to Pluralism (EP), Epistemic Autonomy and Rationalism (AR), and Decoupling from Dogmatic and Communal Enclosures (DC) — was administered to a pilot sample of 170 respondents drawn from rural, semi-urban, and urban locations across India. Composite reliability for the four constructs ranged from acceptable to moderate, and inter-construct correlations were positive and significant throughout. Multiple regression analysis indicated that Digital Access and Pluralism Exposure jointly explained approximately 47 per cent of the variance in Epistemic Autonomy and Rationalism ($R^2 = 0.468$, $p < .001$) and 41 per cent of the variance in Decoupling from Dogmatic and Communal Enclosures ($R^2 = 0.414$, $p < .001$). Independent fact-checking behaviour alone was a significant predictor of rational epistemic orientation ($\beta = 0.358$, $p < .001$). Demographic moderators — age, geographic habitat, and education — did not reach statistical significance in this pilot sample, suggesting that the association between digital access and epistemic autonomy is broadly consistent across sub-groups rather than concentrated in any one segment. The findings extend digital sociology scholarship on the Indian internet revolution by empirically linking connectivity infrastructure to individual-level cognitive and ideological outcomes, while also identifying measurement and interpretive limitations that warrant a larger, stratified follow-up study.

Keywords: digital democratization; internet penetration; epistemic autonomy; social consciousness; dogmatism; India; intergroup contact theory

1. Introduction

The Indian information ecosystem underwent a structural rupture in September 2016 when the commercial entry of a low-cost mobile network operator collapsed the price of mobile data by an order of magnitude. Within a few years, internet subscriptions in the country rose from roughly 259 million in March 2016 to more than 800 million, a scale of connectivity growth without precedent among large developing economies (Laskar, 2023). This expansion was not confined to metropolitan India; it reached small towns, agricultural belts, and communities that

had previously been separated from digital information flows by cost, infrastructure, and literacy barriers. Scholars of digital society have argued that such infrastructural shifts do more than change consumption habits — they restructure the very conditions under which individuals form beliefs, evaluate authority, and negotiate their relationship with inherited social and religious norms (Laskar, 2023).

Historically, in stratified and communally organised societies, access to alternative philosophical systems, scientific literature, and cross-cultural discourse was heavily mediated by local hierarchies, institutional gatekeepers, and physical isolation. An individual's worldview was, in large part, inherited rather than chosen. The proliferation of affordable smartphones and unlimited data plans altered this mediation structure by placing search engines, encyclopaedic knowledge repositories, long-form journalism, and global peer-to-peer discourse directly into the hands of ordinary citizens. This raises a sociologically important question: to what extent has this infrastructural democratization of information translated into a democratization of thought — that is, into greater individual capacity to question, verify, and revise inherited dogmatic and communal assumptions?

This study addresses that question empirically. It does not evaluate the truth-value of any particular tradition, doctrine, or communal norm, nor does it single out any specific religion or belief system. Its analytic focus is strictly sociological and epistemological: it examines whether increased digital access, opportunities for cross-cultural exposure, and independent fact-checking behaviour are statistically associated with two outcome orientations — (a) an epistemic style that privileges empirical reasoning and humanistic ethics, and (b) a reported psychological distancing from exclusionary group-based and dogmatic conformity pressures. The study is grounded in a structured pilot survey of 170 respondents across rural, semi-urban, and urban India, analysed using reliability testing, correlation, and multiple regression.

2. Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

2.1 The Post-2016 Indian Digital Revolution

India's digital transformation has been documented extensively in policy and sociological literature as a discontinuous, rather than gradual, process. Laskar (2023) frames the emergence of a parallel “digital society” in India as a phenomenon that began around the year 2000 but accelerated sharply between 2015 and 2016 following the entry of an aggressive low-cost data operator, which compressed the urban–rural digital divide and extended connectivity to previously underserved populations. This body of work emphasises that digital technology functions as an instrument of social transformation across economic, political, cultural, and religious domains simultaneously, rather than as a narrowly technological or economic phenomenon. Building on this premise, the present study treats internet access not merely as a communication utility but as an infrastructural precondition for a distinct mode of individual meaning-making.

2.2 Information Democratization and Epistemic Autonomy

Information Democratization Theory holds that removing structural and economic barriers to information access diffuses interpretive authority away from centralised gatekeepers —

whether editorial, institutional, or communal — toward the individual. Once search engines, digital archives, and peer-reviewed or long-form knowledge sources become inexpensive and ubiquitous, the marginal cost of independently verifying a claim falls sharply. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), extended here as “epistemic self-determination,” suggests that this reduction in verification cost can strengthen an individual's sense of autonomous competence in forming beliefs, as opposed to relying on externally imposed or inherited certainty. The present study operationalises this pathway through the Digital Access and Fact-Checking Behaviour (DA) construct, which captures the frequency with which respondents use online resources to independently verify claims received from traditional or authority-based sources.

2.3 Digital Intergroup Contact and Pluralistic Exposure

A parallel body of social-psychological research has extended classical Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) into online environments. A meta-analytic synthesis by Imperato, Schneider, Mancini, Fabris, and Longobardi (2021) found that computer-mediated contact with members of different social, cultural, or belief groups can reduce prejudice in a manner broadly consistent with Allport's original contact conditions, even though online contact often lacks the face-to-face structure Allport originally specified. This finding builds on the foundational meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), which established that intergroup contact reliably reduces prejudice across a wide range of group boundaries, not only those defined by race or ethnicity. Applied to the Indian digital context, this literature suggests that routine exposure to online communities outside one's immediate social or communal circle — captured here through the Exposure to Pluralism (EP) construct — may function as a mechanism through which rigid in-group/out-group boundaries soften over time.

2.4 Secularization, Existential Security, and Technological Mediation

Classical secularization scholarship offers a complementary lens. Norris and Inglehart (2004), in their comparative analysis of religion and politics worldwide, argue that shifts in existential security — driven by access to information, economic opportunity, and institutional alternatives — are associated with gradual movement away from strict traditional authority structures, without implying uniform decline of belief itself. Rather than predicting the disappearance of tradition, this framework predicts a diversification of the sources from which individuals draw ethical and interpretive authority. The present study's Epistemic Autonomy and Rationalism (AR) and Decoupling from Dogmatic and Communal Enclosures (DC) constructs are designed to capture precisely this diversification: the degree to which respondents report grounding moral reasoning in empathy, logic, and evidence, and the degree to which they report reduced fear of communal or dogmatic ostracization for holding non-conformist views.

2.5 Synthesis and Positioning of the Present Study

Taken together, this literature converges on a testable proposition: infrastructural digital access (DA) should be positively associated with pluralistic exposure (EP), and both should jointly predict epistemic autonomy (AR) and psychological decoupling from dogmatic conformity pressures (DC). While the broader literature on India's digital revolution is well developed at

the macro-infrastructural level (Laskar, 2023), and the psychology of online intergroup contact is well developed at the social-psychological level (Imperato et al., 2021; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), there remains a gap in India-specific, individual-level, quantitative evidence directly linking digital access behaviours to self-reported epistemic and dogmatic-boundary outcomes. The present study addresses this gap.

3. Statement of the Problem

Despite widespread scholarly and journalistic commentary on how the post-2016 Indian internet boom has altered public discourse, empirical, construct-validated, individual-level evidence on its relationship with epistemic autonomy and dogmatic-boundary decoupling remains sparse. Much of the existing literature is either macro-infrastructural (documenting subscriber growth and the urban–rural digital divide) or focused on Western contexts and general intergroup prejudice rather than dogmatic or communal conformity specifically. This creates a need for a quantitative instrument, validated on an Indian sample, that operationalises digital access, pluralistic exposure, epistemic autonomy, and dogmatic decoupling as distinct but related constructs, and that tests their statistical relationships while accounting for demographic heterogeneity in age, geography, and education. This study was designed to meet that need through a structured pilot survey and regression-based hypothesis testing.

4. Research Objectives

- RO1: To evaluate the degree to which post-2016 affordable internet penetration has stimulated critical inquiry and independent verification of inherited traditional norms.
- RO2: To analyse the role of digital communication platforms in facilitating ideological mobility and exposure to pluralistic, heterodox perspectives.
- RO3: To examine whether digital literacy and information access correlate with a preference for universal humanistic ethics over sectarian group allegiance.
- RO4: To assess the structural relationship between demographic variables (age, education, geographic habitat) and the extent of internet-driven epistemic and ideological independence.

5. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Corresponding to the objectives above, the study addresses four research questions: (RQ1) how significantly does pervasive digital access influence individuals' willingness to question unverified dogmatic and communal assertions; (RQ2) to what extent does routine exposure to diverse online viewpoints reduce adherence to rigid in-group/out-group boundaries; (RQ3) does independent fact-checking behaviour predict a transition toward rational and humanistic moral frameworks; and (RQ4) are these shifts moderated by age, geographic setting, or educational attainment.

These questions were translated into four directional hypotheses, summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Hypotheses and Theoretical Basis

ID	Statement	Theoretical Basis
H1	Higher frequency of digital information-seeking (DA) positively correlates with critical evaluation of traditional dogmas (AR).	Information Democratization Theory
H2	Active engagement with diverse online networks (EP) significantly increases adoption of pluralistic, universal values (DC).	Intergroup Contact Theory (Digital Extension)
H3	Independent online fact-checking behaviour (DA2) is a significant positive predictor of epistemic autonomy (AR).	Epistemic Self-Determination Theory
H4	The relationship between digital access and epistemic/dogmatic outcomes is moderated by age, geography, and education.	Digital Divide / Diffusion of Innovations

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design and Sample

The study adopted a cross-sectional, quantitative survey design. A structured, self-administered questionnaire was distributed online to adult respondents across India, yielding a usable pilot sample of $N = 170$ after screening for completeness. The sample comprised 50.0% male, 47.6% female, and 2.4% respondents identifying as non-binary or preferring not to specify gender. In terms of age, 43.5% of respondents were aged 18–25 years, 37.6% were 26–35 years, 12.9% were 36–50 years, and 5.9% were above 50 years. Geographically, 35.3% resided in urban/Tier-1 metropolitan areas, 34.7% in semi-urban/Tier 2–3 towns, and 30.0% in rural areas, providing reasonably balanced representation across the urban–rural continuum. Educational attainment was concentrated at the undergraduate level (51.8%), followed by postgraduate (31.2%), secondary/higher secondary (11.2%), and doctoral/professional qualifications (5.9%).

6.2 Instrument

The questionnaire comprised a demographic and internet-usage profile section followed by twelve scaled items distributed across four constructs, each measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree): Digital Access and Fact-Checking Behaviour (DA1–DA3, independent variable), Exposure to Pluralism and Cross-Cultural Discourse (EP1–EP3, mediating variable), Individual Epistemic Autonomy and Rationalism (AR1–AR3, dependent variable), and Decoupling from Dogmatic and Communal Enclosures (DC1–DC3, dependent variable). An optional open-text item invited respondents to describe, in their own words, how their post-2016 online media consumption had altered their evaluation

of traditional or dogmatic norms; 126 of 170 respondents (74.1%) provided a qualitative response.

6.3 Analytical Procedure

Composite scale scores were computed as the mean of each construct's three items. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), with alpha values above 0.70 conventionally regarded as indicating good reliability and values in the 0.50–0.70 range regarded as acceptable for short, exploratory pilot scales (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Pearson correlations were computed among the four composite constructs. Hypotheses H1 and H2 were tested using multiple linear regression, with DA and EP entered as simultaneous predictors of AR and DC respectively. Hypothesis H3 was tested using simple linear regression of AR on the single fact-checking item (DA2). Hypothesis H4 was tested using one-way ANOVA (age group, education) and independent-samples t-tests (urban vs. rural) on the AR and DC composite scores. All analyses were conducted at $\alpha = 0.05$.

7. Results

7.1 Demographic and Digital Usage Profile

Table 2 summarises the demographic and internet-usage profile of the sample. A plurality of respondents reported 4–6 hours of daily screen time (44.1%), followed by 2–4 hours (28.2%), over 6 hours (17.6%), and under 2 hours (10.0%). Video/streaming platforms were the dominant primary digital medium (45.3%), followed by microblogging and discussion forums (26.5%), long-form articles and wikis (14.7%), and social messaging applications (13.5%).

Table 2. Demographic and Internet Usage Profile (N = 170)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age Group	18–25 years	74	43.5
	26–35 years	64	37.6
	36–50 years	22	12.9
	Above 50 years	10	5.9
Gender	Male	85	50.0
	Female	81	47.6
	Non-binary / Prefer not to specify	4	2.4
Geographic Habitat	Urban / Tier 1 Metro	60	35.3

Variable	Category	n	%
	Semi-Urban / Tier 2–3	59	34.7
	Rural	51	30.0
Education	Undergraduate	88	51.8
	Postgraduate	53	31.2
	Secondary / Higher Secondary	19	11.2
	Doctorate / Professional	10	5.9
Daily Screen Time	4–6 hours	75	44.1
	2–4 hours	48	28.2
	Over 6 hours	30	17.6
	Under 2 hours	17	10.0
Primary Digital Medium	Video/Streaming	77	45.3
	Microblogs/Forums	45	26.5
	Long-form Articles/Wikis	25	14.7
	Social Messaging Apps	23	13.5

7.2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 3 reports item- and construct-level means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients. All four constructs returned mean scores clustered narrowly between 3.69 and 3.75 on the five-point scale, indicating a generally positive, though not extreme, endorsement of digitally mediated epistemic openness across the sample. Reliability coefficients ranged from $\alpha = 0.551$ (DA) to $\alpha = 0.581$ (AR), which fall in the acceptable range for three-item exploratory pilot sub-scales but are below the conventional 0.70 threshold, indicating that item refinement is warranted before the instrument is deployed at full scale (see Section 9, Limitations).

Table 3. Construct-Level Descriptive Statistics and Reliability (N = 170)

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
DA – Digital Access & Fact-Checking	3	3.69	0.70	0.551
EP – Exposure to Pluralism	3	3.75	0.69	0.567
AR – Epistemic Autonomy & Rationalism	3	3.70	0.68	0.581
DC – Decoupling from Dogmatic Enclosures	3	3.72	0.68	0.559

7.3 Inter-Construct Correlations

Pearson correlations among the four composite constructs (Table 4) were positive and moderate-to-strong across the board, ranging from $r = 0.506$ (DA–DC) to $r = 0.630$ (DA–AR), all significant at $p < .001$. The strongest association was observed between Digital Access and Epistemic Autonomy/Rationalism, followed closely by Exposure to Pluralism and Decoupling from Dogmatic Enclosures ($r = 0.619$). These patterns are consistent with the proposed sequential pathway in which digital access and pluralistic exposure jointly underpin epistemic autonomy and dogmatic decoupling.

Table 4. Inter-Construct Correlation Matrix

	DA	EP	AR	DC
DA	1.000	0.586	0.630	0.506
EP	0.586	1.000	0.586	0.619
AR	0.630	0.586	1.000	0.610
DC	0.506	0.619	0.610	1.000

Note. All correlations significant at $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $n = 170$.

7.4 Regression Analysis: Hypothesis Testing

H1 and H2 were tested by regressing AR and DC respectively on the simultaneous predictors DA and EP (Table 5). The model predicting Epistemic Autonomy and Rationalism was significant, $F(2, 167) = 73.48$, $p < .001$, explaining 46.8% of variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.462$). Both Digital Access ($\beta = 0.428$, $p < .001$) and Exposure to Pluralism ($\beta = 0.325$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors, supporting H1. The model predicting Decoupling from Dogmatic and Communal Enclosures was likewise significant, $F(2, 167) = 59.02$, $p < .001$,

explaining 41.4% of variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.407$), with Exposure to Pluralism emerging as the stronger predictor ($\beta = 0.482$, $p < .001$) relative to Digital Access ($\beta = 0.214$, $p = .003$), supporting H2 and reinforcing the theoretical expectation that pluralistic contact, more than raw access, drives the loosening of communal-boundary conformity.

Table 5. Regression Results for AR and DC

Predictor	β (AR Model)	p	β (DC Model)	p
Constant	0.903	< .001	1.119	< .001
DA	0.428	< .001	0.214	= .003
EP	0.325	< .001	0.482	< .001
R^2 / Adj. R^2	0.468 / 0.462	—	0.414 / 0.407	—
F (df = 2,167)	73.48	< .001	59.02	< .001

H3 was tested via simple regression of AR on the single fact-checking item, DA2 (“I regularly use online search engines, scientific articles, and digital archives to independently fact-check claims received from traditional authority figures”). The model was significant, $F(1, 168) = 46.23$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.216$, with DA2 a significant positive predictor of AR ($\beta = 0.358$, $p < .001$). This supports H3: independent digital fact-checking behaviour, considered in isolation from the broader DA composite, is itself a meaningful predictor of rational epistemic orientation.

7.5 Demographic Moderation (H4)

One-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences in AR or DC scores across age groups (AR: $F(3,166) = 1.42$, $p = .238$; DC: $F(3,166) = 0.63$, $p = .594$) or across education levels (AR: $F(3,166) = 1.92$, $p = .128$; DC: $F(3,166) = 1.90$, $p = .131$), although doctoral/professional respondents recorded the numerically highest mean scores on both constructs (AR = 4.03; DC = 4.13). Independent-samples t-tests comparing urban and rural respondents likewise found no statistically significant difference on AR ($t(109) = 1.40$, $p = .164$) or DC ($t(109) = 0.73$, $p = .465$), despite urban respondents recording marginally higher mean scores on both (AR: urban = 3.75 vs. rural = 3.56; DC: urban = 3.76 vs. rural = 3.67). H4 was therefore not supported in this pilot sample: within the observed range of the data, the association between digital access and epistemic/dogmatic outcomes did not vary significantly by age, education, or geographic habitat, suggesting a broadly generalised rather than segment-specific effect.

Table 6. Sub-Group Comparisons on AR and DC

Moderator	Test	AR (stat, p)	DC (stat, p)
Age Group (4 levels)	One-way ANOVA	F = 1.42, p = .238	F = 0.63, p = .594
Education (4 levels)	One-way ANOVA	F = 1.92, p = .128	F = 1.90, p = .131
Urban vs. Rural	Independent t-test	t = 1.40, p = .164	t = 0.73, p = .465

7.6 Qualitative Response Patterns

Among the 126 respondents who completed the optional open-text item, recurring themes centred on three mechanisms: independent verification of claims via search engines and digital archives before accepting them from traditional authority figures; exposure to cross-disciplinary or intercultural online forums that broadened respondents' frame of reference without requiring them to abandon their own background; and consumption of long-form educational video content that introduced concepts absent from respondents' immediate social environment. Representative responses described routine fact-checking as having reduced reliance on unverified claims in major professional and personal decisions, and described participation in online communities as fostering understanding of different cultural contexts without demanding strict conformity to any single inherited tradition. These qualitative patterns triangulate with the quantitative regression findings, reinforcing that both the verification pathway (DA) and the exposure pathway (EP) are experienced by respondents as distinct but complementary routes toward epistemic autonomy.

8. Discussion

The results provide convergent quantitative and qualitative support for the proposition that post-2016 digital infrastructure in India is statistically associated with individual-level epistemic autonomy and reported decoupling from dogmatic conformity pressures. Consistent with Information Democratization Theory, independent fact-checking behaviour emerged as a robust predictor of rational epistemic orientation both within the composite DA construct and as a standalone item, suggesting that the specific act of verification — rather than internet access in the abstract — may be the operative mechanism. This nuance is practically important: it implies that digital literacy interventions emphasising source evaluation and independent verification skills may have a more direct bearing on epistemic autonomy than blanket increases in connectivity or screen time alone.

The stronger role of Exposure to Pluralism, relative to Digital Access, in predicting Decoupling from Dogmatic and Communal Enclosures aligns with the digital extension of Intergroup Contact Theory (Imperato et al., 2021; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This pattern suggests that it is not raw information volume but structured or repeated contact with perspectives outside one's immediate communal circle that erodes rigid in-group/out-group boundaries. This is consistent with Allport's (1954) original contention that contact reduces prejudice most reliably

when it involves sustained rather than incidental exposure, extended here into the domain of online cross-cultural and cross-ideological discourse.

The absence of significant demographic moderation is a notable finding in its own right. Prior literature on the Indian digital divide has emphasised persistent urban–rural and education-based disparities in access and usage (Laskar, 2023). The present pilot data suggest that once respondents have crossed the threshold into active digital engagement, the downstream psychological association with epistemic autonomy and dogmatic decoupling does not differ significantly by age, education, or geography — though the numerically higher scores among doctoral/professional and urban respondents suggest that a larger, adequately powered sample might yet detect modest moderation effects that this pilot was underpowered to confirm.

It is important to interpret these findings within appropriate limits. The constructs used here operationalise “dogma” and “tradition” in general, non-sectarian terms, and the study makes no claim about the epistemic validity of any specific belief system, nor does it imply that decoupling from communal conformity is inherently or universally desirable for every individual or community. Scholars of secularization caution that reduced adherence to communal authority structures can coexist with continued personal religiosity or spirituality, and that existential security — not internet access alone — is the deeper driver of such shifts (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). The present findings are therefore best read as evidence of an association between digital access behaviours and self-reported epistemic style, rather than as evidence that digital access causes wholesale abandonment of tradition, or that such an outcome would be normatively positive in every context.

9. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes an India-specific, individual-level empirical test linking three previously separate literatures — macro-infrastructural digital divide research, social-psychological intergroup contact theory, and secularization/existential-security theory — within a single measurement framework. Practically, the finding that independent fact-checking behaviour is a stronger and more specific predictor of epistemic autonomy than general digital access suggests that media and information literacy curricula, particularly at the secondary and undergraduate levels where the bulk of this sample was concentrated, could usefully prioritise verification skills over mere access provisioning. For policymakers engaged in the Digital India agenda, the results suggest that continued infrastructural investment in rural and semi-urban connectivity is likely to yield epistemic and pluralistic benefits comparable to those already observed in urban populations, given the absence of significant urban–rural moderation in this sample.

10. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

- Sample size and design: the pilot sample ($N = 170$) was adequate for regression testing but underpowered for detecting smaller demographic moderation effects; a larger, stratified probability sample would strengthen generalisability.
- Reliability: Cronbach's alpha for all four constructs fell in the 0.55–0.58 range, below the conventional 0.70 threshold; future work should expand each construct to four or five items

and conduct exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to improve psychometric precision.

- Cross-sectional design: the data cannot establish causal direction; longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs (e.g., comparing regions by date of network rollout) would allow stronger causal inference regarding the post-2016 connectivity shock specifically.
- Self-report and social desirability: constructs such as epistemic autonomy and dogmatic decoupling are self-assessed and may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly among digitally engaged respondents predisposed to view themselves as independent thinkers.
- Normative framing: although the instrument was designed to be non-sectarian, terms such as “dogma” and “communal enclosure” carry implicit normative valence; future iterations should pilot-test item neutrality across respondents from diverse religious and regional backgrounds to minimise interpretive bias.

11. Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether the post-2016 digital revolution in India is empirically associated with individual-level epistemic autonomy and decoupling from dogmatic and communal conformity pressures. Using a structured pilot survey of 170 respondents, it found that digital access and pluralistic online exposure jointly explain a substantial share of variance in both outcomes, that independent fact-checking behaviour is a specific and robust predictor of rational epistemic orientation, and that these associations hold broadly across age, education, and geographic sub-groups within the sample. While the findings should be treated as preliminary given the pilot scale and reliability limitations of the instrument, they offer an empirically grounded starting point for future, larger-scale research into the cognitive and ideological consequences of India's digital transformation — research that carries implications for digital literacy policy, media education curricula, and the broader sociological understanding of how infrastructural change reshapes belief formation in the contemporary Indian context.

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