Digital Governance in India: The Role in Enhancing Transparency, Efficiency and Accountability

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ABSTRACT:

Digital Governance is also called E-Governance, launched in 2015. It is an important initiative of our Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi under the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat by 2047. E-Governance means using digital information technology and communication technology (ICT) to provide government services. The utilization of ICT and e-governance has great potential to improve government institutions and public service delivery, especially in developing countries. This article examines the role of Digital India in promoting transparency and accountable governance by analyzing key aspects like Aadhaar, UPI (Unified Payments Interface), e-Hospitals, etc. This article provides an outline of E-Governance programs being used in India and the current status of such programs. The E-Governance initiatives are centered on secondary data collected from multiple platforms. The digitization and E-Governance of India have gigantic potential for moderate associations in creating the nation.

KEYWORDS:

Digital-Governance, E-Governance, Transparency, Accountability, Aadhaar, Artificial Intelligence.

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Introduction:

Digital Governance, also known as Electronic Governance (E-Governance), involves the use of technology to provide public services while ensuring transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. The Government of India has been an innovator in adopting digital tools to achieve governance goals, with the Digital India Mission serving as a major national initiative. Digital India today stands as a mass movement, impacting the lives of a majority of Indians. The Digital India programme was launched on 1 July 2015 with the objective of transforming India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. It imagines an India where technology enables better access to services in education, healthcare, and agriculture, while ensuring transparency and accountability

in governance. The utilization of ICT and e–governance has gigantic potential for moderate associations in creating nations.[1] Our vision of E–Governance focuses on offering government services through digital platforms and smartphones, ensuring access to digital services for all citizens. In the present era, the global community increasingly reorganizes political and economic relationships among nation–states based on the principles of democracy and neo–liberalism. In this context, digital governance plays a crucial role in strengthening democratic institutions and improving administrative efficiency. E–Governance further aims to transform public administration by providing efficient services to citizens without the direct interface of government offices. The accurate reason for adopting digital governance in India is rooted in the need to bridge the gap between a very large and diverse population and government services. E–Governance is aimed at transforming the administrative landscape into a SMART (Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent) system, thereby improving service delivery and enhancing public trust in government institutions.[2]

Theoretical Framework of Digital Governance In India:

In India's evolving hybrid digital landscape, the Digital India programme has emerged as a vital instrument for efficient and inclusive delivery of public services. Through initiatives such as digital payments, online platforms, and electronic service delivery, the government seeks to promote economic inclusion, social equity, and sustainable development. Digital governance plays a crucial role in strengthening administrative systems and fostering transparency, accountability, and inclusive growth across Central, State, and Local levels of government. Rapid technological advancements have transformed India's public sector ecosystem, enabling services such as online tax filing, Aadhaar–based digital identity, Digi Locker for document access, and integrated platforms like UMANG. These initiatives ensure seamless access to government services, particularly benefiting rural and marginalized populations. To enhance service delivery, the Government of India has adopted a whole–of–government approach supported by policy coherence, inter–institutional coordination, and public–private partnerships. Despite its progress, digital governance faces challenges such as cybersecurity risks, the digital divide, and infrastructural constraints. However, India's effective digital response during the COVID–19 pandemic, especially platforms like CoWIN,

highlighted the importance of resilient digital infrastructure and strong governance frameworks. A well–structured digital government model framework, guided by global best practices and the United Nations E–Government Survey, provides a systematic roadmap for sustainable digital governance and supports India's progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[3]

Enhancing Administration Efficiency:

The evolution of electronic governance in India has been a gradual and evolutionary process shaped by administrative needs, technological advancements, and policy reforms. Its roots can be traced to the 1970s, when the government–initiated computerization mainly to improve internal administrative efficiency, such as data processing and record management. The establishment of the National Informatics Centre in 1976 was an early institutional step toward integrating information technology into governance. During the 1980s, computerization expanded to departments like railways and census operations, but these efforts were fragmented and largely inaccessible to citizens due to the absence of a legal framework for electronic records. A significant shift occurred in the 1990s with economic liberalization and growth of the IT sector, leading to pilot e–Governance projects. The enactment of the Information Technology Act, 2000 marked a watershed moment by granting legal recognition to electronic records and digital signatures. Subsequently, initiatives like the National e–Governance Plan (2006) enabled integrated, citizen–centric digital service delivery.[4]

Impact On Transparency:

Active e–governance is a crucial facilitator in improving the openness of public administration if funding is implemented to give citizens assured, rapid, and simple access to all the information on the government's activities, policies, and decisions. The use of information technology to make government documents available to the public is one of the verticals of e–governance that aims to increase the transparency and accessibility of government processes. When considering online resources like Right To Information (RTI) websites, which enable individuals to seek and acquire information on the government's finances, policies, and activities, the topic of e–transparency in government seems to make even more sense. Additionally, the likelihood of participating in corrupt

activities and partiality is decreased because contract conclusion and bidding procedures are conducted transparently using e–procurement platforms.[5]

Fostering Accountability and Citizen Engagement:

In India, e–government is a relatively new idea. The necessary impetus for e–governance was provided by the establishment of the National Satellite–Based Computer Network (NICENET) in 1987 and the District Information System of the National Informatics Centre (DISNIC) program, which aimed to computerize all district offices nationwide and provided free hardware and software to state governments. Later, as technology advanced, e–government emerged. Both at the federal and state levels, there are several e–government projects underway today. The Department of Technology and Electronics and the Department of Administrative Changes and Grievance Management developed the National e–Government Plan (NeGP) in 2006 with the goal of ensuring that all government services are affordable, accessible, and reliable while also meeting the basic needs of the public. Due consideration has been given to the idea that a program approach, driven by a shared vision and strategy, is required to expedite the adoption of e–government throughout the various branches of government at the national, state, and local levels. This strategy has the potential to provide individuals with a seamless vision of government, provide portability through criteria, and enable significant cost savings through the pooling of core supporting infrastructure.[6]

Nine Pillars of Digital India:

1. Broadband Highways: focus on creating a nationwide optical fiber network to connect all 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats. This infrastructure ensures broadband connectivity in rural and remote areas and links government departments, universities, research institutions, and citizens.[7]

2. Universal Access to Phones: aims to ensure seamless mobile connectivity across the country. With the expansion of 3G, 4G, and upcoming 5G technologies, Digital India enhances communication speed, efficiency, productivity, and supports emerging technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT).[8]

3. Public Internet Access Programme: includes Common Service Centers

(CSCs) and Post Offices as Multi–Service Centers. About 2.5 lakh CSCs at Gram Panchayats and 1.5 lakh post offices deliver government and digital services to citizens, especially in rural areas.[9]

4. E–Governance (Reforming Government through Technology): uses electronic systems to improve efficiency, transparency, and accountability. It converts manual processes into automated systems, providing online access to applications, databases, and services.[10]

5. e–Kranti (National e–Governance Plan 2.0): restructured the earlier NeGP launched in 2006. It expanded Mission Mode Projects from 31 to 44, emphasizing integration, process re–engineering, and the use of mobile and cloud technologies under the vision "Transforming e–Governance for Transforming Governance".[11]

6. Information for All: ensures open access to government information through digital platforms like MyGov.in, enabling transparency, citizen participation, and two–way communication.[12]

7. Electronics Manufacturing – Target Net Zero: Imports promotes domestic electronics production using digital technologies and IoT, aiming to reduce imports through incentives, skill development, and government procurement.[13]

8. IT for Jobs: focuses on training youth, especially in rural and small towns, to create employment in the IT and telecom sectors.[14]

9. Early Harvesting Programmes: include quick–implementation projects such as biometric attendance, e–greetings, and mass digital messaging systems.[15]

Challenges In Implementation of Digital Governance in India:

1. Lack of Education: One of the foremost obstacles is the educational gap in India. A considerable portion of the population, especially in rural areas, lacks the necessary digital literacy and skills to use digital devices and technology. This makes it difficult for them to access and benefit from the Digital India Programme, which heavily relies on digital tools and services.[16]

2. Lack of Infrastructure and Technology: Effective implementation of the Digital India campaign relies on robust technological infrastructure, which is still lacking in many parts of the country. Basic amenities like reliable internet connectivity, hardware, and software required for

digital initiatives are not readily available, especially in rural areas. Overloaded servers and slow internet speeds can hamper the program's effectiveness.[17]

3. Financial and Technical Issues: India, despite its rapid growth, is still a developing nation, and funding a large–scale program like Digital India can be a challenge. The country often needs financial assistance from external sources to sustain such initiatives. Additionally, technical challenges such as inadequate bandwidth, cybersecurity, and the lack of proper tools and resources can hinder the program's success.[18]

4. Cybercrimes and Lack of Confidence: Concerns about cybersecurity and data privacy can deter people from engaging in online transactions and using digital services. India needs to strengthen its cyber laws and enforcement mechanisms to ensure people's confidence in digital platforms.[19]

Recommendations for the success of Digital Governance in India:

· Indian government needs to start providing digital literacy to every other citizen.

· To create impact of Digital India to be realized, we have to use technology to solve problems faced by Indians and for that we need a very strong culture of grounds–up frugal innovation in IT.

· Our recommendation to the government would be to set up PPP forums in each of these segments to invite industry to participate in areas where they have the domain expertise and interest.

· What is needed now is an unprecedented focus and the will to make it happen across both government and industry.

· The one area where this kind of a model is needed with a high level of urgency is in developing the culture of innovation in India.

· The government must encourage open global standards that will enable India to benefit from the best technology worldwide.

· The government should also focus on sustainable development and basic facilities of rural areas before providing them digital services. These two have to go hand–in–hand.

Conclusion:

Digital India initiative has been launched on July 1, 2015 (1.13 lakh

crore cost) with a vision to digitally empower each and every citizen of the country. Though the plan is ready and we are good to go. But it is not that easy to transform words written on a 'white paper' into a reality. The foremost challenge is to increase digital literacy in the country. To make broadband affordable and accessible, one needs to keep in mind certain ground realities. India is a diversified country, in terms of language, culture, laws which vary from states to states. Complete integration, that is integration of technology and language, is one of the main challenges the mission would face in its implementation. In a world where Internet and cybercrime are inseparable enemies. The entire architecture should be designed in such a way that there is proper authentication done of all the documents put online by citizens and it is available to the right users at any time they want with the right authentication, so proper security measures need to be taken by government.

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