

Role of E-Governance on Indian Democracy in Contemporary Period

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Abstract

E-governance plays a vital role in transforming public service delivery in India by leveraging digital technologies to enhance transparency, efficiency, and citizen engagement. It bridges the gap between government and citizens through online platforms, mobile services, and digital infrastructure, enabling faster access to essential services. Initiatives like the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), Digital India, and Common Service Centres (CSCs) have improved administrative accountability and rural outreach. Despite challenges such as the digital divide and infrastructure limitations, e-governance continues to drive inclusive development and empower citizens, making governance more responsive, accessible, and participatory in the world's largest democracy.

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Introduction

India, the world's largest democracy, has experienced rapid technological advancements over the last few decades, which have significantly shaped its governance mechanisms. E-governance, or the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to deliver government services efficiently and transparently, has become a key element in ensuring a more participatory, transparent, and accountable government. In the contemporary period, especially from the early 2000s to the present, e-governance has emerged as a powerful tool to address many governance challenges. Here I will analyse the role of e-governance in Indian democracy, focusing on its impact on public service delivery, transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and citizen participation.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to examine the development, implementation, and impact of e-governance initiatives in India. The methodology integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches to offer a comprehensive understanding of how e-governance influences public administration, citizen participation, and service delivery. The research is exploratory and descriptive in nature. It draws upon a systematic literature review, case study analysis, and secondary data evaluation to assess the

effectiveness and challenges of various e-governance projects under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) and related programs such as Common Service Centres (CSCs), e-Office, and Mobile Seva. Primary Data (qualitative): While the study does not include field surveys or interviews due to scope limitations, qualitative insights are derived from government policy documents, white papers, and published case studies. Secondary Data (quantitative) is collected from official government portals such as MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology), CSC.gov.in, UIDAI, Digital India reports, and scholarly databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science). Statistical data on digital literacy, service reach, and usage is analyzed.

Literature Review

1. Sinha, R. P. (2006)-E-Governance in India: Initiatives & Issues

Sinha provides a foundational overview of early e-governance programs in India, analyzing state-level initiatives like Andhra Pradesh's e-Seva and Karnataka's Bhoomi. The book identifies challenges such as poor infrastructure, bureaucratic resistance, and lack of interoperability. Sinha stresses the need for user-centric design and policy-level coherence across government layers.

2. Bhattacharya & Devi (2013)-CIIT Research Journal

This study evaluates multiple e-governance projects across India using a performance assessment framework. It finds that while several initiatives achieved early success (e.g., in service delivery), most lacked long-term sustainability due to poor planning, weak monitoring, and fragmented data systems.

3. Singh & Sahu (2018)-International Journal of Electronic Governance

Using a classification-based review, this paper analyzes over 100 articles on Indian e-governance. It categorizes research into awareness, implementation, digital literacy, and citizen adoption. The authors highlight urban-rural disparities and the need for digital inclusion policies.

Democracy and E-Governance: Interrelationship

Democracy is the cornerstone of many modern societies, characterized by a government that is "of the people, by the people, and for the people." It emphasizes principles like participation, transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness. E-governance, on the other hand, refers to the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in government functions to improve the delivery of services, ensure transparency, increase participation, and make governance more efficient and responsive.

The relationship between democracy and e-governance is profound and multi-faceted. E-governance provides the technological infrastructure that enhances democratic principles, while democracy offers the political framework within which e-governance can thrive. This interrelationship has far-reaching implications for public participation, transparency, accountability, and the overall effectiveness of governance.

This essay explores the complex and evolving interrelationship between democracy and e-governance, examining how e-governance has strengthened democratic processes, improved transparency and accountability, enhanced citizen engagement, and brought about inclusive governance. Furthermore, it will address the challenges and limitations of this relationship, particularly in diverse, large-scale democracies like India.

Defining Democracy

Democracy, in its simplest form, is a system of government where power lies with the people. Citizens have the right to participate in decision-making processes, either directly or through elected representatives. The fundamental principles of democracy include:

Participation: Citizens have the right and duty to participate in the political process, including voting, standing for elections, and engaging in public discourse.

Transparency: Democratic governments must be open in their operations, allowing citizens to access information about decision-making processes and hold officials accountable.

Accountability: Elected representatives and public officials are answerable to the people. Citizens have the right to question their actions and hold them accountable through various mechanisms, such as elections or legal processes.

Inclusivity: Every individual, irrespective of caste, creed, gender, or socio-economic status, should have the opportunity to participate in the governance process.

Rule of Law: Democracies function based on a legal framework that ensures equality and justice for all citizens.

Evolution of E-Governance in India

E-governance in India has evolved significantly since its inception. The early 1990s marked the beginning of computerization in government offices, but it was in the early 2000s that the Indian government began taking comprehensive steps towards the digitalization of governance. The launch of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006 was a major milestone. The plan aimed to make government services accessible to citizens electronically, ensuring efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity.

Core Objectives of E-Governance

- i) E-governance seeks to simplify and streamline administrative processes, reducing the time and effort involved in accessing government services.
- ii) By providing real-time access to information, e-governance ensures that citizens are aware of how decisions are made and how resources are used, thereby promoting transparency.
- iii) Digital platforms allow citizens to hold public officials and elected representatives accountable for their actions and decisions.
- iv) E-governance enables citizens to participate more actively in governance, either through voting, contributing to policy discussions, or providing feedback on government services.
- v) E-governance aims to make government services accessible to all citizens, regardless of their geographical location or socio-economic status.

The Role of E-Governance in Strengthening Indian Democracy

India's democracy is a complex system involving a large and diverse population with varying levels of access to resources and governance. E-governance plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges of democratic governance in India by fostering greater inclusivity, improving accountability, and making the system more responsive to citizens' needs.

Enhancing Transparency and Reducing Corruption:

Corruption has long been a significant challenge in Indian democracy, eroding public trust and creating inefficiencies in governance. Transparency is essential to democratic governance, as it allows citizens to scrutinize government actions and hold public officials accountable.

Access to Information: The introduction of online platforms and digital portals has improved access to information regarding government policies, expenditures, and projects. The Right to Information (RTI) Act, implemented in 2005, has been enhanced through online RTI portals where citizens can file RTI requests and track their status. This ensures that citizens have a clear understanding of how decisions are made, promoting transparency in governance.

Real-Time Tracking of Government Programs: E-governance initiatives such as the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) provide real-time tracking of government fund transfers and payments. This system helps reduce leakages in welfare schemes and promotes transparency in the allocation of public resources. Other similar platforms, like the AwasSoft portal for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), provide real-time information on housing projects, ensuring transparency in the progress of development initiatives.

E-Tendering and E-Procurement: One of the significant areas where corruption thrives is in public procurement and allocation of contracts. The introduction of e-tendering and e-

procurement systems has minimized human intervention and favoritism in the allocation of government contracts. Platforms such as the Government e-Marketplace ensure that procurement is conducted in a transparent and competitive manner, reducing the scope for corruption.

Improving Public Service Delivery

One of the most important roles of e-governance in India is improving the efficiency and accessibility of public services. Traditionally, accessing government services in India involved navigating complex bureaucratic procedures, long wait times, and, often, corruption.

Digitizing Government Services: Platforms like e-District, Passport Seva Kendra, and Digi Locker have streamlined the process of availing government services by offering them online. These platforms reduce the need for physical visits to government offices, thereby minimizing opportunities for bribery and corruption while also making services more accessible.

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT): The implementation of Aadhaar (India's unique biometric identification system) has revolutionized the delivery of welfare schemes by enabling Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT). Under DBT, subsidies and welfare benefits are directly transferred to the bank accounts of beneficiaries, reducing leakages and ensuring that the benefits reach the intended recipients. The Aadhaar-based system has been integrated with various schemes like Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), leading to more efficient service delivery.

E-Hospital and Telemedicine: E-governance has also improved public health services through initiatives like e-Hospital, which allows citizens to book appointments, access their medical records, and receive online consultations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of e-governance in healthcare became evident with the rise of telemedicine platforms like eSanjeevani, which provided remote healthcare services to millions of citizens.

Strengthening Citizen Participation

A vibrant democracy requires active citizen participation in governance. E-governance has transformed the way citizens engage with the government, providing them with platforms to voice their concerns, contribute ideas, and participate in policymaking.

MyGov Platform: The Indian government's MyGov platform is an example of how e-governance can foster citizen engagement. Launched in 2014, MyGov allows citizens to participate in discussions on government policies, share suggestions, and provide feedback on various initiatives. It serves as a direct communication channel between the government and the public, enabling citizens to engage with policymakers and contribute to the democratic process.

Social Media Engagement: Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become powerful tools for citizen engagement in India. Government officials, including the Prime Minister, use these platforms to communicate with citizens, solicit feedback, and respond to public concerns. Citizens, in turn, use these platforms to voice their opinions, report grievances, and hold the government accountable.

E-Voting and Digital Electoral Systems: While India has not yet implemented online voting, the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) has streamlined the voting process. The National Voters' Services Portal (NVSP)

also allows citizens to register to vote, check voter details, and access information related to elections. In the future, further integration of e-governance into the electoral process could enhance voter participation, particularly among the youth and those in remote areas.

Promoting Inclusive Governance

India's vast socio-economic disparities and rural-urban divide pose significant challenges to ensuring inclusive governance. Many citizens, particularly in rural areas, have limited access to government services due to geographic isolation, illiteracy, and a lack of infrastructure. E-governance plays a crucial role in bridging these divides by making government services more accessible and inclusive.

Common Service Centers (CSCs): One of the most successful e-governance initiatives in India is the establishment of Common Service Centers (CSCs), which serve as access points for digital services in rural and remote areas. These centers provide essential services such as applying for government documents, accessing healthcare, and receiving digital literacy training. By bringing digital services to underserved areas, CSCs promote inclusivity in governance.

Digital Literacy Programs: To ensure that all citizens can benefit from e-governance, the Indian government has launched digital literacy initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA), which aims to make six crore rural households digitally literate. Digital literacy is essential for ensuring that citizens can access and use digital platforms for governance and services.

Bharat Net Project: The BharatNet project aims to provide high-speed internet connectivity to rural areas, thereby ensuring that even the most remote parts of India have access to e-governance services. By bridging the digital divide, BharatNet ensures that all citizens, regardless of their location, can benefit from the digital transformation of governance.

Increasing Accountability

In a democratic system, public officials and elected representatives must be accountable to the people they serve. E-governance enhances accountability by providing citizens with tools to monitor government activities and hold officials accountable for their performance.

Online Grievance Redressed Mechanisms: Platforms like the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) allow citizens to file complaints against government services and track the status of their grievances. These systems promote accountability by ensuring that officials are answerable for their actions and that complaints are addressed promptly etc.

Conclusion

E-governance has become a vital component of Indian democracy, significantly improving public service delivery, enhancing transparency and accountability, fostering citizen participation, and promoting inclusivity. While challenges remain, the ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide, improve digital infrastructure, and promote digital literacy are crucial for ensuring that e-governance reaches all sections of society.

In recent time, the role of e-governance in Indian democracy is not just about technology but about transforming governance to make it more responsive, transparent, and inclusive. As India continues to embrace digital

transformation, e-governance will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of democracy in the country. The ultimate goal of e-governance should be to empower citizens, strengthen democratic institutions, and create a more just, equitable, and prosperous society.

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