# Communication and Digital Divide: A Case Study on Digital India Connectivity in Northern India with reference to Jammu and Kashmir

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**Abstract:** - In the modern world, technology has become incredibly important for a variety of purposes, including commerce, education, and communication. It may also diminish the digital divide and present chances for employment, government, and communication. Information and communication technologies, or ICTs, are the driving forces behind social progress, economic expansion, educated society, and e-governance. ICTs have a significant positive economic impact, however there are still issues that need to be resolved. The influence of the digital divide is still present, based on factors such as literacy, geography, and ethnicity, from the United States to Haiti. A tech-savvy world is still a dream, even if much has been accomplished. In India, technology was embraced in the late 1970s, and in the ensuing decades, computers took the role of typewriters and other manual processes. In order to transform India into a knowledgeable economy and a digitally empowered society, an initiative known as Digital India was introduced on July 1st, 2015, and it consisted of three main parts: digital infrastructure, governance, and services on demand; and digital empowerment of citizens. A review of the body of literature suggests that communication hurdles and the digital divide continue to exist across the nation, within states, in districts, and between rural and urban areas. Using the survey method with probability random sampling, this descriptive and analytical research article intends to explore and assess the connection and communication perspective of J&K citizens with government through Digital India e- Government platforms. In an effort to close the ongoing digital divide in communication, this study paper also aims to emphasise the significance of digitization and the Digital India Programme. This study also looked at how the people of J&K perceive the Digital India programme.

***Keywords: J&K, e-governance, empowerment, digital divide, and digital India.***

## Introduction

Information and communication technology (or "ICT") innovations have revolutionised human life on all fronts. The advent of the internet has revolutionised global communication and made the world into what the author, McLuhan (1989), dubbed a "global village." The modern world is so digitally advanced that we may obtain information from anywhere in the globe while sitting still.

The innovations have altered the world from information centric to techno centric resulting in ease in communications around the globe. Due to the development and use of new information and communication technologies, developing nations now have a window of opportunity for more remarkable and successful communication.

In order to link and convert India into a digitally empowered society, the country launched the Digital India programme in 2015—India being one of the world's largest economies and internet users (Kaka et al., 2019). According to the Ministry of Information & Communication Technology (2015), the program's primary focus is on core digital infrastructure, governance, services on demand, and citizen empowerment through digital means. According to M. Rekha (2018), the goal of the Digital India Programme is to lessen the digital divide in communication while preparing India for a knowledge-based future by putting technology at the centre of change-enabling processes. This programme serves as a pertinent example for examining the connectedness of Digital India from the viewpoint of Jammu and Kashmir.

The government's e-Government policy initiatives are essential to fulfilling the goals of the Digital India programme.

The Indian government has implemented a number of e-Government policy initiatives that are essential to realising the goals and vision of the Digital India programme. One of the main goals of the Digital India initiative is to effectively deploy e-Governance (Department of Electronics & Information Technology, GoI., 2015). These initiatives played a crucial role in laying out the roadmap for the nation's e-Government projects. A variety of significant topics are covered, including the use of IT resources, email policy, open-source software, open APIs, e-Kranti (National e-Government Plan 2.0), collaborative application development, and application development and re-engineering for cloud-ready applications. In order to deliver electronic services to citizens in an effective, transparent, and cost-effective manner, these policies are intended to support all Central Ministries/Departments as well as all States/UTs in utilising emerging technologies, utilising newer business models, and revamping existing projects (Department of Electronics & Information Technology, GoI., 2015). These policies benefit from input from subject matter experts in government ministries, business, and academia, as well as from national and international best practices in the relevant field. The goal of digital India's e-Kranti architecture is simple, efficient, and mobile governance. It offers the fundamental ideas for both new and continuing e-Government initiatives as well as for revitalising the current ones (Khurana, 2018).

Therefore, it is persuasive to say that applications are developed in accordance with policies and guidelines, which makes them uniform and suitable for hosting and operating throughout the states.

**Digitalization and communication from a Jammu and Kashmir perspective:** Currently a Union Territory (UT), Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is made up of two Divisional Commissioner offices, twenty District Development Commissioner offices, and twenty districts. The capitals of the UT are Srinagar in the summer and Jammu in the winter. The organisation in charge of carrying out the Digital India Programme is the Department of Information and Technology in J&K, UT. The IT department of Jammu and Kashmir oversees the Jammu and Kashmir e-Governance Agency (JaKeGA) and the National Informatics Centre (NIC), both of which have offices in Srinagar. The Jammu secretariat is mostly responsible for spearheading the state's e-governance growth According to secondary data research, the J&K IT department has created

software, mobile applications, web services, portals, and other internet-related products through its agencies overthe years.

The J&K IT department has created portals, software, mobile applications, web services, and other internet-related services for the government of Jammu and Kashmir over the years, according to secondary data analysis conducted by its agencies. Nonetheless, the situation on the ground necessitates quick intervention, as indicated in the findings and conclusion below.

**Recognition:** Examining websites, handbooks, and press articles reveals that J&K has received numerous accolades for its efforts in e-governance and digitalization:

1. In the 'Web Ratna District' category of the 2016 Digital India Awards, District Kupwara of the former J&K State took home the 2nd Prize (Gold) for its e-Government and citizen-friendly website initiatives.
2. In December 2016, a small town called Lanura in the J&K region of Badgam became the country's first cashless village.
3. On National Voters' Day in 2015, the Election Commission of India bestowed a special award on NIC J&K for "Best Practices in Electoral Rolls and Election Management using ICT tools."

1 OBJECTIVES:

a. To investigate the ongoing digital divide in rural communities.
b. To research the difficulties in converting J&K to digital.
c. To investigate how J&K residents view the digital India initiative from a communication standpoint

RESEARCH APPROACHES

The investigators employed secondary data analysis techniques to obtain a comprehensive comprehension of Digital India. Its nature is analytical and descriptive. However, in order to achieve some of the study's goals, the researchers used a survey method with probability random sampling in rural regions to examine how J&K individuals connected to and communicated with the government via Digital India e-governance platforms.

3.1. ACCESS TO DATA

An extensive analysis of secondary data was conducted in order to fully comprehend the Digital India programme. Both a quantitative and a qualitative approach was taken by the researchers; the survey was administered by phone, Google forms, and in-person presence; links were distributed by emails and WhatsApp chat. The method of probability random sampling was applied.

**4.1. Analysis of Secondary Data:**

After reviewing and analysing relevant journals, research papers, brochures, books, and websites, the researcher discovered that the J&K Information Technology Department is the organisation responsible for implementing Digital India in the UT. It does this by means of the Jammu and Kashmir e-Governance Agency (JaKeGA) and the National Informatics Centre (NIC). To increase communication and build connections with the people of Jammu and Kashmir, they provide a range of online/e-governance services, some of which are currently in the execution phase, some of which are in the pipeline, and some of which are in the implementation phase:

| S. No | Services offered |
|---|---|
| 1. | NIC Network (NICNET) in Jammu & Kashmir. |
| 2. | Web Services. |
| 3. | NIC Support in Main Offices. |
| 4. | Mobile Applications. |
| 5. | State Specific Software Project |
| 6. | National level Software Projects |
| 7. | Major Projects under Development/ Implementation and Activities Planned for 2018-19 |

Lists the services provided by the Jammu and Kashmir government to digitalize the Union Territory in support of the Digital India programme, while Table 2 (which consists of 7 distinct service-wise tables) provides a brief description of the services provided. To determine what is being provided to citizens to ensure the success of the Digital India programme, a thorough analysis of the secondary data was conducted.

| Sr. No. | Service | Brief Description |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | NIC Network in Jammu and Kashmir (NICNET). For network services, video conferencing, and data sharing, NICNET offers a vast array of extensions and integrations. The researchers' analysis revealed the following findings: | Under this service, high-speed internet connectivity is available to all 20 J&K Institutes of Higher Learning from the closest NIC district centre, or NIC J&K NOC, which is situated in Jammu.<br><br>A 1 Gbps/34 Mbps leased line and VSATs as a backup for 05 Districts are delivered to all NIC at the Districts.<br><br>All 20 district headquarters, the offices of the lieutenant governor, the chief electoral officer, and two divisional commissioners offices, as well as six separate J&K government directorates, have video conferencing capabilities. Integration of MCU-based systems with DIT and J&K Police studios both inside and outside the Union Territory via 20 Video Conferencing (VC) Studios, the J&K Civil Secretariat, the High Court, the Assembly, the Census Department Directorate, and the CEO of J&K. |

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|---|---|---|
| | | The J&K Police has expanded its NICNET-based connectivity to include all SSP, DIG, and several wings. This also applies to the facility that uses video conferencing.<br>supplying Jammu and Srinagar civic secretariat offices, all 20 district development commissioner offices, the J&K High Court, the Assembly, the Police, and so on with high-speed Internet connectivity. In these offices, central Wi-Fi based access to mobile devices—more than 2000 accounts are provided on a daily basis. High-speed storage and Internet access to J&K-specific data are offered to citizens, government offices, employees, and businesses at the media centre (datacentre).<br>It was discovered that over 6500 offices and officers had email accounts set up. |
| 2 | Web Services | Website design, development, and hosting, along with security audits for domain registration and remote publication, are among the web services offered. the websites of 20 districts, the J&K UT Government Portal, and nearly 100 other UT Government agencies. WCAG 2.0 and GIGW compatible webpages. Additionally, all websites are hosted in the cloud by Web, JKPSC, and J&K SSB. |
| 3 | NIC Support In Main Office | NIC J&K offers S/W Development, VC Studio, Network Operations, LAN/Wi-Fi/Internet Connectivity, and Annual Darbar Move offices between Jammu and Srinagar at the Governor's Secretariat in Jammu and Srinagar. The J&K Legislative Assembly and Council, the J&K High Courts in Jammu and Srinagar, the 22 Deputy Commissioners, and other District offices have all received assistance. |
| | Mobile Applications | According to the NIC, J&K unit's project description from 2018, the eAssembly App is a mobile app designed for the J&K Legislature that allows government departments to view and submit answers to queries posed by honourable members during assembly sessions. |

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|---|---|---|
| | State Specific Software Project | 1. e-Libraries: An Electronic Library Automation and Networking Agenda.<br>2. Electoral Rolls and EPIC Management System of J&K (JKERMS)<br>3. . The system for managing elections.<br>4. TreasuryNet.<br>5. The System for Budget Estimation, Allocation, and Monitoring (BEAMS).<br>6. GRAS, or the Government Receipt Accounting System.<br>7. The PaySys system for bill preparation and payment.<br>8. The system for integrated financial management (IFMS-MIS).<br>9. The Cash Management System of DAT.<br>10. The System for Preparing Budgets (BPS).<br>11. Personnel Information System, Centralised (CPIS).<br>12. KRMCE, or J&K Revenue Management by Computerised Electricity Billing.<br>13. Accounting System for Divisions.<br>14. Skill proofing and Biometric Identification Using Adhaar.<br>15. The JKGAD website.<br>16. The Excise Information System for Jammu and Kashmir.<br>17. JKSFC will use C2G and G2C e-Government services for the distribution of timber.<br>18. The ePension Pension Accounting System.<br>19. The eStamp Stamp Management System.<br>20. The system for managing traffic challans (TCMS).<br>21. The Awaz-e-Awam, or J&K Grievance Portal.<br>22. The J & K Public Service Commission website.<br>23. Online gateway for J &K Service Selection Board.<br>24. PERMANENT ENTITIES.<br>25. The Department of Housing and Urban Development Project (e-Government in Municipalities).<br>26. Rural Area Birth & Death Registration.<br>27. J&K Arms Licences Processing and Monitoring System, or JKARMS.<br>28. Court Cases Monitoring System (CCMS) is number<br>29. Professional Entrance Examination of J&K |

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| | | Board (BOPEE).<br>30. Services for Video Conferences.<br>31. Verification Management Information System (VMIS) for J&K and CID.<br>32. The bulk SMS and CCTV monitoring systems for the Shri Amarnathji Yatra<br>33. The hiring of SPOs, or special police officers.<br>34. Tracker Against Insurgency.<br>35. e-Samiksha: J&K CM instructions are monitored via this programme<br>36. GenProfits.<br>37. Electronic Assembly.<br>38. The J&K college admissions online system.<br>39. J&K government's State Motor Garages.<br>40. Vigilance Organisation - Surveillance software.<br>41. Ministry of RD and PR's MIS on Work Estimate Monitoring and Bill Payment. |
| 6 | National level Software Projects | 1. J&K's Online Tending Solution: e-Procurement (GePNIC).<br>2. Project Mission Mode e-Courts.<br>3. SPARTO<br>4. VAHAN: The Vehicle Registration Online Portal.<br>5. Computerization of the Public Distribution System (ePDS).<br>6. The Portal to India<br>7. AGMARKNET<br>8. Small and medium-sized businesses.<br>9. The Certificate of Jeevan Pramaan<br>10. The PFMS, or Public Financial Management System<br>11. The NADRS, or National Animal Disease Reporting System<br>12. The Bio-Metric Attendance System with Adhaar Enabled (AEBAS)<br>13. Urban Swachh Bharat Mission<br>14. The Project for Community Information Centres (CIC)<br>15. e-Prison: A move towards jail automation PRAGATI.<br>16. Hospital@NIC e-Hosp<br>17. Cloud-e-Hospital<br>18. The National Social Assistance Programme, or NSPA<br>19. The Panchayati Raj and Rural Development MIS |

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|---|---|---|
| | | 20. The Child Development Scheme Integrated<br>21. The National Missing and Vulnerable Children Tracking System.<br>22. CGHS@NIC on the web<br>23. The National Scholarships Website<br>24. NSP 2.0, the National Scholarship Portal<br>25. SARATHI: Online gateway for obtaining a driver's licence and learner's permit<br>26. E-Granthalaya-Library Automation SW, position<br>27. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)<br>28. Agriculture by NeGP.<br>IVFRT |
| | Major Projects Under Development/Implementation and Activities Planned for 2018-19 | 1. Elections to panchayats<br>2. Computerization of College Libraries<br>3. e-District MMP<br>4. IFS Sparrow<br>5. The Accounting System for Government Receipts (GRAS)<br>6. System for Budget Estimation, Allocation, and Monitoring<br>7. The PFMS, or Public Financial Management System<br>8. The Directorate of Economics and Statistics' MIS and Networking Project.<br>9. Personnel Information System Centralised (CPIS)<br>10. Engineering wing division accounting system.<br>11. Computerization of Public Distribution Systems.<br>12. Admission to College Online.<br>13. JKBOPEE's online preference management system<br>14. The JKPSC online application system.<br>15. Services offered online under Vahan 4.0.<br>16. Sarathi 4.0 Online Services<br>17. Services given by Sarathi 4.0<br>18. JKSSB Portal refresh<br>19. Hospital@NIC e-Hospital.<br>20. The National Social Assistance Programme, or NSPA<br>21. The NSP 2.0 National Scholarship Portal.<br>22. The computerization of GP Fund<br>Electronic Assembly |

## The Survey

The participants were questioned about the Digital India Program's expertise, their knowledge of Digitalization and Digital India initiatives, the e-governance services provided, the legitimacy of online e-governance, and how certain they were that they wanted to keep communicating via Digital India platforms. At the end of the survey, 100 randomly chosen rural residents from 20 districts participated. The survey functioned as a control, giving the researcher a fundamental grasp of the opinions of the respondents. Additionally, the percentage of persons who are aware of the e-governance platforms used by the J&K government was investigated. Table 3 contained a list of the results.

## FINDINGS:

Secondary Data Findings: After carefully examining secondary data from government websites, portals, apps, journals, and research papers on the topic, it was discovered that there are not as many Government to Citizen (G2C) services available, and that most recipients (C) are unaware of the procedure and lack digital literacy. The majority of services are created primarily to make government employees' jobs easier (G2E).

Through a survey and analysis of a few websites and portals, such as the JKPSC, JKSSC, JK Awami portal, and bank mobile apps for money transactions, only a small number of services were determined to be user-friendly. According to the NIC, J&K's project profile from 2018, they developed people-friendly mobile apps, but they were either not found or not available on the Android Play Store.

The creation of people-friendly mobile apps, as stated by the NIC, J&K in their project profile 2018, was either not discovered or was not offered on the Android Play Store, which is mostly used by Jammu and Kashmir residents. Additionally, it was discovered that a number of portals and websites created and maintained by the J&K Information Technology department through NIC are in worse condition than private websites as a result of cross-load confusion and non-functioning areas.

## RESULTS OF THE SURVEY:

Of the 100 randomly chosen rural residents in all 20 districts of Jammu and Kashmir, 65% are ignorant. Due to the lack of access to the internet, which is regarded as the fundamental element of the Digital India Programme, 45% of respondents do not use online platforms. 45 percent The creation of people-friendly mobile apps, as stated by the NIC, J&K in their project profile 2018, was either not discovered or was not offered on the Android Play Store, which is mostly used by Jammu and Kashmir residents.

Additionally, it was discovered that a number of portals and websites created and maintained by the J&K Information Technology department through NIC are in worse condition than private websites as a result of cross-load confusion and non-functioning areas.

The government of India's most ambitious undertaking is the digital India plan. The investigation revealed obstacles that must be overcome for the project to be completed successfully, whether they relate to the project's basic digital infrastructure, on-demand services and governance, or citizen empowerment through technology.

## DISCUSSION

As per the Digital India project's goals, India is expected to gain the most exposure and take the lead globally in IT interface, e-Governance, and e-Service. But the researchers discover a different strategy when it comes to Jammu and Kashmir, the recently formed Union Territory of India. The Digital India Program's vision calls for the provision of high-speed Internet, but Jammu and Kashmir's rural areas suffer from poor internet speeds, intermittent power outages, and signal problems, depriving them of the essential digital infrastructure needed to connect and communicate with the rest of the world. People's ignorance of even fundamental platforms, such as the e-books platform (eBasta), e-sign, e-Greeting's site, Digital Locker System, Jeevan Pramaan, e-Hospital, e-Kranti, My Gov programme, e-education, e-Health, e-governance programmes, et cetera, is still present, according to the findings.

The Bharat Net programme was introduced by the Indian government as part of the Digital India initiative. This program's third component calls for the government to establish and enhance internet services in rural areas in order to empower citizens digitally. Under that plan, the government granted licences to a number of internet service providers (ISPs), including Airtel, BSNL, Reliance Jio, and others, so they could use optical fibre to build a rural broadband network in Jammu and Kashmir. The research findings, however, indicate that there is still work to be done, and rural areas—which are home to over 80% of Jammu and Kashmir's population—may encounter challenges until the project is finished.

Both technical and non-technical obstacles were discovered throughout the course of this investigation regarding the exponential growth of the Digital India programme in the rural areas of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Technological illiteracy, a lack of fundamental infrastructure, a lack of understanding, privacy trustworthiness, and other issues are examples of technical challenges.The non-technical issue includes things like people's difficulty accessing services, ignorance, the high cost of digital equipment, low literacy, etc.

## CONCLUSION:

There is still a long way to go in terms of technological advancement and the implementation of the Digital India initiative, which aims to reduce the digital divide, lower communication obstacles, and benefit people by saving important time for connecting and communicating. The government will be able to include the public in a more planned manner with the support of this program's effective implementation and increased awareness. The government must successfully execute the fundamental nine pillars of Digital India for every Indian citizen to be empowered by technology. In addition, careful planning and implementation of the electronics development fund, the effective installation of wi-fi hotspots, broadband highways, centres of excellence on the Internet of Things, data integration of government departments, and the creation of digital infrastructure as a utility for J&K citizens are necessary for better connecting and communicating the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

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