



STUDY MATERIAL

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Subject: Journalism and Mass Communication

Topic: E-governance & its impact in West Bengal

Prof. Aakash Shaw

**Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Journalism and Mass
Communication,**

Vivekananda College, Thakurpukur, Kolkata

E-governance & its impact in West Bengal

Introduction

E-governance in India has continuously been a buzzword in contemporary times. It always questions a layman's curiosity as to what is actually referred to by that term?

To put it simply, the "e" in the term "e-Governance" stands for 'electronic' and the governance in the term refer to carrying out its primary functions to achieve its predetermined goals. Therefore e-Governance basically relates to carrying out the functions in order to achieve collective predetermined goals through the utilization of ICT (Information and Communications Technology).

According to the World Bank, "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." It further says, "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." E-Governance utilizes Information and Communication technologies to provide smarter, effective and transparent services. India, as a developing nation, is increasingly laying emphasis on e-governance initiatives for the development of the country and empowerment of the citizens. West Bengal, a populous state of India, has adopted a similar policy regarding this. It is trying to match international standard in providing services to citizens, employees and businesses through e-Governance.

As per the need of the hour where a noticeable sea change has been noticed to transform almost every aspects of society to safeguard the legal rights of all citizens, ensuring equitable access to public services for achieving predetermined goals. As e-governance uses Information and Communication Technology (ICT), as the main tool, it enables efficiency and transparency in the democratic framework of a country thus opening new avenues for social and economic development and attracts investment and assistance. However, despite the best initiatives taken by the governments, it is becoming difficult every moment to bridge the gap between desired and achieved consequences.

In India, e-Governance started with the launching of NICNET in 1987 – the national satellite-based computer network. This was followed by a presentation of the District Information System of the National Informatics Centre (DISNIC) programme to computerize all district offices in the country for which free hardware and software was offered to the State Governments. NICNET was extended via the State capitals to all district headquarters by 1990. In the ensuing years, with rapid computerization, tele-connectivity and internet connectivity, it gradually established a large number of e-Governance initiatives, both at the Union and State levels. E-Governance involves mainly four types of Government interactions which are given in the following manner:

1. Government to Citizen (G to C): Government to Citizen Governance includes Inter-government initiatives that seeks to deliver services to the citizens and also controls and monitors there online activities.
2. Government to Government (GtoG): Government to Government Governance includes Inter/Intra Governmentdepartmental interactions involving services interactions amongst employees and other government or regulating institutions.
3. Government to Business (G to B): Government to Business governance includes various facilities providedto aid businessmen, entrepreneurs and other private companies.
4. Government to Employee (G to E) :Government to Employee governance ensures transparent information and associated services to the employees in public sector or government undertaking for smooth functioning of the system.

Merits of e-governance

The merits of E-Governance are given in the following manner:

1. **Quick Services:** E-governance initiatives have made communications and interactionsfaster than before. Usage of Internet facilities to render services has reduced the aggregate time taken in normal communication.
2. **Economy:**It has been seen that cost of stationary used for the purpose of manual documentation increases the aggregate government expenditure making the process hectic and cumbersome. Usage of e-applications involving internet seeks to make the process economical saving money for the Government.
3. **Transparency:** E-Governance initiatives involve usage of ICT that makes process of governance transparent. ICT helps in making the information available online, eliminating all the possibilities of hiding of information. The citizens are benefitted with the transparent process as it helps them to see and avail several information in time of their need.
4. **Accountability:** Accountability refers to the obligation of the Government towards the people. After the governing process is made available for public usage in general, the Government immediately becomes accountable as it increases the answerability of the Government agencies towards citizens.
5. **Convenience:** E-Governance seeks to provide convenience through various services to the citizens, helping them avail the services from any place at any time according to their preference.

Demerits of e-governance

The Demerits of e-governance are given in the following manner:

1. **Lacks Personal touch:** Electronic governance initiatives transfers the government services into an electronic based system. The interactions with the system do not involve

personal touch and therefore loses the valuable interactions between persons on both the side.

2. **Technological Problem:** As the data and information is transferred into the electronic process there are instances of technical obstacles in the process which hinders the smooth functioning of the services and thereby creating unnecessary problems for the service seekers.
3. **Chances of evading duties:** It is often seen that the service providers makes casual excuses (e.g. network problem) in order to evade their duties which generally creates problem for the common public.
4. **Lack of sound knowledge:** The process requires a sound knowledge of advanced technology both for the service providers and also for the users. It is generally seen that most of the users face problems in using the e-services as they lack a sound technical knowledge for its operation.

E- Governance in a Developing State: A Theoretical perspective

Many developing nations use Government services as a tool that enables to increase efficiency, enhance transparency and facilitate reforms in public sector. In the book “E-government From Vision to implementation” (2004), Bhatnagar. S outlines the why and how of e-governance initiatives that guides government policies and its implementation to achieve desired goals. In order to initiate e-governance, “Governments need to work the goal of ‘less government’ outsourcing many service delivery tasks” and “the safest approach to adopting a new technology is to take small steps with activities that are manageable within a relatively shorttime frame”- Bhatnagar.S(2004) so that the e-policies could begin to deliver services smoothly. Bhatnagar.S (2004) further elaborates “e- Government projects have to consciously strive to provide benefits to civil servants, as they are the ones that tend to lose power and authority over citizens when electronic delivery of services is introduced.”

Pankaj.S (2004) further explains in his book “Electronic Governance” that “e-Governance seems to have greater managerial benefit in countries with moderate development indices where alternate channels of communications are weak and governance processes are largely democratic to the extent that they are information driven.” He further discusses on the democratic implementation of e-governance from national perspective highlighting the concepts of Electronic democracy that seeks to converge users’ collective participation that look forward to strengthen the process from its core.The advent of e-Governance provides a chance to several governments in developing nations to accept new value propositions of the digital era, offering new solutions to old problems. Governments appear to be genuinely interested in improving the conditions of the citizens, as the aim of any government is the betterment of its citizen through convenient means of administration equipped with effective communication facilitating better channels of interactions where complaints, suggestion or enquiry made by the users can be promptly answered.

Impact of E-Governance in West Bengal

- **Land and Land Reforms Department:** Land and Land Reforms Department of West Bengal government has achieved remarkable success regarding implementation of e-Governance. Land records of all blocks of West Bengal have been computerized. Cadastral maps have been digitized. The department uses application software named “*Bhuchitra*” to manage the land records. Computerization of land records started in 1991 in the Bardhaman district of West Bengal. Now in all 341 blocks of West Bengal computerized record of rights to the land owners are dispensed. For speedy disposal of Land Acquisition cases LAIS (Land Acquisition Information System) software is successfully implemented.
- **WBSWAN:** West Bengal State Wide Area Network connects 19 districts of West Bengal through 2 mbps fibre optic cable. It provides connectivity of Data, Voice & Video Communication facilities from Kolkata to all District, Sub-Division and Block Headquarters of West Bengal. It serves connectivity to some large departmental networks such as PWD, Treasury, Commercial Tax, Home, L&LR, etc. The services provided by WBSWAN are SDC connectivity, internet service, video conference, VoIP communication, mail service, antivirus services. Thus WBSWAN provides seamless connectivity among government departments, directorates and various offices. It has also improved the Government-Citizen and Government-Industry interface. An efficient intra-Government information flow has resulted in efficient and transparent administration.
- **E-district:** E-district is an initiative of the government of West Bengal to provide Government- to- Citizen Services (G2C) at the doorsteps of the people. Citizens can avail services of the government without physically appearing in government offices. They can use internet facility from a citizen KIOSKS or common service centres for submitting application, knowing the status of application or receiving certificates. Following services are provided in several districts of West Bengal under e-District project: Income Certificate, Local Residence (Domicile) Certificate, Redressal of RTI queries & RTI status tracking, Grievance Redressal, Issuance of Certified Copy of Registered Deed, Issuance of Certified Copy of RoR, Issuance of Plot Information, Registration of Shops and Establishments, Issuance, renewal, surrender and cancellation of Firearm License etc. An e-District application is also available on smartphone. E-district project of West Bengal government has revolutionized the concept and system of public service delivery by providing service in a smarter, effective, efficient and transparent way.
- **Education Department:** The Government of West Bengal has embraced information and technology to make the entire teaching system easy, effective and efficient. Most of the schools and colleges have become equipped under the ambit of the schemes. Under directions of Higher Education Department in 2016 all the colleges started the online admission system for the students and further trainings are being provided to staffs and teachers so that they can use ICTs in order to improve and strengthen an efficient educational environment in the state. An integrated “Higher Education Service System” is developed to empower the governing bodies to monitor the progress of the educational system in lieu with National framework thereby proving an easy interface for all stakeholders: teachers, parents, students and other administrative bodies so that their interests can be facilitated in a better and transparent manner.

- **E-governance in Legal framework:** National Informatics Centre in the state has been keenly involved in providing ICT support to the High Court of Kolkata. The Digital file flow system has been introduced in Law Department as part of e-governance initiatives in the state. The State Government is taking active interests to build a legal advice data base management system with easy application modes which can be accessed by other departments. The system software has been upgraded to the state of the art web based application using Oracle 10 RDBMS under a campus wide LAN set up linking all the sections, offices and Court rooms. The significant modules of the updated system software are Case Management Information System (CMIS), Generation of Cause List, Caveat Information System, and Judicial Service Information System, Judgments/Orders Information System, Exchange of Information among High Courts and Supreme Court.

Conclusion:

Not only West Bengal but also other state governments and central government are focusing on maximum utilization of e-Governance initiatives. The problems, limitations and challenges in e-Governance in West Bengal are not quite different from the other parts of the country. Hindrances include security and privacy concerns, resistance to change, cost, unequal access to computer technology, inadequate computer literacy etc. The dispersion of internet and telecommunication services in India has been gradually increasing since the last one and half decade and this gives a ray of hope to the people of India to combat with the long persisting problems of poverty, corruption, regional disparity and unemployment. But at the same time, due to slow pace of project completion, red-tape and resistance from the side of government employees and citizens too has not given the desired result. Keeping in mind the positive sides of e-Governance, the challenges need to be overcome by mutual cooperation of government and the people. We have to be dependent upon e-Governance for getting transparency, efficiency and accountability in governance and administrative procedures.

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