

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IN PLATFORM-BASED GOVERNANCE: A COMMUNICATION STUDY OF MYGOV

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of online communication media has changed the way citizens communicate with the government and the perception of citizenship and involvement. Under the DigitalIndia initiative, steps have been taken to get citizens involved in the digital field. MyGov is one such significant platform in the process of establishing communication between the citizens and the government. This paper focuses on this idea of digital citizenship in platform-based governance, in particular, MyGov as a space for participatory communication and civic engagement. Situating the discussion in the framework of Sustainable Development Goals especially SDG 16 which focuses on inclusive institutions, transparency, and

participatory decision-making, the paper analyses the role of digital platforms in the changing practices of citizenship in India. Relying on secondary sources such as policy documents, government reports, existing literature and media discourse, the study uses a qualitative and descriptive analytical approach. The paper argues that although platforms such as MyGov increase participation and civic interaction, the fulfilment of meaningful digital citizenship lies in the issues of access, awareness and communicative literacy. The discussion attempts to point out the possibilities and the limitations of platform mediated citizenship in the contemporary democratic governance.

KEYWORDS: Fact-checking misinformation platform governance qualitative case study India

INTRODUCTION

Citizenship has traditionally been conceived in terms of a relationship between individuals and the state, in that rights, responsibilities and participation are involved in a political community. For much of history this relationship has been mediated through physical spaces (such as public institutions, elections or civic forums, print or broadcast media). In India, the number of internet users stands at about 825 million as of 2024, which is a significant field of the population that is capable of using digital public spaces (DataReportal, Digital 2024 India report). By mid-2024, it had over 467 million active social media users, which means that out of the entire internet users, over half of them use digital platforms on a regular basis (DataReportal, Digital 2024 India report). The emergence of digital platforms has not only changed the flow of information, it has also transformed the expectations of participation, responsiveness and accountability. In modern societies, digital media platforms have also increasingly taken over the role of sites in which political communication, civic engagement and public discourse takes place. Through these platforms, the citizens are in a position to obtain information, air their opinion and communicate with the institutions in a manner that was not achievable in the past due to time and distance. Consequently, the concept of citizenship has been transformed, and there has come up what is referred to as digital citizenship. Digital citizenship does not

just mean having access to technology but also entails being participants, communicating, being responsible, and engaging in the digital environment in an informed manner. When it comes to India, it is the emergence of the digital infrastructure and mobile connectivity that has resulted in the establishment of novel ways through which governments interact with their citizens. Initiatives undertaken as a part of digital India programme have been focussed on using digital platforms for better governance, delivery of services and public participation. Against this backdrop this paper analyses the concept of digital citizenship in terms of platform based governance in India particularly the MyGov platform. By locating MyGov within a broader framework of thinking about digital citizenship and sustainable development, the paper focuses on discussing the effect of digital communication platforms on modern forms of citizenship. The analysis is not geared towards the quantitative measurement of participation but rather to the reflection of the communicative function of platforms in allowing, mediating and sometimes restricting citizen participation into governance processes.

While existing scholarship on e-governance in India has largely focused on service delivery mechanisms, administrative efficiency, and technological adoption, relatively limited attention has been paid to the communicative dimensions of platform-based citizen participation. In particular,

MyGov has often been examined as a policy initiative or participatory tool, rather than as a mediated communicative space that reshapes the practices and meanings of citizenship. Besides, the literature on the subject of digital citizenship in India is more inclined to focus on access and infrastructure and rather than on the issues of communicative engagement, awareness, and quality of participation. The paper aims to fill this gap by evaluating MyGov in the light of a more communication-based approach, and framing it in the context of more general discussion on digital citizenship and democratic engagement.

METHODOLOGY

The analytical approach used in the study is qualitative and descriptive in methodology to consider MyGov as the platform of digital citizenship. The paper analyses MyGov using secondary source such as government reports, policy documents, official platform data and available academic literature regarding the concept of digital citizenship, its governance, and communication with the people. This method is suitable in comprehending the communicative impact of online platforms since it enables an interpretive analysis of participation, engagement, and institutional arrangement as opposed to a quantitative evaluation of the user activity.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP: THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE.

Digital citizenship has become a concept because of the increased use of digital technologies in the social and political life of individuals. With communication existing more and more in digital form, citizenship can no longer be perceived as participation in physical senses and involvement in formal political process. Digital citizenship is what we perform, in the sense of being involved in civic, political and social affairs via digital means, and not merely being an access to technology, but being able to engage in digital communal space in any way at all that has some meaning.

Academic discourse on the topic of digital citizenship appears to revolve around the participation, responsibility, awareness and information. Before traditional citizenship whereby institutional and territorial boundaries mediate much of the process, digital citizenship occurs in the networked environment, with forms of interaction, which is immediate and usually continuous. The internet is allowing citizens to enjoy their freedom of voice, garner support, access information and interact with institutions instantly. Nevertheless, the opportunities are associated with the questions concerning the quality of participation, inclusion of digital spaces, and the capacity of citizens to be responsible navigators of information.

In actual practice, digital citizenship is affected by several factors such as digital literacy, socio-economic conditions and the design of the digital platforms

themselves. While access to digital technologies has hardly been limited in an increasing number of countries, particularly in developing countries, digital skills and awareness gaps between citizens still shape the nature of engagement with the web. Meaningful digital citizenship therefore relies not only on the technical availability of technology but also on the communicative competences which help individuals to critically assess the information and to take part constructively in digital communication.

From a communication theory perspective, digital citizenship may also be understood through the idea of mediated public spheres, where participation is shaped by the structures and affordances of digital platforms. Scholars have argued that digital platforms do not merely host participation but actively configure the conditions under which communication takes place. In this sense, platform-based governance initiatives such as MyGov operate as institutionalised public spheres, where citizen participation is encouraged, structured, and moderated by the state. This framing allows digital citizenship to be examined not only as an outcome of access but as a communicative practice influenced by platform design, institutional intent, and citizen competence.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN INDIA

In the recent years, digital platforms have played a central role in government communication strategies in India. Mobile-based connectivity is also a significant force of digital interaction with citizens both in urban and rural regions, with India having a population of 830 million smartphone users in 2024 (Statista, *Smartphone Users in India 2024* report). The growing penetration of smartphones and internet connectivity has provided the state with a direct means of reaching the citizens to bypass the traditional intermediaries, like print and broadcast media. Government agencies are no longer limited to using digital platforms to share information and disseminate information but to also seek feedback, address grievances, and encourage participation in government.

The Digital India programme is part of a larger movement towards platform based governance, where digital tools have been used to boost transparency, efficiency and citizen engagement. The government has attempted to establish interactive communication modes through websites, mobile applications and social media on which citizens can access policies and public services. The expectations of the citizens have also changed, and nowadays digital platforms are regarded as valid channels of interaction and participation.

However, there are new challenges that have been associated with the digital governance. Although digital communication can be more inclusive it

would also guarantee a recreation of already existing inequalities to people who are not or are digitally literate in this concept. In addition, platform-based communication is likely to be pro-speedy and pro-visibility with certain consequences to the richness and deliberative nature of citizen engagement. These dynamics are addressed to the significance of the investigation of digital governance platforms not as to what technology is but as to what communicative space would determine what type will the interactions between the citizen and the state be.

A communication-based approach to the concept of digital governance shows the significance of interaction, feedback, and dialogue in citizen-state relationships.

Digital platforms are not neutral tools but communicative environments that frame how participation is articulated and responded to. Therefore, the effectiveness of platform-based governance depends not only on technological availability but also on how communication is structured, acknowledged, and incorporated into governance processes.

MYGOV AS THE PLATFORM OF DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

MyGov forms part of one of the most prominent efforts by India for institutionalising citizen participation through a digital platform. Launched as a part of the Digital India initiative, MyGov works as an interface through which citizen interacts with the government policies, offer consultation and contribute their ideas, and respond to public

campaigns. Since its release (26 July 2014), MyGov has expanded to more than 30 million registered users, and discusses, conducts surveys, and campaigns on matters of governance (MyGov official portal overview). Unlike conventional media of communication, MyGov makes citizen the active players rather than passive users of information. The site also offers various means by which citizens can contribute including debates on policy matters, polls, and group actions. On MyGov, citizens have posted the highest number of comments totalling 55 lakh, have completed over 14 lakh tasks, attempted almost 2 crore quizzes, made 1.5 crore pledges, and cast 20 lakh votes in governance polls (MyGov official platform metrics). These characteristics are indicative of an attempt to incorporate participatory communications in the governance and advocate the larger concept of digital citizenship. Through providing a structured platform of interaction, MyGov will attempt an organisation of the way in which citizens can interact with the government and enables their contributions to be factored in the administrative and policy-making processes. Simultaneously, representation and inclusion are also a matter of concern due to the nature of participation on MyGov. By 2025, MyGov has registered more than 1,031 discussions and 1,788 tasks, which illustrates the level of engagements that are offered to citizens (Ministry of Electronics and IT [MEITY] public report).

Participation is often led by self-selection that could lead to low diversity of voices which are represented on the platform. In order to make it more accessible and inclusive, MyGov is provided in 12 Indian languages, including Hindi, English, Bengali, Telugu, and Tamil, whereby citizens with various lingual backgrounds can join (MyGov official overview). What is more, influence of the citizen's contribution on decision making processes still remains challenging to judge. Despite these limitations, MyGov shows how digital platforms can offer communicative spaces in which practices and expectations of citizenship in an age of digital technology processes are redefined.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 16

The nexus of digital citizenship and sustainable development is especially relevant when the concept is viewed in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 16 with its focus on peace, justice and good institutions. Central to this goal is the promoting inclusive decision-making, transparency and public participation. Digital platforms which allow for interactions between the citizens and the state assumes importance as potential tools for promoting such goals.

Platforms such as MyGov are part of the communicative aspects of SDG 16 as they provide opportunities to citizens to participate in the governance processes other than the elections. Through consultations and feedback mechanisms,

digital platforms can provide a better level of transparency and a feeling of inclusion in the policy discussions. These interactions are in line with the general perception of development as participative process with citizens not being mere recipients but being active stakeholders of the process.

However, the extent to which digital platforms contribute to sustainable development is determined by the quality and inclusiveness of the participation that they enable.

Digital citizenship in this regard does not only mean having a right to access, but also to access in a critical and responsible manner. Without sufficient consciousness and digital literacy, it is very likely that platform-based participation will be symbolic (and not substantive). Thus, although digital platforms have the potential of SDG 16 realization, the degree to which they will become effective is conditionally dependent on the communicative practices and institutional responsiveness that will be brought with their application.

MyGov as a platform of digital citizenship can be analysed with significant implications to governance communication in India. Although the platform offers avenues of participation, the communicative worth of the participation is determined by transparency, feedback systems, and policy responsiveness in sight. Enhancing the feedback between institutions and citizens may be achieved. Increase trust and democratic legitimacy. Moreover, it is necessary to create platforms that can

promote deliberation instead of just symbolic involvement that would promote meaningful digital citizenship and would respond to the goals of SDG 16.

CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS OF PLATFORM MEDIATED DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Although online platforms like MyGov mark a broader platform of citizen engagement, there are several structural and communicative constraints that are unveiled. Among the most widespread challenges, it is related to the digital divide, which continues to have an impact on access and participation trends in India. Disparities in terms of connectivity/digital literacy, language proficiency and socio-economic conditions influence the participants of digital platforms and the success with which they can interact. Consequently, platform based participation may also reflect the voices of the digitally empowered citizens as opposed to the unfortunate groups.

The other problem is related to the type and the scope of engagement that digital platforms enable.

Although the system can be interacted with the help of such mechanisms as surveys, discussions, and feedback forms, they are not always very important in the decision-making processes. The policy making can only be formal or symbolic unless there is a reflection of the suggestions of the citizens. This leads to the issues of transparency and

responsiveness, which are the primary values of digital citizenship and SDG 16 objectives.

In addition to this, it is also the communicative design of the digital platforms itself that plays a major role in the determination of engagement. The focus on short, visible and fixed format may limit the discussion and rational argument. Perhaps, digital participation may be fragmented where no dialogue and subsequent communication exists, and the participation may be partial to become an informed and deliberated act of citizenship. These problems show that digital platforms have to be seen not only as the ways of interaction, but also as the areas of communication, which are to be well planned and institutionalized.

The paper suffers weaknesses due to the use of secondary data and descriptive analysis as opposed to the lived experiences and perceptions of the citizens who have been involved on the MyGov platform. These constraints highlight the distinction between formal participation and substantive democratic engagement.

Furthermore, the paper focuses on a single platform, which may limit broader generalisations about digital citizenship practices in India. Nevertheless, the analysis provides valuable insights into the communicative dimensions of platform-based governance and lays the groundwork for future empirical research.

CONCLUSION

The dynamic nature of citizenship that is marked by the digital age has attracted the interest of the importance of communication platforms in democratic participation. Digital citizenship, as this paper will explain, is more about access to technology and practices of engagement, responsibility and interaction in digital public spaces. Digital governance initiatives institutionalise participation by citizens in a systematic way using communicative mechanisms as is seen in platforms like MyGov in the Indian context.

This paper has discussed the opportunities and constraints of platform-based participation in modern governance by locating MyGov as part of the digital citizenship and Sustainable Development Goal 16. The openness, inclusivity, and civic participation can be supported with the help of online solutions and become the primary theme of global development goals that are oriented on strong and accountable institutions. In the meantime, the effectiveness of such platforms is based on the quality of engagement it will

provide and the extent to which the voice of citizens will be taken into consideration when it comes to the governance process.

The discussion shows that in order to make digital citizenship effective, there is need to further develop digital literacy, digital awareness and communicative responsiveness. As the presence of digital platforms which facilitate a connection between the citizens and the state is increasing, there is a necessity to note whether they can be used to facilitate democratic governance in addition to the fact that the technological development is not the only aspect, but whether they are capable of facilitating the process of smart, inclusive, and participatory communication.

Studies of digital citizenship in the future can be useful in investigating the perceived effect of citizens on the outcomes of governance, leaving engagement measures behind and asking questions of influence and agency. As digital platforms are even more present in mediating the relationship between citizens and the state, the quality of their communicative is the centre of concern when judging democratic governance in the digital era.

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