

Girls at Crossroads

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Objective:
The purpose of the Girls at Crossroads project is to determine society's effect on girls' access to technology in rural Mewat.

Methods:
Data was collected from gender-separated Digital Literacy Centers in three Muslim-majority villages named Ahmadbass, Khalipur, and Badkhal, using purposeful sampling of digitally-literate boys and girls through individual profile interviews and qualitative and quantitative Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Themes are: mobility, confidence, power, desires, and barriers.

Key Findings:

*Names have been changed to protect identity

- Boys have more access to technology and mobility than do girls, but DL classes have increased " " for girls
- All girls interviewed (except for Foram* in Khalipur) feel they have benefitted from DL training and increased in confidence and power; they are now more confident in decision-making, which interviewees say are an underlying difference between the digitally-literate and illiterate, as well as the educated and uneducated
- Most girls could not practice/apply the DL skills they'd learned, but some have shared DL knowledge to neighbors through word of mouth; there are instances of positive community-wide influence like in Vardah's* case
- Most village girls use DL out of necessity, unlike boys who seem to use tech. largely out of entertainment
- All interviewed students (boys and girls) sought DL out on their own, displaying a common desire to learn
- Family finances and outlook on girls' education/DL/mobility majorly influence girls' access to technology
- Location influences boys and girls' access to technology; according to interviewees, village life is restricting
- Most of the DL students (boys and girls) are interested in furthering their DL in the future

TABLE 1: FGD (LEARNING-BASED ACTIVITY)

Note: N/A indicates that the question is not applicable because it was not asked at the time of the survey; each question was developed later into the interview protocol and thus asked for some groups but not for others.

Also, this numbers signify the number of girls or boys who raised their hands to the questions, and red numbers signify the percentages.

| Question | Khalipur Girls (12 total) | Ahmadbass Girls (17 total) | Ahmadbass Boys (15 total) | Ahmadbass Boys (15 total) |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| How many of you feel that you have earned over your 1000? | 0 | 14/82 percent | 4/40 percent | 0/50 percent |
| How many of you are confident? | 9/75 percent | 16/94 percent | 11/73 percent | 10/67 |
| How many of you have people who care about you? | 10/83 percent | 3/18 percent | 10/67 | 8/53 percent |
| How many of you have a dream? | 9/75 percent | 16/94 percent | 13/87 percent | 9/60 percent |
| How many of you want to go to school? | All 12 | All 17 | All 15 | All 15 |
| How many of you feel safe in the village? | 10/83 percent | 9/53 percent | All 15 | 4/27 percent |
| How many of you have more power than boys/girls (DEPENDENT ON CONTEXT); equalize gender of intervention of your own want? | 1/8 percent | 0 | All 15 | 4/27 percent |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|--|--|
| How many of you have technology at home? | N/A | 3/18 percent | 9/60 in girls and 4 in boys (27 percent) | All 15 |
| How many of you have your own technology? | 0 | 0 | 3 (all have mobile phones) | 2 (both have mobile phones) |
| How many of you have benefited from the Digital Literacy classes? | 11/73 percent | All 17 | All 15 | All 15 |
| How many of you have applied what you learned in the classes outside of school? | 4/27 percent | 8/47 percent | 11/73 percent | 8/53 percent |
| How many of you have helped others with the knowledge you gained from these classes? | 1/8 percent | 4/24 percent | 1/7 percent | 8/53 percent |
| How many of you want to pursue a career that requires digital literacy? | 0/0 percent | 2/12 percent | 2/13 percent | 3/20 percent |
| How many of you have brothers or fathers who use technology? | All 12 | 16/94 percent | 11/73 percent | All 15 |
| How many of you have female family members who use technology? | 0 (one girl has an older girl cousin who will be getting a mobile phone soon) | 4/24 percent | 4/27 percent | 1 (older sister has mobile phone, 7 percent) |
| How many of you have digitally-literate female family members? | N/A | 8/47 percent | N/A | 3/20 percent |
| How many of you use social media (have your own social media account)? | 0 | 0 | 1/7 percent | 3/20 percent |

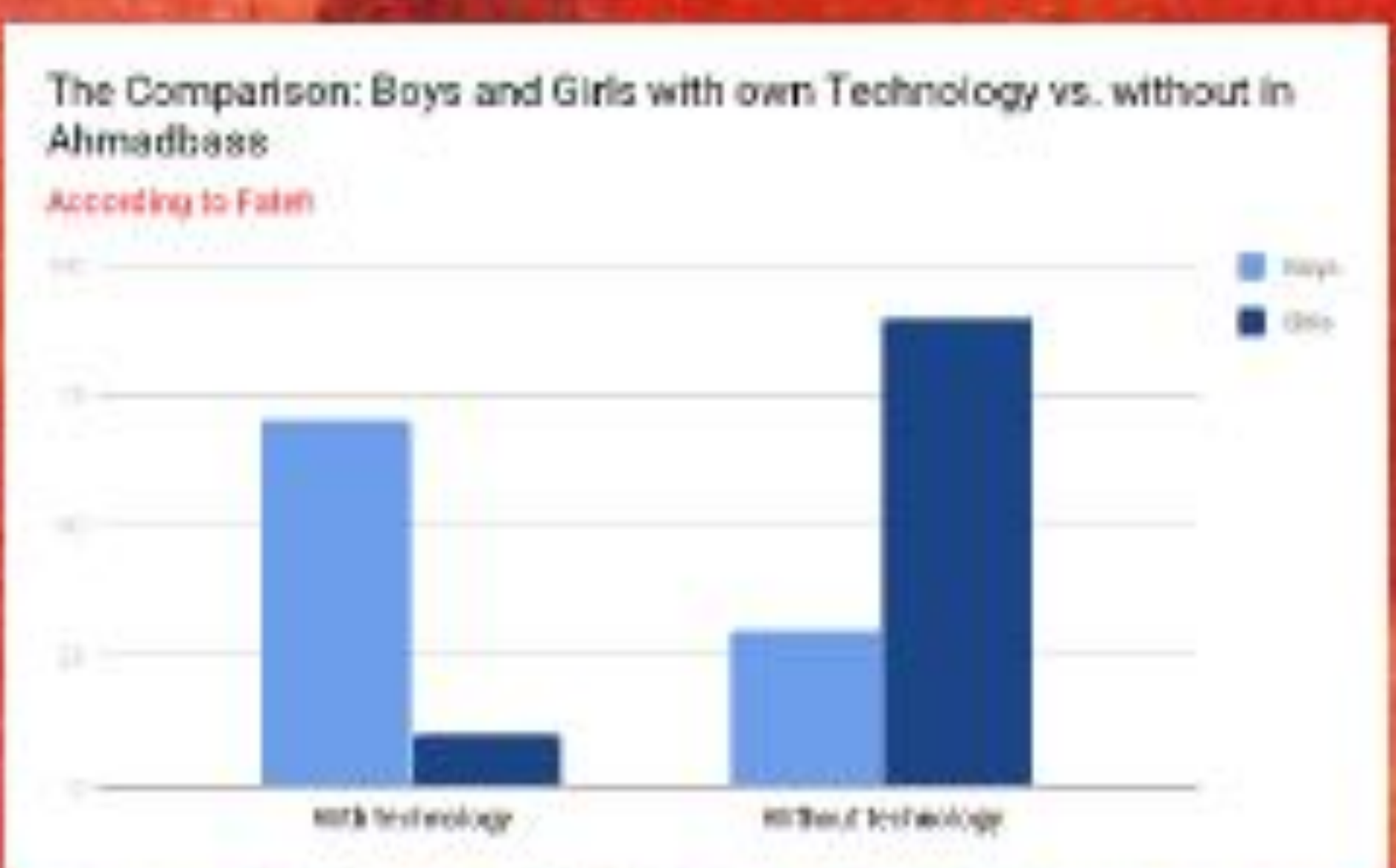
The Wrap-up:

In conclusion, society does indeed have a profound influence on girls' access to technology in rural Mewat, where divisive gender power relations that govern its society are perfectly reflected by the digital gender divide; women are commonly viewed as nameless domestic servants chained to harrowing household duties and childrearing, their voices all too often dismissed as "trivial" or "unworthy." Judged as a waste of time and monetary investment, therefore, girls' education—unlike boys'—is a heavily-nuanced and sensitive subject typically met with derision in the village, especially among males. Because gender stereotypes are deep-rooted in the studied villages of Ahmadbass, Khalipur, and Badkhal, girls are scared to stray from social conventions in fear of offending men, who are perceived as more powerful simply on the grounds of a birth-given factor such as sex, and facing abuse from others. Consequently, the prevalence of fear and low confidence levels among these girls gives rise to a harmful cycle involving lack of power, mobility, and decision-making ability, among many other things, that continues to preserve the tyrannical patriarchy reigning over the remote, rural region.

Given that gender stereotypes are a keystone of the current and ancient construct of rural Mewat, it is through small, micro-level steps, like those carved by trailblazers such as Manaar* and Vardah*, that digital literacy can truly begin to benefit rural Indian girls and, in doing so, ameliorate the harmful gender norms of that area.

FGD: Quantitative Results

Comparing Results (Data from Interviews):



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