



Using Social Networking Services Effectively for a Successful e-Governance in India

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Abstract- *Over the last decade, public service organizations around the world have invested heavily in technologies to improve service delivery and realize cost efficiencies. Collectively known as “e-Governance”, these initiatives were designed to meet a range of organizational challenges—such as improving public access to information and services through online channels; sharing data within and across organizations; improving the efficiency of business processes; and managing organizational performance. However many e- Governance projects are not succeeding or are facing bottlenecks. There is resistance to change or duplication of efforts in many initiatives. In India, the problem has been more, mostly due to the misunderstandings about the term and inability to use technology efficiently to spread the concept of e-Governance. In this paper, we would see the basics of e-Governance, and discuss the prospects of social networking services in order to successfully functioning of e-Governance.*

Index Terms- *e-Governance, e-Government, Indian e-Governance, NeGP, Social Networking.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Government forms the backbone of a community. Public welfare is the key agenda of any government, be it democracy or autocracy, or otherwise. It has to ensure that the benefits reach the needy. However much this sound simple, it surely isn't. The government needs to run its affairs in a transparent and efficient way to reach and be reachable to its citizens. E-Governance has the ability to lend the required efficiency and transparency. The right blend of political will and technology is what it takes to make e-Governance a success.

E-Governance or ‘electronic Governance’ is basically the application of Information and Communications Technology to the processes of Government functioning in order to bring about ‘Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent’ (SMART) Governance. While discussing e-Governance, another term that often strikes is e-Government. Whilst e-Government has traditionally been understood as being centred on the operations of government, e-Governance is understood to extend the scope by including citizen engagement and participation in Governance.

UNESCO defines 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.”

The US E-Government Act of 2002 defines “electronic Government” to mean –

“The use by the Government of web-based Internet applications and other information technologies, combined with processes that implement these technologies, to-

(A) Enhance the access to and delivery of Government information and services to the public, other agencies, and other Government entities; or

(B) Bring about improvements in Government operations that may include effectiveness, efficiency, service quality, or transformation”.

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India, has visualized e-Governance in the Indian context to mean—

“A transparent smart e-Governance with seamless access, secure and authentic flow of information crossing the interdepartmental barrier and providing a fair and unbiased service to the citizen.”

E-Governance aims to help strengthen government’s drive toward effective Governance and increase transparency to better manage social and economic resources for development.

2. NEEDS FOR E-GOVERNANCE

In light of today's changing citizen expectations, governments have begun developing strategies to not only enhance efficiency and effectiveness, but also to strengthen the relationship between government and citizens. While e-government has been largely a one-way street—with government delivering and citizens receiving—these new e-Governance strategies enable government and citizens to engage and partner with each other and other stakeholders. In doing so, they are leveraging new technologies and modifying conventional service provision in innovative ways to create public value. It is a development that is gaining momentum as citizens respond positively to the new information, debate and participation that government and non-governmental community e-Governance tools make possible.

In a survey conducted between 2007-2009 on all the major cities around the World viz. Berlin, London, Los Angeles, Madrid, New York, Paris, Singapore, Sydney, Dublin, Oslo, Rome, Tokyo, Toronto, New Delhi, Johannesburg, and Mexico City; it has been learned that people do indeed want to become more engaged in their Governance. They want to be more informed and to have a bigger say in how government acts to make their lives better.

An effective e-Governance policy will eventually lead to the following advantages—

- Exchange of information with citizens, businesses or other government departments
- Speedier and more efficient delivery of public services
- Improving internal efficiency
- Reducing costs / increasing revenue
- Re-structuring of administrative processes
- Improving quality of services.

In a developing country like India, where corruption has been an important matter of concern that hinders the development of the nation, e-Governance can certainly improve the condition. With a transparent Governance system, it can improve the relationship of citizens and the Government. Providing a direct communication between the citizens and the Governing body, it eliminates the middle-man concept, serving the Government in a better and correct assessment of citizen's needs and requirements.

3. DELIVERY MODELS OF E-GOVERNANCE

The primary delivery models of e-Governance can be broadly classified into the following categories —

- i. Government to Government (G2G)
Within the government system there is large scale processing of information and decision making. G2G initiatives help in making the internal government processes more efficient.
- ii. Government to Citizens/ Consumers(G2C)
In this case, an interface is created between the government and citizens who enables the citizens to benefit from efficient delivery of a large range of public services. The G2C model may apply to the strategy of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) with business concept. By managing their customer (citizen) relationship, the business (government) can provide the needed products and services fulfill the needs from customer (citizen).
- iii. Government to Business (G2B)
G2B initiatives encompass all activities of government which impinge upon business organizations. Here, e-Governance tools are used to aid the business community – providers of goods and services – to seamlessly interact with the government. These include registrations under different statutes, licenses under different laws and exchange of information between government and business.
- iv. Government to Employees (G2E)
Government is by far the biggest employer and like any organization, it has to interact with its employees on a regular basis. This interaction is a two-way process between the organization and the employee. Use of ICT tools helps in making these interactions fast and efficient on the one hand and increase satisfaction levels of employees on the other.

4. E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

Recognizing the increasing importance of electronics, the Government of India established the Department of Electronics in 1970. The subsequent establishment of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in 1977 was the first major step towards e-Governance in India as it brought 'information' and its communication in focus. In the early 1980s, use of computers was confined to very few organizations. The main thrust for e-Governance was provided by the launching of NICNET in 1987 – the national satellite-based computer network.

In the ensuing years, with ongoing computerization, tele-connectivity and internet connectivity introduced a large number of e-Governance initiatives, both at the Union and State levels. A National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development was constituted in May 1998. In 1999, the Union Ministry of Information Technology was created. In the year of 2000, IT Act was passed and e-Governance got its legal reorganization. After implementation of RTI Act, 2005 Government information such as various Cabinet Decisions, forms, procedures, programs, projects, schemes, tenders, quotation calls, notice etc. started being displayed in the State Portal for reference and use by the public. Designated Information Officers in individual Departments and offices are now responsible to provide all information Needs.

e-Governance in India has steadily evolved from computerization of Government Departments to initiatives that encapsulate the finer points of Governance, such as citizen centricity, service orientation and transparency. Lessons from previous e-Governance initiatives have played an important role in shaping the progressive e-Governance strategy of the country.

5. CURRENT STATUS OF E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

India has been harnessing the benefits provided by the Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) to provide integrated Governance, reach to the citizens faster, and provide efficient services and citizen empowerment through access to information. The aim is to redefine Governance in the ICT age to provide SMART GOVERNANCE. Several significant initiatives have been taken at the Centre and the State level in this direction. At the Central level, the government has extensively promoted the use of IT in managing its internal processes and has drawn up a 'Minimum Agenda of e-Governance'. The government has enacted IT Act 2000 which provides legal status to the information and transactions carried on the net. Several state Governments have also taken various innovative steps and initiated a number projects to promote e-Governance and have drawn up a roadmap for IT implementation and delivery of services to the citizens on-line.

The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), based on the learning from these projects was approved in May 2006 and comprises of 27 (now 31) Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and 8 Components with a vision to "make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man". **The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)**, takes a holistic view of e-Governance initiatives across the country, integrating them into a collective vision, a shared cause. Around this idea, a massive countrywide infrastructure reaching down to the remotest of villages is evolving, and large-scale digitization of records is taking place to enable easy, reliable access over the internet. The ultimate objective is to bring public services closer home to citizens, as articulated in the Vision Statement of NeGP. The cornerstones of NeGP are citizen centricity, identification of services & service levels, centralized planning & decentralized implementation and Public Private Partnership (PPP).

The following are some of the major e-Governance projects implemented which I have experienced personally—

Community Information Center (CIC)

On 22 August 2002, the honorable Prime Minister of India dedicated to the people of the eight North-Eastern states of the country, a new structure of localized Governance called Community Information Centers. Each is well-equipped with modern infrastructure, including one server, five client systems, a VSAT, laser printer, a dot matrix printer, modem, LAN hub, TV, webcam and two UPS'. Each center has two CIC operators as managers and for providing services to the public. Basic services to be provided by CICs include Internet access and e-mail, printing, data entry and word processing and training for the local populace. Most CICs charge nominal amounts from users for services, which helps them to meet day-to-day running expenses. To ensure future financial sustainability of this enterprise, it is proposed to use the Community Information Centers for e-entertainment. CIC program was initiated by the Department of Information Technology, Govt. of India and set up at 487 Blocks of the eight North-Eastern states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

GramSampark

'Gramsmpark' is a flagship ICT product of the state of Madhya Pradesh, India. A complete database of available resources, basic amenities, beneficiaries of government programmes and public grievances in all the 51,000 villages of Madhya Pradesh can be obtained by accessing the website. Gramsmpark has three sections-Gram Paridhrashya (village scenario), Samasya Nivaran (grievance redress) and Gram Prahari (village sentinel). An eleven-point monitoring system has been put in place whereby programmes are monitored village-wise every month. Four more programmes are under the monitoring system, which includes untouchability-eradication, women's empowerment, water conservation and campaigns for sanitation.

Gyandoot

The Gyandoot project was initiated in January 2000 by a committed group of civil servants in consultation with various gram panchayats in the Dhar district of the state Madhya Pradesh, India. Gyandoot is a low cost, self-sustainable, and community-owned rural Intranet system (Soochnalaya) that caters to the specific needs of village communities in the district. Thirty-five such centres have been established since January 2000 and are managed by rural youth selected and trained from amongst the unemployed educated youth of the village. They run the Soochanalayas (organised as Kiosks) as entrepreneurs (Soochaks); user charges are levied for a wide range of services that include agricultural information, market information, health, education, women's issues, and applications for services delivered by the district administration related to land ownership, affirmative action, and poverty alleviation. Kiosks are connected to the Intranet through dial-up lines, which are soon to be replaced by wireless connections using CorDECT technology. The Soochanalayas have been equipped with Pentium multimedia color computer along with dot matrix printers. The user interface is menu based with information presented in the local Hindi language and the features of the Gyandoot software are continuously being updated. Gyandoot has been awarded the Stockholm Challenge Award 2002 and CSI National IT Award.

6. SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICES

A social networking service is an online service, platform, or site that focuses on facilitating the building of social networks or social relations among people who, for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. Most social network services are web-based and provide means for users to interact over the Internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging. Online community services are sometimes considered as a social network service, though in a broader sense, social network service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks.

Since their introduction, social network sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Orkut, Twitter, Google+ etc. have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. A 2011 survey found that 47% of American adults use a social networking service.

7. IMPACTS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON E-GOVERNANCE

The advent of social media is transforming the way in which people connect with each other and the manner in which information is shared and distributed. It is different from traditional media such as print, radio and television in two significant ways – first, the amount of content that can be generated by the users themselves far exceeds the content generation by news/opinion makers and second, its “viral” ability for potential exponential spread of information by word of mouth and interlinking of the various social media platforms, thereby considerably reducing the control over spread of any such information.

Web-based social media such as social networking, blogs, Micro blogs, audio and video sharing sites, Wikis etc. makes it possible to connect people who share interests and activities across political, economic, and geographic borders. Through e-mail and instant messaging, online communities are created where a gift economy and reciprocal altruism are encouraged through cooperation. Information is particularly suited to gift economy, as information is a non rival good and can be gifted at practically no cost.

Facebook and other social networking tools are increasingly the object of scholarly research. Scholars in many fields have begun to investigate the impact of social-networking sites, investigating how such sites may play into issues of identity, privacy, social capital, youth culture, education and Government applications.

Social networking is more recently being used by various government agencies. Social networking tools serve as a quick and easy way for the government to get the opinion of the public and to keep the public updated on their activity. The Centers for Disease Control demonstrated the importance of vaccinations on the popular children's site ‘Whyville’ and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has a virtual island on Second Life where people can explore underground caves or explore the effects of global warming. Likewise, NASA has taken advantage of a few social networking tools, including Twitter and Flickr. They are using these tools to aid the Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee, whose goal it is to *ensure that the nation is* on a vigorous and sustainable path to achieving its boldest aspirations in space.

8. SOCIAL NETWORKING ON INDIAN E-GOVERNANCE

In order to encourage and enable government agencies to make use of the dynamic medium of interaction, a basic framework and guidelines for use of Social Media by government agencies in India has been formulated. These guidelines will enable the various agencies to create and implement their own strategy for the use of social media. The document will help them to make an informed choice about the objective, platforms, resources, etc. to meet the requirement of interaction with their varied stakeholders. The Guidelines have been developed for all e-Governance projects currently under National e-Governance Plan, whether being implemented at Central or State level. In addition, it will be applicable to all new e-Governance Projects being developed by any Department or Line Ministry of Central Government.

Social Media is being used by Indian government agencies in a limited way. However, recently many agencies have taken steps to engage with their service seekers on social media. Some of the examples from India are given below—

- The Delhi Traffic Police has joined Facebook and Twitter to ease handling of traffic related issues
- The Indore Police Department has been using a blog, Twitter, online and mobile complaint forms, a Google map of police stations and a digital crime mapper to track criminal activities in the region.
- The Maharashtra Police Department launched a SMS-based complaint tracking system (CTS), called “Turant Chovis”, which promised to quickly redress citizen complaints by sending a first response within 24 hours and resolving the issue within 30 days.
- The Municipal Corporation of Delhi launched its Facebook page and created a forum for better interaction with citizens.
- Kolkata Traffic Police launched its Facebook and Twitter page to register complaints and has been effectively using these tools to help and serve the citizens.

9. CONCLUSION

e-Governance is a form of public administration making “use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to enhance the access and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, employees and management of its local bodies.” E-Governance aims at providing citizen centric services and ensuring increased transparency in the service interactions with various government agencies. e-Governance needs to transform all levels of Government but the focus

should be on local governments since local governments are the closest to citizens, and constitute for many, the main interface with government. There needs to be a clear understanding and appreciation of the purpose and objectives to be achieved through e-Governance. Moreover, there is need to change the mind-set of all the stakeholders involved, i.e. politicians, government officials and civil society at large. Social Networking, if used effectively, can serve a lot for the success of e-Governance. Social networking service's characteristics of connectedness, collaboration and community have the potential of ensuring wide scale including cross border consultation, and can help agencies collapse the duration of consultation process and receive immediate feedback on services delivered.

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