E-Governance in India – A New Perspective

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ABSTRACT

India is a land of extreme living. On one side of the lifestyle we find people living in extreme richness, highly educated, accepting technological changes in all walks of life and flexible to changing cultures of the society. On the other hand, we also find people living in poverty, illiterates or moderately educated, conservative to the technological changes and who still believe in age old customs and practices. Inspite of such extremity one common feature that describes both the sects is the usage of electronic media. The world of internet has not only eased but has also smartened the way of working in all spheres of life. Of the many advantages of E-media, its usage in the governance is deemed to be a boon to the society. E-Governance has made Governing more transparent to the people and the people more clear to the Administration. But India being a land of diversity, the acceptability of E-governance too faces umpty number of challenges in its implementation and usage. This paper makes an effort to list some of the issues and challenges in the implementation of e-governance in India.

KEYWORDS

Highly educated; technological changes; electronic media; E-Governance; Internet; Challenges and Implementation

1. INTRODUCTION

The world's drift towards increased usage of Information and Technology (IT) is opening a whole new chapter of working and easing up the routines in life. With the birth of World Wide Web during the nineties the world seems to have shrunk in its size making both the ends of the world meet at an unimaginable pace. The technology as well as e-governance initiatives 1 have come a long way since then. Internet has connected the world in such a web that citizens are learning to exploit their new mode of access in wide ranging ways. Their expectations from the government and corporate organizations have increased fourfold to ease their civic, professional and personal lives, thus creating a new form of "e-citizenship" [2]. Internet is playing an important role in enhancing the work culture by supporting various activities like better delivery of government services to citizens, improved government interactions with businesses, citizen involvement in decision making, and easy access to required information enabling a more effectual management of governmental affairs. E-Governance is not only a tool to introduce new technological tools but is also striving to bring about an attitudinal change in the mindset and work culture. Governance is meticulous manoeuvre of social systems. It is a process of directing, controlling and organizing the societal elements in a way to be held accountable for their actions to maintain peace, harmony and systematic arrangement. E-governance involves contemporary style leadership, investment methods, decision-making, education system, citizen approachability along with methodical information and service structure[3]. India is a

land of extreme living. On one side of the lifestyle we find people living in extreme richness, highly educated, accepting technological changes in all walks of life and flexible to changing cultures of the society. On the other hand, we also find people living in poverty, illiterates or moderately educated, conservative to the technological changes and who still believe in age old customs and practices. Inspite of such extremity one common feature that describes both the sects is the usage of electronic media. The world of internet has not only eased but has also smartened the way of working in all spheres of life. Of the many advantages of E-media, its usage in the governance is deemed to be a boon to the society. E-Governance has made Governing more transparent to the people and the people more clear to the Administration. But India being a land of diversity, the acceptability of E-governance too faces umpty number of challenges in its implementation and usage. This paper makes an effort to list some of the issues and challenges in the implementation of e-governance in India. This paper is divided into eight sections. The first section introduces the topic of the paper. The second section defines E-Governance and its importance in the development of a nation. A brief review of the literature on E-Governance is discussed in the third section. The fourth section speaks of E-Governance in India; Advantages of E-Governance is given in the fifth section. The sixth section highlights the issues and the seventh points out to the challenges of implementing E-Governance in India. And finally the eighth section draw out conclusions and make a call for further research in evaluating solutions to meet the challenges in implementing better E-Governance.

2. E-GOVERNANCE – DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

The term Governance takes its birth in an ancient Greek word, Kebernon, which means to steer. In its present usage, to govern means to steer, to control and to influence from a position of authority. E-governance had gained a lot of popularity in recent times with no proper definition. Nations define e-governance in accordance with their aims and objectives. Both the terms viz; e-government and e-governance are often used interchangeably. A few popular definitions that cover most of the features of an electronic government are by World Bank and UNESCO. World Bank defines e-governance as "E-Government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/ or cost reductions." UNESCO defined e-governance as

"Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs, including citizens' articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations. E-Governance may be understood as the performance of this governance via the electronic medium in order to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public, and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities."

E-governance is an ICT application assisting informational and transactional services within the government, between the governments and acts as a bridge between the government and the citizen [4]. E-Governance consists of information technology, people and governments [5]. It assists the citizens in free access to information and communication transactions enabling smooth execution of governmental administration. It further enhances the productivity of governmental operation [6]. Further, it is the application of IT to the process of governance to bring Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) governance [7]. Prefixing the word Governance with 'E' implies the usage of ICT (Information & Communication Technologies) in transforming the relation of government with its citizens, business and other government entities. Effective ICT usage results in creating job and earning opportunities; improvement in the access and delivery of basic services like health and education and increasing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of institutions [8].

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different countries have different resources and capabilities. It is possible to imagine 24x7 electronic interactions with the government in developed countries but it is difficult to achieve the same level of efficiency and flexibility in developing counties [9]. Government throughout the world are in quest of finding novel ways to deliver public services more efficiently and effectively to reach people at large [10]. Moreover, due to non-availability of any accepted e-governance framework some countries and agencies of implementation are yet at the stage of simulation or at stages of experimentation. Majority of the developing nations are prey to e-governance application experimentation. The reason being either lack of sufficient research on their state affairs or an attempt to copy the conventional patterns [11]. E-Government was initially envisioned E-Government was initially envisioned to improve communications within the government framework by means of an effective intranet system [12][13] expounds an effective government to be technically competent and adaptive to innovative dynamics. In addition e-governance broadened its scope with improved information and transactional broadcasting applications. Latest e-governance manifested better astounding service applications. Multitudinous services like utility services, tax services, permits/license services or fine payments are made online. Citizens are now facilitated to complain or report any governmental administrative disservice [14]. E-governance has changed the government-citizen intercommunication in a positive fashion [15]. The emphasis is on fostering transparency, communication, and participation 16, 17 refers to digital democracy as "processes carried out online -- communicating with fellow citizens and elected representatives about politics." Nugent outlined digital democracy as a practical approach utilizing web based methods to safeguard and enrich democratic values in state. [18] highlighted the government-citizen intercommunication in a comparative manner characterized thereby as digital and traditional democracy. Although in both the types the communication is percolated through deputed public servant but digital democracy opens up direct communication of public and elected officials with citizens shaping a more transparent and reliable system. In the context of digital democracy, there are two viewpoints regarding the use of the Internet to transform the relationship between government and citizens [19] argues that publicizing information used in the development of government policies would allow citizens to be more fully involved in the democratic process. The alternative view is less optimistic, and is centered on the premise that bringing about change in institutions and behaviour patterns is a sluggish and problematic process, unless carefully moderated, digital-based forums can become chaotic [20]. However, the e-Government challenge is not a technological one. The significance of administrative digitization is to redesign citizen approach by government to strengthen government-citizen relationship. Technology is rather a tool than the goal. Technologies are to boost the quality of government-citizen intercommunication. Thus the challenge is to augment governmental facilities using technology that in turn would embellish citizen lives [21] rather, the challenge is to use technologies to improve the capacities of government institutions, while improving the quality of life of citizens by redefining the relationship between citizens and their government [21].

4. E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

As per the stage of development Priorities of nations differ. India has always initiated good change and the same in adoption of e-governance. India is among those few initiators of e-governance among developing countries. In the year 2000 India began the Gyandoot project in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. Gyandoot project is considered to be a low cost and sustainably efficacious project. The program was misunderstood as a technological upgrade though it was more of a reform. The projected was drafted to rebuild front-end offices but failed due to deficiencies at the back-end that is supposed to support the front-end. The idea and the effort were to create pressure from the community front-end for digitisation of back-end departmental processes. The rural e-Seva project implemented in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh state emerged to be the most systematic and effective endeavour during the first phase of e-governance in India between the years 2000 and 2005. As for community level front end development two initiatives, N-logue and Drishti stand out, each of which at one time claimed to be running thousands of community telecentres across the country that could deliver e-governance services. The National E-Governance Plan (NeGP) in the year 2006 was the inception of second phase of e-governance in India. NeGP's flagship project sought to set up about 100,000 Common Service Centres (CSCs) across India, one for every six villages [22]. NeGP has been able to provide a NeGP has been able to provide the exigency of e-governance, needed working techniques and financial support for extensive adoption of e-governance in both the central and state governments. Such a catalytic action, and perhaps creating an environment for competitive performance, was very much needed in the initial phase. A promising recent policy initiative is the Electronic Services Delivery (EDS) Bill. The legislation made compulsion on all government agencies to function in electronic mode.

5. ADVANTAGES OF E-GOVERNANCE

E-Governance has become a jargon of efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of exchange of information and transaction between governments, citizens and businesses. The usual areas where the citizens transact with the government are to avail the services like,

Telecommunication, Transportation, Post, Medical facilities, Electricity, Education, Certification, Registration, Licensing, Taxation, Passports, and ID-cards etc. To deal with the government in any/many of these areas is known to be a tedious and a cumbersome job [23]. E-Governance has provided relief by increasing the pace of the transactions through the usage of internet and phones; paperless offices, transparency in the policies and procedures and in creation of accountability. E-Governance aims to build an informed society, increase government and citizen interaction, encourage citizen participation in the governance thus helping the government to administer better and to empower the common citizen.

6. ISSUES OF E-GOVERNANCE

E-Governance is fairly a complex process of creating and harnessing the right environment that consists of people who are committed to the cause and who have the right knowledge, skill sets, and attitude. Learning the potentiality of E-Governance in improving the life of masses certain issues related to technology, management and funds need to be highlighted. Internet is now being made available to the common man at his finger tips. This has enlightened him to understand the intricacies of the minute function and provide him confidence in achieving the impossible. The issues related to technology deals with creating networks, inventing softwares and hardwares to allow the functioning of the networks and making them user or application friendly [24]. Technological issues further connect us to understand issues related to managing the change. Prior to e-governance it is essential to review the political process. A constant review assists in identifying the loopholes in the system to frame a more efficient e-governance application. As the purpose of e-governance is better administrative performance and citizen friendly government, the policy formulation process should be critically challenged before its implementation. There is a need to scrape off the unproductive traditional models and mould into novel virtual communities that are value added for the present generation networked citizen [24]. A good change is always needed whether in general management or governmental management. Management of change is successful only if it's adaptive to trending technology. Adaptation of latest technology provides better reasonable government as well. The most important issue is to provide funds for the select pilot projects. The real challenge for the government is to go about funding the full range of initiatives in order to achieve the objective of "Government Online"26. The other important issues of concern are the inter-operability of various governments and integration of data; maintaining the privacy and security of the transactions; establishing the authenticity of the citizens requesting the services needed; Accessibility, usability and acceptability of internal and external structure of public sectors; use of local languages and creating awareness in the rural areas [27].

7. CHALLENGES OF E-GOVERNANCE

One of the important features of new technology is low cost. This low cost is usually in long run process. Technologies succeed if it is cost effective as the crucial challenge is low cost and quality service. Even more challenging, new expectations are being created as digital consumers discover what all possible to do online [28]. E-governance involves not only managing technology but also managing organizational change [29]. Lack of financial support, open access of application, n number of users, bottlenecks of officialdom and less skilled personnel are few of the major hindrances to e-governance development [30]. India is a land of many languages; the diversity of people in context of language is a huge challenge for implementing e-Governance. Literacy level in general and IT literacy in particular is at low level in India. This creates an obstacle in implementation of e-Governance projects; creating awareness, user friendly government websites, making these websites accessible even in the remote areas are minor yet important challenges that need to be resolved for the successful implementation of E-governance [31]

The government should look at providing a 'single window' means for delivery of multiple citizen services. Probably, the best approach would be to encourage citizens to avail e-services from the citizen-portal. The Common Services Centres (CSC) scheme of the Government is a step in the right direction with increased access of ICT infrastructure to the citizens. We should be able to design a delivery mechanism which provides easy and affordable access to a host of most needed services at the citizen-portal. A sound e-governance portal not only facilitates citizen to approach government but also build reliability and assurance among citizens towards public services. It is important that the system adds value for the citizen in terms of saving time, avoiding delays and eliminating harassment. An efficiently researched e-governance framework takes a lead for quality life of citizens. This will boost the productivity of the country as a whole. It is important to create an enabling environment and atmosphere to conceptualize, design, develop, implement and adopt the best e-Governance solutions.

The basic standards for a successful implementation of e-governance in a nation are:
a. E-Governance framework across the nation with enough bandwidth to provide service to a population of one billion.
b. Connectivity framework for making the services reaches rural areas of the country or development of alternative means of services such as e-governance kiosks in regional languages.
c. National Citizen Data base which is the primary unit of data for all governance vertical and horizontal applications across the state and central governments.
d. E-governance and interoperability standards for the exchange of secure information with non-repudiation, across the state and central government departments seamlessly.
e. A secure delivery framework by means of virtual private network connecting across the state and central government departments.
f. Data centres in centre and states to handle the departmental workflow automation, collaboration, interaction, exchange of information with authentication32.

8. CONCLUSION

India, inspite of its diversity in its formation and unity is at its best efforts to keep the democracy working. E-Governance is emerging as tool to keep the government responsible for their policies and the citizens authoritative in making the government work to their satisfaction. India is on the track of keeping itself updated in all aspects of technology, what is still needed is to make every Indian literate in terms of technology and flexibility to adopt and adapt changes. The above mentioned issues and challenges are not beyond our capacity to resolve, but they need a commitment and immediate attention

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