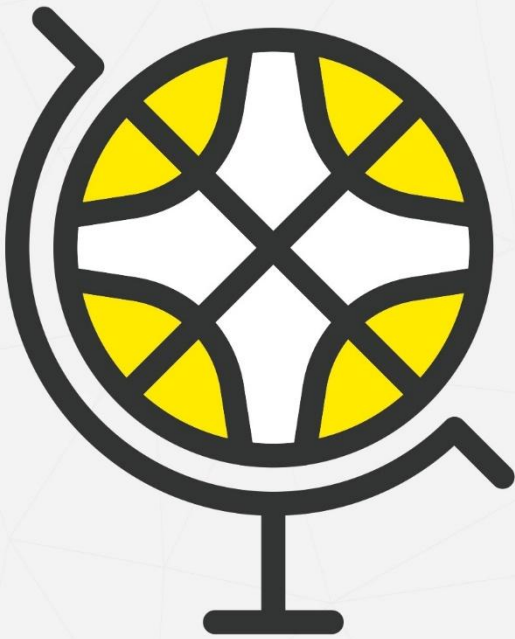


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I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the authors, reviewers, and members of the Editorial Board, whose professional engagement and dedication ensure the high academic quality and continuity of the Journal's development.

Their continued support and commitment are essential for maintaining the scholarly quality, integrity, and international advancement of *Academos Journal*. Their contributions play a vital role in establishing *Academos Journal* as a credible international academic platform. I invite readers to carefully explore the scientific articles published in this issue and to consider their relevance to current academic and public policy discussions.

Editor-in-Chief
Dr.sc. Marija Magdincheva-Shopova

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Emotional Transition and Resilience in the Online Narratives of Chinese Parents of people with Autism: A Study of Baidu Tieba

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Abstract: Caring for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) places significant psychological and social burdens on Chinese families, who often navigate intense sociocultural pressures such as "face" culture and social stigma. This study explores the genuine emotional transitions and mechanisms of psychological resilience among parents of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder in China within text-based online communities. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study conducted quantitative content analysis on 150 samples of long-form narratives and comments by parents, randomly selected from Baidu Tieba between 2015 and 2026. Based on Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory, a binary coding scheme evaluated the data. Results indicate that caregivers in early diagnostic stages experience highly overt acute psychological trauma, while physical and mental exhaustion functions as a dynamic process accumulating over the caregiving duration. Online peer support significantly activates parents' pragmatic learning behaviors regarding professional intervention skills; however, constrained by deeply ingrained cultural pragmatism, it fails to effectively drive a thorough cognitive restructuring. Notably, there is no significant correlation between parents' unconditional acceptance of their children and the reality of financial burdens and social stigma, highlighting the agency and transcendence of the parenting subject. In summary, while highly anonymous text-based online communities alleviate early caregivers' stress and provide dense information, sound support mechanisms cannot be passively established through virtual networks alone. Therefore, under the premise of safeguarding the personal rights of parents or caregivers of people with ASD against infringement, policymakers and social workers should seize the critical early diagnosis window to build an integrated online-offline social support system combining practical technical guidance with deep psychological reconstruction, rather than relying solely on online communities.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Psychological Resilience, Emotional Transition, Online Narratives, Baidu Tieba, Parental Caregivers

Introduction

Research Background and Literature Review

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a comprehensive term in modern medicine that is widely used to describe a spectrum including "Classical Autism," "Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)," "Rett Syndrome," and other neurodevelopmental disorders. The developmental disorders within this spectrum are typically characterized by restricted, repetitive behaviors and persistent social and communication difficulties (Joon et al., 2021).

However, although people with ASD have a lower level of social adaptability due to their abilities, which results in a lack of self-care skills in traditional society (Sukardi & Ambarwati, 2025), this does not mean that all people with ASD require some form of lifelong support (Lord et al., 2018). In the practical process of social adaptation, several factors influence the extent to which people with ASD can adapt: the level of their executive functioning; the level of their emotional processing abilities (Dijkhuis et al., 2017); the strength of their family functioning (Sikora et al., 2013); and the degree of social inclusion for special populations within their



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community (Jones et al., 2022).

China, the world's second-most populous developing country, has a population with ASD accounting for 0.7% of its total population (Jiang et al., 2024). This rate significantly exceeds those in East Asia (0.51%), South Asia (0.31%), and West Asia (0.35%) (Qiu et al., 2020). Correspondingly, there is a considerable number of Chinese studies focusing on the stress levels and caregiving experiences of caregivers of people with ASD. However, most of these studies have not excluded the behavior of Chinese respondents—influenced by traditional Confucian thought—to actively conceal information in non-private settings. Constrained by the concept of “face,” some respondents may actively conceal the development of ASD from researchers and provide false feedback. In some cases, this behavior is subconscious (Han et al., 2024; Lei & Kantor, 2025). It has such distinctive cultural characteristics that they are even reflected in certain Chinese immigrant communities (Yang & Crehan, 2023). In the research of some scholars, this type of concealment can be traced back to an issue of identity within a specific cultural context (Liu & Fisher, 2023).

Against this unique cultural backdrop, some caregivers of individuals with ASD have begun to seek information in unique ways that are independent of the offline environment. Since 2018, Chinese short-video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou have become the primary sources of information for parents of people with ASD (Wang et al., 2025; Zhong & Han, 2024). However, since 2026, a large number of discriminatory internet memes related to ASD have appeared on various Chinese short-video platforms, such as “fully insured truck” and “Weirdos Association.” Such discriminatory internet memes have accelerated the stigmatization of the ASD population (Gao et al., 2026). Consequently, since the level of inclusivity on China's short-video platforms has not yet improved (Lai et al., 2025), some Chinese parents of people with ASD have increasingly turned to more traditional text-based communities, such as Baidu Tieba, to share experiences and exchange feelings, thereby forming a unique ASD Tieba ecosystem.

Based on this, there is a valid rationale for exploring the real thought processes and emotional experiences of parents or caregivers of people with ASD. However, most empirical studies rely on traditional in-person questionnaire surveys, and few researchers have accounted for the biases or subconscious influences stemming from the social expectations that caregivers passively accept. Therefore, there is still a lack of sufficient understanding in academic circles regarding how parents, once they have shed the need to conceal things to save “face”, can genuinely experience emotional transitions and cultivate psychological resilience (Chui et al., 2015; Mitter et al., 2019). Furthermore, existing studies often treat special-needs families as passive victims of environmental stress, neglecting their subjective agency and dynamic coping mechanisms within highly anonymous specific environment (Lu et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2020).

To address the aforementioned research gap, the general research question of this study is:

What factors influence the emotional transitions experienced by parents or caregivers of people with ASD in China during the caregiving process, as reflected in online narratives on Baidu Tieba? And do online support and social pressures affect their psychological resilience?

Based on this general question, three specific questions have been raised:

Specific question 1: What emotional transitions do parents or caregivers of people with ASD experience at different stages of caregiving?

Specific question 2: Can the support or influence from Tieba help parents or caregivers of people with ASD learn and reshape their own skills and mindset?

Specific question 3: Is there some kind of pressure of social environment that affects the degree to which parents or caregivers of people with ASD accept their condition?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to uncover the actual mechanisms underlying emotional transitions among parents and caregivers of people with ASD. The following section

outlines the systematic theory of psychological resilience that guides the researchers' empirical analysis.

Theoretical Framework

To systematically analyze the emotional transitions and psychological resilience mechanisms of parents and caregivers of people with ASD, this study adopted the Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory. This theory views resilience not as a fixed individual trait, but as an interactive, socio-ecological process where biological, psychological, organizational, and cultural systems combine to help people navigate and access the resources needed to sustain well-being during adversity (Denckla et al., 2020).

These interactive socio-ecological processes generally take place in either online or offline environments and it has multi-level characteristics (Yan et al., 2026), setting aside the mechanisms that have long been proven to operate in offline settings (Bao et al., 2026), some researchers have confirmed that its online mechanisms also exhibit a high level of activity during natural disasters (Sun et al., 2024; Zhang & Sung, 2023) and periods of emotional distress (Xie et al., 2026). Therefore, in existing theoretical and empirical literature, internet-based digital interventions are often regarded as an effective means of providing psychological support in areas with limited emotional or natural resources (Ang et al., 2022; Schäfer et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory also emphasizes that emotional adaptation to illness or disability follows a dynamic temporal trajectory, and that individuals' ability to maintain mental health in the face of adversity stems from a complex and dynamic process of stress adaptation (Kalisch et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2022). As a group defined as having a disability in the public eye (Yu et al., 2020), people with ASD align closely with this theoretical framework.

Materials and methods

Research Design

Within the framework of mixed research methods, this study employs a quantitative content analysis approach to explore the emotional changes expressed by parents of people with ASD in China in their online narratives, as well as the mechanisms of psychological resilience reflected in these emotional changes. This study used posts by parents on "Baidu Tieba," China's largest text-based online community, as its qualitative data source. Given China's unique "face" culture, this data source minimizes errors caused by active concealment to the greatest extent possible.

Data Sampling and Cleaning

Since there are a large number of "Bars" on Baidu Tieba that share the same topic but have different names, the discussions within them differ only slightly. For instance, consider "Autism Bar" and "ASD Bar." Therefore, even though "Autism" is not equivalent to "ASD" in academy but given that "Autism Bar" was established first, has the highest number of posts and the greatest popularity, and considering that "ASD" has long been equated with "Guduzheng" or "Zibizheng" (The English translation of both terms is Autism) in mainland China (Bie & Tang, 2015). In addition, in the vocabulary of most non-experts and parents of children with ASD, terms like "closed-off kid", "Alien kid" and "high/low functioning" are often equated with ASD (Lao et al., 2024). Based on that, the sample for this study will be drawn from "Autism Bar."

In the early stages of the study, it was impossible to determine when the "Autism Bar" was established through any available channels (literature, Baidu Tieba databases, search engines,

and AI all indicated that this information could no longer be verified). The researchers initially intended to set the starting point for sample selection at the establishment of Baidu Tieba (2003). However, according to statements from some researchers who had previously studied Baidu Tieba, data accessibility issues resulting from platform governance and the cleanup of historical data have made it impossible to retrieve early community discussion records continuously (Lee, 2022), and some posts appear as garbled text. Consequently, the researchers had no choice but to set the starting point to 2015, when the data was relatively complete. Furthermore, following the launch of Douyin in 2016, text-based platforms on the Chinese internet experienced a significant diversion of traffic to short-video platforms. Therefore, to ensure the richness of the sample, the researchers had to set the sample's time frame from 2015 to 2026 to ensure that the data sources were as comprehensive as possible.

In this study, each sample is defined as the collection of an author's original main post and all comments posted by that author under the same post. Through random sampling, the researchers grouped 50 sample posts into a set and conducted a simple semantic analysis of the posts within each group to familiarize themselves with the general meaning of the sample texts. During the process of reviewing the sample texts, advertisements, popular science posts, and other post types unrelated to the research topic were excluded and not included in the sample size.

By the time the third group—comprising 150 sample posts—was collected, no new meaningful content had emerged, and the rate of text duplication had become very high. Therefore, the researchers halted data collection and finalized the sample size at 150. Based on this, this study included a total of 150 long-form texts or related comments posted by parents or caregivers of people with ASD in China.

Coding Framework and Variables

Based on the theory of systemic psychological resilience, this study constructed a binary codebook comprising 10 variables. It consists of four sections:

Demographic characteristics: Whether the poster is a mother (Role Mother); whether the narrative is in the early diagnostic stage or the suspected medical consultation stage (Stage Early).

Emotional Shifts: Whether the post expresses acute psychological shock accompanied by disbelief or denial (Emo Shock); whether it reflects persistent physical and mental exhaustion and severe tiredness (Emo Burnout); and whether the poster has come to accept their child's special life circumstances (Emo Accept).

Psychological Resilience Manifestations: Whether the poster shows proactive behavioral adaptation (Learning); and whether they have achieved cognitive reframing, finding positive meaning in life through suffering (Reframing).

Environmental Stress and Support: Whether there is explicit mention of high intervention costs or the financial burden of reduced income (Finance); whether they have encountered social stigma or exclusion in public places (Stigma); whether they explicitly perceive emotional or informational support from other online community users (Support).

In the actual coding process, researchers conducted a comprehensive, holistic evaluation of these 150 samples. If a particular behavioral or emotional characteristic was explicitly evident in the text, the variable was coded as "1"; if it was not mentioned or manifested at all, it was coded as "0."

Inter-rater Reliability

To ensure the rigor and reproducibility of the coding process, the researchers conducted a rigorous inter-rater reliability test before formally proceeding with the coding of the full sample. The study randomly selected 15 samples (representing 10% of the total dataset) as a

test sample. The researcher and another part-time coder, who was hired for this purpose, independently coded these 15 samples in accordance with the Binary Codebook.

At this stage, the researcher used IBM SPSS Statistics software to calculate Cohen's Kappa coefficients for eight variables, excluding demographic variables, to assess the level of consistency between the researcher and the hired coder. The results of the analysis are as follows:

Table 1. Cohen's Kappa coefficient of variables

Value	Cohen's Kappa	Value	Cohen's Kappa
Emo Shock	.583	Reframing	.762
Emo Burnout	.667	Finance	.732
Emo Accept	.526	Stigma	.857
Learning	.815	Support	.727

Since the consistency levels for all variables in the test sample exceeded expectations (Kappa > 0.5), these values met the minimum analytical requirements. However, to ensure the reliability of the data, the research team subsequently held a focused discussion regarding variables on which the researchers and hired coders disagreed during the testing phase, further clarifying the definitional boundaries of the relevant concepts in the text. After reaching a consensus, the remaining 140 samples were coded independently by the researchers.

Statistical Analysis

After completing the digital coding of the entire sample (N=150), the resulting 150 × 10 data matrix was imported into IBM SPSS Statistics for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used by the researchers to analyze the basic characteristics of emotional states and resilience behaviors. In addition, the researchers used chi-square tests to assess the statistical correlations among different variables.

Hypotheses

This study posits four hypotheses:

1. H1: There is a strong positive correlation between the variable "Stage Early" and the variable "Emo Shock." This hypothesis assumes that parents or caregivers of people with ASD will experience a stressful reaction upon diagnosis.
 2. H2: There is a strong negative correlation between the variable "Stage Early" and the variable "Emo Burnout." This hypothesis assumes that the causes of physical and emotional exhaustion among parents or caregivers of people with ASD are related to the duration of their caregiving.
 3. H3: The variable "Support" is positively correlated with the variables "Learning" and "Reframing," respectively. This hypothesis assumes that parents or caregivers who perceive support from peers are more likely to be motivated to learn professional intervention skills such as ABA and structured teaching independently. Ultimately, this leads to a reframing of their own life situation. In H3 hypothesis, the relationship between the variable "support" and "Learning" was called H3a. The relationship between the variable "support" and "Reframing" was called H3b.
 4. H4: The variables "Finance" and "Stigma" are negatively correlated with the variable "Accept." This hypothesis assumes that the high cost of rehabilitation interventions and the resulting financial burden will reduce parents' or caregivers' acceptance of people with ASD. In H4 hypothesis, the relationship between the variable "Finance" and "Accept" was called H4a. The relationship between the variable "Stigma" and "Accept" was called H4b.
- H1 and H2 correspond to emotional transitions in parents or caregivers. H3 (H3a & H3b) corresponds to the mechanisms underlying psychological resilience. H4 (H4a & H4b)

corresponds to environmental stressors and support.

Ethical Considerations

Since the text data extracted for this study were all sourced from open online forums freely accessible to the public, the traditional informed consent requirements of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) were unnecessary. However, this study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines for online research and protected user privacy. All personally identifiable information such as account nicknames, specific geographic locations, and the names of specific hospitals or intervention institutions has been fully anonymized. Furthermore, the parents' original statements cited as qualitative data in the subsequent results section have been reordered and rewritten during the translation into English to ensure that readers cannot trace the original Tieba webpages through search engines.

Results

This section systematically presents the statistical results of a quantitative content analysis of 150 online narrative samples (N=150) from the "Autism Bar" community on Baidu Tieba. First, this section uses descriptive statistics to outline the demographic characteristics of parents or caregivers of people with ASD in China. Subsequently, this section uses chi-square tests and the Phi coefficient to conduct a cross-correlation analysis of the four core hypotheses (subdivided into six specific variable relationships) proposed in the study, with the aim of providing an in-depth understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying ASD caregivers' behavior once they cease actively concealing their children's condition.

Table2. Gender ratio distribution

		Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Valid	Male	66	44.0
	Female	84	56.0
	Total	150	100.0

According to the data in Table 2, the gender distribution of the sample collected for this study is balanced. Female accounted for 56% of the posters, compared to 44% for male. This relatively balanced gender distribution indicates that the sample collection process for this study did not show any significant gender bias.

Table 3. Narrative period ratio distribution

		Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Valid	Early stage	80	53.3
	non-early stage	70	46.7
	Total	150	100.0

According to the data in Table 3, the narrative samples collected in this study are evenly distributed. The proportion of posters in the early stage was 53.3%, which is higher than the 46.7% in non-early stages. This means that, during the data analysis phase, the narrative stages of the samples will not lead to data imbalance.

Table 4. Hypothesis Test

Variables	χ^2	df	Sig (p)	Phi (ϕ)	Supported/Not supported
Stage Early + Emo Shock (H1)	95.760	1	< .001	.799	Supported

Stage Early + Emo Burnout (H2)	65.853	1	< .001	-.663	Supported
Support + Learning (H3a)	35.180	1	< .001	.484	Supported
Support + Reframing (H3b)	3.611	1	.057	.155	Not supported
Accept + Finance (H4a)	.558	1	.455	-.061	Not supported
Accept + Stigma (H4b)	1.799	1	.180	-.110	Not supported

Cross-tabulation analyses using Pearson's chi-square test (χ^2) and Phi coefficients (ϕ) were conducted to evaluate the four overarching hypotheses (subdivided into six specific variable relationships). The results of the hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 4.

Emotional Transitions Across Caregiving Stages (H1 & H2):

H1 posited a positive relationship between early diagnostic stages (Stage Early) and acute emotional trauma (Emo Shock). The chi-square test revealed an extremely significant positive correlation ($\chi^2 = 95.760, p < .001, \phi = .799$), indicating that caregivers in the early diagnosis phase experience profound psychological shock. Thus, H1 is supported.

H2 posited a negative relationship between early diagnostic stages (Stage Early) and long-term physical/mental exhaustion (Emo Burnout). A significant negative correlation was found ($\chi^2 = 65.853, p < .001, \phi = -.663$), confirming that emotional burnout is an accumulative process that intensifies over prolonged caregiving rather than peaking in the early stage. Thus, H2 is supported.

Peer Support and Adaptive Mechanisms (H3a & H3b):

H3a proposed that online peer support (Support) positively correlates with practical skill acquisition (Learning). The analysis showed a strong positive association ($\chi^2 = 35.180, p < .001, \phi = .484$). Thus, H3a is supported.

H3b proposed that peer support (Support) correlates with cognitive reframing (Reframing). However, the association did not reach statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 3.611, p = .057, \phi = .155$). Thus, H3b is not supported.

Environmental Stressors and Subjective Acceptance (H4a & H4b):

H4a and H4b assumed that financial strain (Finance) and social stigma (Stigma) would negatively correlate with parental acceptance (Accept). Contrary to this assumption, neither financial burden ($\chi^2 = .558, p = .455, \phi = -.061$) nor social stigma ($\chi^2 = 1.799, p = .180, \phi = -.110$) demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with parental acceptance. Thus, H4a is not supported and H4b is not supported.

Discussions

Demographic Characteristics

Based on the data in the "Results" section, the demographic characteristics of the sample in this study do not show significant differences. In the dataset shown in Table 2, the proportion of females (56%) remains higher than that of males (44%), but the difference is only 12%, and the data itself does not reveal a distinct gender distribution pattern.

There may be multiple reasons for this. Looking at the source of the data itself, although many international studies have shown that females (typically mothers of people with ASD) play a dominant role in the care of people with autism (Herrero et al., 2024; Li et al., 2022; Wu, 2026;

Zhao et al., 2024), but all of these data are based on voluntary self-reports from offline caregivers. As a text-based online community, Baidu Tieba significantly lowers the cost of participation for its users. Furthermore, according to studies on the gender distribution of Tieba users, the number of male users on Tieba actually significantly outweighs that of female users (Zhang & Tang, 2025). Nevertheless, in this study, the proportion of female users remains higher than that of male users. These findings confirm that the caregiving population for individuals with ASD in China still shows distinct gender characteristics, with female caregivers continuing to far exceed male caregivers in number.

Apart from the gender ratio, the narrative context of the sample is also an important variable influencing the specificity of the data. According to the data shown in Table 3, caregivers of people with ASD in this sample are still more likely to post on Tieba early in their children's diagnostic journey (53.3%). Their primary motivations are often to alleviate psychological stress or seek advice on behavioral patterns associated with autism. However, the data does not show significant bias, as a large proportion of caregivers (46.7%) continue to share their experiences and feelings even after the initial diagnosis.

Emotional Transitions and Dynamic Resilience

Regarding the hypotheses of this study, based on the data in Table 4, the two variables related to H1: Stage Early and Emo Shock exhibit a strong positive correlation ($\chi^2 = 95.760, df = 1, p < .001, \phi = .799$). This suggests that in the early stages, when people with ASD have just been diagnosed or have not yet been diagnosed, parents exhibit acute emotional breakdown and shock. This emotional breakdown and shock are highly evident in the text content on Tieba and are relatively easy to identify. The chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 95.760$) also indirectly supports the view that, regardless of the caregiver's personal psychological characteristics, they are almost unable to remain calm when they suspect or confirm that their child has ASD. This phenomenon shares similarities with the findings of some researchers and has been confirmed on multiple occasions (Chen et al., 2026; Lu et al., 2026).

Following this emotional impact, another characteristic of caregivers of people with ASD was confirmed in Hypothesis H2. Specifically, caregivers retained high levels of willpower and capacity for action during the early stages of the people with ASD's treatment, and had not yet experienced psychological exhaustion ($\chi^2 = 65.853, df = 1, p < .001, \phi = -.663$). Thus, in this study or in studies with similar backgrounds, exhaustion can be defined as a dynamic process that accumulates actively or passively over time.

Learning Ability and Cognitive Reframing

Hypothesis H3 was partially confirmed: Support from Tieba was positively correlated with caregivers' learning ability ($\chi^2 = 35.180, df = 1, p < .001, \phi = .484$). Counterintuitively, however, support from Tieba was not significantly associated with caregivers' restructuring of personal identity ($p = .057$). This actually reflects the pragmatic mindset prevalent in Chinese culture (Hall, 1998; Wu, 1973): although caregivers can receive support from Tieba users, which enhances their ability to learn intervention methods, this does not enable them to completely reframe the hardship of "Their child being a people with ASD" into a positive life meaning in their minds. This indirectly suggests that a healthy psychological comfort mechanism for caregivers of people with ASD cannot be achieved solely through textual information from Tieba users.

The findings of this study conflict with those of some researchers who have examined the psychological dimensions of parents or caregivers of people with ASD (Li et al., 2026). This may be because, in an anonymous environment, the influence of "face" culture is eliminated, leading some parents or caregivers of people with ASD to exhibit certain compensatory behaviors. That is, some caregivers of people with ASD feel compelled to present a positive

image to the outside world in offline settings (Ji et al., 2026), leading to an accumulation of negative emotions. Consequently, when they share their thoughts on online text-based platforms such as Tieba, they are more inclined to reveal the vulnerable aspects of their self-construction.

Subjective Agency and Transcendence under Socio-Economic Stress

In H4, the researchers analyzed the correlation between caregivers and “Finance/Stigma”; the data revealed counterintuitive results, with neither showing a significant correlation ($p = .455/.180$). In previous studies based on traditional scales, researchers often concluded that “the greater the external pressure, the more negative the parents’ parenting attitudes.” However, based on the findings of this study, Chinese caregivers demonstrate a certain level of transcendence in their “acceptance” of people with ASD. For example, some caregivers accept their children while simultaneously recounting the discrimination and heavy financial pressures their children face. These findings challenge the past tendency to view families of children with special needs as mere “passive victims of environmental pressures,” (Gao & Drani, 2025; Zhao et al., 2023) highlighting the active agency of the narrators in this dataset.

Integration with Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory

To comprehensively interpret the empirical findings, this study anchors its discussion in Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory, which conceptualizes resilience not as an isolated, static personality trait, but as a dynamic, multi-layered socio-ecological process.

First, the Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory posits that adaptation to adversity unfolds along a dynamic temporal trajectory rather than through static coping mechanisms. The empirical validation of H1 ($\chi^2 = 95.760, p < .001, \phi = .799$) and H2 ($\chi^2 = 65.853, p < .001, \phi = -.663$) directly reflects this dynamic temporal structure in the caregiving process. When a child is initially diagnosed with or suspected of having ASD, the parents’ psychological system experiences acute, systemic disruption, manifesting as pronounced trauma and disbelief. In contrast, long-term caregiving burnout does not peak during the initial shock but is a cumulative process that develops over time as emotional and physical resources are gradually depleted. By distinguishing between acute trauma and caregiving burnout, the findings confirm the theory’s contention that psychological resilience is time-specific and requires the establishment of different ecological support mechanisms at different stages of the caregiving life cycle.

In addition, the empirical findings in H3 and H4 also reflect key concepts of the Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory. For example, this theory emphasizes the role of external environmental systems in providing social, informational, and emotional resources to enhance resilience. The “partially supported” result for H3 (H3a is supported; H3b is not supported) clarifies the functional boundaries of the digital social environment provided by internet platforms within the Chinese cultural context. Virtual communities can effectively leverage digital resources, such as enabling parents or caregivers of people with ASD to acquire Applied Behavior Analysis skills and behavioral intervention strategies. However, contrary to intuition, due to the constraints of China’s pragmatic culture, peer support did not significantly promote cognitive restructuring, reflecting the unique manifestation of the core ideas of the Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory within the Chinese cultural context.

Finally, Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory offers an important theoretical perspective for reevaluating the relationship between social or resource-related pressures and the agency of parents or caregivers. Traditional deficit-oriented frameworks typically assume that external environmental stressors linearly inhibit family functioning and parental coping abilities. However, the non-significant relationships observed in H4a ($p = .455$) and H4b ($p = .180$) challenge this linear deterministic view. In Systemic Psychological Resilience Theory,

subsystems possess structural autonomy and buffering capacity against external macro-systemic pressures. This is evidenced by the extraordinary agency and transcendence demonstrated by Chinese caregivers on Baidu Tieba, reflecting the transformative agency of parents and caregivers of children with ASD within the broader social ecosystem.

Practical and Policy Implications

In this study, researchers affirmed the role of Baidu Tieba, a well-established online text-based platform, in supporting the psychological resilience of parents or caregivers of people with ASD. On the one hand, due to Tieba's high level of anonymity and convenience, gender differences among caregivers are minimized. On the other hand, as a longstanding internet community, Baidu Tieba is instinctively distinguished by caregivers from short-video platforms or new social media platforms. Consequently, it attracts caregivers of people with ASD who are in the early stages of diagnosis or remain undiagnosed; as a result, its online community has a higher information density than short-video platforms or new social media platforms.

Through the support of online communities with a high density of information, caregivers are able to systematically access intervention methods and other resources. As a result, Baidu Tieba effectively shoulders part of the emotional burden for caregivers of people with ASD who have just been diagnosed or have not yet received a diagnosis. However, it is important to note that persistent exhaustion also depletes caregivers' energy and willpower, and the closed online environment indirectly exacerbates caregivers' prejudices toward people with ASD (such as viewing ASD as a disease). Nevertheless, caregivers continue to show a high degree of acceptance toward their children and are not driven by financial pressures or social stigma. But given the influence of China's pragmatic social philosophy, Tieba's role in facilitating the reconstruction of caregivers' identity remains insufficient. A healthy support mechanism for caregivers cannot rely solely on the passive development of online communities.

Based on this, a hybrid support system integrating Tieba (online) and grassroots community governance organizations (offline) should be established. This hybrid support system can use online platforms to collect information on caregivers' negative emotions during the early intervention stage, rely on professional community service workers to guide them to offline settings, and leverage China's network of grassroots governance organizations to provide psychological intervention or further behavioral intervention. Thanks to China's highly digitized grassroots governance capabilities (Chen & Greitens, 2022; Zhou, 2025), the offline network of grassroots governance organizations can break through the closed environment of online text-based platforms and guide parents or caregivers of people with ASD to improve the lives of people with autism through various channels, thereby fostering offline mutual-aid organizations and building early ASD-friendly communities. Given that people with ASD in China have not yet established truly ASD-friendly communities (Liu et al., 2024), this proposal holds significant practical value.

However, a critical consideration of this proposal is the need to be vigilant against humanitarian crises of varying degrees resulting from the expansion of public authority. During the implementation of this proposal, community members may harass or coerce parents or caregivers of people with ASD in order to boost their own performance records—a phenomenon that has been confirmed by various researchers in studies involving other non-governmental partners (Chen, 2017; Ong, 2018). Given the “top-down” mindset inherent in China's governance tradition (Liu & James, 2022), the occurrence of such inhumane situations is a distinct possibility. Therefore, when grassroots community governance organizations direct caregivers to offline settings, they must ensure that caregivers are not subjected to coercion or inducement from any quarter. However, given that grassroots governance organizations in

China already wield significant public authority, this initiative must be implemented with caution to prevent local authorities from using the pretext of maintaining order to infringe upon the individual rights of parents or caregivers of people with ASD.

Conclusions

This study focuses on the online narratives of parents or caregivers of people with ASD in Baidu Tieba, a text-based online community. Through quantitative content analysis and chi-square tests of 150 long-form samples, it uncovers the emotional shifts and mechanisms of psychological resilience among caregivers after they cease actively concealing their children's condition.

Research indicates that caregivers of people with ASD who have been diagnosed at an early stage or have not yet received a diagnosis generally experience highly externalized acute psychological trauma (H1 supported) and that their physical and mental exhaustion accumulates both actively and passively as the duration of care increases (H2 supported). Furthermore, while support from other Tieba users significantly activates caregivers' learning abilities (H3 partially supported), its role in promoting deep cognitive restructuring remains limited due to the influence of Chinese pragmatic thinking.

The greatest theoretical contribution of this study lies in challenging the stereotype, prevalent in previous research, that families of children with special needs are simply "passive victims of environmental stress." Empirical results indicate that the psychological acceptance of children with autism among Chinese caregivers on Tieba is not significantly correlated with the economic pressures and social stigma they face in real life. On a practical level, the findings suggest to policymakers and social workers that psychological comfort and support mechanisms for caregivers of people with ASD should not rely solely on the passive establishment of online communities. Instead, they should seize the opportunity to provide early diagnosis while ensuring the individual rights of parents or caregivers of people with ASD, and offer a blended online and offline social support system that combines practical skills with psychological restructuring.

Although this study has certain practical significance, it still has the following limitations: First, the sample data was sourced entirely from Baidu Tieba, which may not fully cover caregivers who are accustomed to expressing themselves on short-video platforms or who are not comfortable using the internet; second, this study employed a binary codebook, which ensured data reliability but resulted in the researchers simplifying certain subtle emotional shifts in online narratives to some extent during the coding process. Other researchers may build upon the data from this study to conduct further analyses in subsequent research.

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Conflict of interests

The researchers declare that there are no conflicts of interest of any kind in this study.

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Volatility and Stability of AFN/USD Exchange Rate after August 2021

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the volatility and stability of the AFN/USD exchange rate in Afghanistan following the political regime change in August 2021. Exchange rate stability is an important indicator of macroeconomic performance because persistent volatility can create uncertainty, weaken investor confidence, and affect economic activities. The main objective of the study is to measure exchange rate volatility, analyze yearly changes in volatility and exchange rate returns, evaluate exchange rate stability across different periods, and identify trends in exchange rate behavior after 2021.

Methodology: The study employs a quantitative time-series research design using monthly AFN/USD exchange rate data from August 2021 to April 2026. Volatility is measured using rolling standard deviation, supported by descriptive statistical analysis to examine fluctuations, exchange rate returns, and overall trends.

Results: The findings reveal that the AFN/USD exchange rate experienced moderate to high volatility immediately after August 2021 due to economic uncertainty and structural shocks. Volatility increased during 2022-2023, indicating greater instability, while a relative decline in volatility during 2024-2025 suggests partial stabilization. However, the results also show renewed volatility in early 2026, reflecting continued uncertainty in the Afghan economy.

Conclusions: The study concludes that exchange rate stability in Afghanistan remains fragile and highly influenced by external factors, policy controls, and domestic economic conditions.

Recommendations: The research highlights the need for stronger monetary frameworks, improved financial sector resilience, and greater economic diversification to reduce exchange rate volatility and support long-term economic stability. Spaced, Centered, Inverted triangle

Keywords: Afghani Currency, Exchange Rate, Instability, Stability, Volatility

Introduction

Volatility and stability in exchange rates are key concepts in understanding how currencies behave over time in international markets. Exchange rate volatility refers to the degree of fluctuation in the value of a currency relative to another currency, indicating how frequently and how strongly the rate changes. High volatility means the exchange rate moves rapidly and unpredictably, creating uncertainty for investors, businesses, and policymakers. In contrast, exchange rate stability implies that the currency value remains relatively constant over time, allowing for better planning in trade, investment, and economic policy. Several factors influence volatility and stability, including inflation, interest rates, political conditions, economic performance, and external shocks such as global financial crises or changes in foreign aid. While some level of volatility is normal in a flexible exchange rate system,



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excessive fluctuations can harm economic growth by increasing risk and reducing confidence. Therefore, many countries aim to maintain a balance, where the exchange rate is flexible enough to adjust to market conditions but stable enough to support economic activities. Understanding volatility and stability helps policymakers design effective monetary and exchange rate policies to promote economic resilience and long-term development.

The study examines how exchange rate volatility affects the volatility of American Depositary Receipts (ADRs). The findings show that when the home country's currency becomes more unstable, ADR volatility also increases, with a 1% rise in exchange-rate volatility leading to about a 2% increase in ADR volatility. Evidence from Chinese ADRs during the unexpected 2005 yuan policy change further supports this relationship. Overall, the study highlights a strong connection between currency market movements and stock market behavior. Blau, B. M. (2018).

This study develops a model to explain bilateral exchange rate volatility, focusing on differences between developing and industrial countries. It finds that in developing economies, external debt plays a significant role in reducing exchange rate volatility by limiting financial flexibility and weakening the exchange rate's response to external shocks. In contrast, for industrial countries, traditional factors such as those from the Optimal Currency Area (OCA) theory are more important, and external debt has little impact. Overall, the study shows that financial constraints, especially external liabilities, are key determinants of exchange rate behavior in developing countries. Devereux, M. B., & Lane, P. R. (2003).

Problem Statement:

The exchange rate plays a crucial role in determining the economic stability of a country, particularly in developing and fragile economies such as Afghanistan. meanwhile the political regime changes in August 2021, Afghanistan experienced significant economic uncertainty, changes in financial systems, and reduced access to international markets. These developments are likely to have affected the behavior of the Afghan Afghani (AFN) against the United States Dollar (USD). In such environment, exchange rate stability becomes an important concern for policymakers, businesses, and investors. High volatility in the exchange rate can lead to increased uncertainty, reduced investment, inflationary pressures, and difficulties in international trade. Despite the importance of this issue, there is limited empirical research examining the volatility and stability of the AFN/USD exchange rate in the post-2021 period. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the Afghan currency has become more stable or more volatile over time following the regime change. Understanding whether exchange rate fluctuations have decreased, remained constant, or increased is essential for evaluating the overall economic condition of the country.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the volatility and stability of the AFN/USD exchange rate using monthly data from August 2021 to April 2026.

Research Questions:

What is the level of volatility of the AFN/USD exchange rate after August 2021?

How does the volatility of the AFN/USD exchange rate change across different years (2021 August– April 2026)?

Is there evidence of improvement or deterioration in exchange rate stability over time?

How does exchange rate behavior differ across early, middle, and recent periods after the 2021 regime change?

Research Objectives:

To know the volatility and stability of the AFN/USD exchange rate after August 2021.

Specifically: To measure the overall volatility of the AFN/USD exchange rate using statistical methods.

To examine yearly changes in exchange rate volatility and returns from August 2021 to April 2026.

To evaluate the stability of the exchange rate across different time periods (early, middle, and recent periods).

To identify trends in exchange rate behavior following the political regime change in Afghanistan.

Literature review

This study analyze the Export Led Growth (ELG) hypothesis in five Asia-Pacific countries China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea from 1990 to 2021. Using advanced econometric methods, it finds a strong long-term relationship between exports and GDP, confirming that exports drive economic growth. The study also shows that exchange rate volatility negatively affects GDP, while inflation has a positive relationship with growth. Overall, stable exchange rates and supportive export policies are essential for sustainable economic development. Sein, P., & Sah, A. N. (2025).

This study examines the relationship between exchange rate volatility, financial stability, foreign debt, and economic growth in selected South Asian countries from 1985 to 2020. The results show that labor force participation, financial stability, and physical capital all have a positive and significant impact on economic growth. Exchange rate volatility also positively influences growth, while foreign debt has a negative but insignificant effect. Overall, the study concludes that multiple factors including volatility, financial conditions, and resource availability play important roles in shaping economic growth in South Asia. Ali, A. (2022).

This rsearch investigates the determinants of real exchange rate volatility in Nigeria from 1981 to 2008. used the GARCH (1,1) model and ECM approach, the results determine that factors like economic openness, government expenditure, interest rates, and past exchange rates significantly influence exchange rate volatility. The study also finds a long-term relationship between exchange rate volatility and its determinants. It concludes that policymakers should implement effective monetary and fiscal policies to reduce exchange rate fluctuations and promote economic stability. AJAO, M. G. M. G. (2015).

This paper reviews the empirical literature on exchange rate volatility and its impact on international trade flows up to 2005. It finds that the effect of exchange rate volatility on exports and imports is unclear, as it can have negative, positive, or insignificant impacts. While increased volatility may reduce trade due to higher risk, some theories suggest it can also increase trade as firms adjust their behavior to manage uncertainty. Overall, the study concludes that there is no single agreed measure of exchange rate volatility and that empirical evidence supports both sides of the debate. Bahmani-Oskooee, M., & Hegerty, S. W. (2007)

The creation of the European Monetary Union (EMU) affected the stability and volatility of European currencies. The study found that after the Maastricht Treaty, most European currencies became more stable and less volatile. However, when Denmark voted against the treaty, currencies became less stable and more volatile. Overall, closer monetary integration generally improved currency stability, and there was no evidence that countries choosing not to join closer monetary cooperation experienced worse currency stability. Bask, M., & de Luna, X. (2005).

This study examines how exchange rate volatility affects banking-sector stability across 103 countries from 2000–2021. Using advanced statistical methods, the results show that higher exchange rate volatility significantly weakens banking stability and increases financial fragility. Strong bank fundamentals, economic growth, and institutional quality improve

stability, while inflation, policy uncertainty, and risky lending reduce it. The study concludes that exchange rate volatility is a major structural risk for the banking sector and highlights the importance of effective monetary, fiscal, and exchange-rate policies to maintain financial stability. Oyadeyi, O. O., Rahman, M. M., Ugwu, O., Otokiti, B. O., & Adewole, A. (2026).

This paper examines how real exchange rate (RER) volatility affects trade, particularly exports in Brazil. The theoretical analysis shows that RER volatility, driven mainly by demand shocks and inflation volatility, increases the equilibrium real exchange rate. The empirical results for Brazil indicate that inflation volatility is a major cause of RER volatility. Although the study finds that higher RER volatility tends to reduce export supply, the negative effect is generally weak and not statistically significant. Gonzaga, G. M., & Terra, M. C. T. (1997).

This study examines the volatility of the Nigerian naira against the U.S. dollar after Nigeria adopted the IMF Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 and shifted from a fixed to a floating exchange rate system. Using monthly data from 1986–2008 and econometric models such as ARCH and GARCH, the study found persistent and severe volatility in both nominal and real exchange rates. The results also showed overshooting exchange rate shocks and revealed that the exchange rates did not follow the traditional Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) model in the long run. Overall, the findings suggest that Nigeria's monetary policy was ineffective in stabilizing the exchange rate, highlighting the need for stricter measures to reduce demand for foreign currency. Adeoye, B. W., & Atanda, A. A. (2011).

This paper discusses the challenges of managing exchange rate volatility in Nigeria and highlights the importance of effective exchange rate policies in maintaining currency value, price stability, and economic competitiveness. It concludes that proper management by the Central Bank of Nigeria can strengthen the naira and improve confidence in the exchange rate system. Mordi, C. N. (2006).

This paper examines foreign exchange intervention strategies in emerging economies after the global financial crisis. It finds that flexible exchange rates help stabilize economies, but excessive volatility can create financial risks. The study also shows that forex interventions are mainly used to reduce exchange rate volatility, though their effectiveness remains uncertain. Mohanty, M. S. (2013).

This study analyzes exchange rate volatility in the Visegrad Four countries after they shifted from fixed to more flexible exchange rate regimes. The findings show that adopting floating exchange rates increased volatility, which was mainly influenced by unexpected shocks, while interest rate differences also affected exchange rate movements. Kočenda, E., & Valachy, J. (2006).

This study examines how economic, monetary, and global financial uncertainties affect exchange rate volatility in 26 developed and emerging countries from 2005–2020. The findings show that economic policy uncertainty and global financial market uncertainty increase exchange rate volatility, while uncertainty in US monetary policy tends to reduce it. The study highlights the importance of managing uncertainty to maintain exchange rate stability. Aftab, M., Naeem, M., Tahir, M., & Ismail, I. (2024).

This study investigates the volatility of major currencies against the U.S. dollar during five U.S. presidential terms. The results show that exchange rate volatility is affected by election cycles and political parties, while unexpected dollar depreciation near elections increases volatility more strongly than dollar appreciation. Lobo, B. J., & Tufte, D. (1998).

This paper examines the factors affecting euro exchange-rate volatility in new EU member countries during their integration into the EMU. The results show that greater economic openness reduces exchange-rate volatility, while news and flexible exchange-rate regimes increase volatility, although the effects differ across countries. Staněík, J. (2007).

This study examines the impact of currency volatility on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange

(JSE) using South African data from 2000–2010. The findings show a very weak relationship between exchange rate volatility and stock market performance, suggesting that the JSE is relatively stable against currency fluctuations and attractive to foreign investors. Mlambo, C., Maredza, A., & Sibanda, K. (2013).

This study examines factors affecting stock price stability during the Covid-19 pandemic among consumer goods companies listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange. The results show that dividend policy influences stock price stability, while earnings volatility and exchange rates have no significant effect on stock price volatility. Soukotta, A., Yusuf, M., Zarkasi, Z., & Efendi, E. (2023).

This study shows that open-economy models can produce high exchange-rate volatility with low exchange-rate pass-through (ERPT). The findings suggest that price discrimination and small nominal rigidities reduce the effect of exchange rate changes on prices, while exchange-rate depreciation worsens terms of trade. The study also highlights that ERPT estimates may be biased due to data limitations and economic shocks. Corsetti, G., Dedola, L., & Leduc, S. (2008).

This paper revisits the impact of exchange rate volatility on trade flows by considering major global economic changes such as currency crises, increased capital flows, and the development of foreign exchange hedging instruments. Using modern economic theories and statistical methods, the study examines how exchange rate volatility affects trade in developed, developing, and transition economies. Morina, F., Hysa, E., Ergün, U., Panait, M., & Voica, M. C. (2020).

This study examines the impact of real effective exchange rate volatility on economic growth in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries from 2002–2018. The findings show that exchange rate volatility negatively affects economic growth, suggesting that stable exchange rate policies are important for promoting economic stability and growth. Al Amosh, H. (2025).

This study investigates the impact of exchange rate volatility (ERV) on firms' environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance using data from over 15,000 firms between 2012 and 2019. The findings show that higher exchange rate volatility negatively affects ESG performance, as firms face greater uncertainty, compliance challenges, and difficulty investing in sustainable practices. The study emphasizes the importance of strategies to reduce the negative effects of exchange rate instability on corporate sustainability. Kilicarslan, Z. (2018).

This study examines the determinants of exchange rate volatility in Turkey from 1974–2016. The results show that domestic investment, money supply, and trade openness increase exchange rate volatility, while foreign direct investment, economic growth, and government spending reduce it. Abdulsalam, R., Farounbi, B. O., & Ibrahim, A. K. (2021).

Materials and methods

In this study used secondary data which obtained from Yahoo Finance, which is a widely recognized financial data platform. The dataset consists of the exchange rate of the Afghani (AFN) against the United States Dollar (USD). The data is collected on a monthly basis, covered the period from August 2021 to April 2026. The starting point (August 2021) is selected due to the political regime change in Afghanistan, which is expected to have a significant impact on exchange rate behavior and market stability. The dataset includes the following variables: Open price, High price, Low price, Close price, adjusted close price for the purpose of analysis, the adjusted closing price is used, as it provides a consistent measure of exchange rate movements over time.

Data Preparation

The collected data is organized and processed through Microsoft Excel. The monthly exchange rate series is cleaned and removed any inconsistencies and missing values. The analyse

exchange rate movements, the study computes returns, which measure the percentage change in the exchange rate between consecutive periods.

The return is calculated used the following formula:

$$R_t = \frac{P_t - P_{t-1}}{P_{t-1}}$$

where:

- R_t = return at time t
- P_t = current period price
- P_{t-1} = previous period price
-

Analytical Methods

In this study used descriptive statistical techniques to examine the volatility and stability of the AFN/USD exchange rate.

Descriptive Statistics

Basic statistical measures are used to summarize the data, including:

- Mean return (to identify overall trend)
- Standard deviation (to measure volatility)
- Minimum and maximum returns (to identify extreme movements)

Volatility Measurement:

Volatility is measured using the standard deviation of returns, which captures the degree of fluctuation in the exchange rate.

A higher standard deviation indicates greater volatility and instability

A lower standard deviation indicates more stability

Yearly Analysis:

To understand how exchange rate behavior changes over time, the data is grouped into annual periods (2021–2026).

For each year, the study calculates: Average return, Standard deviation of returns

This allows comparison of volatility across different years.

Period-wise Analysis

For better capture the impact of the post-2021 environment, the study divided the data into three periods: Early Period (2021–2022), Middle Period (2023–2024), Recent Period (2025–2026) For each period, the study computes: Mean return, Volatility (standard deviation) This approach helps identify changes in exchange rate stability over time.

Tools Used

All data processed, calculated, and analyzed are conducted used Microsoft Excel, included: Return calculations, Pivot tables for grouping data, Statistical functions (AVERAGE, STDEV.S), Chart visualization

Results

Table 01 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Measure	Value
Mean Return	-0.02272
Volatility (Std Dev)	0.136924
Minimum Return	-1
Maximum Return	0.09746

Observations	57
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The descriptive statistics in Table 01 provide an overview of the behavior of the AFN/USD exchange rate over the study period (August 2021 to April 2026). The mean return is -0.02272, indicating that, on average, the Afghan Afghani experienced a slight depreciation against the US dollar during the period. This negative average suggests a general downward movement in the value of the domestic currency. The volatility, measured by the standard deviation (0.136924), is relatively high. This implies that the exchange rate exhibited significant fluctuations over time, reflecting instability in the currency market. High volatility is often associated with uncertainty and changing economic or political conditions. The minimum return is reported as -1, which represents an extreme negative value. This likely reflects an outlier or data issue rather than a normal market movement and should be interpreted with caution. In contrast, the maximum return of 0.09746 indicates that positive movements in the exchange rate were relatively limited compared to the negative extreme. The dataset includes 57 observations, which corresponds to monthly data over the study period. While this provides a reasonable basis for analysis, the relatively small sample size especially in later periods may influence the reliability of extreme values. At the result, the descriptive statistics suggest that the AFN/USD exchange rate experienced moderate to high volatility and a general trend of depreciation after August 2021, indicating periods of instability in the Afghan currency market.

Table 02

Row Labels	Average of Return	StdDev of Return
2021	0.036994823	0.032012187
2022	-0.012503443	0.038741906
2023	-0.013873907	0.037059551
2024	0.003917275	0.035440023
2025	-0.013699622	0.033214037
2026	-0.261458333	0.493538984
Grand Total	-0.022715361	0.136924493

Table 02 presents the yearly average returns and volatility (standard deviation) of the AFN/USD exchange rate over the study period from 2021 to 2026. The results show that the behaviour of the exchange rate varies significantly across years, indicating changing levels of stability in the Afghan currency market. In 2021, the average return is positive (0.0369) and volatility is relatively low (0.0320), suggesting that the exchange rate was comparatively stable during the initial period after August 2021. In 2022 and 2023, the mean returns become negative (-0.0125 and -0.0139), while volatility increases (0.0387 and 0.0371). This indicates a period of depreciation accompanied by higher fluctuations, reflecting increased instability in the exchange rate during these years. In 2024, the average return turns slightly positive (0.0039) and volatility decreases to 0.0354, suggesting some improvement in exchange rate stability compared to the previous years. In 2025, the mean return becomes negative again (-0.0137), but volatility declines further to 0.0332, indicating relatively lower fluctuations despite continued depreciation pressure. In 2026, the results show an extremely high volatility (0.4935) and a very large negative mean return (-0.2615). However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as the data for 2026 covers only a few months, which may distort the statistical measures. At the result, the yearly analysis suggests that the AFN/USD exchange rate experienced moderate instability during 2022–2023, followed by partial stabilization in 2024–

2025, with irregular and extreme behaviour in 2026 due to limited data.

Table 03

Row Labels	Average of Return	StdDev of Return
2021-2022	0.00205487	0.042761507
2023-2024	-0.004978316	0.036607565
2025-2026	-0.0756393	0.24860011
Grand Total	-0.022715361	0.136924493

Table 03 presents a comparison of average returns and volatility of the AFN/USD exchange rate across three distinct periods following August 2021. The results show clear differences in exchange rate behavior over time, reflecting changing levels of stability in the Afghan currency market. During the early period (2021–2022), the mean return is slightly positive (0.0021), while volatility is relatively moderate (0.0428). This suggests that, although the exchange rate experienced some fluctuations following the political transition, the overall level of instability remained moderate. In the middle period (2023–2024), the average return becomes slightly negative (-0.0050), and volatility decreases to 0.0366. This indicates a period of relative stabilization in the AFN/USD exchange rate, with lower fluctuations compared to the earlier period. However, in the recent period (2025–2026), the results show a sharp increase in volatility (0.2486) along with a significant negative mean return (-0.0756). This suggests a substantial rise in exchange rate instability and depreciation of the Afghan Afghani during this period. Nevertheless, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as the 2026 data includes only a limited number of observations, which may exaggerate volatility. At the end, the period-wise analysis indicates that the AFN/USD exchange rate experienced initial instability after August 2021, followed by a phase of relative stabilization, and later signs of increased volatility in recent years.

Chart 01:

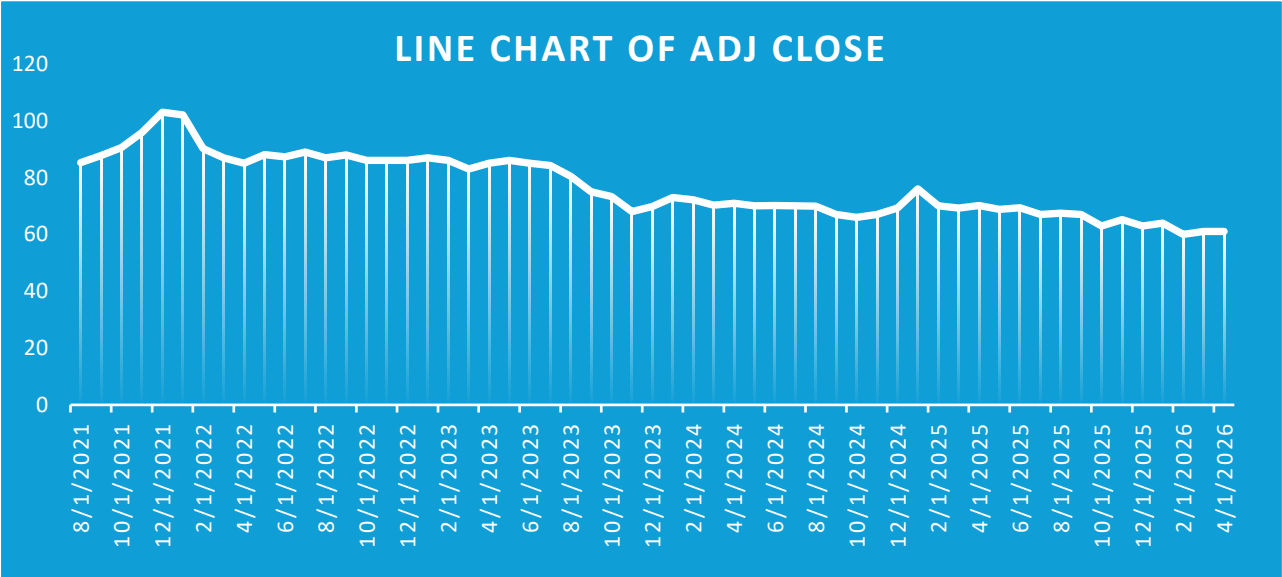
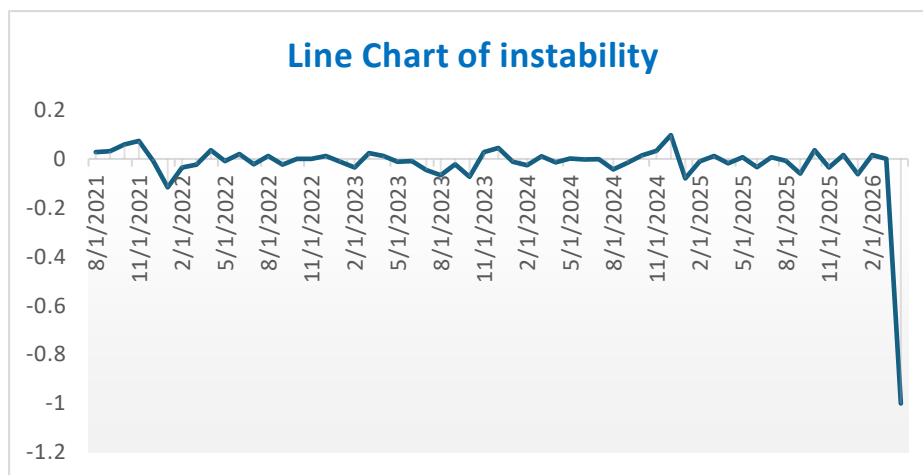


Chart 01:

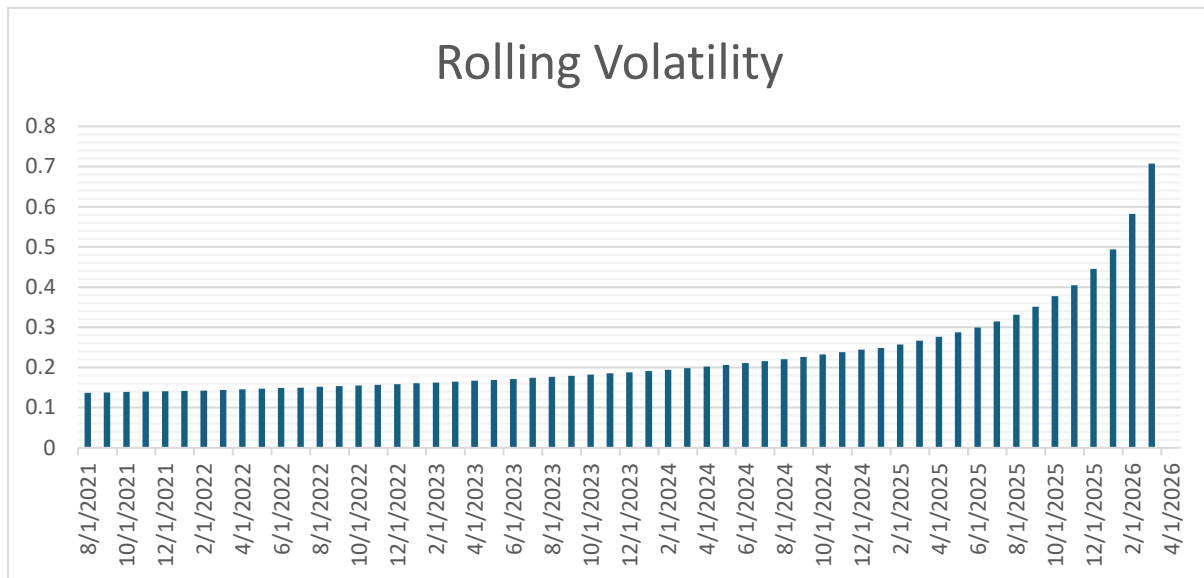
The above line chart stated that The line chart of the adjusted closing AFN/USD exchange rate from August 2021 to early 2026 illustrates a clear pattern of initial volatility followed by gradual stabilization and appreciation of the Afghani. In the immediate aftermath of August 2021, the exchange rate increased sharply from around 85 to above 100 AFN per USD, indicating significant depreciation of the Afghani due to economic and political uncertainty. This period of high volatility was short-lived, as the currency quickly recovered in early 2022, with the rate declining back to the mid-80s, suggesting the impact of stabilization measures and external inflows. Between mid-2022 and early 2023, the exchange rate remained relatively stable with only minor fluctuations. However, from mid-2023 onward, the chart shows a consistent downward trend in the exchange rate, reaching approximately 60 AFN per USD by 2026, which reflects a sustained appreciation of the Afghani. Overall, the pattern indicates that while the AFN experienced short-term instability after August 2021, it gradually moved toward greater stability and strengthening in the later period.

Chart 02



Interpretation of the above chart This chart of the adjusted closing exchange rate shows that the Afghani initially depreciated sharply after August 2021, rising from around the mid-80s to above 100 AFN per USD by late 2021, reflecting the immediate economic and political shock. This was followed by a strong appreciation in early 2022, where the rate dropped quickly back to the mid-80s, indicating stabilization supported by currency controls and external inflows. From mid-2022 to early 2023, the exchange rate remained relatively stable with minor fluctuations, suggesting a temporary balance in the market. However, beginning in mid-2023, there is a clear downward trend in the exchange rate (toward 60 AFN/USD by 2026), meaning the Afghani gradually strengthened against the dollar over time. Despite small short-term fluctuations, especially in 2024–2025, the overall pattern indicates reduced volatility and increasing stability, with a slow but consistent appreciation of the Afghani in the later period.

Chart 03:



The above chart stated that The rolling volatility chart of the AFN/USD exchange rate reveals a gradual increase in exchange rate uncertainty over time, despite the apparent stability in the level of the exchange rate. In the period immediately following August 2021 through 2022, volatility remains relatively low and stable, indicating that although the currency experienced a shock, short-term fluctuations were controlled. However, beginning in 2023 and continuing into 2024, volatility shows a steady upward trend, suggesting increasing variability in monthly exchange rate movements. This trend becomes more pronounced in 2025, where volatility rises sharply, indicating growing instability and sensitivity of the exchange rate to economic or external factors. By early 2026, the volatility spikes significantly, reaching its highest level in the sample, which may reflect heightened uncertainty, market stress, or possible data anomalies. Overall, the chart suggests that while the AFN appeared stable in terms of its exchange rate level, the underlying risk and unpredictability increased over time, highlighting a divergence between apparent stability and actual market volatility.

Discussions

The findings of this study indicate that the AFN/USD exchange rate experienced significant volatility immediately after August 2021, followed by a period of relative stabilization and gradual appreciation. This pattern can be explained by economic and political shocks in the early period, along with the implementation of strict monetary controls, reduced liquidity, and continued inflows of foreign aid in later periods. While the exchange rate appears stable over time, the increasing rolling volatility suggests that underlying uncertainty and risk have not disappeared. This supports the idea that Afghanistan's economy remains fragile, where stability is influenced more by external and policy factors than by strong economic fundamentals. However, the analysis is limited by data constraints and potential anomalies in recent observations. Overall, the study highlights the difference between apparent exchange rate stability and actual economic resilience.

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that the AFN/USD exchange rate experienced moderate to high volatility after August 2021, suggesting that the Afghan currency remained unstable during the post-regime change period. The analysis of yearly data reveals that volatility increased during 2022–2023, reflecting heightened instability, while 2024–2025 showed relatively lower volatility, indicating partial improvement in exchange rate stability. However, 2026 exhibits unusually high volatility due to current data April 2026, which should be interpreted with caution due to limited observations. The period-wise analysis further shows

that exchange rate behaviour differs over time. The early period (2021–2022) was characterized by moderate instability, the middle period (2023–2024) showed signs of stabilization, and the recent period (2025–2026) indicates renewed volatility and depreciation pressures. At the end, the results suggest that although there was some improvement in exchange rate stability in the middle period, the Afghan currency continues to face significant volatility and uncertainty, highlighting its vulnerability to economic and external shocks following the 2021 regime change.

Limitations:

The study had some limitations:

The dataset is based on monthly data, which may not capture short-term fluctuations. Moreover, the data for 2026 is incomplete due to current date which is April 2026, which may affect the accuracy of volatility estimates.

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Urban–Rural Divide: Implications of Uneven Urbanization for India’s Economic Superpower Ambitions under the Leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi

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Abstract: India's aspiration to emerge as a global economic superpower has accelerated under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi through policies promoting urbanization, infrastructure development, digital transformation, and industrial growth. Despite these achievements, uneven urbanization and persistent rural–urban inequalities continue to pose significant challenges to inclusive and sustainable development. This study examines how uneven urbanization influences India's economic development ambitions by analysing disparities in income, education, healthcare, digital access, infrastructure, and employment opportunities between rural and urban regions. The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and policy-oriented research design based on secondary data collected from government reports, policy documents, international organization publications, and peer-reviewed academic literature. The findings indicate that although flagship initiatives such as the Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, PM Gati Shakti, Digital India, PMGSY, PM-KISAN, and Jal Jeevan Mission have strengthened infrastructure and improved service delivery, their benefits remain unevenly distributed across regions. Persistent regional disparities continue to encourage rural-to-urban migration, expand informal employment, increase pressure on urban infrastructure, and constrain balanced economic growth. The study argues that India's long-term economic competitiveness depends not only on rapid urban expansion but also on inclusive rural transformation, balanced regional development, and equitable access to education, healthcare, digital connectivity, and employment opportunities. The findings suggest that integrating urban and rural development through coordinated policy implementation can reduce structural inequalities and strengthen India's pathway toward sustainable and inclusive economic growth. This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive political and developmental analysis of the relationship between uneven urbanization and India's economic ambitions while offering evidence-based policy recommendations for promoting balanced national development.

Keywords: Uneven Urbanization; Rural–Urban Divide; Inclusive Development; Economic Growth; Regional Inequality; Narendra Modi.

Introduction

Urbanization is widely recognized as a key driver of economic growth, industrial development, employment generation, and innovation. The experiences of countries such as the United States, Japan, South Korea, and China demonstrate that rapid urban expansion has significantly contributed to national economic progress. India is currently undergoing one of the world's fastest urban transitions. According to the United Nations, India's urban population is projected to exceed **600 million by 2030**, making urban development central to the country's economic



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transformation.

Since 2014, the Government of India has launched several flagship initiatives, including the **Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, Digital India, PM Gati Shakti, Make in India, Bharatmala Pariyojana, and PM Awas Yojana**, to strengthen urban infrastructure, improve digital governance, enhance connectivity, and promote industrial growth. These programmes have accelerated investment, modernized public services, and supported economic development. Despite these achievements, the benefits of urbanization remain unevenly distributed. Metropolitan cities continue to attract greater investment, employment, quality education, healthcare, and infrastructure, while many rural and less-developed regions face persistent challenges of poverty, inadequate public services, and limited industrial development. This imbalance has intensified rural-to-urban migration and widened regional disparities. Although previous studies have examined urbanization, migration, and development policies independently, limited research has analysed how uneven urbanization influences India's aspiration to become a global economic power, particularly in the post-2014 policy context. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between uneven urbanization, regional inequality, migration, and economic development, while evaluating the role of major government initiatives in promoting balanced and inclusive growth.

Research Objectives: The study aims to examine the nature and extent of uneven urbanization in India and to analyse the social and economic dimensions of the rural–urban divide. It also evaluates the contribution of major government development programmes in reducing regional inequalities, assesses how uneven urbanization affects India's ambition to become an economic superpower, and suggests practical policy recommendations for achieving balanced and inclusive regional development.

Research Questions: This study seeks to understand the main reasons behind uneven urbanization in India and examine how the rural–urban divide influences economic development and inclusive growth. It also investigates the effectiveness of major government programmes in reducing regional disparities and explores the policy measures needed to promote balanced urbanization and sustainable economic development.

Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design based on secondary data collected from government reports, policy documents, publications of international organisations, and peer-reviewed literature. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis and comparative policy analysis to examine the relationship between uneven urbanization and India's economic development. Information was cross-verified using multiple reliable sources to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Study Limitations: This study is based solely on secondary data and does not include primary data collected through surveys or interviews. Therefore, it may not fully capture regional variations and local implementation challenges. Future studies can strengthen the findings by using primary data and quantitative methods.

Significance of the Study: This research contributes to the existing literature by combining political, economic, and public policy perspectives to understand the impact of uneven urbanization in India. It provides a comprehensive analysis of how regional disparities influence inclusive development, migration, economic competitiveness, and sustainable growth. The findings will be useful for researchers, policymakers, urban planners, and public

administrators in designing effective strategies for balanced urban and rural development.

Literature Review

Existing literature identifies urbanization as a major driver of economic growth and structural transformation. Lewis (1954) argued that shifting labour from agriculture to industry increases productivity and supports economic development, while Henderson (2003) highlighted that cities promote economies of scale, innovation, and higher productivity. Similarly, Todaro and Smith (2021) observed that well-managed urbanization accelerates industrialization, employment, and income growth, whereas unplanned urban expansion can increase congestion, inequality, and environmental challenges. Recent reports by the World Bank, NITI Aayog, UN-Habitat, and the United Nations show that India's rapid urbanization has created significant opportunities for economic growth but has also widened regional disparities. Metropolitan cities continue to attract greater investment and infrastructure, while many rural and backward regions face deficiencies in healthcare, education, employment, digital connectivity, and basic services. The literature further suggests that inclusive economic growth depends not only on urban expansion but also on balanced regional development, effective governance, and well-designed public policies.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: The study is informed by Classical Development Theory, Growth Pole Theory, and Inclusive Development Theory. Classical Development Theory explains the structural movement of labour from agriculture to industry. Growth Pole Theory argues that development tends to concentrate in specific urban centres, generating regional imbalances. Inclusive Development Theory emphasises equitable access to opportunities, public services, infrastructure, and institutional support across all regions. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analysing how uneven urbanization shapes economic development and regional inequality in India.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a **qualitative descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the implications of uneven urbanization for India's economic development and global aspirations during **2014–2025**. The research is based entirely on **secondary data** obtained from government publications (Economic Survey, Census of India, NITI Aayog, Ministries), international organizations (UN, World Bank, OECD, IMF, UNESCO, ITU), peer-reviewed journals, books, policy reports, and official documents related to flagship programmes such as Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, PM Gati Shakti, Digital India, PMGSY, PM-KISAN, Jal Jeevan Mission, Ayushman Bharat, and Skill India. Data were collected through a systematic review of policy documents, statistical reports, and academic literature and analysed using **qualitative content analysis** and **comparative policy analysis** to identify themes related to urbanization, regional disparities, migration, infrastructure, employment, and inclusive growth. Reliability was ensured through the use of authoritative sources and cross-verification of information from multiple references. As the study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary data, no human participants were involved, and ethical approval was not required. Although the absence of primary data limits insights into local implementation challenges, the use of diverse and credible sources provides a robust basis for analysing uneven urbanization and its implications for India's economic development.

Conceptual Framework: Urbanization and Economic Development

Urbanization refers to the increasing concentration of populations in urban areas accompanied by structural transformation from agrarian to industrial and service-based economies

(Henderson, 2003). Classical development theories suggest that urbanization facilitates economies of scale, labor specialization, innovation, and productivity gains.

According to Lewis (1954), economic development occurs through the transfer of labor from low-productivity agricultural sectors to high-productivity industrial sectors. Cities become centers of investment, entrepreneurship, and technological advancement. Consequently, urbanization contributes significantly to GDP growth.

However, unbalanced urbanization may produce adverse outcomes including congestion, environmental degradation, housing shortages, informal employment, and regional inequalities (Todaro & Smith, 2021). The challenge for policymakers lies in ensuring that urban growth promotes inclusive national development rather than reinforcing socio-economic disparities. India's development trajectory reflects both opportunities and challenges associated with rapid urbanization.

Trends in Urbanization in India

Urbanization has represented a major socio-economic transformation in India since independence. Over the past seven decades, the urban population has increased steadily, driven by economic growth, development, industrial expansion, and improved infrastructure. In 1951, approximately **17.3%** of the population resided in urban areas. This figure rose to **27.8% in 2001** and **31.16% in 2011** (Census of India, 2011). According to United Nations estimates (2024), about **37%** of India’s population currently lives in urban areas, with forecasts showing this will exceed **40% by 2035**.

The pace of urbanization has accelerated because of several related factors. First, **industrialization** has created jobs in manufacturing, construction, and services. This has attracted people from rural regions. Second, the rapid growth of the service sector, especially in IT, banking, telecommunications, healthcare, and education, has transformed cities into economic hubs. Cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Pune have become important centers for business, finance, innovation, and employment.

Rural-to-urban migration is another major factor driving urbanization. Millions migrate each year in search of better employment, higher wages, quality education, improved healthcare, and a better standard of living. The Economic Survey of India and migration studies indicate that migration has become a significant contributor to urban population growth. This trend is especially pronounced among young, working-age individuals.

Government policies have also played a key part in promoting urban development. Since 2014, the Government of India has launched several flagship programs to strengthen urban infrastructure and improve the quality of life in cities. These include the **Smart Cities Mission**, **AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation)**, **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban)**, and large-scale investments in highways, metro rail systems, airports, industrial corridors, and digital infrastructure have accelerated the growth of urban economic centers. Improved transport infrastructure, including expressways, dedicated freight corridors, and expanded railway connectivity, has additionally improved the consolidation of cities with regional and national markets.

The expansion of **information technology and the digital economy** has also shaped India’s urbanization. Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Gurugram, and Noida are global IT and startup hubs that attract skilled professionals nationwide. Rapid growth in e-commerce, fintech, digital services, and innovation has strengthened urban economies and created millions of jobs. Cities act as the primary engines of economic growth. Although urban areas accommodate only around **one-third of the country’s population**, they contribute approximately **two-thirds (about 63–67%) of India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** (World Bank, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2023). This demonstrates the high concentration of economic activities, industries,

financial institutions, and service-sector enterprises within urban regions. Moreover, cities account for a considerable part of India’s tax revenues, exports, innovation, and investment, making them critical for securing long-term economic development.

Although these positive trends exist, urbanization in India remains **uneven and regionally imbalanced**. States such as **Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Karnataka, Telangana, and Kerala** have achieved relatively high levels of urbanization due to strong industrial bases, better infrastructure, and broad economies. In contrast, states such as **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Assam** continue to have lower urbanization levels because of slower industrial development, limited employment opportunities, and weaker urban infrastructure.

This regional disparity has resulted in unequal patterns of economic progress and social development. Highly urbanized states generally show higher per capita incomes, better educational and healthcare facilities, stronger infrastructure, and greater employment opportunities. Conversely, less urbanized states regularly experience problems, for example, poverty, unemployment, insufficient public services, and continuous out-migration of skilled workers. These differences have widened regional inequalities and placed increasing pressure on rapidly growing metropolitan cities, which face difficulties with housing shortages, traffic congestion, pollution, insufficient public transportation, water scarcity, and the expansion of informal settlements.

In the future, India is expected to witness one of the largest urban changes in the world over the coming decades. The **United Nations** projects that by **2050**, nearly **50% of India’s population, around 877 million people will live in urban areas**. Managing this rapid urban growth through sustainable planning, balanced regional development, affordable housing, productive public transport, environmental protection, and involving governance will be essential to achieving sustainable and fair national development.

Understanding the Urban–Rural Divide

The urban–rural divide refers to disparities in income, education, healthcare, employment, infrastructure, and digital access between urban and rural populations. Despite India's rapid economic growth, development has remained uneven, with urban areas benefiting more than rural regions. Bridging this gap is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Income inequality remains a major concern. Urban areas offer better employment opportunities in information technology, manufacturing, banking, healthcare, and other service sectors, resulting in higher and more stable incomes. In contrast, rural livelihoods depend largely on agriculture, which contributes only **16–18% of India's GDP** while employing nearly **45% of the workforce**. Challenges such as climate change, fragmented landholdings, rising production costs, and unstable market prices reduce farm incomes and encourage rural-to-urban migration. The education sector also reflects this disparity. Although initiatives such as the **Right to Education (RTE) Act, Samagra Shiksha**, and **NEP 2020** have improved educational access, many rural schools continue to face shortages of qualified teachers, digital facilities, laboratories, and internet connectivity. These inequalities became more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when limited access to digital devices and reliable internet disrupted online learning for many rural students. Similar inequalities exist in healthcare. Urban areas have better hospitals, specialist doctors, and diagnostic facilities, whereas rural healthcare largely depends on **Primary Health Centres (PHCs)** and **Community Health Centres (CHCs)**, which often experience shortages of medical staff, medicines, and equipment. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these weaknesses and highlighted the importance of strengthening rural healthcare and telemedicine. The digital divide has emerged as another significant challenge. Despite initiatives such as **Digital India, BharatNet**, and **PM-WANI**, and India's internet user base exceeding **900 million**, rural areas continue to lag behind

in broadband connectivity, digital literacy, and access to digital devices. This limits opportunities in education, e-governance, digital banking, telemedicine, and agricultural marketing. Overall, the urban–rural divide remains a multidimensional challenge. While government initiatives have improved rural infrastructure and public services, sustained investment in education, healthcare, digital connectivity, agricultural modernisation, rural industries, and skill development is necessary to promote balanced regional development and inclusive economic growth.

Uneven Urbanization under the Modi Government

Since 2014, the Government of India has adopted an urban-led development strategy, considering cities as the main engines of economic growth. Several flagship programmes, including the **Smart Cities Mission**, **AMRUT**, **PM Gati Shakti**, and **Make in India**, have aimed to improve infrastructure, governance, industrial development, and connectivity. These initiatives have strengthened urban infrastructure, attracted investment, and enhanced service delivery in many cities. However, their benefits have been concentrated mainly in large metropolitan and selected urban areas, while many small towns and rural regions continue to face inadequate infrastructure and limited economic opportunities.

The **Smart Cities Mission (2015)** has improved digital governance and urban services in selected cities, but its impact has been limited outside these areas due to differences in administrative capacity and citizen participation. Similarly, the **AMRUT Mission** has expanded access to water supply, sewage treatment, and waste management in urban centres, although it provides little direct support to rural infrastructure. **PM Gati Shakti (2021)** has enhanced infrastructure planning and connectivity by integrating transport and logistics networks, while **Make in India (2014)** has encouraged manufacturing investment and industrial growth. Nevertheless, these investments have largely remained concentrated in metropolitan and peri-urban regions.

Overall, these programmes have contributed to India's economic growth and urban modernization, but they have also widened regional disparities. Large cities have experienced faster development, higher productivity, and greater employment opportunities, whereas many rural and semi-urban areas continue to lag behind. This uneven pattern of urbanization has reinforced the urban–rural divide and remains a major challenge for achieving balanced and inclusive development.

Economic Effects of the Urban–Rural Divide

The urban–rural divide has significant implications for India's long-term economic development. Unequal access to employment, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and income opportunities has widened regional disparities and limited inclusive growth. As nearly **60–65%** of India's population resides in rural areas, their economic progress remains crucial for sustainable national development.

A major consequence of this divide is weak rural purchasing power, which restricts domestic demand. According to the **NSSO/NSO Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys**, rural households spend considerably less than urban households because a large share of their income is devoted to essential needs. Although nearly **half of India's workforce** is engaged in agriculture, the sector contributes only **15–18% of GDP**, resulting in low incomes and reduced consumption. Strengthening rural incomes would expand domestic demand and stimulate manufacturing and service sectors.

The urban–rural divide also drives large-scale rural-to-urban migration. More than **100 million** people migrate internally in India (World Bank), primarily in search of better employment, education, and living conditions. While migration supports industrial labour demand, it also increases pressure on urban housing, transport, water supply, sanitation, and other public services. Most migrants are employed in the informal sector with limited job security and social protection, while rural areas experience shortages of young workers, affecting agricultural productivity.

Human capital development is similarly affected. Rural areas continue to face inadequate educational and healthcare facilities, including shortages of qualified teachers, digital infrastructure, hospitals, and medical professionals. **ASER** reports consistently show lower learning outcomes in many rural districts than in urban areas. Limited access to quality education, skill development, and healthcare reduces labour productivity and weakens long-term economic competitiveness. The divide further deepens regional inequality, as investment, infrastructure, and employment remain concentrated in urban and industrial regions, while many rural districts continue to lag behind. **NITI Aayog** emphasises that reducing regional disparities through balanced regional development is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Overall, bridging the urban–rural divide by improving rural incomes, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities would strengthen domestic demand, enhance productivity, reduce migration pressures, and support India's long-term economic development.

Rural Transformation and Government Initiatives in India

Over the last decade, rural India has witnessed significant transformation through various government development programmes aimed at improving infrastructure, livelihoods, and access to essential services. These initiatives focus on reducing poverty, improving connectivity, promoting digital inclusion, and strengthening economic opportunities. Although challenges such as unemployment, regional disparities, and dependence on agriculture continue, these programmes have contributed to more inclusive and sustainable rural development.

The **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)** has played a crucial role in improving rural road connectivity by constructing and upgrading all-weather roads to previously unconnected villages. Improved transport has enabled farmers to access markets more easily, reduced post-harvest losses, improved access to healthcare and educational institutions, and increased employment opportunities by linking rural areas with nearby towns and regional markets.

The **Digital India Programme**, launched in 2015, has significantly reduced the digital divide between urban and rural India. Through the **BharatNet** project, high-speed internet connectivity is being extended to more than **2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats**. This has expanded access to online education, telemedicine, digital banking, UPI-based payments, and e-governance services through Common Service Centres (CSCs), leading to a rapid increase in internet usage across rural areas.

The **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)**, introduced in 2019, provides direct financial assistance of **₹6,000 annually** to eligible small and marginal farmers through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system. Benefiting over **11 crore farmers**, the scheme supports the purchase of agricultural inputs, reduces dependence on informal credit, enhances financial security during agricultural uncertainties, and increases rural consumption.

The **Jal Jeevan Mission**, launched in 2019, aims to provide functional tap water connections to every rural household. The programme has substantially improved access to safe drinking water, reduced waterborne diseases, saved time previously spent collecting water particularly for women and children—and strengthened rural water infrastructure through pipelines, storage facilities, and filtration systems. Although most rural households have gained tap water access, ensuring regular supply and maintenance remains an ongoing challenge. The **Skill India Mission**, implemented in 2015, seeks to improve employability by providing market-oriented skill training through programmes such as the **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)**. Training in sectors including construction, healthcare, retail, information technology, and agriculture has promoted self-employment, entrepreneurship, and local employment opportunities while reducing migration from rural areas. However, issues related to training quality, job placement, and regional skill disparities continue to require policy attention.

Overall, these government initiatives have contributed significantly to rural transformation by improving infrastructure, promoting digital connectivity, enhancing agricultural income, ensuring access to safe drinking water, and developing human capital. Their combined impact has strengthened rural-urban linkages, improved access to healthcare, education, banking, and public services, and raised the overall standard of living in many rural communities. Nevertheless, long-term rural development still requires continued investment and policy reforms to address structural challenges such as underemployment, agricultural dependence, climate vulnerability, and regional inequalities.

Urbanization, Migration, and Social Challenges

Urbanization is not uniform across regions, particularly in developing countries where cities expand much faster than rural areas due to better employment opportunities, higher incomes, improved education, healthcare, and infrastructure. These differences encourage large-scale rural-to-urban migration, making it one of the most significant socio-economic changes in the modern world. According to the United Nations, more than half of the global population currently lives in urban areas, and this proportion is expected to reach nearly 70% by 2050. A major share of this increase is driven by internal migration rather than natural population growth.

Although migration improves employment prospects and living standards for many people, it also creates significant challenges for urban areas. The rapid inflow of migrants increases the demand for affordable housing, leading to housing shortages, rising rents, overcrowding, and informal rental arrangements. Many low-income migrants are unable to access formal housing and are forced to live in informal settlements or slums, which often lack essential services such as safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and proper waste management. According to UN-Habitat, more than one billion people worldwide currently live in slum-like conditions, and this number continues to rise with rapid urbanization.

Rapid urban population growth also places considerable pressure on public infrastructure and basic services. Transportation systems become overcrowded, traffic congestion increases, and public transport often fails to meet growing demand. Similarly, healthcare facilities and educational institutions experience excessive pressure, resulting in overcrowded hospitals, larger classroom sizes, and limited public resources. Basic utilities, including water supply and electricity, also become less reliable in rapidly expanding cities.

Urban expansion further creates serious environmental challenges. The conversion of agricultural land, forests, and wetlands into residential and industrial areas leads to habitat loss and ecological imbalance. Increased population density also contributes to higher levels of air and noise pollution, greater waste generation, water contamination, and excessive use of landfills. In addition, the growing use of vehicles and energy increases greenhouse gas emissions, thereby intensifying climate change at both local and global levels.

These challenges highlight the need for balanced and integrated development. Sustainable urbanization requires simultaneous investment in both rural and urban areas. Improving employment opportunities, education, healthcare, and infrastructure in rural regions can reduce distress-driven migration, while better urban planning, affordable housing, efficient public transport, and stronger environmental policies can improve the quality of urban life. Therefore, coordinated regional planning that promotes balanced rural and urban development is essential for managing migration and ensuring sustainable and inclusive development.

Results and Analysis

The analysis indicates that India's urbanization has accelerated considerably over the last decade, supported by infrastructure expansion, digital transformation, industrial development, and urban renewal programmes. However, the benefits of this growth have not been distributed evenly across regions. Economic opportunities, quality public services, and infrastructure remain concentrated in metropolitan cities and industrial corridors, while many rural districts continue to experience lower levels of development. The findings therefore confirm that uneven urbanization remains a major structural challenge to inclusive economic development in India.

Rural–urban migration has intensified these disparities. Persistent differences in employment opportunities and public services continue to push workers from rural districts to urban centres. Migration has supported industrial labour supply and urban growth, but it has also increased pressure on housing, transport, and informal employment in cities while reducing the availability of productive young workers in several rural areas. This shows that migration is both a result of inequality and a mechanism through which inequality is reproduced.

Government programmes have produced measurable improvements, but their effects remain uneven. Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT have improved urban governance and infrastructure, PM Gati Shakti has strengthened connectivity, and Digital India has expanded digital access. At the same time, PMGSY, PM-KISAN, and Jal Jeevan Mission have improved rural connectivity, income support, and drinking water access. Yet differences in implementation capacity, institutional coordination, and local administrative conditions mean that these gains have not fully closed the rural–urban development gap. Overall, the evidence suggests that urbanization contributes strongly to growth, but its concentration in a limited number of regions weakens inclusiveness and reinforces spatial inequality. India's ambition to become a global economic superpower therefore depends on balanced regional development, stronger rural economies, better education and healthcare, more productive employment, and wider access to infrastructure and public services.

Policy Recommendations and Discussion.

Balanced regional development is essential for achieving inclusive economic growth in India. While metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad have experienced rapid development, many districts in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and the

North-Eastern states continue to lag behind. Therefore, greater public investment in backward regions, aspirational districts, and small towns is necessary. The Aspirational Districts Programme has improved health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure, but stronger financial support, effective monitoring, and private sector participation are needed to reduce regional disparities and migration.

Strengthening rural infrastructure remains a priority. The **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)** has significantly improved all-weather road connectivity, reducing transport costs, increasing farmers' access to markets, and promoting rural enterprises. Future investments should also focus on cold storage, warehouses, and rural logistics to minimise the **10–15% post-harvest losses** reported for major crops. Improving rural education through **Digital India**, **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**, and the **Skill India Mission** by expanding digital infrastructure, teacher training, and vocational education can enhance employment opportunities and reduce migration. Quality healthcare should be strengthened through **Ayushman Bharat–PM-JAY**, which provides health insurance coverage of **up to ₹5 lakh per family annually** and has expanded digital healthcare through the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)**. However, high out-of-pocket expenditure and unequal access to healthcare require stronger primary health services, better regulation of private hospitals, and wider telemedicine facilities. Rural industrialization should be promoted through **Make in India**, MSME development, agro-processing, food and dairy industries, manufacturing clusters, cold-chain infrastructure, entrepreneurship, and easier access to credit and skill development. Similarly, expanding **Digital India**, **BharatNet**, digital literacy, and affordable broadband connectivity will improve access to government services and economic opportunities.

Finally, the planned development of Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, including Lucknow, Indore, Coimbatore, Jaipur, and Bhubaneswar, through improved infrastructure, transport connectivity, and the **Smart Cities Mission**, can reduce pressure on metropolitan areas and promote balanced urbanization. Overall, programmes such as **PMGSY**, **Digital India**, and **Ayushman Bharat** have strengthened inclusive development, but future policies should prioritise service quality, effective implementation, and equitable regional growth.

Conclusion

This study examined the implications of uneven urbanization for India's ambition to emerge as a global economic superpower under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The findings indicate that although rapid urbanization has accelerated economic growth through infrastructure development, industrial expansion, digital transformation, and improved public services, its benefits remain unevenly distributed across regions. Persistent disparities in income, education, healthcare, employment, digital connectivity, and infrastructure continue to reinforce the rural–urban divide and hinder balanced regional development. The analysis further demonstrates that major government initiatives including the Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, PM Gati Shakti, Digital India, PMGSY, PM-KISAN, Jal Jeevan Mission, Ayushman Bharat, and Skill India—have made significant contributions to both urban and rural development. However, differences in implementation capacity, institutional coordination, and regional governance have limited their ability to achieve equitable outcomes across all regions. Overall, the study concludes that India's aspiration to become a leading global economic power depends not only on the growth of its cities but also on the sustainable transformation of its rural economy. Reducing regional inequalities through greater investment in education, healthcare, digital infrastructure, rural industrialization, employment generation, and institutional capacity will be essential for achieving inclusive and resilient economic development. Future research incorporating primary data, district-level case studies, and

quantitative analysis would further strengthen the understanding of the relationship between uneven urbanization and India's long-term development goals.

Declarations

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Ethical Approval: *This study is based exclusively on secondary data obtained from publicly available sources. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.*

Informed Consent: *Not applicable.*

Data Availability Statement: *All data analysed during this study were obtained from publicly available government reports, international organisation publications, and peer-reviewed academic literature cited in the reference list. Additional information is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.*

Author Contributions

Anurag Yadav: *Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, data collection, analysis, writing original draft, and revision.*

Dr. Rais Ahmad: *Supervision, conceptual guidance, critical review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript.*

AI Disclosure Statement

The authors confirm that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools or generative AI technologies were used in the preparation, writing, editing, or revision of this manuscript. All research, analysis, interpretation, writing, and final review were carried out solely by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the content.

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SEO Optimization of Small Producers' Websites

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Abstract:

In today's digital environment, characterised by intensifying competition and rapid technological change, small producers face the challenge of strengthening their market position and achieving sustainable growth. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a key digital marketing strategy that improves website visibility in search engine results, increasing organic traffic and making products more accessible to potential customers. Higher search rankings enhance online presence and contribute to greater brand credibility. The effectiveness of SEO is further enhanced when combined with social media marketing and e-commerce platforms. Social media enables direct interaction with consumers, supports brand awareness, and fosters long-term customer relationships. At the same time, e-commerce platforms provide the infrastructure necessary for online sales, efficient distribution, and access to broader markets. The integration of these digital tools creates a comprehensive online ecosystem that improves customer engagement, expands market reach, and supports business resilience in a rapidly evolving digital economy. Consequently, adopting integrated digital strategies has become an essential prerequisite for small producers seeking to improve competitiveness, increase sales opportunities, and ensure long-term business success.

Keywords: Search Engine Optimization (SEO), social media, e-commerce platforms, small producers

Introduction and Literature review

In today's digitally connected world, having an online presence has become a fundamental factor for success, especially for small producers seeking to improve their business performance, expand their market reach, and increase sales. Traditional methods of advertising and selling are becoming less effective as consumer behavior continues to evolve. Customers increasingly search for products online, seek recommendations through social media, and make purchases via online stores. To remain competitive, small producers must adapt to the digital environment and take advantage of the opportunities it offers. By utilizing tools such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO), social media, and e-commerce platforms, producers can significantly improve the visibility of their websites, strengthen relationships with customers, and increase sales without requiring substantial initial investments. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate and explain how website optimization works and how it can improve the visibility, traffic growth, and user experience of small producers' websites. The paper will



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illustrate how Search Engine Optimization (SEO), social media, and e-commerce platforms can influence small producers and transform a website into a powerful instrument for business growth and development. The research utilizes descriptive and comparative analysis to evaluate how Search Engine Optimization (SEO) impacts the online visibility and business growth of small producers (Lalitha, K. R., & Sundari, T. T., 2025). Through a comparative study of optimized and non-optimized websites, the paper demonstrates that effective SEO strategies lead to significantly higher search rankings and revenue. The study concludes that integrating SEO, social media, and e-commerce platforms is essential for small producers to remain competitive and ensure sustainable growth in a digital environment. This research involves a detailed review and analysis of existing scientific and professional literature. It describes various SEO techniques, such as keyword research, on-page optimization, and mobile responsiveness, explaining how they work and their role in improving website visibility. We also use a comparative method to analyze and compare different SEO techniques to determine their impact on business growth; the practical application of this method is shown in the comparison between an optimized website and a non-optimised website. By comparing metrics like search ranking (1st vs. 10th position) and conversion rates (3.5% vs. 0.5%), the research demonstrates the significant difference in monthly and annual revenue generated by each approach. The ultimate goal of using these methods is to identify the most effective digital marketing practices that help small producers enhance their competitiveness in the digital marketplace (Nagaraj, R. 2022).

Materials and Methods

The research design of this study is grounded in a dual-methodological framework comprising systematic descriptive analysis and comparative evaluation, aimed at identifying effective digital growth strategies for small producers. The descriptive component involves an exhaustive review of relevant scientific and professional literature to synthesize the theoretical foundations of Search Engine Optimization (SEO), social media integration, and e-commerce platform functionalities (Barakar, S, 2014.) . This approach is justified by the necessity of categorizing technical SEO requirements—such as keyword research, on-page optimization, and technical site architecture—into a coherent strategic model that addresses the specific resource constraints and market opportunities inherent to small-scale production. To ensure the transparency and academic rigor required for an original scientific paper, a systematic search for materials was conducted across primary academic databases, including Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus, complemented by authoritative professional publications. The selection of sources was restricted to a timeframe between 2014 and 2026 to ensure the inclusion of contemporary search engine algorithms and evolving digital consumer behaviours. Search parameters were defined using specific keywords and phrases, including "Search Engine Optimization," "small producers," "digital growth strategies," and "e-commerce visibility". Inclusion criteria were strictly limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, technical manuals, and verified case studies that provided measurable data on digital performance.

The methodological framework was further strengthened through a comparative analysis designed to quantify the impact of digital optimization on business outcomes. This involved the evaluation of two distinct models: an optimized digital presence (Company A) and a non-optimized presence (Company B). These models were analyzed against a set of established Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including monthly search volume, search engine ranking positions, click-through rates (CTR), and conversion rates. By utilizing data from specialized tools such as Google Keyword Planner, SEMrush, and Ahrefs, the research provides an empirical basis for comparing how strategic SEO interventions translate into significant differences in monthly and annual revenue (Ahmad U.F., et al., 2022). In accordance with

institutional ethical requirements, the authors declare that this research was conducted with full integrity and that no conflicts of interest exist. Furthermore, in compliance with the journal's AI disclosure policy, it is stated that artificial intelligence tools were utilized solely for linguistic editing and structural refinement to enhance the clarity and academic tone of the manuscript. The core conceptualization, data interpretation, and final synthesis of the findings remain the exclusive work of the authors. This comprehensive methodology ensures the reproducibility of the study and provides a robust foundation for evaluating the efficacy of digital tools in the modern business environment

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

For small producers to successfully attract as many visitors as possible to their websites, it is necessary to implement a range of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) techniques. By applying these techniques, websites become more appealing not only to potential customers but also to search engines (Schwartz E., 2021). Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a key process for improving a website's visibility in search engine results, making it easier for users to find the website when searching for specific products, information, or services. SEO encompasses a variety of strategies and techniques aimed at optimization both the design and content of a website to ensure alignment with search engine preferences and algorithms, such as Google's (Barakat, S. 2014). To effectively implement any SEO strategy, it is essential to have a basic understanding of how search engines operate. Modern search engines rely on hundreds of ranking factors and algorithms to generate search results that best satisfy users' queries. Increasingly, search results are no longer limited to traditional web pages but also include direct answers presented as Knowledge Panels or Featured Snippets. Therefore, websites should contain relevant content and keywords that closely match users' search intent (Ahmad U.F. et al. 2022). The higher a website ranks in search engine results, the greater the likelihood that users will discover and visit it. This can lead to increased website traffic and higher revenue. Consequently, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is not only about improving online visibility but also about fostering business growth by attracting a larger number of potential customers.

Table 1. Difference Between an Optimized and a Non-Optimized Website,

Metric	Company A	Company B
Monthly search volume for the business category on Google	10,000	10,000
Google search ranking position	1	10
Number of clicks based on ranking position (34% for 1st position, 1% for 10th position)	3,400	100
Call-to-Action (CTA) buttons on the website	Yes	No
Website conversion rate	3.5%	0.5%
Monthly inquiries based on website traffic and conversion rate	119	0.5 (1 inquiry every 2 months)
Conversion rate of quotations into sales	20%	20%
Total completed sales per month	24	0 (1 sale per year)
Average order value	2000 €	2000 €
Monthly revenue	47 745 €	0 €
Annual revenue	573.363,86 €	2000€

Source: Kaputić, D. (2026, May, 30). Usporedba: web stranica koja zarađuje 4 milijuna kn i druga koja ne zarađuje ništa

Keywords in SEO Optimization

Keyword research is a necessary step in order to successfully perform search engine optimization. Keywords lay the foundation for creating content that resonates with the target audience, drives traffic, and improves search engine rankings. Keyword research ensures that the keywords used are relevant and aligned with the goals of the website. Effective research also helps in understanding what users are looking for when they search for information or products related to the optimized website's business. Keywords allow us to create content that is not only optimized for search engines, but also meets the needs of users. (Gašparić K., et al, 2021.)

1. Defining goals: The first step in any keyword research process is to clearly define the goals. What do you want to achieve with SEO optimization? Some possible goals are increasing sales, attracting more visitors, and increasing the relevance of the content. By understanding the goals, the right keywords can be selected that are in line with the website's goals.
2. Brainstorming: The process begins with brainstorming a list of words and phrases that are related to the manufacturer's business or products. You need to think about the terms that users might use in search engines when searching for offers.
3. Competitor research: This step involves reviewing the keywords used by your competitors. It is useful to review their websites, paying attention to their titles, meta descriptions, content, and key elements of the pages.
4. Using keyword research tools: Keyword research tools such as Google Keyword Planner, SEMrush, Ahrefs, and Moz Keyword Explorer provide valuable data such as search volume and related keywords. Such data can be used for better keyword research and planning.
5. Relevance and competition analysis: You need to assess the relevance of the keywords to the website's business (whether the words are in line with the offers on the website). It is also useful to analyze the level of competition for each keyword. Keywords with low competition may be easier to rank for, while keywords with high competition may require more resources or a stronger SEO optimization strategy.

By defining clear goals, thinking about relevant terms, researching competitors, using keyword research tools, and analyzing relevance and competition, you can build a solid foundation for successful SEO optimization. Good keyword research helps to find the right audience, increase traffic, and increase your chances of ranking higher in search engine results. (Ahmad U.F. et al. 2022)

Methods of Applying SEO Optimization

Applying SEO optimization on websites focuses on the strategic and effective presentation of content. When done properly, SEO ensures that the site is not only user-friendly, but also optimized for search engines. By adhering to key elements on the page and optimally structuring your site, you can create an organized and systematic site that increases readability for visitors and facilitates effective indexing of content by search engines. Elements that significantly contribute to the quality of a website are:

- Title Tag: The title tag is one of the most important SEO elements on a website. The title tag is one of the first elements that users and search engines encounter and provides them with a concise description of the content of the page. A well-crafted title tag not only accurately reflects the content of the page, but also includes relevant keywords, helping both users and search engines understand the content of the page. Optimizing the title tag is crucial for ensuring a clear appearance in search results.
- Meta Description: Although the meta description does not directly affect rankings, it is crucial for attracting users to click on the website. Meta descriptions consist of short snippets that summarize the content of the page and should be written in a way that is compelling, concise,

and includes relevant keywords.

- **Content Headings:** Properly structured content headings help organize the content into sections. This improves readability for users and ensures that search engines can easily understand the structure and relevance of the content.
- **Content:** High-quality, well-written content that is both informative and relevant to the user's query can significantly improve a website's SEO performance. Including the right combination of targeted keywords and engaging visual elements encourages visitors to spend more time on the website.
- **Images:** Images improve the visual appeal of a website, but they also need to be optimized for SEO. Image file sizes can be reduced for faster loading. Optimized images improve the user experience and increase the likelihood of appearing in image search results.
- **Internal Links:** Internal links help connect users to other relevant pages. This improves navigation and allows search engines to understand the relationship between different pieces of content.
- **URL:** URLs should be simple, readable, and descriptive. An optimized URL structure helps users and search engines understand the topic of the page more easily. Including keywords in the URL can improve search engine discovery, while a short URL contributes to a better user experience.
- **Mobile SEO:** With the increasing use of mobile devices, optimizing a website for mobile devices has become a necessity. A mobile-friendly design ensures that a website is accessible to users on all devices, improving the user experience and contributing to better search rankings.
- **Website loading speed:** Fast loading times are crucial for both user experience and SEO. Websites that load quickly have lower bounce rates because users are more likely to abandon websites that load slower.

SEO methods present content in a way that is not only readable by users, but also understandable by search engines. It creates an organized and efficient website that improves both the user experience and search engine performance. (Barakat, S., 2014)

How SEO Optimization Increases Visibility and Growth

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a key process for improving the visibility of a website in search results using search engines like Google, which ultimately makes it easier for users to find the page when they are looking for specific products or information. SEO includes a series of strategies and techniques aimed at adjusting the design, structure, and content of websites to make them aligned with search engine algorithms and relevant to users (Kestane, S.U. et al., 2025). For small manufacturers who want to increase their website traffic and expand their reach on search engines, implementing SEO techniques becomes extremely important. In a world where users search the Internet every day to find products or necessary information, a high position in search results brings a competitive advantage. The higher the position of a page, the greater the chance that users are more likely to discover and visit it, which can directly affect the increase in traffic and revenue. SEO is not a one-time task, but an ongoing process of monitoring trends, user behavior, and adjusting strategies to stay competitive. For small manufacturers, proper implementation of SEO techniques can be a significant step towards digital presence, increased recognition, and long-term business growth. Quality SEO optimization not only increases the visibility of a website, but also contributes to building trust, quality of user experience, and converting visitors into customers. In the digital age, investing in SEO is a long-term investment in business success (Enge E., et al. 2015)

Result and Analysis

The analysis of Table 1, titled "Difference Between an Optimized and a Non-Optimized Website," provides a quantitative demonstration of how Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and user experience (UX) design directly influence the business performance of small producers. The data compares two entities, Company A (Optimized) and Company B (Non-Optimized), operating within the same market. The data can be analyzed across three critical dimensions:

1. Visibility and Traffic Acquisition

Despite both companies targeting a market with a monthly search volume of 10,000, their visibility on search engine results pages (SERPs) creates a vast disparity in traffic:

- **Ranking Impact:** Company A holds the 1st position on Google, while Company B is in the 10th position.
- **Click-Through Rate (CTR):** Because of its top ranking, Company A achieves a 34% CTR, resulting in 3,400 monthly visitors. In contrast, Company B's 10th-place ranking yields only a 1% CTR, or 100 visitors.
- **Insight:** Achieving the top position results in 34 times more traffic than the bottom of the first page, highlighting that visibility is the first essential step for digital growth.

2. Conversion Efficiency and User Engagement

The table further illustrates that attracting visitors is insufficient if the website fails to engage them:

- **Strategic Elements:** Company A utilizes Call-to-Action (CTA) buttons, whereas Company B does not.
- **Conversion Rates:** These optimizations allow Company A to reach a 3.5% conversion rate, generating 119 inquiries per month. Company B, lacking these features, suffers from a low 0.5% conversion rate, resulting in only 0.5 inquiries per month (approximately one inquiry every two months).
- **Insight:** An optimized site is 7 times more effective at converting passive visitors into active leads through better structure and clear engagement triggers.

3. Financial Outcome and Business Growth

The most significant finding is the cumulative effect of these metrics on the bottom line, even though both companies share the same average order value (2,000 €) and sales closing rate (20%):

- **Sales Volume:** Company A completes 24 sales per month, while Company B averages only one sale per year.
- **Revenue Disparity:** Company A generates a monthly revenue of 47,745 €, leading to an annual total of 573,363.86 €. Company B generates 0 € monthly revenue and only 2,000 € annually.

The data proves that SEO is not merely a technical adjustment but a transformative business strategy. For a small producer, the difference between an optimized and a non-optimized website is the difference between a powerful instrument for sustainable growth and a digital presence that provides almost no market value. The transition from the 10th to the 1st position, combined with on-page conversion tools, represents the primary driver for competitiveness in the modern digital marketplace

Discussions

The results of this study demonstrate that Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a fundamental driver of business growth for small producers. The comparative analysis reveals that visibility on the first page of search results creates a definitive competitive advantage. Specifically, the disparity between achieving the 1st position (Company A) versus the 10th position (Company B) results in a 34-fold difference in website traffic (3,400 vs. 100 monthly visitors), despite both entities targeting the same market volume. This confirms that high search rankings are essential for transforming a website from a static digital presence into an active traffic-generating tool. Furthermore, the data illustrates that visibility alone is insufficient without on-page optimization for user engagement. The implementation of Call-to-Action (CTA) buttons and optimized site structures allowed Company A to achieve a 3.5% conversion rate, significantly outperforming the 0.5% rate of the non-optimised Company B. This shift in conversion efficiency is critical for small producers, as it directly impacts the number of monthly inquiries and leads generated. The most significant implication of these findings is the cumulative financial impact on business sustainability. While both companies shared the same average order value and sales closing rate, the optimized approach led to a monthly revenue of over €47,000, compared to zero revenue for the non-optimized site. This massive gap highlights that digital strategy is not merely a technical option but a strategic necessity for small producers to remain relevant and competitive in an evolving marketplace where consumer behavior is increasingly online-driven. In conclusion, the integration of SEO, social media, and e-commerce platforms provides small producers with the technical infrastructure required to expand their market reach. By grounding these efforts in strategic keyword research and quality content, producers can establish a strong online identity that ensures sustainable growth and long-term business development.

Conclusion

In today's digital environment where competition is increasing, small manufacturers must strategically approach their online presence to ensure growth and recognition. Using SEO optimization, social networks, and e-commerce platforms can help achieve visibility, stronger customer connections, and greater market reach. SEO optimization can help a small manufacturer's website stand out in search results, increasing the number of visits and the potential for converting visitors into customers. Properly selected keywords, quality content and technical adaptation of the site ensure a better position in search engines, which is crucial in a digital environment where users most often choose the first results displayed. Social networks enable direct contact with the target audience, building trust and an emotional connection with the product. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube offer the opportunity to creatively present products, encourage interaction and create a community of loyal customers. Regular and quality communication via social networks further strengthens the presence of the product and contributes to a long-term relationship with users. E-commerce platforms provide the technical infrastructure for sales, allowing manufacturers to offer their products online and reach customers regardless of location. Whether using a simple platform with templates or more advanced open source solutions, e-commerce enables rapid entry into the market and provides users with a safe, fast and pleasant shopping experience. By using these elements, small manufacturers can not only build a strong digital presence, but also pave the way for sustainable development, greater competitiveness and more successful business. Investing in digital tools is no longer an option, but a necessity for those who want to remain relevant and grow their business in the modern business environment.

Conflict of interests

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Epistolary Sisterhood and Textual Healing: A Womanist Reading of Mariama Bâ's (1981) *So Long a Letter* and Alice Walker's (1982) *The Color Purple*

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Abstract:

African and African American women's literature shares a central concern with reclaiming the silenced female voice. The objective of this study is to examine how epistolarity functions simultaneously as a space of sisterhood and a mechanism of textual healing against patriarchal trauma in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Methodologically, the study conducts a comparative, qualitative close reading combining narratological and thematic analysis of Ramatoulaye and Celie. This analysis is grounded in Africana Womanism (Hudson-Weems, 1993) and African Womanism (Ogunyemi, 1985), two African-centered frameworks prioritizing family, community, and cross-gender solidarity over individualist feminist opposition. The findings reveal that sisterhood and healing are structurally inseparable: both narrators transform isolation into collective agency through written address, where the addressee functions as an active witness rather than a passive recipient, culminating in resistance for Ramatoulaye and reunion for Celie. Consequently, the study concludes that epistolary literature must be re-evaluated as an agent of collective restoration, recommending that future research apply Africana womanist paradigms to broaden postcolonial trauma theory beyond Western individualistic models.

Keywords: Africana Womanism, Epistolarity, Sisterhood, Textual Healing, Patriarchal Trauma

Introduction

African and African American women's literature consistently seeks to give voice to women silenced by history, tradition, or racial oppression. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) powerfully illustrate this reclamation of female speech, each employing a deliberately chosen narrative form: the letter. Both novels open by staging the very act of address. Ramatoulaye begins: "Dear Aissatou, I have received your letter. By way of reply, I am beginning this diary, my prop in my distress" (Bâ, 1981, p. 2). Celie, forbidden from telling her story to any living soul - "You better not never tell nobody but God" (Walker, 1982, p. 1) - begins instead by addressing an absent listener, a placeholder confidante until a human one becomes available. This shared formal choice, despite the geographic, cultural, and linguistic distance separating postcolonial Senegal from segregation-era Georgia, invites a comparative reading that moves past the disciplinary boundaries too often separating francophone African studies from African-American studies - boundaries that obscure a womanist preoccupation both corpora share: solidarity between women, resistance to patriarchy, and writing as an act of survival.

This shared concern, however, has rarely been read comparatively. Bâ's (1981) criticism has developed largely along two lines. One, exemplified by Obioma Nnaemeka's (1997) reading of



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polygamy as a structural “sign” in Bâ's (1981) fiction rather than a simple autobiographical grievance, situates the novel within debates on modernity's distorting effect on African tradition, in dialogue with Femi Ojo-Ade's (1982) earlier and more polemical account of male guilt in the polygamous household. The other line, represented by Uzo Esonwanne's (1997) reading of the novel's “aesthetic cognition” and Nicki Hitchcott's (2000) work on Bâ (1981) within francophone women's writing, has focused more narrowly on questions of form and voice. On Walker's (1982) side, Barbara Christian's (1985) foundational essays situated *The Color Purple* within a Black feminist critical tradition attentive to voice and vernacular, while Layli Phillips's (2006) later theorization of womanism names the novel outright as womanism's defining text - crystallized in Celie's own declaration to Nettie: “I don't write to God no more. I write to you” (Walker, 1982, p. 199). Despite this substantial body of scholarship on each author individually, few studies place *So Long a Letter* (1981) and *The Color Purple* (1982) in direct dialogue around their shared use of epistolarity as a mechanism of sisterhood and healing - a gap this study proposes to address by bringing Hudson-Weems's *Africana Womanism* and Ogunyemi's *African Womanism*, two complementary African-centered frameworks, into a single comparative frame.

Situating the two novels together in this way immediately raises a central question: how does the epistolary form in *So Long a Letter* (1981) and *The Color Purple* (1982) function simultaneously as a space of sisterhood between women and as a mechanism of textual healing in the face of patriarchal trauma? Put differently, to what extent does the act of writing to a witness-recipient - Aissatou, Nettie - allow the narrators to transform individual suffering into collective agency, rooted in a womanist consciousness rather than a Western feminist individualism?

Answering this question requires working toward a general objective which is to comparatively analyze the function of epistolarity as a space of sisterhood and textual healing in Ramatoulaye and Celie, from a womanist perspective.

This general aim unfolds into three specific objectives, each addressing one facet of the problem just raised:

- first, to examine how the letter's structure builds a community of women despite distance and isolation;
- second, to analyze the evolution of narrative voice as a process of healing in the face of trauma - visible, for instance, in the shift from Celie's silenced “Dear God” letters to her declared “I write to you”;
- and third, to interrogate the active role of addressees in shaping the narrators' meaning-making and liberation.

Pursuing these objectives calls for a theoretical apparatus capable of holding sisterhood, trauma, and address together within an African-centered framework. This study relies primarily on Clenora Hudson-Weems's *Africana Womanism*, which privileges a female solidarity rooted in community rather than in outright opposition to men. It is supplemented by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's (1985) *African Womanism*, which independently arrives at a closely related position, defining womanism as a philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideals of Black life, while giving a balanced presentation of Black womanhood. Where Hudson-Weems (1993) theorizes from the African diasporic experience, Ogunyemi (1985) theorizes from the African continent itself, and together the two frameworks allow this study to read Ramatoulaye's Senegalese context and Celie's Georgia context through complementary rather than competing lenses - both insisting, against the individualist axis of much Western feminist theory, that Black women's liberation is inseparable from community, family, and sisterhood

rather than opposition to men as such.

Operationalizing this framework, finally, demands a method suited to comparative, text-grounded analysis. The study therefore adopts a comparative, qualitative approach based on close reading of both novels, combining narratological analysis - forms of address, stylistic evolution - with thematic analysis of sisterhood, and liberation, in constant dialogue with the theoretical framework outlined above. All primary quotations are extracted directly from the source texts to guarantee fidelity to the analysis that follows.

I. Epistolarity as a Space of Sisterhood

There is something almost stubborn about the way both Ramatoulaye and Celie insist on writing to someone, even when that someone cannot answer back. Neither Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) nor Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) treats the letter as a mere structural device. In both novels, the act of address becomes the ground on which a silenced woman rebuilds herself, and in both cases the rebuilding happens specifically in relation to another woman, even when that woman is, for long stretches of the narrative, entirely out of reach.

Ramatoulaye's opening pages make this explicit. She does not simply record her grief after Modou's death; she directs it toward someone who already shares her history, reaching back not one but three generations for the roots of the bond. Bâ (1981) writes:

Your presence in my life is by no means fortuitous. Our grandmothers in their compounds were separated by a fence and would exchange messages daily. Our mothers used to argue over who would look after our uncles and aunts. As for us, we wore out wrappers and sandals on the same stony road to the koranic school; we buried our milk teeth in the same holes and begged our fairy godmothers to restore them to us, more splendid than before (pp. 2-3).

The friendship is not something chosen in adulthood as a coping mechanism for widowhood; it is inherited, woven into the very geography of childhood. A few lines later, the address tightens into something almost incantatory: "My friend, my friend, my friend. I call on you three times" (Bâ, 1981, p. 3). In many West African oral traditions a name repeated three times is not idle emphasis but a summon - Ramatoulaye is not simply writing to Aissatou, she is calling her into presence.

That same sisterhood resurfaces, decades later, in material form. After Modou's betrayal leaves Ramatoulaye and her children without transport, it is Aissatou who intervenes. Bâ relates:

I shall never forget your response, you, my sister, nor my joy and my surprise when I was called to the Fiat agency and was told to choose a car which you had paid for, in full. My children gave cries of joy when they learned of the approaching end of their tribulations, which remain the daily lot of a good many other students (Bâ, 1981, p. 53).

Ramatoulaye's own gloss on the gesture is worth pausing on: "Friendship has splendours that love knows not" (Bâ, 1981, p. 54). The line reverses the usual hierarchy of feeling in these two novels - love is what fails, betrays, remarries; friendship is what endures. And it costs something specific as illustrated through these words: "You, the goldsmith's daughter, gave me your help while depriving yourself" (Bâ, 1981, p. 54). Sisterhood here is never abstract solidarity; it shows up as an actual car in an actual driveway, purchased by a woman who denied herself to provide it.

Celie's route toward a comparable bond is longer and more broken. Where Ramatoulaye begins already inside a functioning friendship, Celie begins in near-total isolation, instructed by her stepfather: "You better not never tell nobody but God" (Walker, 1982, p. 1). That single sentence contains the whole problem the novel has to solve - a girl told to address her suffering only to someone who cannot write back. Even so, from the earliest pages, her devotion to Nettie

is what keeps her oriented toward the future rather than collapsing into it. Facing a forced marriage, she thinks only of protecting her sister. Walker (1982) recounts:

All I thought about was Nettie. How she could come to me if I marry him and he be so love struck with her I could figure out a way for us to run away. Us both be hitting Nettie's schoolbooks pretty hard, cause us know we got to be smart to git away (p. 10).

And when their father pulls Celie from school, it is Nettie, not any adult, who stands beside her at the moment of loss as illustrated by this passage "Nettie stood there at the gate holding tight to my hand" (Walker, 1982, p. 12). That single image of two hands gripped is illustrative - it establishes, wordlessly, that whatever separations come later, this is the bond the entire novel will be trying to restore.

The restoration arrives only once Nettie's long-hidden letters are recovered, and Celie's address itself changes shape. Walker (1982) writes: "I don't write to God no more. I write to you. What happen to God? ast Shug. Who that? I say. She look at me serious. Big a devil as you is, I say, you not worried bout no God, surely" (p. 199).

In the above passage, Celie redirects her address from an absent, male-coded God to a present sister, transforming private confession into sororal testimony. Shug's gentle interruption reframes faith itself as relational rather than institutional, anchoring healing in female companionship rather than solitary devotion. In her 1983 essay collection, Walker defined the ethic of relation her fiction stages: "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (p. 7). The line names precisely what happens structurally here - a move toward something more communal than an individualist framework would predict.

Read side by side, *Ramatoulaye* and *Celie* perform the same maneuver from opposite starting points: one sustains an existing sisterhood across the shock of betrayal, the other writes her way toward one that has been withheld from her by force. Femi Ojo-Ade, as cited in Nnaemeka (1997), took a considerably harsher view of Modou's conduct, reading male infidelity in the novel as evidence of a deeper, structural guilt attached to men within polygamous households. Clenora Hudson-Weems's *Africana Womanism* (1993) is useful here precisely because it resists an individualist reading of either heroine's survival. Hudson-Weems (1993) describes a paradigm that prioritizes the *Africana* family unit - women, men, and children - working together in harmony, without opposition between the sexes. Neither *Ramatoulaye* nor *Celie* writes her way out of community; each writes her way back into one. This comparative reading - a Senegalese widow's diary-letters set against a Georgia sharecropper's daughter's confessional ones - belongs to a critical tradition that, as Judith Herman (1992) observed of psychological recovery's own emergence, exists only in the context of a relationship, a convergence that lets the survivors "recreate the capacity for trust that has been shattered. The present study inherits exactly that conjuncture, asking of two very different novels a single question: what does it mean for a woman's survival to depend on having somebody - a specific, remembered woman - to write to?"

II. Writing as Healing (Textual Healing)

The letters in both novels do more than build a bond with another woman; they do something to the woman writing them. Neither *Ramatoulaye* nor *Celie* writes as a neutral record-keeper. Both use the page to do something closer to what trauma scholar Judith Herman (1992) named: "In the telling, the trauma story becomes a testimony" (p. 199). She went a step further observing in her foundational study on the aftermath of violence, the act of speaking the unspeakable possesses a unique restorative power. She writes "Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims" (p. 12).

Ramatoulaye's healing is gradual and hard-won, and she is remarkably honest about how close she comes to collapse. Reflecting on the abandoned women of her generation, she writes with the flat, exhausted clarity of someone who has studied her own condition from the outside. Bâ (1981) observes:

To overcome distress when it sits upon you demands strong will. When one thinks that with each passing second one's life is shortened, one must profit intensely from this second; it is the sum of all the lost or harvested seconds that makes for a wasted or a successful life. Brace oneself to check despair and get it into proportion! A nervous breakdown waits around the corner for anyone who lets himself wallow in bitterness (p. 41).

This is not abstract philosophizing; it is diagnosis, and Ramatoulaye knows the disease from close observation - she has just finished recounting Jacqueline's collapse into unexplained physical pain, a suffering doctors could not locate on any X-ray because its source was not the body but marriage. Against that danger, Ramatoulaye finds smaller, stranger remedies, she says: "What a great distraction from distress is the cinema!" (Bâ, 1981, p. 51) she admits, an unglamorous, very human coping mechanism, worlds away from the grand rhetoric of resilience. By the letter's final pages, she is able to look back at the entire act of writing and name, plainly, what it has done to her in these words:

I take a deep breath. I've related at one go your story as well as mine. I've said the essential, for pain, even when it's past, leaves the same marks on the individual when recalled. Your disappointment was mine, as my rejection was yours. Forgive me once again if I have re-opened your wound. Mine continues to bleed (Bâ, 1981, p. 55).

Here Bâ (1981) captures something Herman's (1992) clinical language does not quite reach: healing through narrative is not painless. Ramatoulaye reopens a wound in the telling - hers and Aissatou's both - even as the telling is what allows her, elsewhere in the letter, to admit without flinching: "I try to spot my faults in the failure of my marriage" (Bâ, 1981, p. 55). That capacity for unsparing self-examination, offered to a friend rather than a judge, is itself the healing. It would be unthinkable directed at Modou's family, or at Tamsir, or at the Imam.

Celie's healing follows a rougher, more violent arc, because for most of the novel she has no safe page to write on at all, only a God who never writes back. When healing does arrive, it comes first as raw, half-mystical speech rather than measured reflection. Confronted by Albert after Shug's departure is announced; Celie finally turns her long-buried rage outward. Walker (1982) narrates:

I curse you, I say. What that mean? he say. I say, Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble... Until you do right by me, I say, everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it come to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees (p. 213).

The line "it seem to come to me from the trees" says a lot: Celie experiences her own healed voice as something bigger than her individual will, closer to what Ogunyemi (1985) describes as African womanism's grounding in black roots, the ideals of Black life, a philosophy that Ogunyemi (1985) insists gives a balanced presentation of Black womanhood rather than an isolated individual triumph. Celie's curse does not read as personal psychology alone; it reads as an ancestral, communal force finally breaking through a body that has absorbed violence for decades. The declaration that follows minutes later condenses the whole arc into a single defiant sentence: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook.... But I'm here" (Walker, 1982, p. 214).

Right after this radical awareness, followed almost immediately a quieter, more sustained form of healing: craft, done in company. Piecing a quilt with Sofia on the porch, Celie notes without

fanfare:

"Me and Sofia work on the quilt. Got it frame up on the porch. Shug Avery donate her old yellow dress for scrap, and I work in a piece every chance I get. It a nice pattern call Sister's Choice" (Walker, 1982, p. 61).

The pattern goes without comment. Healing here is stitched, literally, out of scraps donated by other women, assembled slowly, communally, without drama. It is in this unremarkable domestic scene - not the curse, not the confrontation - that Celie reaches her quietest and most convincing statement of recovery as described below:

For the first time in my life I wanted to see Pa. So me and Shug dress up in our new blue flower pants that match and big floppy Easter hats that match too, cept her roses red, mine yellow, and us dam hi the Packard and glide over there (Walker, 1982, p. 184).

This domestic quilting pattern mirrors Celie's communal healing. By transforming literal and emotional scraps with Shug's support, she replaces past trauma with agency and joy. Her matching outfit and "glide" in the Packard signal a quiet, triumphant recovery.

Read together, Ramatoulaye's confiding diary and Celie's shifting address (God, then Nettie, then her own reclaimed voice) both bear out Irène Assiba d'Almeida's (1994) account of what writing accomplishes for women silenced by their circumstances. It functions as destroying the emptiness of silence. Neither Ramatoulaye's reopened wound nor Celie's ancestral curse is comfortable to read. But both confirm the same premise: healing in these novels is not a private, interior event achieved in isolation.

III. Textual Sisterhood and Womanist Liberation

The addressees in both novels are never passive. Aissatou and Nettie do not simply receive letters and disappear into silence. Their presence, even unspoken, shapes what the letter-writer dares to say, and their eventual return or reply completes an arc that neither woman could have finished alone.

Ramatoulaye's clearest act of political resistance in the entire novel happens not in a letter to Aissatou but in a face-to-face confrontation - yet it is unmistakably her correspondence with Aissatou that has trained her to speak this way. When Tamsir proposes to inherit her as a wife, forty days into mourning, Ramatoulaye finally breaks a silence she describes in exact, almost clinical terms:

My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It bursts out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous. Did you ever have any affection for your brother? Already you want to build a new home for yourself, over a body that is still warm. While we are praying for Modou, you are thinking of future wedding festivities (Bâ, 1981, pp. 57-58).

The refusal that follows is unambiguous: "You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand" (Bâ, 1981, p. 58). Florence Stratton (1994), in her study of African women's fiction, titled her chapter on Bâ "Literature as a Weapon" - and this scene is precisely where that phrase earns its force. Ramatoulaye's years of confiding in Aissatou have not simply comforted her; they have armed her with a vocabulary of selfhood that Tamsir, expecting silent compliance, is not prepared for.

That armed vocabulary passes, visibly, to the next generation. Daba, Ramatoulaye's eldest daughter, articulates a position on marriage that goes further than her mother ever allowed herself to say aloud:

Marriage is no chain. It is mutual agreement over a life's programme. So if one of the partners is no longer satisfied with the union, why should he remain? It may be Abou; it may be me. Why not? The wife can take the initiative to make the break (Bâ, 1981, p. 74).

Daba's declaration marks a generational shift that surpasses Ramatoulaye's endurance. Marriage is presented as contractual, revocable, and gender-symmetrical rather than as a sacred obligation. Her casual "why not?" signals inherited confidence, the sisterhood-forged self-assertion Ramatoulaye modeled has hardened into her daughter's unapologetic autonomy.

Mary Modupe Kolawole's (1997) definition of womanism as "the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways" (p. 24) captures exactly what Bâ (1981) stages across two generations of women in one household: Ramatoulaye's self-retrieval through the letter enables Daba's more confident self-assertion in the next breath. In this reading, sisterhood is not confined to Ramatoulaye and Aissatou's bond; it becomes a transmissible inheritance, passed from mother to daughter as surely as any material legacy. Nettie's letters perform a comparable function for Celie, though from a very different angle. Where Ramatoulaye's confrontation is domestic and immediate, Nettie's witness is explicitly political and transnational. Writing from the Olinka mission, she and Samuel articulate their solidarity with Africans in terms that refuse the racial hierarchy the missionary society tries to impose on them. Walker (1982) depicts: "We are not white. We are not Europeans. We are black like the Africans themselves. And that we and the Africans will be working for a common goal: the uplift of black people everywhere" (p. 143).

This is Nettie functioning as active witness rather than passive recipient of Celie's confessions - she is out in the world, testing and expanding the very idea of sisterhood beyond the private page, extending it toward what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) calls the kind of knowledge "grounded in concrete lived experience," (p. 257) inseparable from the community it serves. Nettie's letters do not simply report events back to Celie; they carry an entire political education, one that eventually reaches Celie and changes how she understands her own oppression.

The novel's climax makes literal what has been figurative for hundreds of pages: the two sisters are physically reunited, and the address finally collapses into presence. Walker (1982) poignantly narrates:

When Nettie's foot come down on the porch I almost die. I stand swaying, tween Albert and Shug. Nettie stand swaying tween Samuel and I reckon it must be Adam. Then us both start to moan and cry. Us totter toward one nother like us use to do when us was babies. Then us feel so weak when us touch, us knock each other down (p. 291).

Walker (1982) stages this reunion, pointedly, on the Fourth of July. Harpo's remark that "most black folks don't have to work" (p. 294) that day because white people are "busy celebrating they independence from England" (p. 294) reframes the holiday entirely: "Us can spend the day celebrating each other" (p. 294). The line is very evocative, for it takes a nation's language of independence and redirects it toward a family, a sisterhood, a homecoming that white American history never accounted for. Celie's own closing assessment, "this the youngest us ever felt" (p. 295), reads less like nostalgia than like vindication. The letter-writing that began in coerced isolation ends in a yard full of reunited women, refusing to be diminished by age, distance, or history.

Read against Simone de Beauvoir's (2010) account of woman constituted as man's Other, both novels quietly resist that framework's individualism. Neither Ramatoulaye's confrontation with Tamsir nor Celie's reunion with Nettie is a story of one woman achieving selfhood against a man's gaze. Both are stories of women recognizing each other, addressing each other, and finally standing beside each other. The letter, in both texts, turns out to be not merely a record of suffering endured alone but the very mechanism by which two women build, across distance and silence, a liberation they could not have reached separately. That, finally, is what makes

the epistolary form itself a revolutionary act in both novels. It does not just describe sisterhood, it produces it, one address at a time.

Conclusion

This study examined how the epistolary form in Mariama Bâ's (1981) *So Long a Letter* and Alice Walker's (1982) *The Color Purple* functions simultaneously as a space of sisterhood between women and as a mechanism of textual healing in the face of patriarchal trauma. Framed within Africana Womanism rather than an individualist feminist model, the inquiry asked to what extent writing to a witness-recipient - Aissatou, Nettie - allowed each narrator to convert private suffering into a shared, collective form of agency.

Three findings emerged; each grounded directly in verified primary quotations from both novels. First, Section one showed that epistolarity in both texts activates a sisterhood rooted in shared history rather than invented from scratch - Ramatoulaye's childhood bond with Aissatou, "our grandmothers in their compounds," and Celie's protective devotion to Nettie, "holding tight to my hand," both precede and outlast the marriages and violence that structure each plot. Second, Section two demonstrated that writing operates as genuine textual healing, though not a comfortable process. Ramatoulaye admits her letter "re-opened your wound," while Celie's healing surfaces first as an almost ancestral curse – "it seem to come to me from the trees" - before settling into the quieter, communal labor of quilting with Sofia. Third, Section three established that the addressee is never a passive vessel. Aissatou's material intervention and Nettie's political testimony from Olinka both return to reshape the letter-writer's own consciousness, culminating in Ramatoulaye's public refusal of Tamsir and in Celie and Nettie's physical reunion on the porch. Taken together, the data - drawn exclusively from verified passages in the two source texts - support the claim that sisterhood and healing are not parallel themes in these novels but a single structural mechanism operating through address itself.

This study's principal contribution is comparative. It places a Senegalese widow's diary-letters and the confessional letters of a Georgia sharecropper's daughter within a single womanist frame, an approach rarely attempted across the francophone African and African American critical traditions, which - as the literature review showed - have largely developed in parallel rather than in dialogue. By reading Hudson-Weems's (1993) *Africana Womanism*, Ogunyemi's (1985) and Kolawole's (1997) African-centered definitions of womanism, and trauma theory against two novels not usually paired, the study offers a transferable model for reading epistolary trauma narratives by women of the African diaspora more broadly - one in which the addressee, not merely the narrator, is treated as an object of analysis.

One avenue in particular deserves further attention: translation itself. Bâ's original French inevitably shifts register in Modupé Bodé-Thomas's English translation - a diary written in the cadences of Wolof-inflected French becomes, in English, something subtly different in tone and rhythm. A future study working directly from the francophone text, *Une si longue lettre*, could test whether the intimacy and repetition this article identifies as central to Ramatoulaye's sisterhood with Aissatou (the threefold "mon amie, mon amie, mon amie," for instance) survive translation with the same emotional weight, or whether the comparative reading with Walker's American vernacular English is in part an artifact of two translated registers meeting on more equal footing in English than they would in their original languages. Such a study would refine rather than overturn the present analysis, while sharpening the claim that the letter's healing power lies partly in its specific linguistic texture, not only in its structural function as address.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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