

CHAPTER- 10

THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY ON GOVERNMENT ASSISTED PROGRAMS/SCHEMES

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INTRODUCTION

Various dimensions contribute to the concept of good governance, all of which align with the societal ideals articulated in the Constitution. The Constitution upholds the equal protection of all citizens, irrespective of factors such as caste, creed, gender, faith, race, or place of birth, under the umbrella of fundamental rights. Central to the state policy is the shift towards establishing a "welfare state" rather than a "police state," echoing the constitutional principles that aim to create a social and economic democracy. Crafted with the vision of securing justice, freedom, equality, and empowering vulnerable groups, the Indian Constitution underscores the commitment to good governance.

India's journey over the past six decades reflects the pursuit of good governance, focusing on enhancing access to economic and social opportunities, eliminating poverty, and providing effective services to the underprivileged. In May 1999, the Indian Prime Minister convened a conference of state governors to explore avenues for improving government efficiency and responsiveness. The action plan emerging from this conference emphasized key pillars, including (a) fostering a responsible and citizen-friendly administration, (b) promoting transparency and the right to information, and (c) enhancing the performance and integrity of the civil service.

The enactment of the Right to Information (RTI) Act marked a significant turning point in the trajectory toward achieving good governance. Transparency in government is intricately linked with accountability, and the RTI Act is instrumental in binding administrative procedures to the principles of good governance. By ensuring transparency, accountability, and openness in governance, the RTI Act has emerged as a vital force in shaping good governance and fostering development. It serves as a deterrent against bureaucratic dominance, fosters openness, accountability, and responsiveness in government, and expands citizens' opportunities for engagement and understanding of the functioning of their government [1] [2].

"ICT" or Information and Communication Technology encompasses a wide array of services and technologies, incorporating telecommunications (phones, fax machines) and internet-based applications (email, file transfers, entertainment). This includes tools like video conferencing, teleconferencing, and MIS. Technologies range from radio and television to cellular mobile communications, utilizing devices like mobile phones,

computers, and wireless base stations. Software, essential for the functioning of computers and the internet, is a set of instructions. ICT tools facilitate communication and information exchange, encompassing computers, software programs, networks, intranets, power lines, and various communication systems. The term also includes non-internet networks and relies on a combination of new and traditional methods despite the continuous evolution of technologies [3].

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What were the existing applications of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in government welfare programs?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

2. To assess the awareness and comprehension of ICT among recipients.
3. To coordinate efforts to enhance governance through the utilization of information and communication technology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Qualitative research was selected to explore subjective phenomena influenced by factors like culture and personal motivation, delving into the decision-making process of employees from lower socioeconomic backgrounds through a formative evaluation study. Quantitative research focused on numerical data, providing insights into phenomena and relationships, aiding in segmentation, and employing statistical models. Both approaches were systematically applied, with a

minimum sample size of 400 from rural areas in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, utilizing probability sampling. Data were collected through a structured interview schedule that centred on socioeconomic status, perceptions, and awareness of the computerized service delivery system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The majority of respondents (59.75%) fell within the age range of 61-70. Age was significant in understanding employment distribution and societal demographics. Marital status was reported as 52.50% married, 41.75% widowed, and 5.75% unmarried. Marital status often reflected societal perceptions of respectability. Religious diversity within the sample was evident, with 79.00% of respondents identifying as Hindu and 21.00% as Muslim. However, 100% of the respondents were not aware of how to check the application status, indicating a need for education on the application process.

Regarding data security and confidentiality, 53.00% of respondents believed in it, suggesting trust in data management. Similarly, 69.00% expressed a belief that rules and regulations were correctly followed, indicating confidence in government stakeholders. In terms of service delivery, 78.00% of respondents believed services were delivered within the stipulated time, reflecting majority satisfaction with timely service delivery. Furthermore, 96.50% believed the overall quality of governance had increased after computerization, suggesting positive outcomes from ICT implementation. An overwhelming 98.00% believed that computerization/e-governance could bring good governance, indicating a strong consensus on the positive impact of ICT on governance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study aimed to address the overarching question: "Can new information and communication technologies help achieve the good governance objective in the service delivery of welfare schemes in the study area?" Through meticulous examination and analysis of the region under investigation, the findings unequivocally support the assertion that e-governance and ICT-enabled governance represent the optimal means to attain the objectives of good governance.

The study's comprehensive exploration of various components of good governance demonstrated their collective impact on enhancing the provision of public services. It was established that the service delivery system of welfare programs in the study area has experienced notable improvements in accountability, transparency, effectiveness, and responsiveness, all attributed to the strategic integration of ICT and e-governance practices. The report affirms that ICT has emerged as a transformative and indispensable tool in the pursuit of good governance objectives.

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