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ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Hansraj College is one of the largest constituent colleges of the University of Delhi. The college was founded by the D.A.V. College Managing Committee on 26th July, 1948 in the sacred memories of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati and Mahatma Hansraj who spent their magnificent lives emphasizing the importance of knowledge. It is one of the leading lights in the D.A.V. family of over 700 institutions.

Hansraj College is a premier institution dedicated to teaching and research. It has highly qualified academicians who impart education in Science, Commerce, and Arts at undergraduate and graduate levels to more than 5000 students. The college has consistently demonstrated outstanding performance in academics, sports, and extracurricular activities.

The college has completed 76 years in the realm of imparting higher education. It has made significant and unparalleled contributions in terms of producing scholars, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and sportsperson serving in different domains not only in our own country but even at international levels.

Hansraj College stands at the cusp between the past and the future today. While it retains inspiring facets of its proud history, with an equally sharp gaze it looks ahead, assimilating the exciting world of new knowledge as it unfolds in front of it, holding the promise of an experience seeped with exhilarating learning and holistic growth for all those who enter its portals.

About the Journal

The *HRC Journal of Economics and Finance* is a **double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal** for students, researchers, and faculty to showcase their research pertaining to the discipline of economics and business. It is an international journal. Our mission is to provide a platform through which scholars can publish their scholarly findings to showcase them with the research community at large. We invite research papers and articles on topics related to the field of economics, business and management for its quarterly journal publication.

Message from the Principal

The launch of the *HRC Journal of Economics and Finance* is a milestone that marks our dedication towards providing a platform to young researchers in the field of economics and finance. It is even more fortuitous that the launch has been manifested in the Platinum jubilee year of the college, the Centenary year of the University of Delhi and the 75th year of India's independence.

The New Education Policy, 2020 has launched a paradigm shift that encourages research both at the faculty and student level. Accordingly there is a growing need to provide credible platforms to present research outputs at all levels. This journal fills a significant gap and will contribute to fostering a research ecosystem thereby advancing the objectives of the NEP 2020. This journal will provide an opportunity to students, teachers and scholars, around the world to come together and showcase the links between classroom teaching and their practical training.

I congratulate the authors whose papers/articles have been published in the journal and encourage others to contribute to future issues. Appreciation is due to the Editor In-Chief of this journal, Dr. Apoorva Gupta who has worked tirelessly for the successful launch of this issue of the journal. My best wishes for the success of this venture.

Prof. (Dr.) Rama
Principal
Hansraj College

From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers,

It is my great pleasure and privilege to present the next issue of the Journal of Hansraj College, the *HRC Journal of Economics and Finance*. The journal provides a platform to young researchers in the field of economics, business, social sciences, finance and management to publish their scholarly articles. Our inclusive nature ensures that we cover the wide range of issues in the field. This issue features a diverse range of articles that provide insightful analyses and innovative perspectives on various contemporary economic topics.

We have received around thirty papers relevant to the field of development economics, political economy, macroeconomic policy, financial markets, international trade, and behavioral economics. All the papers went through three rounds of review process, first by the editors and then by the review board. All the papers have gone through double blind peer review process. The authors were communicated with the revisions. The papers were accepted only after the satisfactory revisions were being made. We strictly follow the research ethics and do not tolerate plagiarism. All the selected papers were tested for plagiarism before publication. We have worked tirelessly to bring out the fourth issue of the journal with high quality research work.

Writing quality research papers takes a lot of time and effort, and the authors must be congratulated for writing their research papers for the journal, which is launched in the Platinum Jubilee year of the college, the Centenary year of the University of Delhi and the 75th year of India's independence. We also take this opportunity to congratulate the review board of this issue for their constant academic support for the timely release of the journal. We also thank the support received from the Principal of the college, Prof. (Dr.) Rama, the Advisory Board and the Editorial Board.

We hope that readers find the articles interesting, informative and engaging, and enjoy reading it. We believe that this effort of ours will stimulate further research and discussion in the field of economics and finance, and encourage readers to write for further issues of the journal. We look forward to receiving your feedback and suggestions for future issues.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this journal belong to the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the college, the editors, the Advisory Board, the Editorial Board, and the Review Board of the *HRC Journal of Economics and Finance*.

Dr. Apoorva Gupta

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The influence of retirement planning on financial well-being of retirees in tertiary institutions of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Retirement planning plays a critical role in ensuring post-retirement well-being of retirees yet a substantial percentage of Africans are not prepared for retirement. There are high cases of poor financial well-being experienced by many retirees in Sub Sahara African countries. Ineffective retirement planning poses a threat to their overall financial; health and psychological well-being. The pension systems in many African countries have been strained because of the worsening economic conditions in many countries and Zimbabwe is not an exception as cases of loss of savings and pensions due to loss of purchasing power of the local currency has been experienced for many decades. The research sought to establish the influence of retirement planning on financial well-being of retirees especially in the face of increased life expectancy, rising cost of living, and the increased retirement age of employees in Zimbabwe. The study adopted an interpretative paradigm and used an explanatory research design. The research was qualitative in nature; hence twenty (20) members composed of ten (10) serving members with fifty years and above, and ten (10) retirees were accessed from one tertiary institution in Harare. Structured questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data. The study established that retirement planning was critical for post-retirement well-being as it gives a peace of mind to retirees, helps to cover unexpected expenses, reduces financial distress, enhance the overall well-being, minimise debt obligations, enhances protection of property, enables

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planning for healthcare, and helps to develop an investing and retirement income plan. The study recommended that employees should attend retirement planning conferences to acquaint themselves with the retirement planning process to follow. The management of tertiary institutions were recommended to positively influence employees to engage in retirement planning by sponsoring employees to attend retirement planning seminars such that they would acquire the necessary retirement planning and financial literacy skills. Furthermore, institutions were recommended to organise seminars and conferences for retirement planning to help employees to effectively plan for retirement.

Key words: Retirement planning, financial well-being, financial literacy, pension

1. Introduction

Planning for retirement is critical for post-retirement financial well-being of retirees. However, a substantial percentage of Africans are not prepared for retirement (Blessing & Ph, 2021). There are evidences of poor financial well-being experienced by many retirees in Sub Sahara African countries (Njoka, 2021). Ineffective retirement planning poses a threat to their overall financial; health and psychological well-being (Abidin & Zainuddin, 2021; Mitchell & Lusardi, 2011; Zazili et al., 2017). The pension systems in many African countries have been strained because of the worsening economic conditions in many countries and Zimbabwe is not an exception as cases of loss of savings and pensions due to loss of purchasing power of the local currency has been experienced for many decades (Chen et al., 2024; Dhlembeu et al., 2022; Kefela, 2011). Other studies conducted revealed that more than 90% of employees in Africa do not plan for retirement and in most cases the employer notifies the employee of the retirement date three months before (Adam et al., 2017; Iramani & Lutfi, 2021; Theodorus Sutadi & Tri Rahmawati, 2024). Retirees' state of financial well-being is very low in less developed economies and many retirees live an abject poverty (Comerton-Forde et al., 2022; Soepding et al., 2022).

Despite government employees being on pensionable conditions, the monthly pension income hardly meets the retirees' monthly financial needs (Singh, 2021). It is imperative that employees engage in effective retirement planning in order to compliment the

employers' efforts of ensuring a post-retirement financial well-being of their employees. This can be ensured by embarking on effective retirement planning. The researchers sought to investigate if retirement planning has a substantial influence on financial well-being of retirees so as to develop suitable strategies to enhance increased retirement planning by employees in tertiary institutions of Zimbabwe. The research sought to establish to what extent planning for retirement influence financial well-being of employees in tertiary institutions of Zimbabwe, and what strategies can be used to increase the retirement planning exercise of employees in tertiary institutions of Zimbabwe. The paper covers the review of literature, research methodology, data presentation and discussion of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

The study focused on the concepts of retirement and the retirement planning process which are deemed critical to the financial well-being of retirees as discussed below.

2.1. The Concept of Retirement

Retirement is a transmission of former working class from the active way of life to an inactive way of living. Many retirees suffer from retirement tremor due to failure to adjust to life outside employment (Abidin & Zainuddin, 2021; Hassan et al., 2016; Sabri et al., 2024). According to Wakilabad et al., (2023) retirement encompasses a change in value, economic participations and societal features of life. Lawton et al., (2024) further indicate that retirement may result in dissolution of a way of life and a changeover to a new life for the retirees.

Retirement marks a major life changeover from being employed to a period of financial dependence on accumulated assets, pensions, and other income streams (Jaffar et al., 2024). In many societies, including developing economies, the shift presents both financial and psychological challenges. The effectiveness of retirement planning has begun as a fundamental element of retirees' financial well-being (Dhlembeu et al., 2023). Poor planning often leads to post-retirement poverty, dependency, and reduced quality of

life, whereas sound planning enables financial independence and security (Soepding et al., 2022).

2.2. The Process of Retirement Planning

Retirement planning is a planned procedure of preparing for an individual's monetary future beyond the employment phase (Liu et al., 2022). It contains setting goals for retirement and implement a strategy to attain them, targeting to guarantee a consistent source of revenue when one chooses to cease working (Afthanorhan et al., 2020). Effective retirement planning is a continuous process that adapts to an individual's life changing condition and financial background (Ghadwan et al., 2023). It entails an appreciation of numerous elements, including how much to be saved, the suitable investment vehicle to adopt, risk management, and planning for unexpected expenditures (Bhatia & Singh, 2024). The aim is to form a monetary cushion which would allow a worker to enjoy the retirement period peacefully, and free from financial distress (Mousavi & Rasaeimanesh, 2023).

Retirees are individuals who have exited the formal labour market, usually upon reaching a specified retirement age or due to personal or health-related reasons (Dhewa, Makurumidze & Mukapiku, 2025; Khawar & Sarwar, 2021). The retiree's life should be considered in planning for retirement and should not only focus on finances but health and social issues as well. According to Lusardi & Streeter, (2023) the average employee is expected to a good amount of years of leisure after retirement. Vieira et al., (2023) posit that retirement can last anything up to 30 years and more, and this calls for the need to plan for a health, effective and well-adjusted life after retirement. Dhlembeu et al., (2022); and Ghadwan et al., (2022) further highlight that retirement planning is the good forecaster of retirement satisfaction.

The research sought to establish the influence of retirement planning on retirees' financial well-being especially in the face of increased life expectancy, high living costs, and the increased retirement age for employees in Zimbabwe. Planning for retirement plays an essential role on financial safety of employees during the post-retirement phase, and a

variety of factors like marital status, age, income level, exchange rate, and inflation rate significantly influence employees' ability to make retirement savings (Abidin & Zainuddin, 2021; Ghadwan et al., 2022; Mustafa et al., 2023). The participation by employees in planning for retirement is important particularly with the existence of increased life expectancy, rising cost of living, and the increased retirement age of employees in Zimbabwe.

This paper will provide new insights on the nexus between retirement planning and financial well-being which will be used as literature for future studies. It will also provide empirical evidence of how retirement planning affects financial well-being in Zimbabwe.

3. Research Methodology

This study has adopted an interpretative paradigm and used an explanatory research design. The research is qualitative in nature; where twenty (20) members composed of ten (10) serving members with fifty years and above, and ten (10) retirees were accessed from one tertiary institution in Harare. Interview guides were used for collection of data to get insights from the participants' views and opinions about the influence of retirement planning on financial well-being of retirees. Open ended-questionnaires were used to ascertain some hidden issues which the participants would have failed to express on and objective-type interviews. To improve the appropriateness of the structured questionnaires, the researchers established the relevance of the instrument in addressing the research topic through a pilot study. Since this study is based on the sample collected, the results are not applicable to the country as a whole. However, our respondents have given some suggestions that may have macro-level policy implications.

4. Discussion of Findings

Since the study follows a qualitative approach, wherein the participants in the survey were asked open-ended questions, the findings of this paper are presented in a descriptive manner. The main results that we obtained in the study are highlighted below.

With the quest to ascertain if retirement planning has an influence on financial well-being of employees in tertiary institutions of Zimbabwe, the bulk of the participants indicated that retirement planning indeed influences the state of financial well-being of retirees as it helps to cover unexpected expenses. By embarking on responsible retirement planning exercise, retirees would plan accurately through proper budgeting of the current and future unexpected expenses (Dhewa, Makurumidze & Mukapiku, 2025; Ghadwan et al., 2022). Furthermore, financial literacy enables people to critically consider complex financial products such as insurance, pension packages, and annuities, ensuring better outcomes (Mohd et al., 2020).

It was revealed from the study that the primary technique for which retirement planning impacts financial well-being was by promoting early and consistent saving behaviour, which was deemed important for financial safety. This supports the research by Comerton-Forde et al., (2022) which asserts that planning for retirement is critical for ensuring financial security. It was further established from other studies that individuals who begin to plan for retirement timely are better positioned to benefit from compound interest, allowing their savings to grow significantly over time, this concurs with the study conducted by Jaffar et al., (2024).

Furthermore, the study established from the participants that through structured retirement planning, individuals can estimate future financial needs including healthcare costs, housing, and daily living expenses and set realistic savings goals to meet them, this corroborates the findings by Mohanty et al., (2023). In the absence of such planning, many retirees face income inadequacy or are left to depend solely on limited state pensions, which may not be sufficient to sustain a comfortable lifestyle (Aubrey et al., 2022). Retirement planning, therefore, acts as a safeguard against poverty in old age, especially in countries with weak or fragmented social welfare systems (Kurbanova & Berde, 2024; Njoka, 2021).

The study also found out that effective retirement planning significantly enhances investment decision-making and promotes portfolio diversification, both of which are crucial for sustaining financial well-being upon retirement. This corroborates the research by Chen et al., (2024). Retirement planning often incorporates tools such as risk tolerance assessments, which help tailor portfolios to individual preferences and life stages (Laila et

al., 2025). Participants also revealed that the key aspect of planning is understanding the effects of inflation on long-term purchasing power, prompting individuals to favour growth-oriented investments over stagnant savings options, and this corroborated with the findings by Pak et al., (2024) who indicated that inflation has an effect on retirement planning.

The study established that retirement planning is critical element for a sound post-retirement financial well-being as it gives a peace of mind to retirees. The participants indicted that the peace of mind would be an advantage which come as a result of a proactive approach than a reactive approach to financial planning for the retirement income. This was ascertained by most of the participants accessed for the study and the findings supports the findings that by Ratnawati et al., (2023), and So et al., (2023) which asserted that by engagement in retirement planning, it significantly promotes financial literacy and encourages future-oriented behaviour, both of which are critical for financial well-being in later life. Furthermore, the improved financial knowledge fosters disciplined spending, where long-term security is prioritised over immediate gratification, and retirement planning also cultivates a forward-thinking mind-set, prompting individuals to consider how current financial behaviours impact their future life (Dickason-Koekemoer & Ferreira, 2019; Garg et al., 2024).

The research further established that planning for retirement is an essential element for a sound post-retirement financial well-being as it reduces financial distress of retirees. Most participants pointed out that financial distress comes from poor financial planning where expenses in most cases end up exceeding income. By embarking on effective retirement planning, retirees would be saved from the dangers of financial distress which in most cases has negative consequences to the health, psychological, and emotional well-being of retirees (Bell et al., 2024; Fan & Henager, 2025; Faturohman et al., 2024). The study supports the notion that through activities such as budgeting, setting financial goals, and seeking guidance from financial advisors, individuals develop a deeper understanding of personal financial decisions making (Kamakia et al., 2017).

The research further established that planning to retire affects the retirees' overall health, emotional, psychological and financial well-being as they hinted that in the absence of financial security, all the other forms of well-beings would be compromised as health,

emotions, and psychological well-being heavily relies on financial well-being. It further concluded that effective retirement planning results in sound financial well-being of retirees. This corroborates the study by Puelz & Puelz, (2022) which found out that retirement planning plays a pivotal part in reducing dependency and promoting financial autonomy among retirees, which in turn enhances their overall well-being

The study further established that financial dependence in old age can undermine personal dignity, strain familial relationships, and contribute to emotional distress, particularly when retirees feel like a burden to others especially in need for financial assistance to meet routine financial requirements. This assertion resonates with the study by Laila et al., (2025) who asserts that financial dependence contributes to emotional distress. Moreover, a study by Karakara et al., (2022) established that retirees with adequate savings are better equipped to respond to unforeseen events such as health emergencies or home repairs without compromising their quality of life, thereby have a sound state of financial well-being in the post-retirement phase.

Based on the responses from our survey, the study revealed that planning for retirement affects the retirees' financial well-being as it minimise debt obligations to the retirees. They can adequately plan for financial requirements to meet all the obligations in a timely manner. The participants explained that high debt obligations triggers stress-related ailments for most people whether serving or retirees, hence absence of debt obligations make retirees live peacefully and healthy from financial distress. This supports the findings that people who engage in comprehensive exercise of planning for retirement are likely to accumulate sufficient resources to support themselves, thereby avoiding reliance on family members or government aid (Hauff et al., 2020).

This research further established that planning for retirement was a critical catalyst for good financial well-being as it enhances protection of property acquired during working period. Most retirees tend to lose properties to creditors especially in the post-retirement phase when they fail to service financial obligations. All the participants agreed that protection of property from creditors would only come if retirement planning has been properly executed by an employee. The advantage comes as a result of adopting a proactive stance to financial retirement planning by the employee. The findings corroborate the findings that thoughtful retirement planning also enables individuals to

prepare for long-term care needs and engage in estate planning, ensuring that their wishes are respected and their legacy is managed effectively (Dare et al., 2023).

It was further established from the study that retirement planning positively influence financial well-being through its ability to enhance healthcare planning and effective financial planning for post-retirement living. Participants explained that when retirees embark on healthcare planning, their state of health and financial well-being would rise as cases of healthcare costs would be very low, thereby contributing to long living for retirees. The study supports the findings that through the planning process, individuals become more informed about financial products like real estate, and equities, which allows them to choose strategies appropriate for their financial needs and risk appetite (Khawar & Sarwar, 2021).

The participants of the study also revealed that retirement planning positively influences the financial well-being of retirees as it helps to develop an investing and retirement income plan. The participants explained that the availability of an investing and retirement income plan reduces financial distress related ailments for most people whether serving or retirees.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Our paper concludes that retirement planning is critical for a stable post-retirement financial well-being as it gives a peace of mind to retirees, helps to cover unexpected expenses, reduces financial distress, enhance the overall well-being, minimize debt obligations, enhances protection of property, enables planning for healthcare, and helps to develop an investing and retirement income plan. The interventions that would enhance increased retirement planning of employees in tertiary institutions of Zimbabwe were recommended as follows.

Employees can engage in retirement planning exercise by encouraging their fellow employees to attend retirement planning conferences to acquaint themselves with the retirement planning process to follow. Furthermore, employees can also partake in

income generating entrepreneurial ventures and start-ups to supplement their low incomes and enable creation of retirement savings for post-retirement financial well-being.

The management of tertiary institutions can influence employees to engage in effective retirement planning exercises through creating a platform for employees to identify their post-retirement line of business and start nurturing them whilst at work through entrepreneurial venture and start-up groups. Furthermore, institutions can sponsor employees to attend retirement planning seminars such that they would acquire the necessary retirement planning and financial literacy skills. Moreover, institutions can themselves organise seminars and conferences for retirement planning to help employees have a positive attitude towards retirement planning.

Policy makers should develop user-friendly retirement options that allow employees to access some of their retirement savings whilst at work and utilise the funds to start sustainable entrepreneurial ventures and start-ups. Furthermore, the culture of retirement planning should constantly be communicated and preached to employees periodically such that they prepare for the inevitable process. Policy makers can create opportunities for staff to utilise their vacation holidays by venturing into investment activities and being attached to various organisations of their interest where they could access some hands-on knowledge about the running and management of related business way before retirement. This will enable employees to test their ideas and establish their feasibility or viability before retirement.

Retirement planning is crucial and through the survey conducted in this paper, we have highlighted some of the problems faced by retired people and suggestions that they have for working professionals to manage their retirement expenses. As the population is aging, saving for retirement is crucial. We hope that this study will bring some attention to this pressing issue of the hour and help the policymakers to design policies for the old-age support for the people of Zimbabwe.

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A Qualitative Synthesis of Social Media Marketing in India: Practical Implications for Technology, Localization, and Governance

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Abstract

Social media marketing (SMM) has become an integral part of the business strategy for Indian companies of all sizes and industries. The Indian digital landscape is a unique one, with a huge population, multilingualism, high smartphone penetration, and low-cost mobile data, which has resulted in one of the most dynamic and complex social media environments in the world. This paper is a qualitative synthesis of peer-reviewed research, industry reports, and Indian brand case studies published from 2009 to 2025, to understand the current situation of SMM in India, emerging technological and cultural trends and implications for practitioners and policymakers. The main research question for this study is: How to effectively leverage social media platforms, both globally and regionally, incorporate emerging technologies, adapt content for linguistic and cultural diversity, and incorporate ethical governance into marketing strategies for Indian businesses? Using thematic synthesis and cross-case analysis, the study concludes that the Indian SMM is in a state of multi-platform complexity, rapid growth of vernacular and video content, and integration of commerce. The future of Indian SMM is also expected to be driven by hyper-personalisation, through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), immersive experiences in Augmented and Virtual reality (AR/VR), and a governance imperative focused on transparency and data ethics.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Artificial Intelligence, Augmented and Virtual Reality, Influencer Marketing, Ethical Branding, Vernacular Content

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1. Introduction

Social media has revolutionised the way organisations communicate, interact with customers and make money, and is now spreading across the world. This change has been more pronounced in India, where structural factors specific to the subcontinent have played a significant role in driving it. With the introduction of Reliance Jio in 2016, the availability of cheap mobile data enabled the internet to reach hundreds of millions of Indians, turning them into active digital citizens in a short span of time (Kumar & Singh, 2021). This growth produced a social media environment of unprecedented size and variety, from urban professionals to rural farmers, English speakers to digital natives who speak vernacular languages, from big multinational companies to single-person micro-enterprises.

For Indian businesses, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp are essential tools for communication, customer acquisition, and community engagement (Gupta, 2022; Kamath & Alur, 2024). In addition to these global giants, there are also indigenous apps like ShareChat and Moj that cater to the growing user base of vernacular internet users, who prefer to use the internet in their regional languages like Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, and Bengali instead of English (Mehta, 2023). In the case of global and regional platforms operating in the same national market, a portfolio approach to platform strategy is required that is not sufficiently covered by most of the SMM frameworks in the West. In this context, the current paper reviews the literature and case studies to explore the strategic challenges Indian businesses face in this complexity.

The paper is organized as follows: firstly, an introduction setting the context of the problem; second section reviews the literature that summarizes the previous studies and sets the research objectives; thirdly, the current status and future of Indian SMM; fourthly, detailed case studies; fifthly, strategic implications; sixthly, key tensions; and seventhly, a conclusion that provides actionable recommendations.

2. Literature Review

The academic basis of social media marketing is based on a collection of foundational conceptual studies that laid the groundwork for the theoretical language of social media and its marketing implications. Mangold and Faulds (2009) redefined social media as a hybrid component of the promotion mix, one that both extends the reach of marketer-generated messages and allows for consumer-generated dialogue that is not under the organization's control. This dual nature sets social media apart from all previous media and requires a qualitatively different managerial approach: marketers are no longer able to broadcast their messages to a passive audience, but have to participate in the continuous social conversation, guide and influence it. Kietzmann et al. (2011) built on this concept by creating a honeycomb model that identifies seven functional building blocks of social media: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups, which define what users can do on a platform and thus what strategic priorities marketers should pursue on that platform. This was followed by a typology of social media forms by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) that serves as a foundation for aligning brand communication goals with platform features: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds.

The application of AI and data analysis in marketing has been a major focus of recent research. Appel et al. (2020) suggested that AI would allow for hyper-personalisation at population level by means of dynamic creative optimisation, predictive audience modelling, and conversational AI systems, which would change the economics of personalised communication. Effective personalisation was once an expensive proposition, with large creative teams and customer service teams required, but with AI, the marginal cost of personalisation is near to zero, enabling even smaller, less resourced businesses to provide individually tailored content experiences. In addition to the personalisation capabilities of AI, there has been growing research on the infrastructural and network effects of social media platforms. For instance, Aral et al. (2013) developed a research framework for the role of social media in business transformation, and identified the feedback loops between social influence, information diffusion, and consumer decision making that are now algorithmically engineered by social media platforms. Overall, these studies suggest that organisations are most likely to derive

strategic value from social media when they think of it as a data infrastructure that is part of business strategy, not just a tool for creative communication.

With the increasing regulatory and consumer oversight of social media practices, the ethical aspects of social media marketing have received considerable academic interest. In multicultural and multilingual markets like India, where the diversity of the user base raises the risk of targeted manipulation and the difficulty of implementing universal standards, Kapoor et al. (2022) identified a variety of ethical issues, including privacy violations, the amplification of misinformation, opaque disclosures of influencers, and discriminatory micro-targeting. Their analysis reveals that ethical governance of social media marketing is not only a legal compliance issue, but also a strategic capability that can impact on brand equity, consumer trust and commercial viability. Such concerns are consistent with the claim of Mangold and Faulds (2009) that consumer-generated content can spread both positive and negative information about brands quickly and widely, making failures in governance and brand management far more damaging than in the era of one-way mass media.

Existing studies have highlighted the unique features and challenges of the Indian social media marketing landscape. For instance, Kamath and Alur (2024) noted that the Indian SMM has evolved from its infancy of brand experimentation in the early 2010s to a more advanced and multi-platform practice in the 2020s, highlighting the increasing sophistication of Indian marketers in managing their platforms' portfolios and segmenting their audiences. Mehta (2023) also noted that vernacular video content in regional languages has significantly higher organic reach for rural and semi-urban audiences compared to content in English. This is a critical insight that has implications for content strategy and partnerships with creators, as vernacular video content in regional languages has significantly higher organic reach for rural and semi-urban audiences compared to English language content (Mehta, 2023).

Gupta (2022) examined the social media strategies of Indian startups, such as Zomato and Swiggy, and how tone, personality and real-time cultural responsiveness can replace big advertising budgets in creating brand equity for digitally native consumers. Raghavan (2021) explored the concept of ethical branding in India using the examples of Tata Tea and Nykaa, stating that the key factors that distinguish successful brands from

unsuccessful ones in establishing ethical brands on social media are authenticity and consistency in purpose-driven communication. Sharma and Patel (2022) have reported that the adoption of WhatsApp commerce by Indian Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) has had a significant impact on the commercial landscape, as the integration of social media and digital payments has opened up a new world of e-commerce opportunities for these businesses, far beyond the traditional urban, formally banked customer base. Ballabh (2024) and Tuten and Solomon (2017) also explored the evolution of influencer marketing, revealing a trend towards micro and nano influencers, which focus on building trust and authenticity with their followers rather than simply numbers.

A synthesis of this literature shows that in simpler markets, the technological capability, cultural sensitivity and ethical governance are relatively independent dimensions of complexity, but in the Indian context they are deeply interlinked and must be managed simultaneously to achieve successful social media marketing. Without technological capability, cultural sensitivity can lead to efficient, but irrelevant, communication; without cultural sensitivity, engagement can be fleeting; and without ethical governance, organisations can make token gestures that they are unable to scale up. The literature, however, has focused on these three dimensions individually, either based on international technology-oriented frameworks or empirical studies in India, but not to the extent of combining both in a single strategic framework. Furthermore, the Indian SMM environment is constantly changing, with the rise of vernacular platforms, the development of SMM infrastructure, and the increasing speed of AI-powered marketing tools, which has left practitioners lacking in evidence-based guidance for the new challenges they encounter.

This study aims to fill these gaps by integrating the findings from the key international frameworks, the latest empirical studies in India and documented brand case studies in a cohesive thematic analysis. It aims to achieve three research goals in doing so. First, it aims to understand the current landscape of social media marketing in India, identifying the key platforms, content types, metrics, and governance issues that define the present-day social media marketing landscape. Second, it looks at the future trajectory of Indian SMM in the context of five emerging forces: artificial intelligence and automation, immersive augmented and virtual reality experiences, social commerce integration, ethical branding and governance, and deep vernacular localisation. Third, it provides

practical strategic guidance for businesses of all sizes and industries, offering insights on how to leverage technological advancements, cultural awareness, and ethical governance to build effective and sustainable SMM strategies. The paper thus provides a synthesising framework that connects the international theory with Indian practice, providing conceptual integration and managerial applicability.

3. Methodology

The research design used in this study is integrative research design using qualitative approach based on thematic synthesis. The relevant articles from the peer-reviewed journals, industry reports and documented Indian brand case studies published from the year 2009 to 2025 were selected based on their relevance to social media marketing practice, technological innovation, and Indian market dynamics. Thematic synthesis was used, based on Thomas and Harden's (2008) framework for qualitative evidence synthesis, which included iterative reading; open coding of key themes and the construction of analytical categories that spanned across individual studies. A cross-case analysis of Indian brand experiences allowed the identification of strategic patterns that are not specific to any single company. To structure managerial implications in a way that is easily accessible to practitioners, strategy matrices and comparative tables were created. This approach is suitable for a domain that is dynamic, context-specific, and where a systematic narrative synthesis can offer more in-depth and actionable information than a quantitative meta-analysis.

4. Present State of Social Media Marketing in India

In 2025, India's social media marketing landscape is characterized by large-scale digital adoption, substantial cultural and linguistic diversity, and the growing influence of social media platforms and algorithm-driven marketing practices (Rakshana, 2026). To grasp the current situation, it is important to look at the platform ecosystem, content dynamics, commercial integration, measurement maturity and governance issues that make up the operating environment of Indian marketers.

4.1 User Base and Platform Mix

The number of social media users in India has increased from around 310 million in 2018 to over 467 million in 2024 and is expected to reach around 480 million by the end of 2025.² This growth, as described in Table 1, has been unevenly distributed, both demographically and geographically.

Table 1: Social Media User Growth in India (2018–2025)

Year	Users (Millions)	Growth Rate (%)
2018	310	—
2019	340	9.7
2020	390	14.7
2021	430	10.2
2022	450	4.6
2023	460	2.2
2024	467	1.5
2025* (projected)	480	2.8

Source: Compiled by author; * Statista (2025). See Footnote 2

Instagram and YouTube have a large user base of urban youth with high digital literacy, whereas regional platforms like ShareChat and Moj have a large rural and semi-urban audience, whose digital participation has increased after the democratisation of mobile data (Mehta, 2023; Gupta, 2022). Indian businesses have to deal with a more complicated platform mix than most other key markets. Facebook and Instagram continue to be the most popular social media channels for brand pages, paid ads and influencer marketing (Gupta, 2022; Kamath & Alur, 2024). YouTube is a unique site for long-form and vernacular video. Nearly everyone with a smartphone is using WhatsApp, making it a key direct customer communications, commerce facilitation, and peer-to-peer marketing tool. ShareChat and Moj offer access to audiences whose media consumption is largely in regional languages, and who are a significant and growing group that is largely ignored by globalised platform strategies (Mehta, 2023). Table 2 presents the key features and trade-offs of each of the major platforms.

² Statista (2025), *Number of social media users in India from 2018 to 2025*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com> (accessed in April, 2026)

Table 2: Leading Social Media Platforms in India for Business Marketing

Platform	Primary Use Case	Strengths	Limitations
Facebook	Community building	Large user base, multilingual reach	Declining youth engagement
Instagram	Visual branding	Influencer ecosystem, fashion & lifestyle	Algorithm dependency
YouTube	Video marketing	Long-form content, vernacular reach	High competition
WhatsApp	Direct commerce	Peer-to-peer marketing, SME adoption	Limited advertising features
ShareChat	Regional content	Strong rural penetration, local languages	Limited global reach

Source: Compiled by the author

4.2 Content Formats, Influencer Ecosystems, and Commerce

Short-form video content like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts is the most popular content format for urban youth, and community groups on WhatsApp and Facebook are great for peer recommendations among rural and non-metropolitan audiences (Mehta, 2023). The influencer ecosystem has evolved into a more segmented and specialised structure. Celebrity macro-influencers are typically used for brand awareness campaigns that require large budgets. However, there has been a systematic shift of investment towards micro-influencers and nano-influencers, generally classified as creators with 10,000–100,000 and 1,000–10,000 followers, respectively (Korzynski et al., 2025). Their smaller but highly engaged communities are often perceived as more authentic and cost-effective for specialised product categories (Ballabh, 2024; Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

Social commerce, which combines social media with e-commerce, is one of the most promising trends in Indian SMM today. The penetration of UPI based digital payments has triggered a paradigm shift from social media as an awareness creator to a point-of-sale environment. With WhatsApp Business storefronts, SMEs can handle catalogues, answer inquiries, and finalize transactions all in one messaging platform, without the need for a separate e-commerce platform (Sharma & Patel, 2022; Kumar & Singh, 2021). Indian marketers use a variety of measurement techniques, ranging from the most sophisticated, like sentiment analysis and predictive attribution modelling, to the most basic, such as platform-native vanity metrics, for instance likes and follower counts, which makes it difficult for them to prove Return on Investment (ROI) and invest strategically (Kamath & Alur, 2024; Appel et al., 2020).

5. Future of Social Media Marketing in India

Table 3 provides a summary of five forces that will define the future course of Indian SMM. These forces are not working in isolation; they will interact to generate some of the most important business opportunities and governance challenges in the next era of digital marketing in India.

First is AI-driven personalization. AI will transform the economics of SMM by making hyper-personalisation possible at scale, thanks to dynamic creative optimisation, predictive audience modelling and conversational AI, which Appel et al. (2020) predicted would become a standard for advanced marketers. AI-based personalisation is especially strategically relevant in India's linguistic landscape and income inequality. AI-powered personalisation will be leveraged by SMEs more and more via platform-native tools that were previously exclusive to tech giants (Kumar & Singh, 2021). Second are the augmented reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) experiences. The experiential nature of digital commerce is slowly being overcome by AR/VR technologies. Lenskart's try-on features, which have been used by eyewear brands and are now being tested by fashion and cosmetics brands, enable customers to see products on themselves, helping to overcome the uncertainty that discourages online shopping for products where fit and appearance are important (Mehta, 2023). VR showrooms developed by Tata Motors for discovering cars and real estate platforms for viewing properties offer a more immersive brand experience, resulting in higher emotional engagement and purchase intent than static formats. These technologies are likely to become commonplace in the social commerce toolbox, which is the third emerging trend, as hardware becomes more affordable and as platform-native AR tools gain traction.

Table 3: Emerging Trends in Indian Social Media Marketing

Trend	Business Impact	Example Application
AI-driven personalization	Higher conversion rates	Flipkart product recommendations
AR/VR experiences	Enhanced customer engagement	Lenskart AR try-on; Tata Motors VR showroom
Social commerce	Direct revenue generation	WhatsApp Pay storefronts; Instagram Shops
Ethical branding	Improved trust and loyalty	Tata Tea 'Jaago Re'; FabIndia sustainability
Regional content	Wider rural penetration	ShareChat vernacular campaigns

Source: Compiled by the author

Third, social media will keep evolving into a transactional platform with the integration of social platforms and India's UPI-based payment infrastructure. With the penetration of almost all Indian adults with smartphones, WhatsApp Pay allows end-to-end commerce, from product discovery to enquiry, from payment and after-sales service to all in one messaging interface (Sharma & Patel, 2022). This democratisation of social commerce will increase the addressable market to tens of millions of micro enterprises that form the backbone of Indian retail. At the same time, consumers are becoming more aware of how brands behave in terms of environmental and social issues, and this is now becoming a minimum market standard rather than a differentiator (Kapoor et al., 2022; Raghavan, 2021), making companies to go for ethical branding, which is the fourth emerging trend. Lastly, vernacular localisation is no longer a niche issue, but a commercial necessity in India, where there is a wide variety of languages. By collaborating with local creators and supporting culturally relevant content creation, brands can tap into the audience segments that are shaping the future of Indian internet usage (Mehta, 2023; Gupta, 2022). Thus, developing regional content is crucial.

6. Case Studies: Indian Brand Experiences

The strategic principles outlined in the previous sections are illustrated by four Indian brand cases, which collectively show the diversity of SMM approaches in various industry contexts, at various scales and with various strategic goals.

6.1 Zomato and Swiggy: Real-Time Brand Engagement

India's leading food delivery apps Zomato and Swiggy have built up social media accounts that are considered to be the gold standard of brand personality management in the Indian digital marketing landscape. Both brands are part of a fiercely competitive space with very similar service offerings and a consumer base of digitally savvy urban millennials and Gen-Zers who are immune to traditional advertising. In such structural situations, both brands adopted social media strategies that were based on editorial authenticity instead of product promotion (Gupta, 2022). Their social media teams are as

nimble as newsrooms, watching in real time what is happening in the culture, news and sporting events, and reacting in hours with content that makes the brand a part of the conversation, not a vendor trying to get noticed. This has created significant earned media value, with the Zomato Twitter account being featured in the national media on several occasions, making social media a public relations outcome at a low cost. The strategic lesson is that in service categories where the product is commoditised, with limited product differentiation, brand voice and cultural intelligence can be key sources of competitive advantage, which is in line with the theoretical focus of Tuten and Solomon (2017) on the role of social media in the construction of brand personality.

6.2 Nykaa: Content-Led Commerce and Tiered Influencer Strategy

Nykaa, India's largest beauty and lifestyle brand, is one of the best examples of a brand that has been created almost solely through social media and influencer marketing. In a market where beauty retail was offline, fragmented and international brand counters dominated, Nykaa had to build the credibility and consumer trust for a digital-first retail model in a high involvement product category where the product experience is key to purchase confidence. It has reacted by becoming more than a retailer; it's a beauty authority and content publisher (Raghavan, 2021). The long-form tutorial videos, ingredient explanations and seasonal beauty trend analyses that were posted on YouTube and Instagram were a massive investment and helped to establish Nykaa's reputation as a trusted source of information before they even got to the sales pitch. The content foundation allowed for a tiered influencer strategy: macro-influencers were partnered to build brand awareness among aspirational audiences, and micro- and nano-influencers were partnered to create authentic and community trust that led to conversion among value-conscious and specialised consumers in specific beauty subcategories, such as skin care for specific skin types, regional makeup styles, and affordable beauty alternatives. This content-led and influencer-driven strategy contributed significantly to Nykaa's brand visibility and consumer engagement, supporting its successful public listing in 2021 (Bhattacharjee, 2023). The success of Nykaa's influencer strategy also supports Ballabh's (2024) view that influencer marketing in India is best executed when it is tiered, targeted and based on category-specific expertise.

6.3 Amul: Translating Legacy Brand Equity into Digital Virality

Amul's signature advertisement style, known as Amul Girl, which has been commenting on news, politics and culture with wit and cultural insight since 1966, is a unique example of legacy brand equity being transferred to social media. The format is simple, visually appealing (a unique cartoon character in front of a white background with a punning caption), topical and timely (new creatives created within 24-48 hours of a newsworthy event) and culturally resonant (national), which makes it a format that is able to generate organic social sharing without paid amplification (Mehta, 2023). The social media age has seen Amul's creative team speed up their production pace and expands their topical reach to include sports, entertainment and social issues as well as politics, while keeping the format's core intact, but making it more relevant to the news cycles and cultural references of digital audiences. The commercial impact has been significant – Amul is one of the most followed and most engaging Indian brand social media accounts, even with a much smaller digital marketing budget than its competitors. The strategic lesson is that heritage brands with a strong cultural equity don't need to change in order to be relevant to digital audiences; they just need to find ways to adapt the qualities that earned their equity (relevance, wit, cultural intelligence, speed) to the formats and cadences that digital platforms reward. This finding further supports Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) argument that brand assets should be aligned with the characteristics of the platform.

6.4 Reliance JioMart: Social Commerce as Economic Inclusion

Reliance JioMart's entry into WhatsApp commerce is a groundbreaking move to expand social commerce to the informal sector of Indian SMM, which has been largely under-researched. JioMart allows local kirana stores and neighbourhood retailers to become sellers on WhatsApp Business, manage product catalogues in the messaging app and accept orders from customers who are already using WhatsApp for personal messaging (Sharma & Patel, 2022). The strategic rationale behind this model is clear: JioMart does not try to convince India's approximately 13 million kirana and neighbourhood stores (Goyal, 2021) to install a dedicated app and onboard them to a proprietary e-commerce platform, but instead integrates commerce into a platform that retailers and customers

already use for everyday communication. The impact of JioMart's commercialization goes beyond just the revenue it can generate for the company; it also creates an economic opportunity for small traders in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, who have not had the technical resources to engage in digital commerce, to do so without needing to invest in anything beyond using a smartphone. JioMart is thus helping to expand the addressable market for digital retail while simultaneously building the platform density that makes JioMart's own marketplace more valuable. This case highlights that social commerce strategy, when conceived with the actual capabilities and limitations of less digitally-sophisticated participants, can deliver economic development outcomes in addition to commercial goals, a combination of commercial and social value creation, in line with the ethical branding literature as reviewed by Raghavan (2021).

7. Strategic Implications for Indian Businesses

The theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and case evidences converge to five strategic priorities for Indian businesses, which are summarised comparatively in Table 4. These strategic priorities are not mutually exclusive but are interrelated. The most successful social media marketing campaigns will likely involve a combination of several elements, including content, analytics, customer trust, and social commerce, depending on the specific needs and capabilities of the target audience, the industry, and the organisation.

Table 4: Present vs. Future Business Strategies in Indian SMM

Dimension	Present Strategy	Future Strategy
Content	Celebrity endorsements, memes	AI-generated personalization, immersive formats
Analytics	Engagement metrics, ROI tracking	Predictive modeling, sentiment AI
Customer Trust	Compliance with IT rules	Ethical transparency, sustainability
Sales	Lead generation	Integrated WhatsApp/Instagram commerce

Source: Compiled by the author

First, investing in data analytics and creative technology is the strategic investment at the core of capability building. Appel et al. (2020) found that the quality of data infrastructure is a key element of AI-driven personalisation, and Indian enterprises need to invest in marketing technology, analytical expertise and cross-functional skills to link social media engagement with business results. Second, a diversified platform portfolio is key to capturing the full Indian market – large brands should have a presence on both global and regional platforms, while SMEs should aim for depth rather than breadth, targeting one or two platforms where their specific target audience is most active (Kamath & Alur, 2024). Third, social commerce integration, which refers to the integration of transactional features into social media platforms, is a key priority, especially for SMEs in consumer-centric industries where WhatsApp storefronts and UPI payments provide a seamless journey from social discovery to purchase (Sharma & Patel, 2022). Fourth, companies need to proactively institutionalise ethical governance by creating policies on data usage, disclosure of influencers, content moderation, and sustainability communication, before the regulatory issues or reputational problems occur (Kapoor et al., 2022; Raghavan, 2021). Fifth, localisation strategy should be viewed as a long-term capability of the organisation and should be supported by local creators, cultural advisors and community managers who have first-hand experience of the local context (Mehta, 2023; Gupta, 2022).

8. Discussion

The analytical amalgamation of theoretical frameworks, empirical literature, and Indian case evidences brings to light three major challenges that Indian social media marketers must face.

The first major challenge is to strike a balance between mass reach and cultural and regional relevance. Platforms with the widest reach, like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, are geared towards the global audience and optimize for engagement patterns that might not be culturally and linguistically specific to Indian consumer segments. Content standardisation is often required to achieve scale on these platforms, which

compromises the authenticity of the content, and platforms like ShareChat and Moj have better relevance but do not have the advertiser infrastructure of their international counterparts (Kamath & Alur, 2024; Mehta, 2023).

The second big challenge is to find the balance between technology automation and genuine consumer interaction. While AI-powered personalisation and automated campaign management can be highly efficient, over-automated social presences may come across as algorithmically generated and less authentic, especially in the context of influencer marketing where the key to commercial persuasion is the perception of a real human endorsement (Appel et al., 2020; Ballabh, 2024). The key is to use automation to improve efficiency and maintain the human touch, cultural savvy, and warmth that keeps consumers connected.

The third big challenge is to find a balance between fast commercial expansion and responsible governance practices. The commercial pressures of social commerce present structural challenges to the ability to put data privacy and disclosure requirements first and foremost, which both Kapoor et al. (2022) and Mangold and Faulds (2009) have suggested is ultimately counterproductive, as the costs of regulatory and reputational damage are likely to be much higher than the short-term growth sacrificed by operating within an ethical framework.

These challenges indicate that the best way to Indian SMM is to integrate AI-driven operational efficiency and human creative and cultural intelligence in a tiered manner, with proactively institutionalised ethical frameworks. In the case of resource-constrained SMEs, they should focus on investing in WhatsApp commerce and regional platform integrations that can be the most direct route from social engagement to commercial transaction (Sharma & Patel, 2022).

9. Conclusion

Social media marketing in India has moved from an experimental side-line to the main stream of business communication and earning. In India, the social media environment is characterized by the adoption of various platforms, evolving content formats, the

integration of commerce functionalities, and the adoption of analytics and data-driven marketing practices, albeit with varying degrees of penetration. The future of social media marketing in India will be defined by AI-powered hyper-personalisation, AR and VR-enhanced shopping experiences, the rise of social commerce, and a greater focus on ethical governance, both for market appeal and regulatory compliance.

In this context, the strategic priorities for businesses are becoming more and more apparent. The key prerequisite for successful personalisation with AI is investment in data and analytical capabilities. With the Indian social media audience being linguistically diverse, vernacular and cultural localisation are the key commercial imperatives. Ethical governance should be integrated into the organisation's practices before issues arise, such as data privacy, disclosure of influencers, content moderation and sustainability communication. Given the UPI infrastructure, WhatsApp penetration and the commerce environment, social commerce integration, especially for SMEs, is the most promising near-term opportunity, and is ideally suited to India's structural attributes. Organisations that systematically build these capacities, produce genuinely localised content, and embed ethical governance into their organisational culture will have an edge in creating value for their business in the long run from India's vast digital scale.

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Gender Disparities in Labour Force Participation in India: A Descriptive Rural–Urban Analysis

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Abstract

This studies explores the gender inequality in labour force participation in India with a particular emphasis on rural-urban variations since the year 2017- 2018 to 2022- 23. The study is descriptive in nature and uses secondary aggregate Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) statistics obtained from published Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reports released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). Gender inequality is measured on three parameters, namely absolute gender gap, relative gender gap, and Gender Parity Index (GPI). The outcomes show that the female participation in labour force has improved significantly, especially in the rural regions, where the absolute gender gap reduced by 13.1 percentage points as compared to 5 percentage point in the urban regions. The Gender Parity Index in the rural areas improved by 0.32 to 0.52 demonstrating that gender disparities were narrowed significantly, whereas the urban GPI improved slightly by 0.27 to 0.34. In spite of these advancements, participation of male labour force still reigns in both rural and urban labour market. The results show that women are still disadvantaged and still experience structural and socio-economic limitations, particularly in the urban regions and that specific, gender-sensitive labour market policies are needed to ensure inclusive economic development in India.

Keywords: Labour Force Participation Rate, Gender Disparity, Gender Parity Index, Rural–Urban India

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1. Introduction

The concept of gender equality has been acknowledged as one of the key pillars of economic empowerment, social justice, and inclusive development in most countries. Women's labour force contribution has a significant influence on the welfare of a household, economic productivity and long-term economic development (Fluchtman et al., 2024; Sorsa, 2015; Akhtar et al., 2023). Although major growth has been made in the field of education and health for female, gender gaps in labour force participation remain largely unchanged in many developing economies, especially in India (World Bank, 2012; Lahoti & Swaminathan, 2015). Many of these are potential indicators of the fact that women's human capital is underutilised and signs of structural, social and institutional obstacles to women's access to the labour market (ILO, 2019; World Bank, 2023).

The analysis is conducted based on the aggregate gender-wise Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) statistics reported in the annual PLFS reports generated by the National Statistical Office (NSO). Gender disparities in LFPR embrace variations in exposure to economic chances and engagement into productive pursuits. According to the World Bank estimates labour force participation of female workers in India was 31.2 per cent, in 2023, that of males was 76.8 per cent, and thus there was a large and enduring gender gap (World Development Indicators, 2023). These inequalities are quite significant relative to many other developing economies and this begs the question of whether India has inclusivity in its development process.

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) evidence indicates that there has been some recovery in participation in the labour force by women in India since 2017 and especially since 2017-18. The male labour participation rate in rural regions rose to 80.2 per cent in 2022-23 after being at 76.4 per cent in 2017-18 and the female labour participation rate also rose from 24.6 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.5 per cent in 2022-23 (PLFS report, 2022-23). These gains though notwithstanding, the gender gap is still tremendous, which is an indication of slower convergence of male and female participation rates. Female labour force participation in cities grew slightly between 20.4 per cent in 2017-18 to 25.4 per cent in 2022-23, which was a steady increase as compared to men who remained at an average of about 74.5 per cent. The observed rural–urban differences reflect spatio-

temporal variations in the structural constraints influencing female labour force participation in India (Chatterjee & Sircar, 2021; Fernandez & Puri, 2023).

There is an increasing literature on gender differences in the labour force participation in India. According to Shiekh et al. (2019), there are notable disparities between the unemployment rates and male and female labour force participation, which points to unmitigated labour market inequalities. According to Srivastava et al. (2019), gender differences in labour force participation are high in India such that the rate of participation of females is significantly lower than that of males and global rates. These studies indicate that economic growth has not been adequate enough to curb the gender differences in participation in the labour market.

Research of recent years also points to high levels of regional differences in gender differences. According to Fernandez et al. (2024), there is a reduction in the gender disparities in participation in labour force in most industries in high-growth states (such as Tamil Nadu) and a constantly high gender disparity in states such as Uttar Pradesh. In their findings, they highlight the fact that lessening gender inequalities in labour force participation is crucial in order to experience sustainable and regionally equal growth.

In addition to quantified levels of participation, the economic role of women in India is usually undervalued since unpaid and informal employment is common. It is demonstrated by Srija and Vijay (2020) that only a third of the work performed by women is recorded in the traditional employment indicators, which is in contrast to a predecessor of three-quarters of the work of men. This underrepresentation does not only hide the true role that women play in the economy, but also the witnessed gender disparity in the labour market participation levels.

Even though the available literature gives significant information on the determinants and trends of female labour force participation, systematic rural-urban analyses based on the recent national-level data are still scarce. In addition, not many studies use multiple indicators to measure absolute and relative aspects of labour force participation inequality in gender. To fill these gaps, the current research paper analyses gender disparities in the labour force participation in India using a rural-urban analysis through PLFS data and various measures of gender gaps. In such a way, the research is useful in further developing the knowledge of spatial variations in women involvement in the labour

market, on the one hand, and providing policy-relevant knowledge towards facilitating equitable and inclusive development.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The literature review is presented in Section 2. The data source and methodology are discussed in Section 3. The results and discussions are presented in Section 4, followed by the study conclusion in the last section.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Global Evidence on Gender Disparities in Labour Force Participation

Research from around the world has repeatedly identified the presence of gender gaps in labour force participation in economies. Righetto (2023) investigated into the importance of marital status in Italy and observed a great impact of family structures on women's labour market entry. Gevrek et al. (2022) also found that social norms, gender-role attitudes, fertility, religiosity and education inequality tend to support the male-dominated pattern of labour force participation in Turkey. It is observed that in the context of Iran, occupational segregation, gender discrimination, and restrictive social norms are among the most important factors that have caused gender inequality in contribution in the labour marketplace and restricted the process of achieving SDGs by female (Taheri et al. 2021). Taken together, these studies indicate that the gendered outcomes of the labour market remain to be influenced by socio-cultural and institutional dimensions in all countries.

Gender results are also influenced by trade, institutions and labour market structures. Yu et al. (2021) discover that the greater competition in imports in China exacerbates labour market participation difference, especially amongst women. Aldan (2021) demonstrates that despite the positive growth of female labour force participation in Turkey, it is still significantly connected with the existing gender wage disparities, partially because lower skilled women are entering the labour force. In the United States, Popov et al. (2019) present evidence that gender difference in labour force participation is greatly decreased under the influence of increased competition in credit market sectors.

2.2. Gender Disparities in Labour Force Participation in India

The gender disparities in the labour force participation in India have been very high in spite of the growing up of the economy and the increasing education levels of the females. Banerjee (2019) records the lack of change in the low level of female labour force participation in India and blames it on the social and cultural barriers. According to Kumari (2018), there is a U-shaped association between financial progress and the female labour force participation, which highlights the influence of education, the childcare accessibility, cultural norms, and the gender wages differences.

Recent researchers also touch upon structural barriers of women in India. Baral et al. (2022) demonstrate that the contribution of females in the labour force is still low as they are subjected to social norms that restrain them, lack of education, job flexibility, and discrimination at work. According to Singh et al. (2022), young females in India are much less probable than men to receive regular paid jobs and that marital status explains a significant fraction of gender wage gaps. Bishnu et al. (2024) believe that gender disparities in labour force participation are based on differences in the labour demand and the deterioration in female participation caused by the increasing male wages and household income impacts. India has also high indicators of labour force participation and unemployment with regard to the gender gap; the article Kasabe (2024) reports that gender inequality still persists between males and females.

There are sub-national pieces of evidence in India that show that gender disparities even in the areas that have seen economic growth still exist. According to Pandey (2022), a huge gender disparity in the labour participation in Bihar is reported despite economic development, and therefore the need to have women play a bigger role in the development process in order to achieve gender equality.

2.3. Household Dynamics, Gender Attitudes, and Mobility Constraints

Gender attitudes and the factors at the household level are important determinants of women's involvement in the labour market. As demonstrated by Preston (2023), gender role attitudes and education levels converged by a 6.5 percentage point between 2001-05 and 2015-19, and this led to gender differences in labour force participation converging.

Farré et al. (2022) show that commuting time impacts married women in disproportional ways, where every 10-minute increment in commuting time decreases women involvement by 4.4 per cent, and the effect of the same on men does not change significantly. Hu et al. (2023) discover that disruption of household arrangements have a negative impact on the labour force participation by females, especially married women, and that shows the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic labour. Molina et al. (2022) also demonstrate that increased female labour force reduces the gender differences in aspirations and achievement, which also impacts positively on the educational investments and future opportunities of the girls.

2.4. Research gap and Contribution of the study

This paper is mainly descriptive in nature and highlights the gender gap in the labour force participation across rural and urban areas in time through a set of gender gap indicators based on recent data from the PLFS.

Using the PLFS data from 2017-18 to 2022-23, the present study focuses on the gender disparity indicators: Absolute Gender Gap, Relative Gender Gap and Gender Parity Index, These indices, have been used in the past to analyze gender gaps in labour force participation, However, these have been specifically be used here to analyze the different rates of gender convergence in rural and urban labour markets. The results show that there is a gender convergence in rural India more than that in urban India over the study period in particular.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1. Data Source

This paper examines gender inequalities in the labour force participation in India and particularly the rural-urban inequality. The paper uses Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data which is an annual survey conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). The PLFS is the most effective and consistent source of labour market data in India and is based on internationally accepted standards.

The study uses the information available from the published annual reports of PLFS gender-wise Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) data reported in the PLFS annual reports 2017-18 to 2022-23.

The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) as per Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) is the proportion of persons in labour force (persons who are working or seeking/work available) to the people. The LFPR in the present study is the number of employed and unemployed persons who are seeking/available for work as a percentage of the population in the age group 15 years and above.

3.2. Analytical Framework

To examine gender disparities in labour force participation, the study employs three complementary indicators: Absolute Gender Gap (AGG), Relative Gender Gap (RGG), and Gender Parity Index (GPI). Together, these measures capture both absolute and proportional differences between male and female labour force participation rates.

Trend analysis and computation of gender disparity indicators are carried out using Microsoft Excel, which is used for data organization, graphical presentation, and calculation of the indices.

3.3. Measurement of Gender Disparity

3.3.1. Absolute Gender Gap (AGG)

The absolute gender gap measures the difference between male and female labour force participation rates in percentage points.

$$\text{AGG (Rural)} = \text{Male LFPR (Rural)} - \text{Female LFPR (Rural)} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{AGG (Urban)} = \text{Male LFPR (Urban)} - \text{Female LFPR (Urban)} \quad (2)$$

A higher value of AGG indicates a wider gender disparity in labour force participation.

3.3.2. Relative Gender Gap (RGG)

The relative gender gap expresses the absolute gender gap as a percentage of male labour force participation, thereby capturing the proportional extent of female disadvantage relative to the prevailing labour market norm.

$$\text{RGG (Rural)} = \frac{\text{Absolute Gender Gap (Rural)}}{\text{Male LFPR (Rural)}} \times 100 \quad (3)$$

$$\text{RGG (Urban)} = \frac{\text{Absolute Gender Gap (Urban)}}{\text{Male LFPR (Urban)}} \times 100 \quad (4)$$

The Relative Gender Gap (RGG) assumes the labour market participation of men as the reference point given that the participation rates of men are usually higher and more stable in the labour markets.² Given the patriarchal nature of Indian labour market, male participation is generally considered as the norm for the labour market, with female disadvantage measured against it in the field of labour market inequality literature. The RGG thus reflects the missing contribution of women's labour force participation, as a proportion of the male participation rate.

3.3.3. Gender Parity Index (GPI)

The Gender Parity Index measures the ratio of female to male labour force participation rates and provides an intuitive indicator of gender equality.

$$\text{GPI (Rural)} = \frac{\text{Female LFPR (Rural)}}{\text{Male LFPR (Rural)}} \quad (5)$$

$$\text{GPI (Urban)} = \frac{\text{Female LFPR (Urban)}}{\text{Male LFPR (Urban)}} \quad (6)$$

- **GPI = 1** indicates equality between male and female labour force participation
- **GPI < 1** indicates higher male participation

² Male labour force participation is chosen as the denominator because male participation is the prevailing labour market benchmark and the dominant labour force attachment that is used in labour economics literature (Mincer, 1962; Goldin, 1995; International Labour Organization, 2019). Hence, the Relative Gender Gap is the proportionate disadvantage of women's participation in the labour market based on the established gender labour market norm. While using the female LFPR as denominator may exaggerate proportional differences as participation rates among females are generally lower and less stable than for males across regions and over time.

- **GPI > 1** indicates higher female participation

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Trends in Labour Force Participation Rates by Gender and Region

Table 1 shows the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of both men and women in rural and city India in the year 2017-18 and 2022-23. The findings indicate that there are rural-urban gender differences in the participation of both genders with time. Male participation in the labour force in rural regions also exhibits a slow growth with 76.4 per cent participation in 2017-18 and 80.2 per cent in 2022-23. The participation of female labour force in the rural regions shows a much steeper rise as it has increased by 24.6 per cent to 41.5 per cent in the same period. This significantly increased growth signifies that there has been a significant upsurge in labour market involvement among women in rural India.

Table 1: Labour force participation rates (in %)

Rural		
Year	Male	Female
2017-18	76.4	24.6
2018-19	76.4	26.4
2019-20	77.9	33
2020-21	78.1	36.5
2021-22	78.2	36.6
2022-23	80.2	41.5
Urban		
Year	Male	Female
2017-18	74.5	20.4
2018-19	73.7	20.4
2019-20	74.6	23.3
2020-21	74.6	23.2
2021-22	74.7	23.8
2022-23	74.5	25.4

Source: PLFS report (2022-23)

Conversely, the urban male labour force participation has been fairly constant with a slight fluctuation of 74.5 per cent in 2017-18 and 2022-23. The number of women participating in the labour force in urban areas grows by 20.4 per cent in 2017-18 to 25.4 per cent in 2022-23, but the growth rate is much slower than in rural areas. Regardless of the improvements in both areas, there is a large gap between the genders throughout the period.

4.2. Absolute Gender Gap in Labour Force Participation

Absolute gender gap (AGG), which is the disparity between male and female rates of labour force participation, gives an idea of the level of gender inequality. Table 2 show the trends in absolute gender gap in rural and urban areas. The absolute gender gap in rural regions decreases steadily between 51.8 percentage points in 2017-18 to 38.7 percentage points in 2022-23, or by 13.1 percentage points. This gradual drop indicates the accelerated increase in the female labour force participation compared to their male counterparts in the rural India.

Table 2: Absolute Gender Gap in Rural-Urban Labour Force Participation (in %)

Year	Absolute Gender Gap	
	Rural	Urban
2017-18	51.8	54.1
2018-19	50	53.3
2019-20	44.9	51.3
2020-21	41.6	51.4
2021-22	41.6	50.9
2022-23	38.7	49.1

Source: Authors' Calculation

The absolute gender gap in urban areas decreased by only 5 percentage points during the study period, going from 54.1 percentage points in 2017–18 to 49.1 percentage points in 2022–23. While there was a significant reduction in gender gap in rural labour markets, urban markets showed a significantly higher gap in participation in the labour market. The urban gender gap in the labour force participation rate was marginally unchanged at approximately 50 percentage points between 2019–20 and 2022–23, suggesting overall lack of enhancement in improving females' contribution in the labour force compared to

men. These results indicate that gender convergence was observed in rural labour markets, but not in urban labour markets.

4.3. Relative Gender Gap in Labour Force Participation

The relative gender gap (RGG) is used to present absolute differences in a percentage of the labour force participation of men to capture proportional differences. Table 3 show tendencies in the relative gender gap in rural and urban regions. In India, the gender gap in rural areas diminishes considerably, as the gap in 2017-18 was 67.8 per cent and in 2022-23 it is 48.3 per cent, a difference of 19.5 percentage points. This massive drop shows that the labour force participation rates by female have risen at a higher rate as compared to that of men in the rural areas.

The relative gender gap in urban areas also decreases but much more gradually, i.e., by 72.6 per cent in 2017-18, to 65.9 per cent in 2022-23, or by 6.7 percentage points. The urban relative gender gap is more constant and higher than the rural one throughout the study period, showing the presence of more and more aggressive obstacles to women participation in the labour force in urban areas. Such results imply that compared to the earlier days, gender gaps in labour force participation are bridging in both regions albeit at a slower rate in the rural areas than the urban areas.

Table 3: Relative Gender Gap in Rural-Urban Labour Force Participation (in %)

Year	Relative Gender Gap	
	Rural	Urban
2017-18	67.8	72.6
2018-19	65.4	72.3
2019-20	57.6	68.8
2020-21	53.3	68.9
2021-22	53.2	68.1
2022-23	48.3	65.9

Source: Authors' Calculation

4.4. Gender Parity Index in Labour Force Participation

Gender Parity Index (GPI) directly indicates gender equality, which is the ratio of woman to man labour force participation. Table 4 shows the tendency of the GPI of rural and urban regions. The GPI in the rural regions rises by 0.32 in 2017-18 up to 0.52 in 2022-23, indicating a significant change of female participation compared to that of males. This 0.20 point growth shows that there is some significant improvement in attaining gender equity in rural labour markets.

In cities, the GPI increases by 0.27 in 2017-18 to 0.34 in 2022-23; this is only 0.07 points of the growth. In as much as the positive growth is an indicator of some change, there is still a lot that urban regions can do to lessen the disparity between the rural and the urban regions in terms of gender equality. All in all, the GPI values are below unity in the two regions, which signifies further male dominance in the labour force participation. The rural areas however improve faster which points out inequality in the developmental stages of the regions.

Table 4: Gender Parity Index in Rural-Urban Labour Force Participation

Year	Gender Parity Index	
	Rural	Urban
2017-18	0.32	0.27
2018-19	0.35	0.28
2019-20	0.42	0.31
2020-21	0.47	0.31
2021-22	0.47	0.32
2022-23	0.52	0.34

Source: Authors' Calculation

4.5. Findings of the Study

These findings show that the gap in gender differences in labour force participation in India has been narrowed meaningfully between the start and end of the study period but in the rural regions it has been more effective and sustained than in urban regions. The absolute and relative gender gaps are decreased; the Gender Parity Index in both regions has got better. However, there are still relatively high gender inequalities in urban labour

markets, which may indicate the existence of more powerful structural, institutional, and socio-cultural divisions that hinder the women participation.

Such results support the idea that policy interventions in the region, especially the urban ones, should focus on mitigating the limitations of inflexible working schedules, safety issues, and inequalities in care loads to facilitate inclusive and gender-equitable labour market performance.

5. Conclusion

The analysis shows that there has been a noteworthy growth in the female labour force in India between 2017-18 and 2022-23, and rural regions have a higher rate of improvement compared to urban regions. The fact that gender gaps are narrowing (evidenced by the decreasing absolute and relative gender gaps and the increasing values of the Gender Parity Index) is a sign of slow progress in changing women's position in the labour force to be more inclusive. Nevertheless, the male involvement still prevails, especially in the city labour markets, where it has been slow to progress.

The results indicate that though the rural female involvement has been advantageous due to the economic need and informal sources of employment, urban female involvement still experiences some structural barriers which include lack of job flexibility, safety issues and non-payment of care. These limitations need to be remedied by developing specific policies including childcare, flexibility in employees work schedules, skill training and enhanced workplace safety in order to bring meaningful gender equality in the labour participation. In the future, the analysis can be expanded to state- or district-specific trends and sector-specific employment to offer more in-depth information regarding the regional disparities.

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The Macroeconomic Impact of Artificial Intelligence

Adoption on Labour Markets in Emerging Economies: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming labour markets across the global economy, yet its macroeconomic consequences for emerging economies remain insufficiently examined in the existing literature. This paper presents a systematic review of the current literature on the impact of AI adoption on labour markets in five major emerging economies—India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Nigeria—over the period 2015–2024. Drawing on published findings from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and peer-reviewed academic literature, this review synthesizes evidence on three interconnected questions: How has AI adoption affected employment levels and occupational structures in emerging economies?; what are its distributional consequences for income inequality and vulnerable workers?; and what policy frameworks does the literature recommend to manage the transition equitably? The review finds that existing studies consistently identify a dual and asymmetric effect: AI adoption displaces routine and low-skill employment in manufacturing and services while generating new demand for higher-skilled, technology-complementary occupations, thereby widening pre-existing income inequality unless counteracted by deliberate policy intervention. The literature further shows that the magnitude of these effects varies significantly across countries depending on institutional quality, educational endowments, digital infrastructure, and sectoral

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composition. The paper concludes by identifying gaps in the current literature and highlighting the need for firm-level and longitudinal studies in the Global South context.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Labour Markets, Emerging Economies, Technological Unemployment, Income Inequality, Literature Review, AI Policy, Macroeconomics

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has transitioned from a domain of speculative science to a pervasive economic force reshaping industries, institutions, and labour markets across the global economy. The automation of cognitive and physical tasks, once considered the exclusive province of human workers, is now increasingly performed by machine-learning algorithms, robotic systems, and large language models. While the productivity-enhancing potential of AI is widely acknowledged in the literature, its distributional consequences—particularly in the context of emerging and developing economies—remain deeply contested (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2018; Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014).

Emerging economies occupy a paradoxical position in the global AI landscape. On one hand, the literature suggests they stand to benefit enormously from AI-driven productivity gains, potentially leapfrogging traditional stages of industrial development. On the other hand, scholars have highlighted that their labour markets are characterized by large pools of low- and semi-skilled workers whose livelihoods are most vulnerable to automation. Countries such as India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Nigeria collectively employ hundreds of millions of workers in sectors such as manufacturing, retail, agriculture processing, and routine services that AI is actively transforming (Chang and Huynh 2016; ILO 2023).

This paper is motivated by three research questions that the existing literature has not comprehensively addressed in a comparative emerging-economy framework: (1) How has AI adoption affected employment levels and occupational structures in major emerging economies? (2) What does the literature reveal about the distributional consequences of AI adoption for income inequality and vulnerable workers? (3) What policy frameworks

does the scholarly and institutional literature recommend to manage the AI transition equitably in the Global South?

To address these questions, this paper undertakes a systematic review of published academic literature, institutional reports, working papers, and policy documents published between 2013 and 2024, identified through Google Scholar, JSTOR, SSRN, the ILO's LABORDOC, and the World Bank Open Knowledge Repository. The five sample economies—India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Nigeria—were selected to ensure geographic diversity and to cover a range of AI preparedness levels. The review makes three principal contributions. First, it provides a comparative synthesis of AI-labour market findings across five diverse emerging economies. Second, it maps the sectoral and distributional dimensions of AI's impact as documented in the literature. Third, it identifies critical gaps in existing scholarship and offers directions for future empirical research. The paper does not present original econometric analysis; rather, it systematically reviews and critically evaluates the evidence produced by existing studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations: Technology and Labour Displacement

The intellectual foundations of debates surrounding technology and employment date to the classical economists. Ricardo (1821) acknowledged the possibility of technological unemployment in his chapter on machinery, while Keynes (1930) famously predicted “technological unemployment” as a temporary malady of the transition to an automated future. The post-war consensus, however, leaned toward technological optimism: Solow (1956) and subsequent growth theorists argued that innovations would create new categories of work faster than they destroyed old ones, a position empirically supported through much of the twentieth century (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2018).

The digital revolution revived these debates. The task-based framework developed by Autor, Levy, and Murnane (2003) remains foundational: it distinguishes between routine tasks (susceptible to automation) and non-routine tasks (complemented by technology), predicting a hollowing out of middle-skill employment. Acemoglu and Restrepo (2018;

2020) extended this framework by distinguishing displacement effects (where machines substitute for labour) from reinstatement effects (where new labour-intensive tasks emerge), finding that in U.S. manufacturing, displacement has significantly outpaced reinstatement since 1990. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) further argue that AI constitutes a general-purpose technology with economy-wide transformative potential comparable to electricity, making its labour market effects broader and more persistent than prior technological waves.

2.2 AI Adoption and Labour Markets: Evidence from Emerging Economies

The literature on AI's labour market impact in emerging economies begins most prominently with the World Bank's World Development Report (2016), which estimated that up to 77 percent of jobs in countries such as China and India were susceptible to automation. However, subsequent scholars challenged this estimate. Banga and te Velde (2018) argued that these figures overstate risk by ignoring task heterogeneity within occupations and the fact that low wages in developing countries reduce the economic incentive for automation. Chang and Huynh (2016), in a study of ASEAN economies, estimated that approximately 56 percent of employment was at risk, with garment and textile sectors facing the most acute exposure—a finding directly relevant to Indonesia and other sample countries.

Country-specific literature reveals nuanced patterns. For India, Mehrotra and Parida (2019) document that IT-sector AI adoption has driven rapid growth in high-skill employment while depressing wages and employment in routine back-office roles. For Brazil, studies reviewed by the ILO (2023) indicate that service-sector automation is disproportionately affecting low-income female workers. In sub-Saharan Africa, Cazzaniga et al. (2024) at the IMF find that countries such as Nigeria, with low AI preparedness index scores, face the double jeopardy of limited capacity to benefit from AI productivity gains while remaining exposed to trade-channel automation effects as manufacturing competitors adopt AI.

The IMF's AI Preparedness Index (Cazzaniga et al. 2024) provides a useful cross-country summary. Among the five economies reviewed, India scores highest (0.62), reflecting its

technology sector and English-language talent pool, while Nigeria scores lowest (0.38), indicating the weakest institutional and infrastructural foundation for managing an equitable AI transition. These disparities in readiness imply that the impact of AI on labor markets is not uniform even within the ‘emerging economy’ category, a point emphasized by Rodrik (2016) in the context of premature deindustrialization. Table 1 documents the AI preparedness and investment indicators across sample economies, and Figure 1 in Section 2.4 below illustrates the growing divergence in AI investment as a share of GDP over 2015–2022.

Table 1: AI Preparedness and Investment Indicators for Sample Economies

Country	IMF AI Preparedness Index (2023)	AI Investment (% of GDP, 2022)	Global AI Ranking
India	0.62	1.80%	47
Brazil	0.55	1.20%	58
Indonesia	0.49	0.90%	67
South Africa	0.51	1.00%	63
Nigeria	0.38	0.40%	91

Source: IMF AI Preparedness Index (Cazzaniga et al. 2024); World Bank (2023)

2.3 Distributional Consequences: Inequality and Vulnerable Employment

A consistent theme across the reviewed literature is that AI adoption worsens income inequality in the short to medium term, particularly in contexts with weak redistributive institutions. This is consistent with the skill-biased technological change (SBTC) hypothesis (Autor, Levy, and Murnane 2003), which predicts that technology increases relative demand for high-skill workers while depressing returns to low-skill labour. Cazzaniga et al. (2024) find that across a broad sample of economies, AI adoption is associated with a declining labour income share, consistent with the findings of Acemoglu and Restrepo (2020) for advanced economies. In emerging economy contexts, this effect is amplified by the absence of robust social protection systems that might otherwise cushion displaced workers.

ILO (2023) data on vulnerable employment rates—defined as the share of workers in informal, own-account, or contributing family employment—show that while rates have declined modestly across all five sample economies between 2015 and 2023, the pace of decline has slowed in countries with higher AI adoption intensity, suggesting that AI may be partially offsetting traditional pathways out of vulnerable employment. Table 2, compiled from ILO (2024) and World Bank (2024) data, summarizes vulnerable employment and Gini coefficient trends. Notably, all five economies recorded rising Gini coefficients over the review period, with Nigeria experiencing the sharpest increase (from 35.1 to 38.4). While the literature does not establish direct causation, studies by Cazzaniga et al. (2024) and Rodrik (2016) identify AI-driven labour market polarization as a contributing factor consistent with these observed trends.

Table 2: Vulnerable Employment Rate and Gini Coefficient Trends, 2015–2023

Country	Vulnerable Emp. Rate 2015 (%)	Vulnerable Emp. Rate 2023 (%)	Gini 2015	Gini 2023
India	76.1	71.4	35.7	37.8
Brazil	34.2	31.8	51.3	52.9
Indonesia	58.3	53.7	39	38.2
South Africa	18.4	17.9	63	63.5
Nigeria	81.6	79.3	35.1	38.4

Source: ILO ILOSTAT (2024); World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform (2024)

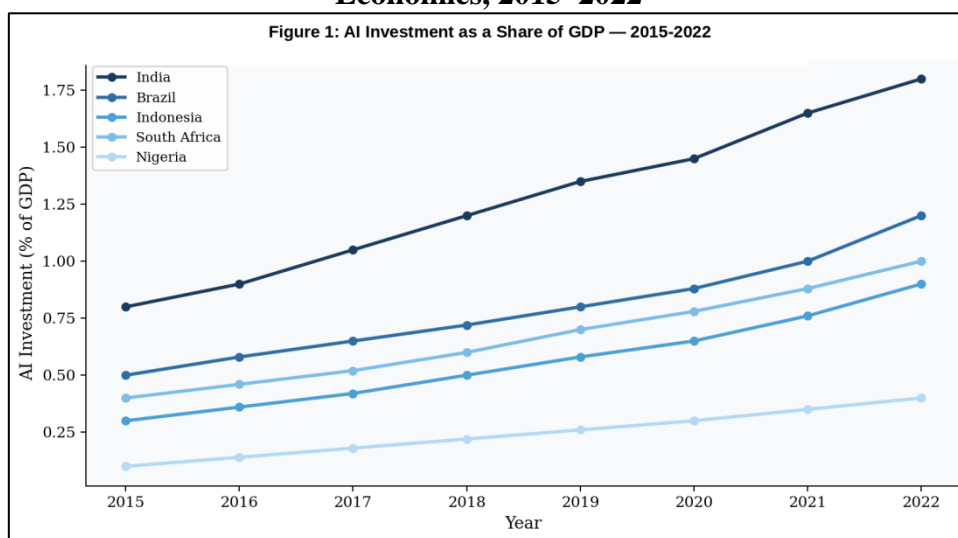
2.4 AI Adoption Trends, Investment, and Gender Dimensions

The literature documents substantial and growing AI investment across all five sample economies, though from very different baselines. World Bank (2023) and IMF (2024) data, illustrated in Figure 1 below, show that India’s AI investment as a share of GDP grew from approximately 0.8 percent in 2015 to 1.8 percent in 2022, driven largely by the private technology sector and government initiatives such as the National AI Strategy (NITI Aayog 2018). Nigeria, by contrast, saw investment growth from just 0.1 percent to 0.4 percent over the same period, reflecting both lower private sector capacity and limited public investment in digital infrastructure.

Gender dimensions are particularly salient in the reviewed literature. The ILO (2023) reports that in Indonesia and Brazil, women account for a disproportionate share of

workers in sectors with high automation risk, including garment manufacturing and retail. Banga and te Velde (2018) further note that women in these sectors tend to have lower digital literacy and less access to retraining programs, compounding their vulnerability. This gender-differentiated impact of AI represents a critical gap in the policy literature, as most national AI strategies reviewed do not explicitly address gender equity in labor market transitions.

Figure 1: AI Investment as a Percentage of GDP — Sample Economies, 2015–2022



Source: World Bank World Development Indicators (2023); IMF (2024)

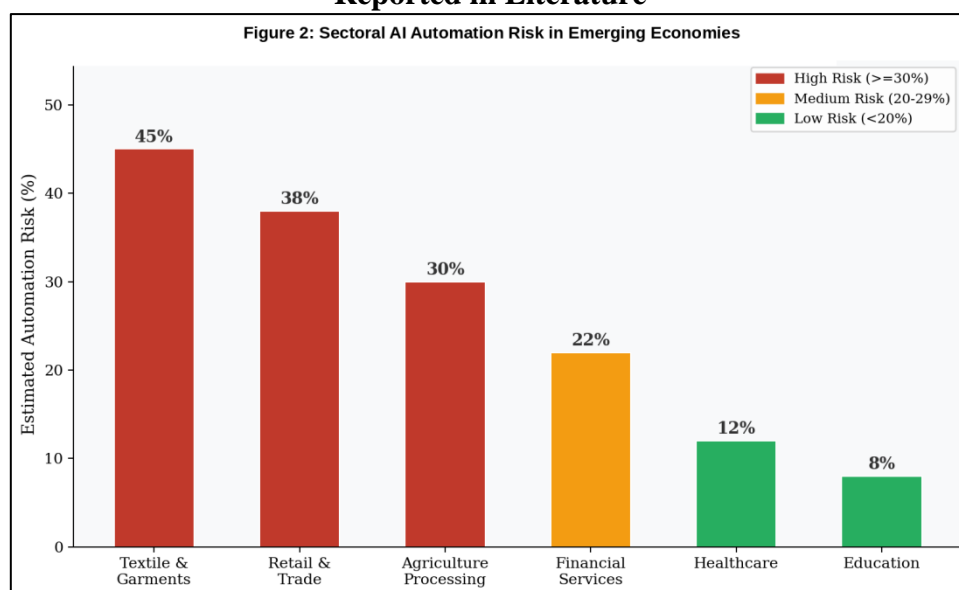
2.5 Sectoral Dimensions of AI Disruption

The reviewed literature consistently identifies significant variation in impact of AI on labour markets across sectors. Chang and Huynh (2016) and the World Bank (2016) estimate that textile and garment manufacturing faces the highest automation risk (estimated at 45 percent), followed by retail and trade (38 percent) and agriculture processing (30 percent). These figures are particularly alarming in the context of Indonesia's garment sector, which employs approximately three million workers, the majority of whom are women with limited access to retraining opportunities (ILO 2023).

Conversely, the literature documents AI complementarity in sectors such as healthcare, education, and personalized services, where technology augments rather than substituting human judgment (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014). Agriculture presents a nuanced case:

precision agriculture technologies offer substantial productivity gains for smallholder farmers in Nigeria, India, and Indonesia, yet Banga and te Velde (2018) note that adoption is severely constrained by inadequate rural digital infrastructure and limited access to affordable capital. Figure 2 summarizes the sectoral automation risk estimates reported in the literature.

Figure 2: Sectoral AI Automation Risk in Emerging Economies as Reported in Literature



Source: Chang and Huynh (2016); World Bank (2016)

2.6 AI, Productivity, and the Growth Nexus

A distinct strand of the literature examines the macroeconomic growth effects of AI adoption. Aghion, Jones, and Jones (2017) model AI as a general-purpose technology capable of accelerating long-run economic growth, particularly as AI penetrates knowledge-intensive sectors. IMF (2024) analysis finds a positive association between AI investment and total factor productivity growth across a broad sample of economies, with the effect strongest in countries that combine AI adoption with high human capital endowments. Among the sample economies, India's trajectory is most consistent with this pattern: sustained AI investment alongside strong tertiary education outcomes has contributed to productivity-led growth in the technology services sector.

However, the literature cautions against interpreting AI-led productivity growth as automatically welfare-enhancing. Rodrik (2016) documents “premature deindustrialization”—the contraction of manufacturing employment in developing countries before they have reached the income levels at which advanced economies deindustrialized—and argues that AI-driven automation accelerates this trend. South Africa’s case is illustrative: despite moderate AI preparedness and productivity gains in financial services, structural unemployment has remained above 30 percent, reflecting the failure of new job creation to compensate for displacement (ILO 2023; World Bank 2023).

2.7 Policy Responses: What the Literature Recommends

The policy literature reviewed converges on several recommendations. First, investment in education and reskilling is identified as the most critical lever. Cazzaniga et al. (2024) argue that countries with higher AI preparedness scores—which incorporate measures of human capital and digital skills—are better positioned to realize productivity gains while managing displacement. Second, adaptive social protection systems are widely recommended, including portable benefits, unemployment insurance adapted to gig and informal workers, and conditional cash transfers (ILO 2023; World Bank 2016).

Third, the literature increasingly calls for international policy coordination on technology transfer and AI governance. Banga and te Velde (2018) argue that without deliberate knowledge transfer mechanisms, the global AI divide will widen, leaving lower-income emerging economies such as Nigeria increasingly marginalized from AI-driven growth. A notable gap in the reviewed policy literature is the limited attention paid to the political economy of AI policy reform in emerging economies, where vested interests and weak institutions may impede even technically sound recommendations. This represents an important direction for future research, as the feasibility of policy implementation is at least as important as its design.

3. Conclusion

This paper has presented a systematic review of the current literature on the macroeconomic impact of AI adoption on labour markets in five major emerging economies over the period 2015–2024. The review finds that existing scholarship consistently documents a dual and asymmetric effect: AI adoption displaces routine and low-skill employment while generating new high-skill opportunities, with distributional consequences that disproportionately harm vulnerable workers—particularly women and informal sector employees—unless counteracted by targeted policy. The magnitude of these effects varies significantly across countries, conditioned by institutional quality, educational endowments, digital infrastructure, and sectoral composition.

The review identifies three significant gaps in the existing literature. First, rigorous firm-level and household-level empirical studies directly measuring AI adoption and its labour market consequences in emerging economy contexts remain scarce; most evidence is extrapolated from advanced economy studies or aggregate cross-country data. Second, the gender dimensions of AI’s labour market impact in the Global South are underexplored, despite clear evidence that women are disproportionately concentrated in high-risk sectors. Third, the political economy of AI policy reform in emerging economies—the conditions under which governments are able and willing to implement the policies the literature recommends—is almost entirely absent from the literature.

Future research should address these gaps through longitudinal panel studies at the firm and household level, gender-disaggregated analyses of automation risk and retraining outcomes, and political economy investigations of AI governance in emerging market economies contexts. The rise of AI is not an event that emerging economies can afford to wait passively; but neither can policymakers act effectively without a more robust and context-specific evidence base than currently exists.

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The Unequal Lives of Older Women- A Review

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Abstract

The scholarship on gerontology, i.e. the multidisciplinary study of processes and problems of aging, is under-representative of problems of older women as they are the missing pieces of the bigger puzzle for navigating the development of an optimum support system for the growing older population in India and the world. The effectiveness of delivering an adequate support system to this vulnerable group of population is plagued by the deficiency of social welfare systems in accounting for and addressing the problems of deprivations and disadvantages faced by women which accumulates in their old age. This paper is a review of the status of older population in India through a gendered lens in an attempt to present the numerous vulnerabilities faced by older women and the greater exclusion that they suffer from due to faulty social protection mechanism.

1. Introduction

The population throughout the world is ageing more rapidly than ever. According to the United Nations (2018), the global population of 60 years or older, in 2017, was accounted at 962 million, and is expected to double by 2050 with an estimate of 2.1 billion elderly population. The developing world is experiencing the phenomenon on a greater scale and is home to two-thirds of the people aged 60 years or above. India as a developing nation has gained 21 years in life expectancy and has second largest number of older persons in

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the world. The population of 60 years and above in India is projected to increase from 71 million in 2001 to 179 million in 2031, and further to 301 million in 2051 (Rajan et al., 2003). This trend of demographic transition exacerbates income inequality among the population since the elderly are economically vulnerable because of the rise in economic insecurity, decline in health, increase in medical spending, weakening of family system, and low social protection (Mohanty et al., 2023). Estimates based on consumption expenditure indicate that approximately 18 million of the elderly population in India are living below poverty line and further suggest that age dimension should be integrated into social policies for evidence based planning (A. Srivastava and Mohanty, 2012).

Globally, population of elderly women is in majority than elderly men as studies conclude that women live longer than men. This phenomenon of increasing proportion of elderly women is referred as “feminisation of ageing”. The decadal growth rate of female elderly in India is 42.2 as compared to only 28.6 for elderly males which points towards the phenomenon (Gupta, 2013). This trend of increasing female elderly is significant for present and future research because of gender related socio-cultural and economic discrimination which influence women’s course of life and the impacts of which cumulate as they age (Serrao, 2015). In India, poverty, isolation, and weak institutional support pushes elderly women into severe vulnerabilities which necessitate targeted policy responses to improve their well-being considering their deprivations and dependence (Y. Kumar and Bhakat, 2021). Women’s longer life expectancy, higher illiteracy, lower lifetime earnings, and often informal and interrupted work histories pile up on their old age vulnerabilities and as a result gender neutral and poorly targeted social security mechanisms fail to address their unique challenges (Arza, 2017).

2. The Indian Context

India is undergoing a demographic transition resulting from an increasing lifespan and decreasing fertility rates. According to United Nations data, India's median age has been continuously increasing and is expected to continue to rise. The median age was approximately 28.4 years in 2021, and it is anticipated to increase to 38.5 years by 2050. By 2050, the proportion of India's population aged 60 and older is predicted to rise from 10% to 20%, putting pressure on the country's current social assistance system (Mubarish,

2025). As the Indian population ages, the feminization of the elderly increases. From 1950 to 1955, Indian women's life expectancy at age 60 was 0.07 years higher than men's. By 2010–2015, the disparity had quadrupled and is expected to increase to two years by 2050-2055 (Mubarish, 2025). Thus, age- and gender-related issues are projected to become more prevalent owing to demographic transitions, sex-based life expectancy inequalities, and widowhood. Evidence shows that only 26.3% of the elderly population in India is financially independent. Approximately 20.3% are partially dependent on others, while 53.4 % of the older population entirely depends on others for their economic security (Goli et al., 2019). Given the severity of economic insecurity among the elderly population, the presence of a well-designed social protection system becomes non-negotiable.

2.1. Vulnerabilities of Older Women

One of the most notable characteristics of aging is gender-biased longevity, that is, women live longer than men, which results in the “feminization of aging”. This must be considered in policymaking, owing to the vulnerabilities that women face (Serrao, 2015). Since women tend to live longer than men, the rate of widowhood among women is higher (71% women are widows and 29% men are widowers), which has implications for living arrangements, economic status, and health outcomes. Negative health outcomes in elderly women are exacerbated by reproductive morbidities, lack of access to nutrition compared to their male counterparts, and lack of economic independence in early life. However, these outcomes are even more severe in the case of widows due to their increased dependency (Gupta, 2013). Living with the family is the most common arrangement for elderly women (three out of four); however, in terms of the proportion of women living alone, 69% of the total prefer to live alone, showing a greater level of coping ability than older men (Giridhar et al., 2015). Living alone is also a popular preference among elderly women due to the prevalence of abuse (13% rural elderly and 9% urban elderly) after the age of 60. Evidence reveals that a higher proportion of older women are subjected to physical abuse by their daughters-in-law (Giridhar et al., 2015). Older women’s vulnerabilities result not only from post-ageing factors but also from limited power and accumulated deprivations in the life course, which negatively impact their capabilities, behaviour, and security later in life. Women face restrictions in

accessing education, which strips them of the capacity to secure adequate employment, contribute to savings, and access healthcare services, all of which add to their vulnerability in old age (Serrao, 2015). In terms of old-age income security, women must be the centre of concern and policymaking since they have lower labour force participation and withdraw earlier than men. Additionally, they are in a position of disadvantage due to inadequate or null ownership of ancestral properties, rendering them in dire economic status compared to the elderly male population (Bloom et al., 2010). Thus, elderly women are more vulnerable to income inequality due to their major presence in the informal sector, inadequate access and ownership of assets, lower mortality rates, and shorter working life, and therefore require greater social protection.

Given the vulnerabilities and the presence of a gender-biased labour market, contributory pension systems are often ill-equipped to offer old-age protection to women as they are to men. Research indicates that policies that separate pension entitlements from contribution records improve older women's access to pensions (Arza, 2017). Research carried out to assess the effectiveness of non-contributory schemes, such as IGNOAPS, are positive for improving welfare among elderly women by means of increased household consumption; however, evidence also suggests that changes incorporated in program specifications post 2007 may have resulted in weakened poverty and income inequality reduction effects (Unnikrishnan and Imai, 2020). Altogether, while IGNOAPS has been an important source for providing a social security net to vulnerable elderly women, its design and implementation induce inclusion and exclusion errors in targeting and exclude inflation-adjusted compensation, which limits the degree of effectiveness in reducing income inequality among the targeted beneficiaries (Narayana, 2019).

2.2. Social Protection Mechanisms

In India, economic security for the elderly has traditionally been provided by means of extended family and intergenerational support; however, with the trend of growing migration, industrialization, and nuclear family structures, the traditional system of old-age security is becoming insufficient and irrelevant (S. V. Kumar, 2003). Additionally, the traditional system also suffers from gender-biased provision of support, as evidence shows older women, especially widows, being constrained from income, health care, and

emotional support (Gupta, 2013). Consequently, India must strengthen its state-based social protection system, which comprises legal protections, welfare programs, and contributory and non-contributory pension schemes, to address the economic security of its growing older population.

Legal measures form an integral part of the overall social protection mechanism for the elderly population, as they help them acquire appropriate support and protection from the family and stakeholders involved, given the scenario of increasing cases of elder abuse and neglect. The introduction of “The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (MWP) Act, 2007, and its amendment in 2019 reflect the legal efforts to protect the rights of the elderly and provide them maintenance support. The Act enables the provision to secure maintenance support through the tribunal with the powers of a Civil Court under the Act (Issac et al., 2021). The monthly financial cap of Rs.10,000 constrains the provision, along with the traditional stigma of carrying one’s child’s name to court to complain about care and support.

India implements various nationwide and state-specific welfare programs to address the day-to-day discomforts and deprivations of its elderly population. Rajan and Mishra (2020) critically examine welfare programmes and schemes available in the public and private sectors, like the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (health insurance) for the unorganized sector workers, LIC Jeevan Akshay (annuity plan), ICICI Lombard Overseas Travel Insurance for unplanned medical and non-medical expenses when the person is abroad, and many more.

Contributory schemes dominate pension policy design in India, where support is based on financing through both employer and employee participation. The pension scheme in India can be divided into the Employees Provident Fund, Employees’ Pension Scheme, Special Provident Funds, and New Pension Scheme (NPS). The NPS is the primary defined contribution scheme for government and organized sector employees since 2004, which mobilizes savings through market-based investments, thereby reducing the fiscal burden of the government. However, the household savings and investment environment in India is not adequately built to achieve optimum outcomes from the design of the NPS (Mallavarapu, 2009). The system of contributory schemes links work and earnings to

benefit entitlements and therefore restricts social protection to a small percentage (7%) of the formal workforce in the organized sector.

Non-contributory schemes are funded by the government, and employees or retirees are not required to pay anything. Key programs include the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) and the Annapurna Scheme. Unnikrishnan and Imai (2020) evaluate the welfare outcomes from the IGNOAPS and reveal that, on one hand, it results in an increased household consumption (5.5% on average) by increasing food and non-food consumption and household assets, and on the other, it reduces the household labour supply and induces no effect on poverty and non-pension income. The Annapurna Scheme is a sub-scheme of the National Social Assistance Program, where an older person covered under the IGNOAPS is entitled to receive 10 kg of food grains per month, free of cost, via the Public Distribution System (PDS). A review of the program (Irudaya Rajan and Mishra 2020) indicates that the implementation has been slow and only 612 million of the 991 million allocated funds have been released.

3. Theories of Aging and Inequality

Cumming and Henry's (1961) disengagement theory is one of the earliest theories in sociology of aging. It argues that aging is not merely a biological process but involves an inevitable, gradual, and universal process of withdrawal from interaction and participation in social roles. The theory makes a case for mutual withdrawal, that is, both the aging individual and society withdraw from each other through mechanisms of declining health or choice on the part of the individual and through retirement norms or reduced opportunities on the part of society. This process of disengagement is viewed as an inevitable part of preparing for the final stage of life and not as a lingering problem that needs to be addressed. The theory propagates the idea that dissatisfaction or psychological stress among the elderly stems from the denial of this withdrawal or disengagement process and not from social rejection.

Hochschild (1975) argues that the disengagement theory is not a universal and inevitable outcome of aging and separates aging and disengagement, stating that aging is a psycho-biological process, whereas disengagement relates purely to a change in social position.

Hochschild views disengagement as a variable process resulting from health status, gender roles, widowhood, and access to meaningful work, and not only from the biological process of aging. His theory works from the perspective of engagement, which works on two dimensions: social and normative, where social engagement relates to actual participation in work, family, and leisure, and normative engagement translates from the meaning an individual imputes to social bonds. Furthermore, the level of social and normative engagement is believed to vary across society types (pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial). Thus, Hochschild presents an alternative hypothesis where disengagement theory is falsifiable, and the major variables (social and normative engagement) are independent of each other and aging.

Havighurst (1961) developed the activity theory of ageing, which directly opposes the disengagement theory, arguing that older adults are physically active and healthy because of their social engagement. Research supports the validity of both theories and links them to unique sets of socio-economic and demographic factors; however, these factors have not been discussed in any identifiable study, which leads to the criticism that they are often subjected to (Asiamah, 2017). Social theories of aging have evolved from individual theories of role, disengagement, activity, and continuity to recent theories on modernization, feminism, and interactionism, along with a methodological shift from quantitative to qualitative and now to mixed methods for precision and validity in capturing the aging experience (Rosenberg, 2022).

In disengagement theory, inequality is treated as a by-product of aging rather than a structural concern, whereas cumulative disadvantage theory emphasizes that inequalities observed in later life are the outcome of the systematic accumulation of positive and negative economic and social positions experienced by individuals in their early lives (Crystal et al., 2016). Cumulative inequality theory builds on the idea of cumulative disadvantage and integrates the role of social systems and family dynamics in generating and perpetuating inequalities. It further states that structural factors that create unequal exposures lead to divergent aging experiences and their outcomes (Gilligan et al., 2018). The cumulative disadvantage adds to the vulnerability of elderly women who are already poor, divorced, or victims of abuse and have faced a lifetime of deprivation in nutrition, education, and employment. Thus, greater institutional preparedness is required for

ageing women, who often face years of financial, social and psychological subordination (Serrao, 2015).

Gender relations and patriarchal structures intensify older women's vulnerabilities, as their well-being depends on husbands and sons, and the absence or insufficiency of this support structure dramatically heightens their risk of poverty, especially where state social safety nets are weak (Olmsted, 2005). Chant (2008) explores the thesis of the "feminisation of poverty" and how policies exacerbate the situation instead of alleviating it. This study addresses the failure of social programs to be inclusive of the responsibilities and obligations (unpaid caregiving role) faced by women throughout their lives, most and sometimes all of which are unpaid and unaccounted for, and have a bearing over their careers, lifetime earnings, and social and income security potential. Thus, cumulative gender disadvantages and the failure of pension system design to target vulnerable beneficiaries and make provisions for the "cost of caring" leaves older women with far lower income security and exaggerated income inequality in their later years of life (O'Rand, 1996).

4. The Intersection of Social Protection and Aging

Social protection refers to a system of programs and policies designed to reduce inequality and poverty, manage social risks, and promote the well-being of vulnerable populations. The system comprises three core components: social assistance (social pensions and non-contributory transfers, such as cash benefits), social insurance (contributory schemes and unemployment insurance for protection against specific risks), and labour market policies (wage subsidies and training) (Midgley, 2020). Social protection can be delivered through state mechanisms or informal family and community networks. The growing trend of migration and nuclear families has weakened the structure of familial support, thereby resulting in greater vulnerability for the aging population, especially women who depend on husbands and children (G. Srivastava et al., 2025). Moreover, the intersectionality of social protection and aging complicates the situation for older women as policy frameworks tend to treat older population as a

homogenous group, failing to correct for the greater deprivations that cumulates for the female population and their unequal socio-economic situation which is only amplified.

Welfare economics vouches for social protection as a tool for redistributing resources to improve social welfare and reduce income disparities. Evidence proves that strong social protection institutions aid in times of crisis by absorbing shocks and lowering poverty and inequality, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Carraro and Marzi, 2021). The empirical literature further demonstrates that pensions, health insurance, and cash transfers are important tools for addressing income inequality in old age by helping maintain the standard of living when work income ceases but the extent of the optimum outcome is a product of policy coverage and design (Li et al., 2020). However, social protection designs in India are gender biased and fail to produce similar outcomes for women and men.

The exclusion of compensation accruing to unpaid care work from social protection design is the most consequential source of gender inequality in pension outcomes. Unpaid care, that is childcare, elder care, and domestic labour, constitutes around 10 to 39 percent of GDP at market rates in many countries but yet cumulates to zero pension entitlement under contributory schemes (Addati et al., 2018). The financial costs of this exclusion fall overwhelmingly on them and are compounding in nature resulting from opportunity costs in the form of forgone advancement in career and wage rates, and the long-term cost of forgone pension contributions that cannot easily be recuperated upon labour market re-entry (Femmes, 2015). Thus, women who interrupt careers for caregiving face a kind of penalty upon return to work in form of reduced hours and lower wages which further diminishes the capacity to rebuild pension entitlements in the later years of their working lives. Germany (2024) presents an outstanding example of accommodating the unpaid care economy by making considerations for child-rearing period and short-time employment under its Pension law which helps to strengthen the women's pension rights and can be followed by the developing countries to converge the income gap of its older men and women.

In most countries, women are less likely to receive pensions owing to gendered labour markets and life course deprivations in education, health, and opportunities. The lower rates of pension coverage are not accidental but are the predictable outcome of systems

that designates male members as breadwinner and assumes continuous, full-time, formal employment as the basis for social protection entitlement. The fundamental components of social protection design create gender pension gaps and lead to greater inequality among older women. For example, stronger links between contributions and entitlements cause greater penalties for women, and excluding compensation for unpaid care entails costs in the form of financial obligations, lost opportunities, and foregone wages (Femmes, 2015). Therefore, non-contributory social pensions are becoming popular pension policy tools in lower- and middle-income countries attempting to achieve universal coverage. Universal pension systems combining social pensions and contributory pensions have been developed in Argentina, Belarus, Botswana, Cabo Verde, China, Georgia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Tanzania (Ortiz and Juergens, 2019). Evidence from Nordic countries also show that the gap in gender pension is substantially lower in Denmark and Iceland where a greater proportion of the total pension is derived from non-contributory benefits as compared to the other Nordic countries (Andersson, 2023). However, such cross-country evidence is still scarce, and more studies need to be conducted to study and navigate the persisting income inequality among elderly women, especially in developing countries like India.

5. Conclusion

The literature collectively establishes that population aging in India builds a status of income inequality among the elderly and due to a lifetime of deprivations faced by women, they face an even more intense degree of income inequality (Rajan et al., 2003; Srivastava & Mohanty, 2012; Mohanty et al., 2023). Thus, feminisation of aging is a concept of growing importance as a result of gendered inequalities in education, employment and negligence of the unpaid care economy. Survey across the literature on Social Protection System in India reveals that the majority of old age pension schemes cater to old-age care and protection for organised sector employees dominated by male beneficiaries, whereas the female elderly make up for the vulnerable population group due to poorly targeted schemes, and designs dominated by contributory pension-system

(Gupta, 2013; Serrao, 2015; Arza, 2017). Empirical evidence seldom discusses the distributional outcome of vulnerable groups especially older women (Beramendi, 2007; Priyadarshee & Hossain, 2010; Aiyar & Kapur, 2019) but the limited evidence reveals that non-contributory schemes like direct cash transfers can smoothen income inequality among elderly women (Li et al., 2020; Unnikrishnan & Imai, 2020). The overall situation of inequality provides numerous opportunities for future empirical research on socio-economic inequalities suffered by older women in India and the world. For now, the government must focus on methods to incorporate the economic vulnerabilities of older women in their research and policy designs, along with focusing on minimizing targeting errors in the non-contributory pension schemes to enable welfare delivery to the last mile.

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