

Youth Participation in Digital Governance Platforms: A Study of Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa

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Abstract- Youth constitute a big proportion of the population in a nation such as India and use the digital technology widely. Their participation in digital governance platforms is critical to strengthening of participatory democracy. The present paper examines the level of student participation in digital governance initiatives. The research is noteworthy as it provides the information concerning the utilization of digital governance platforms by youth who are considered to be digital natives. The research also focusses on determining the obstacles faced by the youths in accessing the platforms. Further, the factors which influence their usage are also taken care of in the study.

The nature of the research is analytical and descriptive. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire from 100 students selected on the basis of random sampling and secondary data was obtained from various scholarly literature. The study compares the levels of participation, perceived utility and ease of use with percentage based statistical methods and analysis is also done through the 'Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)' and the 'Ladder of Participation Model'.

The paper elucidated that students are very conscious about digital governance platforms and its usage. However, they still lack meaningful participation, including the submission of grievances, comments, and consultations. Some of the constraints that students have to face includes language constraints, trust issues, complex interface and technical glitches. Nonetheless, institutional support, awareness promotion, and training programs are also demonstrated as significant factors to be involved in by the universities to enhance their participation.

The paper accomplishes that students can move to abandoning the use of tokens to an active engagement of participation in digital government through improving digital literacy, developing campus-based digital governance programs, and improving the use of platforms.

Index Terms: Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Digital governance, Digital Platforms, Ladder of participation, Technology Acceptance Model, Youth participation

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid innovations in digital platforms have made digital governance an essential aspect of the public administration as digital technologies have brought a revolution in governance systems across the world. Digital governance is a term that refers to use of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) to deliver services, enhance transparency, and engage citizens in the decision-making process by the governments (UN e-Government Survey, 2022). Programs such as Digital India, MyGov, UMANG, DigiLocker, and other state portals have tried to build more participatory and inclusive forms of governance in India by availing digital platforms through which citizens interact with government institutions (MeitY, 2023; Singh and Sharma, 2022). Besides improving service delivery, such platforms aim at boosting the level of democracy by providing individuals with an opportunity to air their views, make complaints, and participate in policy making procedures.

Youths are considered to be one of the most important stakeholders in the ecosystem of digital governance. In India, the youth population is one of the largest in the world and young individuals utilize smart phones and internet (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2023). More commonly known as 'digital natives', this is the cohort that is more accustomed to the use of digital devices and the digital platform compared to the earlier generations (Prensky, 2001). Youth involvement in digital governance, therefore, has become an important research area to scholars and decision-makers whose primary concerns include encouraging democracy and improving governmental

performance. To enhance responsiveness, accountability, and transparency of governance by making it more inclusive and participatory, the active involvement of the youth in the digital platform can enhance democracy and their participation in it (Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes, 2012; OECD, 2021).

Despite the increased digitization of governance in India, the use of these platforms by young people differs. Although the proportion of urban and educated young people who are becoming more aware of digital services is relatively high, the studies indicate that the rates of meaningful involvement in the governance processes, including the feedback provision, consultations, or the grievance redressal framework (GRF), remain low (Bhatnagar, 2020; Gupta and Jana, 2023). The barriers to youth participation on digital governance platforms include barriers like usability, lack of trust, lack of digital literacy, and lack of awareness and participation (Mishra and Kaushik, 2021). Also, the digital divide continues to affect access to and use of digital governance tools particularly in semi-urban and rural locations (World Bank, 2022).

Universities and other institutions of higher learning will be instrumental in creating civic awareness and encouraging youth participation in politics. A large portion of the population in terms of contribution to participatory governance is the university students who are politically aware and technologically active enough to make a big difference on the internet (Checkoway, 2011). The Indian context continues to lack empirical research in the interactions among the university students and the institutionally-level digital governance platform. The awareness, patterns of use, and perceptions of digital governance platforms are valuable information to policymakers and administrators interested in making youth more interested in participating in governance processes.

To examine the issue of youth participation in digital governance platforms, the present research adopted Chaudhary Devi Lal University (CDLU), Sirsa as a study area. The study rationale is to assess the perception of students regarding the barriers to digital governance platforms, their awareness, usage, and trust. The research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on the topic of digital governance and involvement of young people in India by analyzing primary data collected among university students. The findings provide policy-informed

information at the institutional and national levels to support the development of digital engagement systems and make the governing systems more inclusive.

The paper highlighted the importance of understanding the role of the youth in digital regulating platforms, as one of the means of enhancing participatory democracy in the digital age. To demonstrate the opportunities and challenges of youth participation in digital governance in India, the research will consider student views and experiences in CDLU, Sirsa.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Following are some of the relevant literatures reviewed:

Meijer and Bekkers (2022) investigated the enhancement of openness and citizen engagement through the digital governance projects in the article titled “Digital Government and Public Participation: A Review of Recent Research.” The authors argued that digital platforms could improve accountability and service delivery but this would depend on the institutional reforms, data security and citizen trust. Participatory tools such as feedback systems should be incorporated in order to strengthen democratic governance.

Bhatnagar (2023) in the article “Digitization Governance and citizen engagement in India: Trends and challenges” examined the effects of Digital India initiatives in participation and delivering of public services. According to the report, the disparities in semi-urban and rural localities still exist, despite the fact that urban youth use digital platforms more often. It meant that to be able to ensure fair digital governance, infrastructure development, training and awareness campaigns are needed.

Saebo, Rose, and Skiftenes Flak (2024) in their article “A Systematic Analysis of Digital Tools for Citizen Participation” reviewed the transformation of digital platforms in public participation in governance. The study says that online participative tools promote greater interaction between citizens and governments, although its effectiveness depends on institutional responsiveness and transparency. They also highlighted the fact that authentic digital participation should have accountability instruments and participatory design.

Omweri (2024) in his article “E-Government Implementation in Developing Countries” reviewed the key factors that affect the uptake of digital governance. The study suggested that there is a significant effect of digital literacy, governance capability, and digital infrastructure on public participation. Moreover, it is stated that inclusive participation is still undermined by socio- economic inequalities and a lack of understanding. In order to enhance the outcomes of the participatory government, the capacity of the institution, in the form of digital literacy, should be reinforced.

Zulmasyhur, Setiawan, and Nicolaus (2024) in the article entitled “Enhancing Governance through digital transformation” have discussed how integration of digital transformation to the local government increases the efficiency and openness of the government. According to the report, digital platforms work to improve the effectiveness of the communication between the government and the population, but the success of these platforms depends on the institutional readiness, digital literacy, and equitable access to technologies. The authors had a high sense of inclusive digital strategies to achieve effective public engagement.

In brief, the analyzed literatures indicated that digital governance enhances transparency and engagement. However, to ensure fair and constructive involvement of citizens, its usefulness depends on digital literacy, universal access, institutional readiness and trust.

III. OBJECTIVES

- To examine the awareness and usage level of digital initiatives by the university students.
- To find out the problems faced by youth in accessing and using the digital initiatives.
- To identify the factors that could enhance the participation of the youth in digital governance.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent are university students enlightened on digital governance platforms?
- What are the platforms of digital governance that students are aware of and use?
- What is the frequency of using digital governance platforms by students?

- Do students believe that the engagement of youth with government is enhanced through the digital platform?
- To what extent do students perceive digital governance platforms to be user-friendly?
- What are the problems associated with the use of these platforms?
- What can motivate the youth to make more efficient use of digital governance platforms?
- Is there a need to promote the participation in digital governance platforms in academic institutions?
- Is there a relationship between digital governance participation and digital access (gadgets and internet connection)?

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based on both primary and secondary data. Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa is considered as the universe of the study on basis of convenience. Primary data is collected through the structured questionnaire, administered on 100 students of the university covering undergraduate, post-graduate and doctorate students randomly. Secondary data is obtained from journals' articles, e-books, newspaper, theses and other documents. The two theoretical frameworks namely, “Ladder of Participation by Arnstein and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)” form the basis of the analysis of the use of digital platforms by youth in the governance system. The degree of youth involvement in the online platforms in connection with digital governance could be examined through the Arnstein model. The current study utilises TAM to determine the perception students have towards the digital governance platform. The perceived benefits, usefulness, accessibility, and trust determine the use of the digital governance tools by the students. By considering these factors, this study will be in a position to establish the barriers and enablers to the participation of the youth in digital governance. Further, the data collected is analysed in form of percentage.

VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Following are the two models related to the use of digital platforms by youth in the governance system.

a. Ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Arnstein employs a well-known paradigm referred to as the “Ladder of Participation” to measure the level of participation by citizens in the governing activity. According to this method, participation is thought of through eight levels, beginning with non-participation (treatment and manipulation), then, the levels include tokenism (informing, consulting, and placating), and finally, citizen power (partnership, delegated power, and citizen control). This approach can be used to determine whether digital governance platforms merely deliver information to the citizens or allow them to engage with and make meaningful decisions. (Arnstein, 1969)

b. Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)

“Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)” that was developed by Davis (1989) has been one of the most popular methods to understand how digital technologies are adopted and used by people. The model presents the following two main factors that determine the adoption of new technology, which are perceived utility and perceived ease of use. When a user perceives a digital platform to be efficient and easy to use, chances are higher that he or she will adopt and continue to use it. (Davis, 1989)

TAM developed in combination with the Ladder of involvement by Arnstein offers an inclusive perspective on the study of the degree of involvement and the variables that can have any impact on the use of digital platforms by university students.

VII. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Awareness and usage level

There is a very strong technological base among the youth as 100% of respondents reported that they use a laptop, desktop, tablet, or smartphone. The connectivity is generally normal with 81% of individuals accessing the internet on daily basis and 19% accessing it rarely. 96% of individuals have heard about digital governance platforms meaning that there is high awareness. Only 3 percent of the respondents were not aware of any of the following specific platforms: DigiLocker (85 percent), UMANG (70

percent), e District (59 percent), MyGov (56 percent), RTI online (43 percent) and online grievance portals (40 percent). But, 94 percent of the respondents say they used at least one digital governance tool, which means that there was considerable initial adoption; however, these frequency numbers are not continuous, meaning that awareness has not fully translated into actual use. Online certificates (55%), MyGov (50%), complaint portals (21%), and others (11%), were the next followers in terms of the use of platform users (DigiLocker (84%) and scholarship portals (68%). The majority of the users are active but not heavy users as the figures reveal that 56 percent of them use these platforms regularly, 33 percent do it occasionally and only 9 percent rarely. There are mixed results on perceived ease of use; one-third of them are mid-level, one-third are slightly positive, and the smaller percentage are very easy. Only five percent consider them tough implying that perceived ease of use is not very high.

Issues encountered in access and use of digital initiatives

Only one out of five respondents reported no problems in using these apps, and 4 out of five reported having issues [language barrier (32%), technological problems (15%), distrust (14%), complex interfaces (13%), ignorance (12%), and poor internet (9%)]. It implies that not only the infrastructural constraints exist (still, the internet quality affects a minority) but also the qualitative ones (usability, language, trust).

Reasons why youth are becoming more involved in digital governance

Most of the perceived needs were encompassed by the four categories, which were awareness campaigns (78%), training programs (77%), campus workshops (47%) and simpler apps (54%). Only 7% of students chose "other." Furthermore, 96 percent of the respondents believe that higher learning institutions need to promote involvement in digital governance, which shows a high interest in campus-based programs and institutional support. The rating of the students on a scale of 1 to 5 on whether digital platforms enhance youth involvement in government was mostly positive, though there is still the room of improvement (35% at 4, 30% at 3, 22% at 5, 11% at 2, and 2% at 1).

Synthesis and analysis using the theoretical frameworks

The table shows the interpretation and analysis of the data as per ‘Arnstein model and TAM model’.

Model	Questionnaire Variable	Level/ Concept	Analysis
Arnstein Model	Heard about platforms	Awareness stage	The data shows almost all the respondents know about digital governance platforms. This shows how dissemination of information has been effectively made through institutional and digital channels.
	Used platforms	Token Participation	Though the majority of the students have accessed the digital platform, their access is limited to service-based functions such as scholarships and certificates. This depicts token involvement where users interact with systems but otherwise do not influence the decision- making process. The interaction remains functional as opposed to being intentional.
	File complaints/ RTI/ MyGov	Active Participation	A low proportion of respondents only mentioned MyGov, RTI systems, and complaint portals. This indicates that, little active civic participation is occurring on the digital media.
	Give Feedback/ opinion	Higher Participation	The consultation or feedback platforms are not highly engaged. There are very few students who engage in policy feedback and opinion exchange.
TAM Model	Do digital platforms increase participation?	Usefulness	The majority of the population strongly believes that the transparent nature and participation are enhanced by the internet platforms. This is one of the aspects of TAM such as high perceived usefulness.
	Frequency of use	Usage	According to the usage trend, most students use the platforms rarely but not regularly. This means that they are intermittent rather than consistent civic activity driven by need rather than individual commitment.
	Are these platforms easy to use?	Ease of Use	On the whole, the level of usability is moderate. A large percentage of students indicate that they experience trouble with using platforms although some students find it easy to use them. According to TAM, perceived ease of use, albeit in modest amounts, causes irregular usage and restricted behavioral intention.
	Problem faced	Barriers	Most of the respondents mentioned barriers such as poor training, complexity of interfaces and lack of awareness of features. These constraints are cognitive and usability-related, rather than infrastructure-related as well. This indicates a second-level digital divide whereby access exists but the chance to act is minimal.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study examined the knowledge, usage patterns, challenges, and the levels of college students

engagement in digital governance programs. The digital platforms are proving to be a critical tool that can be used to improve transparency, service provision, and citizen participation in the

contemporary governing space. The involvement of young people in digital governance is important in strengthening participatory democracy and responsive governance systems, as they are a demographically important and digitally active demographic. The findings of the research showed that students are thoroughly familiar with the activities of digital governance and have a strong technological background. Many respondents stated that they were aware of the online grievance systems, DigiLocker, UMANG, and MyGov, and most of them had used at least one digital governance program. This translates to the fact that digitally governed activities have successfully penetrated the young in terms of awareness and first adopting the activities. However, the survey also demonstrates that there is an appalling lack of awareness to active participation. Most students use digital platforms to perform service-related activities, such as receiving documentation, scholarships, or certifications; relatively fewer of them engage in activities that would exhibit active civic engagement, such as complaining, offering criticism, or attending consultations.

Applying the Ladder of involvement by Arnstein, one comes to know that most of the students can only achieve small steps to active or empowered involvement, as they remain in the stages of awareness and token involvement. The Technology Acceptance Model shows that students consider digital platforms useful, yet they are less engaged with it regularly and meaningfully due to the presence of hurdles and intermediate levels of ease of use. More profound involvement is still impaired by such problems as lack of knowledge about the features of the platform, language barriers, complex interfaces, lack of training, and concerns regarding responsiveness and trust. Participation rates can be significantly improved by campus workshops, digital literacy training, awareness campaigns as well as by institutional support. To increase the engagement of students even more, more friendly interfaces can be improved and confidence in digital technologies can be provided.

The overall results of the study imply that even though digital governance programs have been effective in generating youth knowledge and access, they are currently not fully utilized as tools of participatory governance. To reduce the gap between usage and meaningful involvement, there are better usability, dedicated capacity-building efforts, and institutional

guidance that should be provided in the future. Besides enhancing the democratic participation, intensifying the participation of the youth in the online governance platforms will aid in establishing more responsive, transparent, and inclusive governance in the digital era.

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