

Fostering Inclusion through Technology: E-Participation as Pathway to Better Governance in India

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Abstract: Participation of general public in governmental policies and that of decision-making endeavours constitutes an important aspect of democracy. Applying Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the framework of citizen engagement has the prospective to allow more and more people to get involved the processes of governance. Nowadays, e-governance techniques and procedures are key reserves for accelerating government services and interaction with the public and establishments. e Participation facilitates the government's transition to public-centred governance to achieve citizen empowerment. The Digital India programme launched to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The current study tries to explore and understand the role of ICT and other digital platforms in enhancing citizen participation in Governance.

Keywords: ICT, E Participation, Digital India, Digital Delivery of Services

Introduction

Electronic participation is a core component of e-governance. It leverages digital platforms to enhance citizen engagement, transparency, and inclusivity in governance. Digital technologies provide opportunities and channels for such involvement for the general populace (Pinto, Macadar, & Pereira, 2023). e-government channels empower communication between governing bodies and citizens by enabling effective participation among all stakeholders(e-participation) (Mustafa, Rafiq , Jhamat, Arshad, & Rana , 2024). e Participation describes the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to accelerate civilian engagement and involvement, both direct and indirect, in Governmental activities, involving that of administration processes, public service delivery, policymaking etc. e participation letting citizens, public administrators, and Politicians to interact and interrelate through Digital platforms. It is highlighted as a key dimension of governance and one of the pillars of sustainable development (United Nations, 2024).

E-Participation refers to the use of ICT by the public and government to interact, create spaces and new opportunities for collaboration, and influence public decision-making (Coelho, Cunha, & Pozzebon, 2022). This advancement not only improves service delivery but also contributes to broader socio-economic development (Kumar, Sachan, & Mukherjee , 2023). An important facilitator for all of these types of e-

participation is e-information, i.e. information through electronic means, is necessary to inform and encourage citizens to participate (Roztocki, Strzelczyk, & Weistroffer, 2024). The relevance of e-participation originated from the need to answer the diffused lack of trust in governments caused by reforms and some political crises that featured the beginning of the twenty-first century (Royo, Bello, Torres, & Downe, 2023).

Electronic involvement

E-Participation relates specifically to engagement with citizens and external stakeholders, a set of technology-facilitated participatory processes, both deliberative and decision oriented (Welch, 2012). Electronic involvement (e-participation), for example, can be critical in fostering larger participation in decision-making and public policy (Tavares, M, & J, 2020). e-participation offers added suitable pathway to citizen involvement through personal computers, tablets, or mobile phones. e-Participation may grab multiple forms, including that of e-deliberation, e-consultation, e-voting, e-petitioning e lobbying, and e-referendum (Roztocki, Strzelczyk, & Weistroffer, 2024).

Table:1 E-Participation vs. Traditional Participation

Aspect	E-Participation (Digital)	Traditional Participation (In-person)
Accessibility	High; location and time independent	Limited; requires physical presence
Inclusivity	Greater; reaches diverse and remote groups	Often limited by geography and resources
Simplicity	Higher; user-friendly digital interfaces	May be complex for some participants
Time Efficiency	Fast; instant feedback and communication	Slower; dependent on scheduled meetings
Cost	Lower; reduced logistical expenses	Higher; venue, travel, and material costs
Transparency	Enhanced; real-time information sharing	Less transparent; slower dissemination
Empowerment	High; direct citizen involvement in decision making	Varies; often less direct
Security/Privacy	Digital data risks; needs robust cybersecurity	Physical security; less data vulnerability

Sources: Compiled from (Alon-Barkat & Busuioc, 2024) (G.V Pereira,M.A Macadar & M.GTesta,, 2024) (Fischer, Kakabadse, Mossberger, & & Le Blank, 2020)

As such e-participation is a necessary subset of participation and e-governance, both for intrinsic and instrumental reasons (Blanc, 2020) Intrinsic in the sense that e-participation is a desirable element when building inclusive, participatory and trust-based societies – which are key principles for sustainable societies. Instrumental in the sense that e-participation increases government's accountability, improves public services delivery, enhances the legitimacy of governance processes and improves the quality and success of policies. The e-participation tools offer innovative platforms for public engagement in government decision-making,

which is vital to the process of democracy (Adnan, Ghazali, & Othman, 2022). The extensive kind of diffusion of Cyberspace based technologies make e-participation a very promising element of democratic processes.

The e participation transforms citizens from passive recipients to active contributors in policy and service design (Medaglia, 2022). It creates new spaces for dialogue and partnership between governments, civil society, and the public (Alon-Barkat & Busuioc, 2024). Citizen participation in the public policy decision-making process could result in more effective service delivery, which may increase opportunities for democratic involvement (Haesevoets, Roets, Severen, Dierckx, & Verschuere, 2023). By availing access to information and enabling feedback, e-participation fosters transparency and holds governments accountable to citizens (Medaglia, 2022). Various measures have been used in the literature on e-participation to gauge participation levels. Nonetheless, e-participation experts more frequently employ a three-point scale that differentiates between information provision. e participation has become a new potential factor for improving voice and accountability through the introduction of digital services and the transformation of governance (Maoa, Zhang, Zou, & Deng, 2025).

Table: 2 Five levels of e-participation

S.No	Level	Credentials
1	Level 1	Informing citizens, engaging them in a limited way. This level cannot be considered participation de facto but a one-way flow of information from the top (e.g., the government) to the bottom (e.g., citizens). Citizens are merely informed about the objectives and operative programs of public institutions
2	Level 2	It allows the collection of citizens' opinions and feedback on specific public initiatives. Governments establish the topics for consultation, formulate the questions, and oversee the procedure. Still, this level guarantees a limited degree of influence of participants in decision-making, as citizens are invited to contribute their opinions on confined topics.
3	Level 3	Involving and discussing and recognises a slightly higher level of influence. It entails community-building activities and engages citizens through multiple public discussion formats.
4	Level 4	Collaboration and participation, introduces a discrete degree of influence, operatively involving citizens in public initiatives (e.g., in experimentations with living labs) where people can offer innovative ideas and contribute to shaping public services.
5	Level 5	The empowerment of citizens who gain power and influence, namely the possibility to define the process of collaboration and steer its evolution in partnership with government.

Sources: Compiled from (Mariani, Mortati, Rizzo, & Deserti, 2025)

In e participation framework United Nation includes following three credentials, Firstly E information, whereby the government provides information to citizens. Global trends in sharing government information with the public are improving. 81 %of countries publish information on dedicated OGD portals, and 75 % provide geographic information system (GIS) or other geospatial data on their national portals.

Secondly E consultation whereby the government consults citizens on policy or on service delivery at different stages of the process and possibly provides feedback to them. Between 37 and 43 per cent of countries inform the public about upcoming consultations on education, employment, social protection, or justice-related issues.

Thirdly E decision making: whereby the government involves citizens in decision-making. People's voices have been heard and their feedback incorporated in actual decision-making in various sectors is found in far fewer countries (an average of 17 per cent) (United Nations, 2024).

E-participation has several benefits. It includes ; *Inclusiveness*: inclusion can be defined as the imperative for governments to reach all citizens; *Transparency*: Transparency is usually defined as the principle of enabling the public to gain information about the operations and structures, decision-making processes and outcomes and performance of the public sector.; *Accountability*: Participation (in combination with transparency) is often a key component of accountability mechanisms.; *Communication*: The exchange of information that takes place between governments to citizens. As part of e-government initiatives, many governments have created features for individual accounts and digital access to all government services on a portal (Blanc, 2020)

Table:3 Global and regional distribution of countries by E-Participation Index (EPI) 2024

	Low EPI	Middle EPI	High EPI	Very High EPI
193 -UN Member	48	58	42	45
Oceania	4	8	0	2
Europe	2	1	19	21
Asia	9	14	11	13
Americas	9	12	7	7
Africa	24	23	5	2

Source: Compiled from: (United Nations, 2024)

E-Participation and Inclusive Governance in India

E participation in India has attained newfangled momentum through India's instantaneous adoption of digital initiatives to renovate traditional or conventional governance models, reorganise governmental operations, expand service delivery intended to empower citizens by offering easy access to public services. Digital India is a flagship programme of the Government of India, launched on July 1, 2015, with the vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. India ranks as the third largest digitalised country in the world, behind the US and China. It has the world's second largest mobile and internet network by number of users (Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), 2025). The digital India programme is likely to benefit citizens by generating employment opportunities, creating new chances in regard to start-ups, quality of service delivery. The main objective of the program was to push

digitization and connectivity as a vehicle for boosted economic growth. (Borah, 2020). Digital India initiatives are making use of Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) that take advantage of mobile, social media, Cloud and data analytics in delivering citizen-centric, business-centric and government-centric services through mission-mode projects. India is at the cusp of a digital revolution for which Digital India is the vehicle. Pioneering Digital India efforts, such as Aadhaar - universal digital identity, Jan Dhan Yojana - financial inclusion to every household, targeted public distribution system food security to all eligible families, especially those below poverty line, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to all authenticated beneficiaries, Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (DISHA) – digital literacy in every household, Government eMarketplace (GeM) enabling product sellers and service providers to directly transact with government procurement agencies etc., are transforming India into a digitally empowered society & knowledge economy. Since 2020, the country has accelerated its e-information ecosystem through robust e-governance initiatives, digital infrastructure expansion, and citizen-centric platforms.

Under Digital India Programme India has augmented the e-information ecosystem by means of strategic e-governance initiatives, extended digital infrastructure, citizen-centric platforms etc. Some of these are;

DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) under Digital India programme. DigiLocker aims at 'Digital Empowerment' of citizen by providing access to authentic digital documents to citizen's digital document wallet. DigiLocker is a secure cloud-based platform for storage, sharing and verification of documents and certificates such as degree certificates and PAN cards, online. This reduces the reliance on physical documents and streamlines document sharing with government and private entities.

UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) provides a single platform for all Indian Citizens to access pan India e-Gov services ranging from Central to Local Government bodies. UMANG strives to be the one stop gateway to all government schemes and services through different channels like Mobile Application (iOS, Android), Chatbot, Voice Bot and Website. The motto is All Services and Schemes at one place, All Documents at one place, All Engagements at one place and All Transactions at one place .

Mobile Seva: Mobile Seva is an innovative initiative aimed at mainstreaming mobile governance in the country. It provides an integrated whole-of-government platform for all Government departments and agencies in the country for delivery of public services to citizens and businesses over mobile devices using SMS, USSD, IVRS, CBS, LBS, and mobile applications installed on mobile phones

Common Service Centres (CSCs): Common Services Centres are the access points for delivery of Government-to-Citizen (G2C) e-Services within the reach of the citizen, by creating the physical service delivery ICT infrastructure. It helps in making a transparent service delivery mechanism and reducing citizens' effort in visiting government offices

MyGov: An interactive platform for citizen engagement, MyGov allows users to participate in policy discussions, submit feedback, and collaborate on governance issues, fostering transparency and inclusivity, involves Groups, Do, Discuss, Poll/Survey, Blog, Talk, Campaigns, and Podcast.

Table: 4 Percentage of countries offering various e-participation mechanisms 2024

S.No	Description	Asia	Africa	Americas	Europe	Oceania
1	e-participation portal	57%	31%	40%	86%	14%
2	e-tools for public integrates consultation/ deliberation	72%	30%	49%	88%	36%
3	e-petition or similar mechanisms	45%	19%	34%	74%	14%
4	how people's voices are included in policy decision-making	38%	9%	29%	49%	36%
5	Portal provides a way for people to report corruption	81%	48%	57%	88%	57%

Source: Compiled from: (United Nations, 2024)

E consultation and decision making in India

E-consultation in India has swiftly grown since 2020, performing a pivotal task in both governance and deliverance of public services. e-consultation enables citizens, industry stakeholders, and government agencies to interact, provide feedback, and avail skilled suggestions and advice distantly. Accordingly, transparency, efficiency, and inclusivity have enhanced across diverse divisions. Substantial innovations in Online Consultations are;

Policy and Governance Consultations: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), under Government of India, is a stand-alone ministerial agency, responsible for formulating and implementing national policies and programs aimed at enabling the continuous development of the electronics and IT industry. MeitY's focus areas include the development, promotion, and regulation of the electronics and IT industry in India, fostering digital governance, enabling innovation in emerging technologies and promoting cybersecurity initiatives within country.

Infrastructure that supports e-consultation: The Digital India programme has furthered a robust digital infrastructure that supports e-consultation across various domains, including Education and Skilling- E-Counselling, Collab CAD, Collab GEO – Online Collaborative 2D Geometry Tool, Healthcare and Wellness-eSanjeevani, Ayush Information Hub (AIH), Aarogya Setu.

Through the integration of data driven systems, artificial intelligence (AI), and stout digital infrastructure allowed more transparent, efficient, and evidence-based decision-making processes at all levels of government. Significant E-Decision Making Apparatuses are; Digital Infrastructure and Platforms a-NeGD has been playing a pivotal role in supporting MeitY in Programme Management and implementation of e-

Governance Projects; providing technical and advisory support to Ministries and Departments, both at Central and State levels along with other Government organisations. NeGD manage the national digital platforms such as DigiLocker, UMANG, and my Scheme. Digital India Programme has created a comprehensive digital ecosystem, ensuring high-speed internet connectivity, digital identity, and digital payments, all of which are foundational for effective e-decision making; The adoption of decision support systems (DSS) powered by AI and big data analytics has revolutionized policymaking and public administration. These systems analyze vast datasets, identify trends and patterns, and provide actionable insights for government officials; Digital Operations Centres (DOCs) Gateway to Data-Driven and Evidence-Based Solutions for Informed Decision Making. Krishi DSS dynamically integrates data from state, central, and global levels, fostering a data-driven approach for sustainable agriculture; The Data Governance Quality Index (DGQI) The intent of the DGQI is to enable Ministries/ Departments and state departments to assess themselves at various levels of data maturity on the basis of a standardized framework, which in turn would facilitate deepening of digitization in the Government of India.

The DI initiative aims at reforming Government through technology and providing Electronic Delivery of Services (EDS). Governance and services on demand will stress on seamless integration of services across departments and jurisdictions and making services available in real time for both online and mobile platform. It would also bring in public accountability through mandated delivery of government's services electronically, a Unique ID and e-Pramaan based on authentic and standard interoperable and integrated government applications and data basis. Digital empowerment of citizens will lay emphasis on universal digital literacy and availability of digital resources/services in Indian languages.

India has evolved e participation rapidly over the last decade, the foremost influence behind this is the government's push for digital renovation and transformation and that of the cumulative diffusion of internet and mobile knowhow. The variety and accessibility of citizen e-participation platforms availed by the government, non-government establishments together with private actors are growing day by day. This marks a shift from the traditional top-down governance model to a more participatory approach, where citizens can interact directly with the government (Khan & Haider, 2025). Adoption and integration of evolving technologies, for instance Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), and Cloud Computing etc have been transmuting e-participation scenario in India, effecting governance broader and more inclusive. Efforts are being made to enhance digital inclusion in rural areas and ensure comprehensive and equitable e participation of each and every one, offering several level digital literacy training programmes to bridge the digital divide and generating digital content personalised to regional dialects and requirements.

Barriers of e Participation

The utilisation of digital technologies to enhance citizen involvement in governance has expanded universally. In spite of its budding potentials, numerous barriers persist to restrain its efficacy and inclusivity. Such issues are predominant amidst varied populations and frameworks. Digital divide denotes the inadequate or unequal access to digital technologies amongst the public. Socioeconomic condition, age, geographical setting etc attributed this divide, mitigating digital divide challenges is essential for the success of e-participation initiatives (Pinto, Macadar, & Pereira, 2023)

Digital accessibility allows people with various disabilities, such as visual, hearing, motor or intellectual problems, to use websites and mobile applications. Attention to these aspects is a measure of society's inclusiveness (Krok, 2024). dDigital infrastructure includes data centre and database management systems, meaning any municipality ought to be equipped with skilled personnel to ensure that data remains safely stored and protected at data centres and database management systems (Molobela, 2025) .E-government service providers may attach greater importance to factors that influence citizens' trust in e-governments such as trust in e-government, trust in internet, perceived risk, and privacy and security (Gupta, Hooda, Jeyaraj, Seddon, & Dwivedi, 2024). E-participation initiatives have often been conceived and implemented through a heavy focus on technology aspects, to the detriment of aspects of organizational change in public institutions and broader sociotechnological considerations (Blanc, 2020).

Table: 5 Barriers of e Participation

Barriers	Particulars
Non- Technical Barriers	➤ Low levels of confidence in politicians ➤ Lack of interest in public affairs despite technology enthusiasm ➤ Lack of citizens' willingness to produce content, reviews or feedback ➤ Lack of interest in political issues ➤ Lurking behaviour ➤ Privacy issues ➤ Wide and diverse range of political actors ➤ Unawareness of participation environments ➤ Lack of alignment between topics and citizens' priorities ➤ Lack of understanding of the content
Technical Barriers	➤ Integration of e-participation into actual government ➤ Digital illiteracy ➤ Lack of transparency ➤ Difficult internet access or IT equipment to participate ➤ Lack of accessibility

Sources: Compiled from (Mariani, Mortati, Rizzo, & Deserti, Design Thinking as a Strategic Approach to E-Participation From Current Barriers to Opportunities, 2025)

Here barriers are classified as Non- Technical Barriers and Technical Barriers. Some barriers, are initial, are comparatively easier to attend, while multifaceted barriers that involves substantial attempts to overcome. Technical barriers can be overcome by way of technological interferences and enhancement, and that of improving the reach of internet and digital infrastructure. While nontechnical barriers habitually rest on swinging citizen's attitudes and approaches, such as tackling digital incompetence, encouraging awareness of public engagement opportunities, and ensuring government transparency and accountability. It requires a holistic and all-inclusive initiations from Government.

Conclusion

The modern society has turned into a digital society. e -participation lets information revelation, policy openness, and improved interface between the government and the society. These efforts increase the effectiveness and competence in government service delivery, nurturing a more interactive milieu between the public and government organisations. The strategy of e participation outlined various predicted advantages, comprising that of better service efficiency, enhanced public trust, boosted openness, the eradication of administrative and fiscal corruption, and eventually, the elevation of democratic governance. However, the effectiveness of e participation depends deeply on numerous factors, such as the eagerness of digital infrastructure, public's digital literacy, and inclusive and accessible digital platform layout. Additionally, even if technology has offered ease of access to information and deliverance of public services, faces substantial challenges that hamper the optimisation of public participation, especially in developing countries. It is found that ne-participation has become a focus in the arena of public administration and is exploited by governments to upsurge public involvement and participation and transparency in governmental policy decision and activities.

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