Towards the Technology of Oneness: The Scope of Digital Democracy and its Effectiveness in a Nation Staten

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ABSTRACT--Digital democracy or e-democracy refers to the application of digital media and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the governance of a nation state. It presumes that all the adult citizens of a country can equally participate in the development and decision making process of a nation. It enables a secure and wider participation of the public in the political environment. The paper analyzes effectiveness of the digital initiatives of the government of a nation, the challenges involved in reaching out to the public, the scope of digital governance in the future and how successful digitalization can be, in order to promote the participation of people in policy making process. An analysis of the active participation and contribution of individuals to promote the social and economic growth of the nation will also be carried out in the paper.

Keywords-- digital democracy, e-governance, anonymity, ICT, digital infrastructure, political participation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is an umbrella term that includes the civil society, voting process and media. It is the blend of all these institutions and structures that make up a democracy. There is an increased decline in trust on democratic institutions globally and policy makers around the world have been searching for a prominent factor that would motivate the people to participate in the democratic process.

Digital technologies are used in the field of democracy as a transparent and reliable method to achieve individual expertise on decision making in a democratic process. This also empowers the citizens and helps to from a relationship between the rulers and the ruled. It has become important for any democracy and the government to set up platforms to enable its citizens to share ideas and information, raise arguments and concerns or submit petitions for individual needs or larger trends or patterns and thereby hold the government officials accountable for their functioning.

Digital democracy is the practice of using digital tools and technology for governance and seeking ways in which information and communication technology can deepen the participation of the citizens and thereby promoting transparency in the public sphere. The governmental departments can give the citizens access to the various information, through online consultation services like social networking sites, websites or applications. A more participatory role for citizens would help individuals to collaborate with policy makers so that they can make decisions on how they want to be governed. Internet connectivity promotes a wider participation of public in the democracy which was earlier limited to a high brow group.

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Citizens have the alternative to visit political websites, look for political data, follow news on the web, take an interest in conversation and discussions, or compose e-petitions. The point of implementing digitalization promotes transparency and clarity. This is accomplished by the digitalization of administrations and the expanded use and distribution of government information. When more information is accessible to general society and other government divisions, there is greater responsibility. This can go from charging web based petitions, enrolling to cast a ballot to the distribution of national exchange measurements and division spending plans. The thought is, as more administrations are digitalized, the interest for a digitalized government develops. This would prompt a quicker and progressively effective administration. Thus e-government enables an efficient management of the processes of the government.

E-Participation expects to enable a further developed political discussion through digitalization. The primary method here is to provide forums where citizens can address and settle issues with the administration directly. For e.g.: - The RTI Knowledge Portal is a website created by the government of Kerala to educate the public about the act. There is also a provision to file for any kind of petition to the government online and response would come within thirty days of receipt. This way people in a democracy can put their power to use and to some extend it is a tool to fight corruption in any state. Politicians and bureaucrats, in this way, would be able to track the issues that concern the public and thereby strengthening the public debate.

Many countries around the globe have also introduced online voting, which is more efficient and time saving when compared with the traditional mode. However, many countries like India use electronic methods for voting. The Indian voting machines have electromechanical buttons for voters and are non-networked. The EVM is augmented with the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). The use of electronic means for voting has become common, but online voting has the threat of getting hacked. However, digitalization of governmental processes would definitely increase the legitimacy and transparency of any government.

The aim of any democratic country is to digitalize their working in order to reach out to maximum number of citizens. The citizens would be given forums online to provide them idea, technical expertise and submit proposals and petitions online. The officials can use applications, websites and live streaming techniques to raise awareness among the public on a social issue or set an agenda for public debate.

Digital participation has its own disadvantages too, with the advantages surpassing the disadvantages. For any democracy to progress in a linear manner, it requires constant investment and innovation. Any digital initiative would become successful only if the entire population benefits from it. Rural areas that lack digital infrastructure for digital participation is an obstacle to overcome. All the citizens may not have access to smart phones or even internet connection. Even if they do, many of them would lack technical knowledge to participate in the digital democracy. Even though there are non digital methods available for political participation, the aim to disseminate these provisions among all equally. With digitalization, there are increased chances of private companies gaining power. The denial of digital anonymity, manipulation of content, prohibition of encryption modes are also threats to e- democracy, especially at an age in which people rely so much on social networking sites for information.

II.   OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the features of digital democracy, how far has its accessibility been made use of by the citizens, the advantages and the disadvantages of digitalizing democracy. At an era when the citizens of a nation depend to a large extend on accessing data online, utmost importance should be given to security and encryption mode. The government officials pass many immediate messages through online platforms, in order to create awareness among the people. Security threats, hacking, lack of digital knowledge and infrastructure would all affect the digitalization process. In the light of this, the people participation, the effective of digital democracy in a nation state are also analyzed in the paper.

III. HYPOTHESIS

It can be assumed that citizens of any nation with digital knowledge would participate in the digital democratic process and make use of its benefits. At the time of unrequited flood in the state of Kerala or when the pandemic of Corona hit the entire world, the leaders all over the nation has informed citizens on safety precautions in the online platform, with the citizens taking up the issue and providing necessary information back to the government and by spreading the word, especially in social networking sites. There are many websites and applications for the citizens to file petitions through e-petitioning system, raise a particular issue and call for public debate and discussion in digital democracy. However, the effective implementation of the same would depend on the way in which officials respond to it. Though the final outcome is not what the individual sought, it can be assumed that considering the citizens' opinions and engaging them as soon as possible, would make the working of the democracy more legitimate and transparent. Online political participation has seen a constant hike in these years as the citizens want their voices to be heard.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A case study of three different online platforms namely, My Gov, kerala.gov.in and Perinjanam Grama Panchayat; an application by the government of India, the official web portal of the government of Kerala and an application by a local panchayat in the state of Kerala respectively, are reviewed to analyze the different services available online, how interactive they are and how much people benefit from these. The above mentioned applications and websites are run by the national, state and a local ruling body in India and this itself shows how progressing is the field of digitalization in the country.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study has been done on digital democracy and e- participation in policy making and politics and on the factors that favour the application of digital media in policy making. The conclusion was that digitalization was not successfully incorporated into governmental organization.

Another study has analyzed the impact of digital platforms on politics, specifically the blog readers. The factors that predict the traditional and online forms of participation are also distinguished.

Another study focuses on how digital technology influences political campaigns and mobilization and ways in which it disseminate social science.

VI.   ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

My Gov app is an interactive platform that enables the citizens across the country to share their views, thoughts and ideas in relation to various programs and policies of the government. The services are provided in both Hindi and English. The citizens need to login to the application, where they can share their insights through polls, talks, tasks, discussions, blogs and polls.

The citizens can engage in various tasks through online contests like logo design, story writing and photography contests, or by participating in online quiz and by taking up various start up challenges. The open discussion field under the app is a public discussion platform that enables them to share their ideas and citizens to ensure peoples participation in the working of the government. A recent example is an option given in the app for the users to share their ideas and suggestions to fight corona endemic. The open polls and surveys enable the citizens to take surveys like digital awareness survey and poll their opinions on government policy.

The app ensures the participation of people in the democratic process by taking in their ideas and suggestions on social issues. The app is updated and it covers the privacy policy to protect the identity of users. Though it is user friendly, the application could have been made more interactive and also discussions and explanations on all the pressing issues should also be brought up through the application. Records show that over one million people of the nation use the app and the competitions and contests attract the children too. These kinds of applications are effective to build a nation with people participation.

Kerala.gov.in is the official website portal of the government of Kerala for informing the people on all the cabinet decisions, government orders, acts and rules and ordinances. Along with providing e-services like regulating e-certificates from different departments to paying bills online and giving information on different welfare schemes, there is a grievance redressal option which makes the website more interactive. There is also a provision to track our application status. All the helpline numbers along with the news regarding the state are updated in the website.

The website is also helpful for tourists as it provides information on the major tourist destinations in Kerala, along with their accessibility, specialties and an information centre with contact numbers of all the tourist information offices in Kerala. The English language option can be used by the non Malayalam speaking citizens. However, the non English speaking foreigners may find it hard to use, since there are only two language options provided.

The Kerala government official web portal thus exemplifies how a government can bring all its departments under a single portal for providing information to people both in and outside the state. It provides services both in English and Malayalam to make it user friendly too. One of the major objectives of a democracy should be to provide its services timely, cost effectively and transparently to its citizens. It enables anyone with digital knowledge and smart phones could pay the bills or apply for their certificates in a single click. Making the democracy people friendly is achieved through such services.

The Perinjanam Grama Panchayat is a digital initiative by a panchayat called Perinjanam, located at Thrissur district in the state of Kerala. The app was developed as a part of their Smart Panchayat Project that intends to serve the users anything in relation to the panchayat. The app provides the users with public information, notices, e-certificates, government policies in downloadable files. The helpdesk option gives the residents of the panchayat

detailed information on all the workers and professionals, along with their contact number for easy accessibility. Also the official contact number, along with link to the website is provided in the application.

The application was started as a part of the smart panchayat project would stand as a model for any other local body to adopt, as it makes all the services of a panchayat under an application. There is also a provision for the residents of the panchayat to submit their suggestions and complaints, which makes the space more interactive. The app provides its services only in Malayalam as it is used solely by the residents of a single panchayat from the state of Kerala. It stands as a perfect example of how a local body can contribute to the digitalization of a nation.

The effectiveness of any digital initiative would depend on major factors like how often the app gets updated, the availability of information in regional language, the availability of a mobile web version and the connectivity of the application with other social networking sites like face book, twitter and youtube. The effectiveness of the applications and a website taken for case study can be analyzed in terms of the above said factors.

Domain	Languages available	On Constant Updating	Availability of Mobile Web Version	Connectivity with social networking sites
My Gov app	English, Hindi	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kerala.gov.in	English, Malayalam	Yes	Yes	Yes
Perinjanam Grama Panchayat App	Malayalam	Yes	Yes	Yes

The analysis makes it clear that all the digital forums taken for case study are working effectively to promote a transparent working of the democracy. Three of them prove to be user friendly and a corresponding face book or twitter accounts for the same prove that people can benefit immensely from it. A large group of people would benefit from this. These applications can be made further interactive, only if the government officials would respond to their proposals and queries quickly and timely.

VII.   CONCLUSION

Digital technology can immensely influence the governing process of any nation state. Many countries around the globe are making optimum use of it. However, many other nations still thrive on how to make use of

digitalization, for the democracy to become transparent. This is of prime importance in the case of developing countries with its villages lacking digital infrastructure and people lacking digital education. In the case of India, it is in a highly progressive stage, with even the local governments making use of it and the citizens responding to it affirmatively. The civilians are in need of more interactive platforms that would help them to participate more in the policy devising process of a nation.

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