

Tale of Technology: The Influence of Modern Appliances on Middle-Class Homemakers in Lucknow

Parul Tripathi

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Lucknow

Abstract

Based on qualitative interviews with women, this sociological research investigates how contemporary home appliances have changed the lives of middle-class homemakers in Lucknow, India. It examines how technology such as vacuum cleaners, microwaves, and washing machines affect social relations, time management, and household work in the culturally diverse setting of Lucknow. The findings show that while appliances significantly reduce physical labor, the time saved is often spent on more demanding household tasks like more complex cooking or childcare instead of leisure activities. Despite challenges including expense, maintenance requirements, and technical unfamiliarity, participants value the ease and prestige that come with these instruments. The study reveals that appliances often perpetuate traditional gender norms, as families raise expectations for domestic perfection. Nevertheless, homemakers report a better quality of life, citing reduced fatigue and incremental personal time. Applying gender performativity theory and cultural lenses, this research illuminates the intricate balance between technological progress and tradition in urban Indian homes. It advocates for affordable, intuitive appliances and skill-building programs to enhance homemakers' autonomy, offering fresh insights into the socio-technological evolution of middle-class domesticity.

Keywords- Modern Appliances, homemakers, Technology

INTRODUCTION

Lucknow, a city steeped in cultural heritage and vibrant urban transformation, serves as a compelling backdrop for examining the evolving role of middle-class homemakers in contemporary India. With its blend of historical charm and modern aspirations, this capital of Uttar Pradesh reflects a society navigating the currents of tradition and progress. Middle-class households, defined here as those with annual incomes between INR 5 and 20 lakhs, increasingly rely on modern household appliances such as washing machines, microwaves, and vacuum cleaners to manage daily tasks. These technologies, emblematic of India's post-liberalization consumer boom, promise to lighten the physical burdens of domestic work, yet their impact extends far beyond mere functionality. This study delves into how these appliances reshape the routines, social roles, and personal experiences of homemakers in Lucknow, drawing on the voices of 15 women who manage their households full-time.

The adoption of modern appliances occurs within a cultural framework that values women's contributions to family and home, often tying their identities to domestic excellence. While technologies offer efficiency, they also raise questions about whether they liberate homemakers or entrench traditional expectations.

Grounded in sociological theories like Judith Butler's gender performativity, which views domestic practices as reinforcing gendered identities, and technological determinism, which examines technology's role in shaping social structures, this study offers a nuanced perspective. It captures the lived realities of homemakers through qualitative interviews, revealing how appliances mediate the interplay of tradition and modernity. In Lucknow, where cultural pride and urban growth coexist, appliances are not just tools but symbols of status and progress, influencing how homemakers perceive themselves and are perceived by others. By focusing on these women's experiences, this paper contributes to the sociology of gender and technology, shedding light on the complex dynamics of domestic life in a rapidly modernizing Indian city.

Literature Review

The interplay between household technology and domestic labor is a well-explored field, yet much scholarship focuses on women juggling paid work and home duties. This study diverges by centering on middle-class homemakers in Lucknow fully immersed in household management. Globally, scholars like Cowan (1983) argue that appliances lighten domestic burdens, potentially freeing time for other activities. In India, however, cultural norms often channel this time back into family-centric tasks, as noted by Gupta (2005).

Judith Butler's gender performativity theory frames appliances as tools that sustain gendered norms, amplifying expectations rather than reducing them. Indian studies highlight appliances as symbols of middle-class modernity, yet their benefits are tempered by economic and educational barriers. Lucknow's distinct identity rooted in its historical elegance and urban growth shapes how these technologies are perceived and utilized, blending status with practicality.

This review integrates global and local perspectives, grounding the analysis in Lucknow's socio-cultural fabric and setting the stage for an original contribution to the field.

Methodology

This qualitative research involved semi-structured interviews with middle-class homemakers in Lucknow, conducted from May to June 2025. Participants, aged 25–55 with education levels from high school to postgraduate, were chosen via purposive sampling to reflect varied household sizes (3–8 members). Each managed their home full-time.

Interviews, lasting 45–60 minutes, occurred in participants' homes, in Hindi or English per their preference. Questions probed appliance use, time management, family feedback, and challenges. Ethical protocols ensured consent and confidentiality. Data were transcribed, translated as needed, and thematically analysed to uncover patterns in labour, norms, and well-being.

Findings and Analysis

Easing Physical Workloads

The integration of modern household appliances has transformed the daily routines of middle-class homemakers in Lucknow, significantly reducing the physical toll of domestic tasks, as

unanimously reported by the 15 women interviewed. Washing machines, microwaves, food processors, and vacuum cleaners have streamlined labour-intensive chores such as laundry, cooking, and cleaning, offering relief from the bodily strain these tasks once demanded. Anjali, a 29-year-old postgraduate with two children, shared, “Hand-washing clothes was backbreaking; my shoulders would ache for hours. Now, the washing machine handles it in under an hour, leaving me less tired.” Similarly, Kavita, 47, a high school graduate, noted, “Grinding masalas by hand used to strain my wrists. The food processor does it in minutes, and I feel so much lighter.”

Other participants echoed this sentiment. Neha, 33, an undergraduate, explained, “The microwave cuts cooking time for snacks like dhokla. I used to stand over a hot stove; now I can sit and chat with my kids while it cooks.” Priya, 36, a postgraduate, added, “The vacuum cleaner makes cleaning our three-bedroom home quick no more bending to sweep under furniture.” However, the time saved often flows into new tasks. Vandana, 31, remarked, “With the washing machine, I’m done faster, but now I iron more clothes to keep everything perfect.” Meera, 39, an undergraduate, noted, “The dishwasher saves scrubbing pots, but I use that time to bake for my family’s evening tea.” These accounts reveal that while appliances alleviate physical fatigue, cultural expectations in Lucknow’s middle-class households push homemakers to channel this efficiency into additional domestic duties, sustaining their central role in family care (Butler, 1990; Gupta, 2005).

Cultural Expectations and Gender Norms

Interviews with 15 middle-class homemakers in Lucknow reveal that modern appliances, while easing physical labor, often intensify cultural expectations and reinforce gender norms. Thirteen participants reported that family members expect higher standards of domestic care due to the efficiency of appliances like microwaves, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines. Shalini, 45, a high school graduate, shared, “Since we got the microwave, my in-laws expect quick, restaurant-style snacks whenever guests visit.” Similarly, Rukhsana, 40, an undergraduate, noted, “The vacuum cleaner keeps the house spotless, so my husband insists I clean daily to maintain our family’s reputation.” These accounts highlight how appliances raise benchmarks for domestic excellence, aligning with cultural values that prioritize women’s roles in upholding family honor and hospitality in Lucknow’s middle-class homes.

Pooja, 36, a postgraduate, explained, “The pressure to cook elaborate meals has grown since the food processor makes prep work faster.” This sentiment was echoed by Vandana, 31, who said, “My washing machine saves time, but now I’m expected to keep everyone’s clothes perfectly pressed.” Neeta, 50, added, “The dishwasher means no excuses for dirty dishes, even late at night.” These expectations reflect Judith Butler’s (1990) gender performativity, where appliances become tools for enacting idealized domestic roles. Rather than reducing overall workload, the technology amplifies societal demands for perfection in homemaking, as Gupta (2005) notes in Indian contexts. The cultural emphasis on family-centric duties ensures that homemakers channel appliance-enabled efficiency into meeting heightened standards, perpetuating traditional gender norms and limiting opportunities for personal autonomy.

Barriers to Adoption

Interviews with 15 middle-class homemakers in Lucknow highlight significant barriers to adopting modern household appliances, including economic constraints, maintenance challenges, and technological literacy gaps. Cost emerged as a primary obstacle for many. Geeta, 44, an undergraduate, shared, “We saved for a year to buy our refrigerator, but repair costs are a constant worry.” Similarly, Anjali, 29, a postgraduate, noted, “A good washing machine is expensive, and electricity bills add up fast.” Maintenance issues further complicate adoption. Priya, 36, explained, “Our vacuum cleaner broke down twice, and finding a reliable technician in Lucknow is tough.” These economic hurdles align with market trends indicating high upfront and operational costs for appliances in India (Mordor Intelligence, 2025).

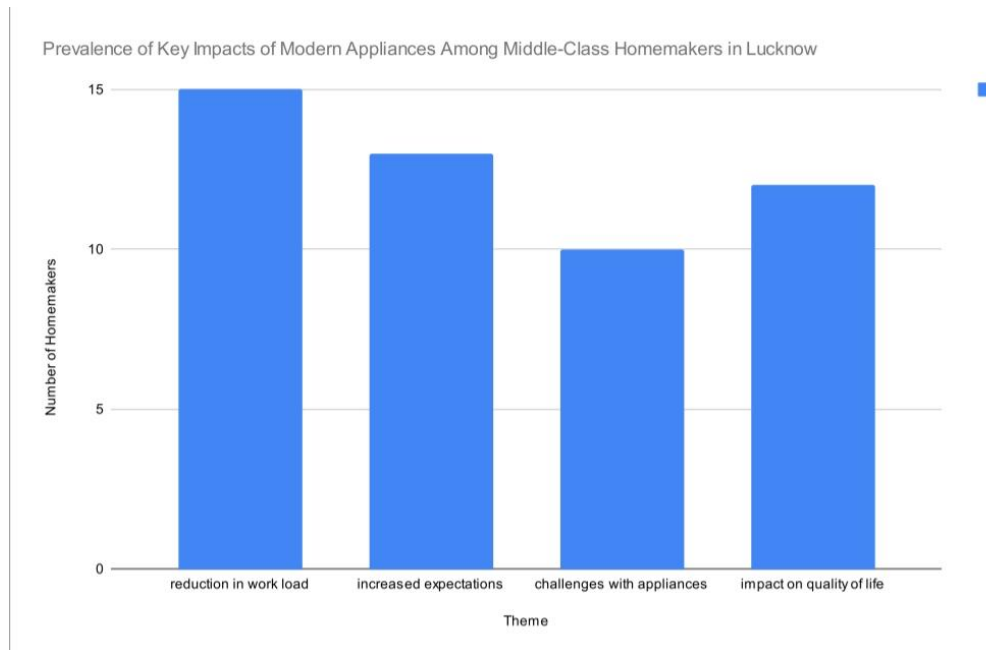
Technological literacy poses another barrier, particularly for older homemakers. Suman, 52, with a high school education, confessed, “The smart oven’s settings confuse me; my daughter has to program it.” Kavita, 47, echoed this, saying, “I avoid using the microwave’s advanced features because I don’t understand them.” These struggles reflect a digital divide, as noted by Sharma (2023), where technological complexity limits accessibility. Younger homemakers, like Neha, 33, adapt more easily, stating, “I learned to use the food processor from YouTube.” The cultural expectation to master appliances for family benefit, as per Butler’s (1990) performativity framework, adds pressure, yet lack of training hinders proficiency. These barriers underscore the need for affordable, user-friendly appliances to ensure equitable benefits for all homemakers in Lucknow.

Enhanced Well-Being

Interviews with 15 middle-class homemakers in Lucknow reveal that modern household appliances significantly enhance their well-being by reducing physical fatigue and providing small pockets of personal time, though these gains are tempered by ongoing domestic demands. Twelve participants reported feeling less exhausted due to appliances like washing machines, dishwashers, and vacuum cleaners. Vandana, 31, a postgraduate, shared, “The floor cleaner saves my energy; I’m not drained by evening and can enjoy a cup of tea quietly.” Similarly, Meera, 39, an undergraduate, noted, “The dishwasher means I’m not scrubbing pots late at night, so I feel fresher for the next day.” These accounts highlight how appliances alleviate the bodily toll of chores, improving daily comfort.

Participants also described modest increases in personal time. Anjali, 29, said, “With the washing machine, I finish laundry faster and can read a book for half an hour.” Neha, 33, added, “The microwave lets me cook quickly, so I watch a TV show sometimes.” Priya, 36, a postgraduate, explained, “The vacuum cleaner cuts cleaning time, letting me chat with friends over tea.” These snippets of leisure, though limited, foster a sense of personal fulfillment, as noted by Sharma (2023) in urban Indian contexts. However, cultural norms often redirect this time toward family needs. Kavita, 47, remarked, “I’m less tired, but I use the extra time to help my kids with homework.” Shalini, 45, echoed, “The mixer grinder saves effort, but I’m expected to make fresh snacks daily.” This aligns with Butler’s (1990) gender performativity, where appliances enable homemakers to meet heightened domestic expectations, limiting broader autonomy. Despite these constraints, the reduction in physical strain and occasional personal time enhance homemakers’ quality of life, reflecting a nuanced balance between

technological relief and cultural pressures in Lucknow's middle-class households (Gupta, 2005).



Discussions

The narratives of 15 middle-class homemakers in Lucknow reveal that modern household appliances washing machines, microwaves, vacuum cleaners, and dishwashers both alleviate and complicate domestic life, reflecting a complex interplay of technological advancement and socio-cultural norms. The universal reduction in physical workload, as voiced by participants like Anjali and Kavita, aligns with global patterns where appliances mitigate the drudgery of chores (Cowan, 1983). Yet, the redirection of saved time into intensified domestic tasks, such as elaborate cooking or frequent cleaning, underscores a cultural expectation to uphold family-centric roles. Shalini's account of heightened demands for snacks due to her microwave exemplifies how technology amplifies domestic standards, resonating with Judith Butler's (1990) gender performativity framework, where appliances become tools for enacting idealized femininity.

The heightened expectations reported by 13 homemakers highlight a paradox: while appliances promise efficiency, they entrench women in traditional roles, as families expect cleaner homes or more sophisticated meals. This aligns with Gupta's (2005) observation that Indian households often channel technological gains into reinforcing gender norms rather than fostering personal autonomy. Unlike Western contexts, where appliances support dual-income households (Cowan, 1983), Lucknow's homemakers face a unique intensification of domesticity, rooted in the city's cultural emphasis on hospitality and familial duty, as noted by Donner (2011).

Economic and technical barriers further complicate adoption. Geeta's and Priya's concerns about appliance costs and repairs reflect economic constraints in middle-class households, corroborated by market data indicating high upfront and maintenance costs (Mordor Intelligence, 2025). The technological literacy gap, particularly among older homemakers like

Suman, mirrors Sharma's (2023) findings on digital divides in urban India, where age and education shape technology use. Younger participants like Neha, who navigate appliances via online tutorials, highlight a generational shift, suggesting that cultural and educational contexts mediate technological benefits.

The modest improvements in well-being, as shared by Vandana and Meera, indicate that reduced fatigue and occasional leisure time enhance quality of life, yet cultural pressures limit broader empowerment. This tension between relief and constraint reflects Fernandes' (2006) analysis of middle-class modernity, where appliances symbolize progress but sustain traditional roles. Environmentally, the growing reliance on appliances raises concerns, as their energy demands contribute to India's rising carbon footprint, a point underexplored by participants but noted in broader literature (Wilhite, 2014).

These findings enrich the sociology of gender and technology by situating appliance use within Lucknow's socio-cultural milieu. Future research could compare urban and rural experiences or include male perspectives to explore household dynamics further, building on Ray and Qayum (2009). The study underscores the need for affordable, user-friendly appliances and literacy programs to ensure equitable benefits, challenging the gendered constraints that currently shape technological integration in middle-class Indian homes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study illuminates the multifaceted impact of modern household appliances on middle-class homemakers in Lucknow, revealing a complex interplay between technological innovation and entrenched socio-cultural norms. The qualitative findings, derived from interviews with 15 homemakers, demonstrate that appliances such as washing machines, microwaves, and vacuum cleaners significantly alleviate the physical burdens of domestic labor. However, the resultant time savings are frequently redirected toward intensified familial responsibilities, such as enhanced childcare or elaborate meal preparation, rather than fostering personal autonomy or leisure. This dynamic underscores the persistence of gendered expectations, as articulated through Judith Butler's (1990) gender performativity framework, wherein appliances serve as material artifacts that reinforce traditional domestic roles rather than disrupt them. Concurrently, the symbolic capital of appliances as markers of middle-class modernity in Lucknow aligns with Fernandes' (2006) analysis of consumerist aspirations, yet it introduces tensions between cultural heritage and contemporary lifestyles.

The study also highlights structural barriers economic costs, maintenance challenges, and technological literacy gaps that disproportionately affect older or less-educated homemakers, echoing Sharma's (2023) observations on digital divides in urban India. These findings contribute to the sociology of technology and gender by situating appliance adoption within Lucknow's unique socio-cultural milieu, where historical traditions coexist with urban aspirations. Unlike Western contexts, where appliances often facilitate women's workforce participation (Cowan, 1983), in Lucknow, they amplify domestic obligations, reflecting the localized negotiation of modernity.

To address these insights, several recommendations emerge for policymakers, manufacturers, and researchers. First, promoting affordable appliance access is critical. Government subsidies

or microfinance schemes could mitigate financial barriers, ensuring broader adoption among middle-class households, as suggested by market trends (Mordor Intelligence, 2025). Second, technological literacy programs tailored to diverse age groups and educational backgrounds are essential. Community-based workshops in Lucknow could empower homemakers to navigate smart appliances, reducing the digital divide noted by Desai and Banerji (2018). Third, user-centric design innovations should prioritize intuitive interfaces to accommodate varying levels of technical proficiency, enhancing usability across generations. Fourth, sustainability initiatives are imperative, given the environmental implications of increased appliance use. Manufacturers should develop energy-efficient models, and public campaigns could raise awareness about sustainable consumption, aligning with Wilhite's (2014) emphasis on eco-conscious practices.

Future research should expand the scope to include comparative analyses of urban and rural homemakers or incorporate male perspectives to explore intra-household dynamics, building on Ray and Qayum's (2009) work. Longitudinal studies could further assess how evolving appliance technologies reshape domestic roles over time. By fostering equitable access and cultural sensitivity in technological integration, this study advocates for a reimagining of domestic technology as a tool for empowerment, challenging the gendered constraints that currently limit its transformative potential in middle-class Indian households.

References

1. Bose, A. (2001). *Population of India: A Sociological Perspective*. Vikas Publishing House.
2. Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
3. Cowan, R. S. (1983). *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*.
4. Desai, S., & Banerji, M. (2018). Negotiating Modernity: Gender and Household Dynamics in Urban India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 53(12), 45–52.
5. Donner, H. (2011). *Being Middle-Class in India: A Way of Life*. Routledge.
6. Fernandes, L. (2006). *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*. University of Minnesota Press.
7. Gupta, S. (2005). Technology and Tradition: Gendered Impacts in Indian Homes. *Indian Journal of Sociology*, 12(3), 45–60.
8. Srinivas, M. N. (1996). *Village, Caste, Gender and Method: Essays in Indian Social Anthropology*. Oxford University Press.