

JOURNAL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PEER REVIEWED, INDEXED & REFEREED BI-ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

ISSN 0972-8309

<https://www.jndmeerut.org>

[Vol. 39, Special Monsoon Issue, 2026]

<https://doi.org/10.62047/JND.2026.09.15.205>

Digital Democracy Redefined: Technologies, Participation and Democratic Governance

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Abstract

The proliferation of digital technologies has completely changed the dynamics of interaction between citizens, the state and political institutions, creating opportunities for new modes of democratic participation and presenting challenges to democratic governance. This paper explores the development of digital democracy and analyses how ICTs have impacted political participation, public discourse and state-citizen interactions. It is argued that there exists a dialectic relationship between digital technologies and democracy. Further, the paper provides a critical analysis of both the liberating and repressive aspects of digital technologies. The paper makes the case for the next step in the transformation of democracy, that is, to transform e-governance and digital delivery of services into participatory digital governance, prioritising deliberation, inclusion, accountability, and meaningful citizen participation.

Keywords

Digital democracy, Participatory digital governance, E-Governance, Digital India, Citizen participation, Surveillance capitalism, Digital governance, Democratic accountability, Social audit, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

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1. Introduction

The history of mankind has witnessed several revolutions, such as the Agricultural Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. Each revolution had a “deep economic, social, political and cultural impact on the societies” (Rostiashvili, 2012: 11). The successor of the Industrial Revolution is the recent Digital Revolution. The Digital Revolution consists of “digital logic circuits and related technologies, such as computers, digital cell phones, fax machines, and other gadgets. The use of computers and the Internet is rapidly transforming societal interactions and the relationships among citizens, private businesses, and the Government” (Rostiashvili, 2012).

Scholars like Castells (2009) and Meraz (2009) have increasingly argued that the digital age has drastically changed the dynamics of power in society. The earlier formal keepers of power—governments, corporations and mass media organizations—are not the sole repositories of power. In addition to these, new power centres have emerged through digital platforms (social activists, influencers, hackers, online communities, etc.) that have the potential to influence/challenge the dominant narratives. Scholars of various fields have attempted to understand the complex intersection of technology and politics and have concluded that the digital age has redefined political life around the world, providing new methodologies for governance, advocacy and public discourse in virtually every form of political system.

2. Research Gap

The emerging literature focuses largely on four broad themes: the democratic potential of digital technology, digital political participation and activism, e-government and the phenomenon of digital service delivery, and new challenges presented by surveillance, misinformation and algorithmic governance. Though these studies have significantly advanced our knowledge of the relationship between technology and democracy, they still face limitations in their incorporation of governance.

Most of the scholars have analyzed digital technology as a tool for enhancing administrative efficiency or as a medium for political communication and electoral engagement. Significantly, scholars have paid less attention to institutionalizing digital technologies so that citizen participation becomes a continuous process and not a rare occurrence; thereby, citizens become an integral part of the public policy cycle. Moreover, even though India has taken several substantial steps to

implement digital governance through initiatives such as Digital India, Aadhaar and the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), the focus has mainly been on improving service delivery, digital inclusion, and technological advancement rather than exploring channels for participatory governance.

This article aims to fill the gap by proposing a Participatory Digital Governance model as an extension of the Digital Governance model. This framework will add a new dimension to digital governance, i.e. adding a citizen-centric approach to the efficiency-driven model of e-governance. By integrating democratic theory, digital governance, and the New Public Service, it seeks to make deliberation, stakeholder consultation, digital social accountability, and collaborative policymaking integral to digital governance.

3. Research Questions

The article attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What has been the impact of digital technologies on democratic processes, along with the challenges faced by digital democracies, especially in India?
2. How will participatory digital governance ensure sustained citizen participation in the public policy realm?

4. Research Methodology

The study uses a qualitative, concept-based interdisciplinary approach to research to investigate the impact of digital media on democratic governance. It utilizes the existing literature, analysis of policy documents and case studies to build a framework of participatory digital governance. This is a conceptual and analytical paper. Drawing upon literature in democratic theory, the New Public Service, and digital governance, this paper articulates the concept of Participatory Digital Governance as a normative framework for institutionalizing ongoing citizen involvement across all stages of the policy process.

However, the aim of the study is not to test causal claims but to build theory through synthesizing the literature to create a robust conceptual framework for future empirical work on the governance of democracy in the digital era.

5. Digital Democracy

The rapid development of ICT has brought a tectonic effect on the multifaceted concept and practice of democracy. Digital democracy (also known as e-democracy) is best understood as a subset of the broader democratic system, wherein digital technologies are employed to deepen democratic practices. It does not replace traditional democratic institutions such as parliaments, elections, or civil society-but rather complements or extends them through digital means. InfoScipedia define digital democracy as “the promotion of democratic rule through digital technology. Also referred to as internet democracy, digital democracy is the adoption of technology in the governance process. It is the application of digital tools to entrenching political interaction and active participation in politics”

(Akinyetun & Ebonine, 2022). The Oxford Dictionary defines digital democracy as “the use of computer-mediated communication to enhance participatory democracy and political engagement” (Chandler & Munday, 2016). According to Mark Graham, digital democracy “refers to the various ways through which electronic platforms can engage the wider and more informed participation of the public in the political environment” (Graham, 2019). In other words, digital democracy is a “phenomenon that interconnects two evolving areas, that of democratic self-government and that of digital infrastructures” (Berg & Hofmann, 2021).

5.1 An Historical Overview of the Development of Digital Democracy

The evolution of digital democracy from the 1980s to the present can be categorized into four distinct phases, each marked by technological advancements and shifting democratic ideals.

1. **Teledemocracy or Electronic democracy:** Democracy started using technology to strengthen information flows in the 1980s. The phase known as teledemocracy was marked by innovative technologies like “satellites, fibre optic cable, interactive television and computer networks” (London, 1995). Electronic democracy was based on the premise that public discussions/ deliberations/ debates were the cornerstone of a strong democracy. Political communication changed drastically as “the voluntary associations, public spaces, local newspapers, and neighbourhood assemblies of their day gave way to computer bulletin boards, satellite television, and radio call-in programs” (London, 1995). It was assumed that electronically mediated communication would remedy several shortcomings of representative democracy. “Cable TV channels would allow citizens to communicate among themselves without mediators and thereby create direct-democratic opportunities” (Berg & Hofmann, 2021: 2).
2. **Virtual democracy:** Virtual democracy was the second phase in the development of digital democracy. Emerging in the 1990s, this phase was marked by the increasing usage of the Internet. The virtual world was used to create virtual communities, which sometimes functioned on the utopian idea of a “denationalised democracy” (Berg & Hofmann, 2021: 4).

Thus, this communitarian version of democracy in the 1990s witnessed the rise of civic networks and community forums, such as Seattle Community Network and Cleveland FreeNet, which provided platforms for local discussions on civic matters. “Platforms like AOL, IRC (Internet Relay Chat), and Yahoo! Chat...provided spaces for individuals to gather based on shared interests, hobbies, or professions” (Anjum, 2025).

3. **Web democracy:** The turn of the century was characterized by the era of Internet enthusiasts, with the widespread adoption of the Internet in society. The Internet facilitated the emergence of numerous forums/platforms that

enabled widespread political and policy engagement for the general populace. “Friendster (2002), MySpace (2003), and LinkedIn (2003) followed, each introducing innovative ways to connect and share. MySpace allowed users to customise profiles and share music, while LinkedIn catered to professional networking. These platforms expanded the concept of online identity and networking” (Anjum, 2025).

The collapse of many dot-com companies during 2000-2002 left a surplus of bandwidth infrastructure but no demand in the initial phases. The failure of these companies led to a reduction in connectivity costs. The survivors—Google, eBay, and Amazon, despite initial disillusionment, were the ones that helped create the commercial and social web and democratized access to information and services. This infrastructure laid the groundwork for a more accessible internet.

4. **Web 2.0:** The inception of Facebook in 2004 signified a pivotal moment in social networking. “Other platforms like Twitter (2006), Instagram (2010), and Snapchat (2011) diversified the social media landscape. Each brought unique ways of interaction, from microblogging to photo and video sharing, fostering new forms of online communities” (Anjum, 2025). Compared to larger social networks, few platforms (Reddit, Discord, etc) facilitated more specialised and personal relationships (Anjum, 2025).

A few of the present users, called netizens, have become ‘content creators’. “Emerging communication services such as blogs, ‘daily me’ diaries, podcasts, virtual radios and video channels create novel possibilities of practising but also of imagining democracy” (Berg & Hofmann, 2021: 4). Through these novel prospects, the netizens can express themselves and contribute to the public discourse (surpassing the government/ conventional channels) through “online petitions, weblogs, civic journalism, wikis (collective intelligence)” (Hacker & Van Dijk, 2000: 3).

The aforementioned note discusses the brief trajectory of ICT development while (apparently) enhancing democratic values. It is worth noting that the potential of ICTs in a democracy lies in achieving “more direct-democratic self-determination” (Berg & Hofmann, 2021: 5).

5.2 Digital Technologies & Democracy: A Dialectical Relationship

Digital technologies and democracy may have a dialectical relationship because the two influence and reshape each other in a continuous and dynamic process. On one hand, digital technologies influence democratic institutions, participation and political communication, and on the other, the development and use of digital technologies are also conditioned by democratic values, regulations, and social practices.

To understand the relationship between digital technologies and democracy, this section of the paper is divided into three parts that discuss the nature of

technology and explore the reciprocal influence between digital technologies and democratic processes.

5.2.1 Nature of Technology

Scholarly debates have centred on the nature of technology and the role it plays in a political set-up. On the one hand, some scholars (such as Marianne Kneuer) believe that technology lacks inherent values or goals. Technology is simply a tool, and it depends on humans how they utilize it. “Technology is ex-ante neutral, and its effect on political structures, processes, actors, behaviour and norms depends on the motives of use, the content that is transmitted, the way that the technology is used (quantitatively and qualitatively speaking), and, finally, on the political context in which the digital media are used” (Kneuer, 2016).

Contrary to this, some scholars argue that technology has inherent biases and is not neutral. Lance Strate, in his article—‘If it’s Technology, it’s not Neutral’, argues from a media ecology perspective that technology is fundamentally not neutral. Giving a wide definition of the term ‘technology’, he visualizes technology as just not “gadgets and machines,.....tools and implements. Technology encompasses our techniques, systems, and skills, our languages and symbol systems, our codes and modes of communication, and our media for sharing messages with each other and interacting with our environment” (Strate, 2012). He puts forward the core concept of “technological bias”, which refers to the idea that natural objects are inherently neutral, and only technologies that have been put into use inherently carry the attribute of driving specific actions and outcomes. Moreover, inventors cannot always predict the long-term consequences of the technology created.

In this regard, David Wiley has offered a few other insights. According to him, technologies inherit the biases and intentions of their creators. Also, all knowledge is culturally rooted and therefore, the seemingly “natural” use of technology is in fact a social construct. He, therefore, concludes that the nature of any technology depends on how people use it.

5.2.2 Digitalization Deepens Democracy

It is assumed that the decision-making power of the citizens increases in a democratic set-up since “it forces decision makers to take into account the interests, rights, and opinions of most people in society” Christiano (2015). The diverse and plural ‘voices’ are the foundations of a robust democracy. In a representative democracy, there is a strong reliance upon the political parties and pressure groups for these voices to be heard. With the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT), this dependency has decreased, thereby somewhat lessening the representative character of a democracy and evoking its direct participatory aspect.

An informed ‘voice’ enhances the depth and authenticity of a democratic set-up. Digitalization, especially through social media, has revolutionized how information is accessed in real time. Instant updates through platforms like X,

Instagram and Facebook allow users, organizations, and media outlets to share information the moment it happens. Sometimes, eyewitnesses at events post before traditional media can react. Thus, digitalization has amplified the means to create an active and aware citizen who is keen to participate in public debates. Digital democracy facilitates easier participation, broader sharing of opinions, and enhanced interaction among citizens, especially overcoming geographical boundaries. This has facilitated participation for individuals who might not otherwise engage in public debate and civic involvement (Schlosberg & Dryzek, 2002). Users of the online platforms have the power to choose different political causes despite sitting remotely from the site of contestation. This is often referred to as ‘digital activism’ or ‘online activism’. Like-minded users can sign and share petitions, donate to political causes, and even participate in crowdfunding for activism-all from their devices. This fosters global solidarity.

“While often associated with electronic voting, digital democracy encompasses much more, including citizen participation in policy-making processes and the protection and promotion of democratic values” (Ravinder, 2023). E-Government, a part of digital democracy, has simplified and made government services accessible to the common man. Through channels created by information technology, the efficiency of the government can be monitored and assessed through real-time data, public feedback, and measurable improvements in service delivery. “This digital approach empowers individuals to express their opinions, provide feedback, and hold their leaders accountable” (Ravinder, 2023). Thus, digital democracy has transformed political communication and engagement in profound ways. It has “created the new role of the citizens as content provider or ‘citizen journalist’, thereby changing communication patterns in a significant way” (Kneuer, 2016: 1).

5.2.3 Digitalization and Democracy: A Marriage of (In)convenience?

While it is an acknowledged fact that digitalization has transformed the face of modern democracy and augmented more inclusive civic engagement, one cannot deny the unforeseen challenges it has posed to human society. A few years back, the optimism surrounding the opportunities thrown open due to digitalization was such that e-democracy was considered a “panacea capable of curing democratic fatigue and revitalizing or modernizing democratic process” (Kneuer, 2016: 2). However, in recent times, several exhaustive studies have been carried out to assess the negative impact of digitalization on democracy. Before elaborating on this negative impact in the future section, it may be pointed out at the outset that many of the threats posed by digitalization are context-driven. One cannot find a “consistent picture of the impact” (Kneuer, 2016: 2) of technology on democracy. One cannot find the same degree of strengthening of democratic values in a political setting that is authoritarian, or that is at a nascent stage of development. A corollary argument that follows is that “no technology can fix a lack of political will, knowledge, experience, motivation, and skills required for full participation in

various democratic activities. No technology can dissolve the social material inequalities that appear to be so strongly related to differences in the electoral process and political participation process” (Rostiashvili, 2012: 13).

5.3 Algorithmic Effect

Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, TikTok, and YouTube employ algorithms to ascertain the material displayed to users. These algorithms are capable of exacerbating specific perspectives, resulting in echo chambers or filter bubbles. Echo chambers hide the opposite viewpoints from the users while reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs/biases. At the same time, bots or fake accounts controlled by software plant fake stories as ‘trending’ news or news feeds, giving the impression to the viewers that they are receiving authentic information. Many people consider the information given on social media to be always factually correct.

By keeping track of the information consumed by the users, the technology giants are playing a detrimental role in democratic participation. Utilizing the user’s profiles, the digital platforms have “the potential to ‘nudge’ or influence undecided voters and win elections, leading to a new form of dictatorship (Helbing *et al.*, 2019; Roose, 2021) and traumatizing democracy” (Christodoulou & Iordanou, 2021: 4). They become “the centre of political information- seeking and agenda-setting, two fundamental processes of democracy.” (Unver, 2017: 128.) Thus, digital media has been known to manipulate voters instead of empowering them. In such a scenario, informed political judgements become a myth. Furthermore, these companies can control the narrative of an event by controlling the content made available for the user’s consumption. By exposing users to only one-sided perspectives, these online platforms play an important role in deciding the fate of government policies. “Research indicates that behavioural microtargeting significantly affects voter behaviour, with consequences for manipulation, privacy intrusion, and the moral limits of persuasive technology in democratic processes” (Asimakopoulos *et al.*, 2025). Also, in certain extreme cases, content showing hate speech or group targeting might aggravate political violence.

5.4 Technology Giants as Reservoirs of Citizen Data: Surveillance Capitalism

“Data and datafication exemplify new forms of power while their systematic collection and commodification as part of surveillance capital constitute novel modes of domination” (Berg & Hofmann, 2021: 13). Digital platforms are major repositories of citizen data. A large amount of data is collected by the platforms when “we navigate and interact with digital media, through clicks, tweets, likes, GPS coordinates, timestamps and sensors by smart information systems, which register information of our behaviour, beliefs and preferences for profiling citizens. Those who have access to citizens’ digital data and profiling know more about individuals than probably their friends, family members or even individuals themselves” (Christodoulou & Iordanou, 2021: 4). The data thus collected is analyzed and shared (sold) to various marketing and advertising companies by

these platforms, without any permission of the users. Claiming to be a for-profit business, the personal information of the users is sold at a very high price to advertising companies. The monetisation of data helps businesses target the consumers most likely to purchase their products or services.

The introduction of AI techniques requires information on how the human mind functions (“deep mind” judgments). This necessitates more extensive access to personal data, leading to increased surveillance of individuals. This data collection is essential for training machine learning models, but it raises significant privacy concerns. Also, data theft or data breaches leave the oblivious citizens at the mercy of hackers who can misuse this information for identity theft, financial fraud, and extortion, etc.

5.5 Surveillance vs Privacy Debate

Earlier, only the authoritarian regimes like the People’s Republic of China, Russia and North Korea were known for the extensive use of surveillance systems. In contemporary times, surveillance tactics are being used both by authoritarian and democratic regimes. It is argued that democratic governments must indulge in surveillance of their citizens since “...with the growing threat of terrorism, far-right radicalization and extremist groups emerging in western societies, surveillance is viewed not only politically necessary, but also electorally popular” (Ünver, H. A., 2018: 1). This type of surveillance is essential for the existence of democracy itself, as without such practices by the government, national security may be at risk. With the changing face of threats to national security, governments can only anticipate such attacks through surveillance practices.

In this case, the state and the technology giants share a paradoxical relationship. Surveillance processes require the cooperation of the technology companies. “As a customer of data, governments are mandating cooperation and obliging platforms to grant access to their data trove, for example, in the area of law enforcement, police work and state security” (Berg & Hofmann, 2021: 13).

Surveillance practices generate a lot of information (with limited access to the common man), which must be kept constantly in a retrievable state for the government agencies to use. This entails huge costs to the government.

The critics of government surveillance argue that by secretly collecting and maintaining large amounts of data on citizens, the government wastes a huge amount of taxpayers’ money. Secondly, neoliberals point out the loss of privacy, which every individual has an inherent right to. This data can be “accessed by government employees or exposed to the public through a hack or a leak” (Königs, 2022: 3) and subsequently may be misused for objectionable purposes. Thus, civil rights violations and potential abuse of surveillance technologies are the two concerns in the surveillance-privacy debate that might lead to digital dictatorship. There is no guarantee that a government will use surveillance practices for the ‘public good’ (national security and crime prevention). As Gopal Das writes (2019), “[d]igital dictatorship is a double-headed beast.” A government can use the data collected to

control and suppress information, thereby regulating its dissemination to manage and constrain perspectives. Secondly, restricting communication, it reduces the population's capacity to express dissenting opinions, especially by human rights activists and journalists. Supporting this argument, Ünver writes, "some of this secrecy may often take the form of using state-owned secrecy and surveillance apparatus to spy on opposition groups, political parties, or citizens despite a clear absence of a national security threat" (Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies *et al.*, 201: 4). Pegasus software, developed by Israel, is one of the most effective and controversial surveillance software in present times. It has been used by governments to extract information about dissenters and has left them vulnerable to being manipulated, blackmailed, falsified, and facing defamation charges.

5.6 States and Citizens in the Digitized World

Biometric identification of citizens is the norm of the day in every country. In other words, to some extent, citizenship rights are dependent upon technology. Digital identification reshapes the basis on which individuals are either granted access to or excluded from participation in civic life. By making digital connectivity a prerequisite for political recognition, it also serves to restrict access to public participation.

Critics point out that the technology-driven identity systems are being used beyond their stated goals. Once the biometric details (fingerprints, facial recognition, iris scans, etc) have been fed into the database, it can be used for many intrusive activities, especially in the case of a data breach. "The consequences of a biometric data breach can be severe, as stolen biometric data can be used for identity theft, fraud, or other criminal activities.....The long-term impact of such breaches can haunt individuals for years, as biometric data cannot be revoked or reset like a password" (Hendrickson, 2025).

5.7 Limitations of the State's Digital Power

Firstly, the state's sovereignty is compromised when it depends on technology firms. States are heavily relying on private firms since the ability to develop, manufacture, and manage digital technologies typically resides with private companies, rather than within government institutions. "The extent and vulnerabilities of a government's reliance on these private firms-whether domestic or international-vary based on the state's size, resources, and capabilities. Apart from assisting states in crime prevention, the telecommunication firms assist in maintaining law and order in an area. For example, the order to shut down internet services in an area requires the cooperation of the telecommunications companies" (Diepeveen, 2024).

Secondly, people do not always accept the intrusion of the state in their private matters and sometimes have resorted to circumventing state surveillance tools. This has given rise to a new, separate industry that creates innovative techniques called Privacy-Enhancing Technologies (PETs) to bypass or counter state surveillance practices. It is important to note that "the sophistication of circumvention tools owes

partly to technological improvements, but largely due to the absence of a strong legal and political social contract between states, tech companies and citizens over the extent and depth of surveillance practices” (Unver, 2018: 12).

Thirdly, territory is a key element of the existence of a state. However, the workings of a digital public sphere suggest a form of politics that is not limited by geographic location. “The physical realities of digital technologies have resulted in renewed concern for State control over territory and resources” (Diepeveen, 2024). There is a growing tension between state sovereignty and globalized data flows. The geographical location of the data centres becomes significant here. Since most of the time, these data centres are located outside state boundaries, it means that the information of its citizens is shared by an external firm (power). Some states aim to localize data, requiring that data generated within their borders be stored and processed domestically. The European Union’s GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) is cited as a prominent example of a successful regulatory framework asserting such control.

6. Digital Democracy in India: Challenges & the Road Ahead

The transformation that India, the largest democratic experiment in human history, is undergoing is profound, and its scale has no parallels. The government has been constantly shifting to a cyber government via multiple policies, institutions and plans. Initiated in 2015, the Digital India programme was built to make government services available to citizens electronically by improving online infrastructure and promoting socioeconomic digital empowerment. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter (X), and Facebook are increasingly being used as tools of political mobilization. Smartphones and affordable data have connected even remote areas to the national digital narrative. Digital India, Aadhaar, and Unified Payments Interface (UPI) are a few examples of how government programs digitised public services and financial systems (Ravinder, 2023).

The recent administrative reforms in India are aimed at increasing the proximity of the Government to the Citizens with the help of digital technology. Therefore, the Next Generation Administrative Reforms have the policy thrust of “Maximum Governance - Minimum Government.”

6.1 Challenges

With over 850 million internet users and widespread adoption of mobile phones, digital tools now play a central role in India in shaping governance, political engagement, and citizen participation. While digital democracy has several advantages, several difficulties need to be addressed. The following are some of the challenges of digital democracy in India:

- **Accessibility Problems:** Internet accessibility is still a challenge in rural areas of India. With high rates of illiteracy, digital literacy skills are a dream for the rural population. The problem becomes more glaring where the marginalized communities are concerned.

- ▶▶ **Lack of Digital Literacy:** Digital literacy is lacking not only in the rural population but also amongst the urban population, especially the elderly people. A big part of the population is still not familiar with different digital platforms and tools and does not have the skills needed to use them effectively. This lack of familiarity and skill severely restricts their capacity to participate actively in the decision-making process in a digital democracy.
- ▶▶ **Language Barriers:** The Indian population has a rich linguistic diversity. Digital platforms cannot be accessed in every local language in India. English is still the most predominant language used on online platforms. This linguistic barrier poses a significant limitation to the accessibility of e-democracy, hindering a considerable portion of the population from fully engaging in digital democratic processes.
- ▶▶ **Technological Dependence:** The infrastructure in India is in a developing stage. It still has not achieved a stage wherein technological failures, such as power outages, server crashes, or cyber-attacks, can be completely ruled out.
- ▶▶ **Cyber-attacks:** In addition to the challenges described above, cybercrime has emerged as a major threat, eroding public trust, distorting information and undermining the integrity of democratic institutions. A voter database, government portal, or digital ID system compromise could lead to privacy violations and electoral outcome manipulations.

6.2 From Digital Democracy to Digital Governance: The Need for Citizen-Centric Participation

The digital revolution has had an impact everywhere on different government systems. Most of the developments have focused on improving service delivery. Initiatives such as the National e-Governance Plan and later the Digital India Mission have resulted in significant improvements in the digitization of the redressal of complaints as well as the digital delivery of government services and welfare in India. Although these improvements have made processes faster, and there is more information available to the public, as well as ease of access to these services, there has been negligible focus on digital solutions for fostering democratic engagement and collaborative policymaking.

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberalism became the dominant Ideology. This episode marked the transition from New Public Administration to New Public Management. NPA stressed on state led bureaucratic model of development, whereas New Public Management advocated a neo-liberal strategy, which is a market-driven developmental model where the state is supposed to move from rowing to steering. The major stress of New Public Management was on 3 E's: economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, but failed to acknowledge the importance of democratic values in governance. UNDP 2002 report "Deepening Democracy" stressed strengthening democratic core principles by further enlarging the concept of governance and including principles like participation,

consensus-oriented, inclusive and equitable growth along with already earlier stated principles of governance: transparency, accountability, and the rule of law.

The basic idea was that without incorporating democratic principles, the whole governance system will eventually remain weak. In a democratic setup, citizens should occupy central space and everything else should revolve around them. It is the responsibility of the state to ensure active citizens' participation in governance. Democratic citizenship emerged as a central theme in Denhardt's concept of public service approach, wherein he refused to limit the role of the state to steering purposes and wanted the state to play an active role in ensuring participation of citizens. He wanted New Public Service to replace New Public Management. The state should create a conducive environment where open dialogue can take place, and citizens can collaborate at both the formulation and implementation level; for this to happen, he advocates revival of community, which in the last few decades has often been castigated as a major impediment to the development process.

True legitimacy of a state is based on citizens' trust in the regime, which in turn can be gained by enhancing participation of citizens in policy formulation and implementation. It is the responsibility of the state to provide citizens a platform to engage with them. In this context, Allan Octavian Hume's advice to the Moderates of the INC is still relevant. He, at that time, told Indian leaders to form a political party to air their grievances against the British government. By doing this, he provided them with platforms to directly engage with the British government rather than adopting undemocratic means to oppose their policies. In recent times, we have witnessed protests at both national and international levels. The Arab Spring, the Sri Lankan crisis, the Bangladesh protest and the Cockroach Janta party agitation. In all these agitations, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and X were used to mobilise large sections of society. These protests were termed as "social media revolutions" (Skinner, 2011).

The major issue behind all protests is the growing distrust of citizens towards their government, leading to a democratic deficit. This rising distrust can be attributed to the inability of the state to provide citizens a platform to engage with them. Taking a leaf out of Hume's advice, different state governments should work out ways and means to collaborate with citizens. Most of the recent protests are social media protests, as the young generation is using digital platforms to air their grievances against the state. Learning from them, the government should also use digital media to interact with them. This issue can be easily addressed by the government if it creates dedicated grievance redressal portals, online discussion forums and stakeholder engagement platforms.

The reason behind these protests and uprisings is not the misuse of digital platforms but the unavailability of government platforms where citizens can air their everyday fundamental problems that affect their livelihood, like unemployment, corruption, government failure, economic distress, etc. So, blaming social media for these protests will be a wrong diagnosis of the problem. The real problem is shrinking

space for dissent and unavailability of platforms where citizens can raise their concerns. So, rather than using internet shutdown, restrictions on social media as a strategy to control these uprisings, the government, in turn, should think in terms of using the same digital medium to interact with citizens.

6.3 Digital Service Delivery to Digital Accountability and Participatory Governance.

To date, governments across the globe have used digital platforms for service delivery. In India, the government under the Digital India Mission 2015 tried to provide services to citizens in a digital format, like E-health, E-education, Digi Locker, E-police, E-Courts, etc. Under this, the major emphasis of the government is efficient and effective delivery of services. After effectively rolling out digital plans, the government should now move toward digital democracy, whereby the digital medium will be used by union, state and local governments to engage with citizens and stakeholders. To strengthen the governance model in any country, stakeholder consultation is a must. Most of the developmental projects get stalled because of the government's unilateral decision-making process, where the government rolls out plans without taking stakeholders on board. In the absence of any consultation with stakeholders, most of the developmental projects get stuck in litigation as the dissatisfied stakeholders on issues like land acquisition, impact on the environment, etc resort to courts to address their concerns, which eventually lead to long-term litigation delays. It is for this very reason that the country's ranking on ease of doing business falls, and most of the projects go into litigation mode. So, to avoid developmental projects landing in unnecessary litigation and to improve your ratings on ease of doing business, prior stakeholder consultation is a must. So, by creating these interactive digital platforms, the government can very easily bring all stakeholders on board.

Apart from using digital platforms for consultation and collaboration, the same digital platform can be used for social audits. Social audit is community monitoring of social welfare schemes floated by the government. It is being used by the government to ascertain whether the real benefits of government schemes reach the actual beneficiaries or not. In India, social audit, as an accountability mechanism, was placed under MGNREGA and the National Food Security Act 2013. Social audit is considered an instrument for participatory governance. It is often referred to as 'RTI Plus Jan Sunwai' (Chandhoke, 2022) as information lying with the government is accessed through RTI and the same is verified by the community in public gatherings. Even though it is a great accountability tool in the hands of the community on the government, it failed to yield required results because of institutional infrastructure constraints. In the absence of institutional infrastructure, different local self-governing units find it difficult to regularly carry out such large-scale social audits. Social audits require physical meetings where all the community members should audit government records in the presence of officials, media persons and Political representatives. Due to infrastructural constraints, these meetings are sporadic. Now, by using digital platforms, the

government can easily organize social audits via digital platforms, just like most public and private institutions are using platforms like Google Meet, etc to convene online meetings and presentations. Similarly, the government, via these mediums, can interact with citizens, and an online interactive social audit session can be organized. In the same manner, digital platforms can be used to showcase records and organize public hearings.

To generate citizen trust and to increase transparency and accountability, the government should develop digital platforms to facilitate real-time monitoring of government schemes. Digital platforms can provide citizens and stakeholders a platform to air their opinions on government policies. The government should suo motu invite public opinion on draft legislation, welfare reforms, infrastructure projects and policy proposals to avoid further disputes. By doing this, the government will be able to assure foreign and domestic investors that their investments are safe in our country. Hence, the evolution of e-governance should be in a progressive manner, beginning from e-Delivery of Service e-Grievance Redressal e-Participation e-Social Audit e-Democracy. The aim should be to transform citizens from passive consumers of government services into active participants in governance, thereby realising the vision of democratic governance championed by UNDP and the citizen-centric approach of Denhardt's New Public Service. Digital media can act as a big enabler to ensure participatory governance.

7. Conclusion

Digital technology and particularly AI can offer a change which can dramatically alter the way citizens interact with the state. Things essential for achieving governance targets like participation, transparency, and accountability, which were once considered difficult to achieve, have been made possible with the emergence of digital means and AI. Digital platforms are both a boon and a bane; they do not have any value of their own; the true value of their potential lies in how it is used. If it's being used for inciting violence, propaganda, or planting false narratives, then it will be a bane and can have serious adverse consequences, but if we use the same to invite opinions on government policies and programs, for stakeholders' consultation, then it can be a boon and acts as a catalyst for positive change. So, the real value of digital platforms lies in the way we use it. There is little doubt that it needs to be regulated in such a way that it empowers citizens. To date, we have used digital technology in service delivery only, like e-district, e-courts, e-income tax filings, but now the government needs to move beyond service delivery toward digital democracy, which is to utilize digital means to enhance participation. This shift will not only make the system more responsive and participatory but will eventually help improve the overall governance structure by making the system more accountable and transparent. The government should seriously examine the possibility of raising its stake in creating digital platforms for public consultation and collaboration. This area has huge potential to strengthen democratic practices in the country rather than fearing its negative impacts

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