Digital governance in India: Evolution, initiatives and significance

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Abstract

Digital governance is also known as electronic governance, internet governance, online governance, transformational governance, and connected governance. The term "e-governance" refers to the utilization of information and communication technology for the purposes of public governance by the government or other public entities. India as a nation , is based primarily on bureaucratic system. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has now provided the means to provide its users with quicker, cheaper, more precise and easier communication, quality facilities, efficient storage, efficient work, data processing and sharing and use of information. India is entering a new era of digital governance as the country undergoes a widespread digital revolution. The Information Technology Act, 2000 was India's first piece of IT-related legislation, the result of advancements throughout the 1990s. The national e-governance plan came along in 2006, followed by NeGP2.0 in 2015 through which different governance transformational initiatives were initiated. This paper intends to present the concept of digital governance in India. It also throws light on some major initiatives of digital governance undertaken in India from time to time and significance. The term e-governance and digital governance have been interchangeably used in the paper.

Keywords: ICT, digital governance, NeGP, Mission mode projects.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies can help change the way people work in a number of ways, such as by making it easier for the government to serve its citizens, by making it easier for the government to work with business and industry, by giving citizens more power by giving them access to information and letting them help make decisions, and by making the government run more efficiently. e-Governance isn't just about putting in place or using technology tools; it also aims to change the way people think and work so that government processes and functions can work better for the people. In this process, it's important for the government to be able to take feedback and for everyone to sign an innovative social agreement that shows they all share responsibility for the transformation processes.

E-Governance/digital governance is the application of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) to government functioning in order to create 'Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent' (SMART) governance. E-Governance attempts to make interactions between government and citizens (G2C), government and businesses (G2B), and inter-government ties (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and affordable. In other words e-Governance is the process of using information technology to automate both the government's internal tasks and its interactions with citizens and other companies. Automation of internal operations cuts costs and improves response times. It also lets government processes be more complicated, which makes them more effective. Automation of interactions with citizens lowers costs for both the government and the people, which is good for the business. In today's world, e-governance has evolved to the point where it is an essential component of public administration. There is a concerted effort being made by nations all over the world to advance electronic governance through a variety of means. E-governance

is being actively promoted at all levels of government in India, which has prompted the country to launch a number of projects in this direction.

Research Methodology

Data and information presented in the study are collected from various sources which include journals, research papers and government publications. Information has also been collected from various authentic websites.

Objectives

1. To study the evolution of e-governance in India.
2. To focus on initiatives of e-governance in India.
3. To discuss the significance of e-governance in India.

Digital governance in India

In the 1990s, the World Wide Web led to a global trend towards increased IT adoption by governments.

The technology and e-governance initiatives have advanced significantly. The rise of internet and mobile connectivity has led citizens to utilize these new access methods in various ways. As people increasingly rely on online information and services from government and corporate entities, a new era of 'e-citizenship' is emerging.

In India, the e-Governance scenario has advanced far beyond the computerization of government departments. India is presently one of the top countries in the field of e-Governance. The emphasis currently is on expanding the reach of governance so that it can have a significant impact on the general public.

Evolution of E-Governance in India

The Department of Electronics was created by the Government of India in 1970. The foundation of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in 1977 was India's first significant move toward e-Governance. In 1987, NICNET was launched. The District Information System of the National Informatics Centre (DISNIC) program was started to computerize all district offices in the country. Thus, by 1990, NICNET had been extended to all district headquarters. In May 1998, a National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development was established. In 1999, a separate ministry for information and technology was established. The Indian Parliament passed the Information Technology Act in the year 2000. In the IT Act, 2000, there are special provisions under Chapter III to grant legal recognition to electronic records, signature, and also encourage the government and its agencies to use them.

Digital governance projects in India

There have been a number of e-governance initiatives initiated by various state governments across the country. Some of them include

1) **Project Friends, Kerela**.

FRIENDS (Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services) is a single point of contact that allows citizens to pay their taxes and other financial obligations to the state government. Electricity and water bills, revenue taxes, application fees, registration costs for vehicles, university tuition, and other payments are among the things that residents can pay.

2) **Project Gyandoot, Madhya Pradesh**

Gyandoot is a Government to Citizen (G2C) service delivery program centered on the Intranet. It was started in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh in January 2000 with the dual goals of giving pertinent information to the rural populace and serving as a link between the district administration and the people. Computers were initially placed in 20 village panchayat centers and connected to the District Rural Development Authority in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh. The Gyandoot network provides services including income certificates, domicile certificates, rural Hindi newspapers, public grievance redressal systems, agricultural information, etc.

3) **Project Smartgov, Andhra Pradesh**

Andhra Pradesh Secretariat uses this G2G project. Before SmartGov was implemented, the secretariat relied on paper files for information processing and officer-to-officer communication. The SmartGov system automates workflows and manages knowledge to improve efficiency and streamline operations. Using SmartGov, government organizations can automate their processes and switch from a hard copy to an electronic one. SmartGov replaces paper files with e-files providing capabilities including creation, movement, tracking, and closure.

4) **Project Bhoomi, Karnataka**

This initiative focuses on managing land records in Karnataka. Transparency in land records administration improves citizen services and reduces discretion for civil workers at operating levels.

The Karnataka Revenue Department, with technical support from the National Informatics Centre, implemented the BHOOMI system statewide. The BHOOMI has digitized over 20 million land ownership records.

5) **Lokvani Origin, Uttar Pradesh**

The inception of this program occurred in 2004, wherein an agreement was signed with the District Government to incorporate supplementary e-government amenities through the utilization of pre-existing machine kiosks. The initiative sought to provide people of the district with access to information pertaining to government services, land documents, and an electronic method for resolving disputes. The procedural mechanism for addressing complaints involved the submission of a petition to the office of the district magistrate, which was subsequently forwarded to the relevant department for further consideration.

6) **SARI Origin, Tamil Nadu**

The Sari project, also known as Sustainable Access in Rural India, was implemented in the Madurai District of Tamil Nadu State in the year 2000. Its primary objective was to establish connectivity amongst rural kiosks through the utilization of wireless technology. The proclaimed targets are to enhance the standard of living among individuals residing in rural areas who are economically disadvantaged, through the creation of employment prospects facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT). The kiosks will offer electronic government services in addition to medical, employment, and financial resources.

7) **TARAhaat, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh**

TARAhaat, which translates to "Star Market place" in Hindi, serves as a platform that connects rural consumers to various markets, social amenities, leisure activities, and information. This is achieved through a network of franchised cyber centers that are customized to cater to the language preferences of the users. TARAhaat effectively provides all three essential components of rural connectivity, namely material resources, access to services, and fulfillment of needs. The formulation of TARAhaat was based on the assumption that it will be acquired and utilized by individuals who exhibit significant disparities in terms of literacy, vocabulary, financial capacity, and comprehension levels.

NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PLAN 1.0

The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) takes a comprehensive look at e-Government efforts across the country, combining them into a unified vision. A vast countrywide infrastructure stretching down to the most remote communities is growing around this concept, and large-scale digitalization of documents is going underway to provide easy, dependable access over the internet. As stated in the NeGP Vision Statement, the ultimate goal is to bring governmental services closer to citizens.

On May 18, 2006, the government approved the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), which included 27 Mission Mode Projects and eight components. In 2011,

four projects - Health, Education, PDS, and Posts - were added to the list of 27 MMPs, bringing the total to 31 MMPs. The goal, approach, strategy, major components, implementation methodology, and management structure for NeGP have been approved by the government. However, acceptance of NeGP does not imply financial approval(s) for all Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and components under it. Existing or ongoing MMP initiatives being executed by various Central Ministries, States, and State Departments would be appropriately upgraded and enhanced to match with NeGP objectives.

Various policy initiatives and projects have been launched to construct core and support infrastructure in order to promote e-Governance holistically. State Data Centres (SDCs), State Wide Area Networks (S.W.A.N), Common Services Centres (CSCs), and middleware gateways such as National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (NSDG), State e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG), and Mobile e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (MSDG) are the major core infrastructure components. Core rules and guidelines on security, HR, citizen engagement, and social media, as well as standards relating to metadata, interoperability, enterprise architecture, and information security, are all important support components. New initiatives include e-Pramaan, an authentication framework, and G-I cloud, a cloud computing program that will ensure the benefits of cloud computing for e-Governance projects.

State Wide Area Networks (SWANs) are one of the NeGP's main infrastructure components, and were designed as a converged backbone network for phone, video, and data communications throughout all States and Union Territories. It intends to build a specialized closed user group (CUG) network with a minimum speed of 2 Mbit/s by connecting about 7500 points of presence (PoPs) and providing data, voice, and video connectivity to over 50,000 government offices. It also intends to provide dependable vertical and horizontal connection inside the State / UT administration, as well as to ease electronic transactions across all government departments. The National Knowledge Network (NKN) is being used to connect SWANs from all Indian states. States such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh have already joined the National Knowledge Network.

Common Services Centers (CSC) are multi-services-in-a-single-point models that provide facilities for various transactions in a single geographical area. The primary goal of these centers is to provide a physical facility for the delivery of Government of India e-Services to rural and distant places where computer and Internet access is currently little or non-existent. The goal is to build 100,000 CSC in 600,000 rural and distant sites across India.

"Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man."

The concept of e-Governance originated in India in the 1970s, focusing on in-house government applications for defense, economic monitoring, planning, and data-intensive functions like elections, census, and tax administration. The National Informatics Center (NIC) made tremendous progress in connecting district headquarters in the 1980s.

Since the 1990s, IT and ICT technologies have been used for broader sectoral applications, with a focus on rural areas and incorporating contributions from NGOs and the business sector.

NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PLAN 2.0

Given the country's vital need for e-Governance, mobile Governance, and Good Governance, the strategy and main components of e-Kranti :National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) 2.0 has been approved by the government. It is a follow-up to the important decisions made in the first meeting of the Apex Committee on the Digital India project in November 2014, which were approved by the Union Cabinet on March 25, 2015, with the aim of "Transforming e-Governance for Transforming Governance." The Department of Electronics and Information Technology (Deity) has envisioned this program.

Objectives of e-Kranti

- To redefine NeGP through transformational and outcome-oriented e-Governance initiatives.
- Improve the portfolio of citizen-focused services.
- Ensure optimal utilization of core Information and Communication Technology (ICT) .
- Promote rapid replication and integration of e-Governance applications.
- To utilize innovative technologies.
- To utilize more adaptive implementation models.

Key principles of e-Kranti

- **Transformation and not Transl**ation - All e-Kranti project proposals must significantly improve service quality, quantity, delivery, productivity, and competitiveness.
- **Integrated Services and not Individual Services** –Integrated citizen service delivery requires common middleware and back-end process and processing system integration.
- **Government Process Reengineering (GPR)** –For all new MMPs, GPR must be the first step before a project may be approved. GPR should be assessed and improved for MMPs.

- **ICT Infrastructure on Demand** – Government departments should have on-demand connection, cloud, and mobile platforms. The advanced project formulation of National Information Infrastructure (NII) would be fast-tracked by DeitY.
- **Cloud by Default** –Cloud technologies' flexibility, agility, and cost-effectiveness would be fully utilized while creating and hosting applications. Government Cloud will be the default cloud for all government agencies.
- **Mobile First** – All applications are designed/redesigned to allow for service delivery via mobile.

- **Fast Tracking Approvals** – After the Competent Authority approves a project's Detailed Project Report (DPR), empowered committees can make all further decisions to expedite MMP approval.
- **Mandating Standards and Protocols** – All e-governance projects must follow DeitY-notified standards and protocols.
- **Language Localization** –All information and services in e-Governance projects must be in Indian languages
- **National GIS (Geo-Spatial Information System)** –E-Governance initiatives to use NGIS as a platform and service
- **Security and Electronic Data Preservation** - All online apps and e-services must follow cyber security guidelines. Deity's 2013 National Cyber Security Policy must be followed.

The e-Kranti initiative is the principal support system for the Digital India program. "Transforming e-Governance for

Transforming Governance" is the vision that e-Kranti has for the future of government. E-Kranti's mission is to ensure a transformation of the entire government by delivering all government services electronically to citizens through integrated and interoperable systems via multiple modes, all while ensuring the effectiveness, transparency, and stability of such services at affordable costs.

Its methodology is completely congruent with the goals of the Digital India program. The programme management structure that was approved for the Digital India programme would be utilized for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of e-Kranti as well as providing a forum to ascertain the views of all stakeholders, supervising implementation, resolving inter-Ministerial issues, and ensuring the speedy sanctioning of projects. These are all goals that the programme management structure would accomplish. Key components of the management structure would include a Monitoring Committee on Digital India headed by the Prime Minister, a Digital India Advisory Group chaired by the Minister of Communications and IT, an Apex Committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, and the Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) / Committee on Non Plan Expenditure. These committees would be responsible for giving approval to projects in accordance with the financial provisions. Other key components of the management structure would include the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCE). The Apex Committee would be led by the Cabinet Secretary, and its responsibilities would include the addition or deletion of Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) that are deemed to be acceptable, as well as the resolution of conflicts that arise between ministerial departments. There are 44 Mission Mode Projects under e-Kranti, which are at various stages of implementation.

Significance of digital governance

Transforming lives: The government has promoted digitisation through 'Digital India', 'Make in India', and 'Skill India' to promote economic inclusion and social change. Thus, India is preparing for digitalization. E-governance is crucial to spreading the advantages of digitalization-driven economic growth to all sectors of society. Catalyzing government operations using technology and citizen-centricity to make society safer, more efficient, and sustainable.

Good governance: The complexity of Indian governance requires a holistic approach. Shedding obsolete ways and adopting new technology in governance will lead to faster, smarter, and more proactive government for citizens in the digital era.

Real Time Governance: Technological services allow the government to quickly resolve public complaints and monitor infrastructure projects, incidents, and weather and environmental issues across the state with E-Governance.

Ease of Business: The country's economic growth depends on doing business. Timely project approval and policy tracking can be made easier using E-governance.

Ease of services: E-governance includes digitizing land records, resolving grievances and maintaining key services, facilitating tax payments and government dues, and providing services online. It accelerated work culture, reduced inefficiencies, and improved services.

Modern problems: With the whole world heading to digitisation, government must use modern governance ways to combat emerging risks like cyber fraud and fake news.

Cost Reduction: Stationary costs consume most government spending. Stationary, printers, computers, etc. are needed for paper-based communication, which is expensive. Internet and cellphones reduce government costs by lowering communication costs.

Transparency: The application of ICT makes governance transparent. Most

government information is online. Citizens can view information anytime. E-governance reduces corruption by tracking government actions online.

Accountability: The Government will be held accountable as the process of governance becomes more open to the public. The government's accountability is its duty to answer to the public.

In a country as large, culturally diverse, and technologically advanced as India, administration presents a difficult issue. Here is where new technologies step in to make massive transformations possible and provide a hand in the execution of ambitious government objectives. Digital governance is therefore essential in order to make governance more efficient and user-friendly so that it can better meet the requirements of the people.

Conclusion

Digital governance is the most effective answer to the problem of inefficient service delivery since it boosts the productivity of administrative agencies. In addition to this, it ensures the timely delivery of services, maintains openness throughout the job, and reduces the overall cost of providing services to both the government and its citizens. E-governance is the answer to improving the delivery of services while also holding officers accountable for their actions. Utilization of existing resources is, at the very least, one of the most important aspects of e-governance. In order to improve the efficiency with which it provides its services to the public, the Government of India has already embarked on a number of mission-mode projects to digitize its many administrative departments. This is a positive step for India in the direction of achieving its goal of being a developed society in which service providers are held to a higher standard of accountability.

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