



Digital Access and Participation Disparity in Rural African Communities: A Qualitative Study from South Africa

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Abstract

Digital access and participation disparities in rural African communities have become a critical issue, particularly in South Africa where digital technologies are increasingly integrated into dispute resolution processes. Qualitative research methods were employed through semi-structured interviews with community leaders, local authorities, and selected participants from rural areas of South Africa. Data analysis involved thematic coding to identify common themes and patterns related to digital inclusion in dispute resolution. The findings indicate a significant disparity where only 25% of the surveyed rural communities reported having reliable internet access, with limited broadband infrastructure being the primary obstacle. Furthermore, participants highlighted issues such as illiteracy, lack of awareness, and inadequate training as major barriers to digital participation in dispute resolution processes. The study concludes that while there is a growing need for digital inclusion in rural areas, current efforts are insufficient to address existing disparities effectively. Recommendations focus on improving internet infrastructure and enhancing community education programmes. To mitigate the identified challenges, recommendations include investing in improved broadband connectivity, implementing targeted literacy programmes, and collaborating with local authorities to promote awareness and usage of online dispute resolution platforms. Digital inclusion, rural communities, South Africa, dispute resolution, digital divide

Keywords: *African Geographic Disparity, Digital Divide, Participatory Research, Socio-Digital Interaction, Technological Access, Cultural Context, Community Engagement*

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