Electoral Reforms in India in the form of Digitisation and its Future Potential

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Abstract

The study has focused on understanding and exploring the detailed aspects of Electoral reforms in India. The research study aims to investigate digitalisation's potential role in impacting India's electoral process and assess its future potential. The research design is a qualitative study, the qualitative data is collected from various databases including Google Scholar, web-articles, and news articles to access the latest information about the research area. The result identified the importance and need of strengthening the Electoral reforms in India and digitalisation have a positive impact in the future.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

India is considered a diversified democratic country and is continuously focused on maintaining and conducting transparent elections. As per the report of Drishtiias (2024), the Election Commission of India (ECI) is an autonomous constitutional authority addressing the major roles and responsibilities of conducting fair elections. However, the electoral process is considered the cornerstone of democracy as there are various challenging aspects identified and therefore, the research paper is focused on enhancing and maintaining the transparency of elections in imposing a growing emphasis on digitalisation.

ECI has implemented various digital initiatives to enhance and modernise the electoral process as some of the initiatives include the implementation of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) or the usage of indelible ink (Auerbach et al. 2022). The study intends to contribute and diversified the knowledge of enhancing the electoral landscape as there is a potential opportunity in innovation and digitalisation (George 2023). The study focused on understanding by addressing challenges and identifying the potential future aspect of practice globally.

1.2. Significance of Study

There is a significant aspect of conducting the study to explore and enhance electoral integrity. The study will explore various issues like, vote manipulation or various risks of electoral fraud as it aligns with various stakeholders within the democratic system. In addition, the study would help in simplifying the process of registration or gaining needful information about the vote and thus, increase the voter turnout. The study will help in enhancing and gaining the digital system to promote transparency, monitoring and effective audit elections. Therefore. The study findings will help in gaining overall awareness and knowledge about the impact of technology in understanding and accessing the knowledge about the accountability of electoral bodies.

1.3. Problem Statement

Despite being a democratic country, India is facing certain challenges with the electoral process, as it is leading and resulting in a lack of transparency, lowering the voters, and accountability of the process

(Dash, Ferris and Winer 2019). With the wide changes and implementation of digitalization, there is a need to investigate and understand the impact of digitalizing landscape. The integration of digital initiatives is identified to have existing gaps in overall accessibility for marginalized communities (Martin and Picherit 2020). In addition, certain challenges and issues such as digital literacy and data security are identified as key barriers to implementing the complete aspect of a fully digitalized electoral system.

1.4. Research Aim and Objective(s)

The proposal aims to investigate digitalisation's potential role in impacting India's electoral process and assess its future potential. Following are the developed research objectives in accomplishing the aim of the study.

- To access the current understanding of digitalisation in Indian Elections.
- To identify the key challenges and potential future/ opportunities of digitalisation within Electoral Reforms in India.
- To develop potential recommendations for policymakers in addressing challenges and effective implementation of digitalisation reform.

1.5 Research Question(s)

The research questions would help in conducting the study and deducing the needed findings. The following are the developed research questions:

- What is the current understanding or existing initiatives of digitalisation in Indian Elections?
- What are the key challenges/risks and potential future/ opportunities associated with digitalisation in Indian elections?
- What are essential policy measures recommended for efficient and successful implementation of digitalisation reforms?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This part intends to develop critical insights based on existing literature that shed light on electoral reforms in India in the form of digitalisation and its future potential. The researcher will critically analyse relevant concepts and theoretical perspectives related to this research topic, which will provide meaningful insights.

2.2. Digitalisation in Indian Election

The digitalisation of Indian elections has transformed the electoral process. According to Verma (2022), rapid technological advancement, precisely in the context of electronics and telecommunications, has impacted the exercise of freedom, democracy, and the electoral process, revolutionising the conduct and administration of elections. The introduction of electronic voting machines and voter-verified paper audit trails in the Indian election system intends to maximise transparency and efficiency. Nath (2019) described the digitalisation of the electoral process as the incorporation of digital and electronic methods and tools aiming to enhance efficiency. It encompasses the utilisation of digital techniques to streamline the election process and the use of digital platforms like social media, electronic media, and other digital communication methods such as mobile devices for campaigning or disseminating information.

2.3. Challenges and Opportunities Associated with Digitalisation in Indian Elections

Identification of potential _challenges_ and opportunities for digitalising the Indian electoral process and election system can be useful for understanding the significance of the digitalisation process. Considering the challenges, it can be said that the rise of social media and digital platforms across India has led to the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation that can influence voters, mislead them, create echo

chambers, and undermine the integrity and transparency of the electoral process (Ravinder 2023). Furthermore, deep fakes and manipulated media intensify challenges and complicate the issue. Another challenge is unequal participation in the electoral process, as a significant portion of the Indian population still lacks access to digital technologies despite the increasing internet penetration (Ravinder 2023).

Considering the potential opportunities, it can be said that in India, the world's most populated country and the largest democracy, in which more than 960 million people are eligible to vote, digitalisation of the Indian electoral process and election system can enhance voter participation by making information more accessible and enhancing communication. At the end of 2022, around 66% of the Indian populace utilised smartphones, and it is anticipated that by 2026, the country will have around one billion smartphone users (Sheikh 2024). Another opportunity for digitalising the Indian electoral process and election system is improving the efficiency of electoral management through the use of digital tools that can streamline different aspects of election management (Ravinder 2023).

2.4. Recommended Policy Measures for Efficient and Successful Implementation of Digital Reforms in Indian Election

The regulatory authorities need to focus on incorporating effective policy measures to manage the digital reforms in the Indian election efficiently. For that, strengthening voter surveillance and cybersecurity through robust security measures to protect electoral data and systems from cyber threats, promoting digital literacy among voters, ensuring data privacy and facilitating remote voting can be effective. Prioritising rural and underserved areas for rigging digital literacy can be effective. Implementation of strict data privacy regulations can help the regulatory authorities protect crucial information and boost public trust. Promoting digitalisation for the electoral process and election system can create remote voting options for overseas citizens and domestic migrants (Naganoor 2023).

2.5. Summary

In summary, it can be said that digitalising the Indian electoral process and election system can create certain opportunities, such as increased voter engagement and efficient electoral management. However, there are certain challenges, such as the digital divide across the country and the spread of misinformation, of digitalising the Indian electoral process and election system that can mislead voters. Employing recommended measures can address these challenges.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

There are various types of research philosophies including realism, pragmatism and interpretivism in conducting the study. In this study, the chosen approach is **interpretivism,** which would focus on understanding the impact of digitalisation and understanding subjective experiences. This approach is particularly relevant for understanding the complex social phenomena associated with electoral processes and the impact of digitisation on these dynamics (Junjie and Yingxin 2022). The research method of the study is qualitative, and therefore, interpretivism research philosophy would allow for considering detailed understanding and perspectives of the considered study in shaping and deducing the needful findings.

3.2 Research Approach

The chosen research approach for this study is the **inductive research approach**, which will help in exploring and understanding the complexities of the electoral process and digitalisation. The chosen research approach will help in collecting the qualitative data and develop the overall understanding to deduce the key findings (Vears and Gillam 2022). The inductive approach has significant flexibility for

the researcher in deriving the needful findings and conclusions for understanding the potential opportunities within the electoral context.

3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The collected data is qualitative studies and therefore, electronic databases such as Google Scholars and others like government websites, web articles and news publication houses are considered in the Indian context. The considered keywords include "Electoral Reforms", "India", "Election Commission of India" "digitalisation" and others are considered.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
The articles are published between 2016 and now.	The articles are published before 2019.
The article is in the English language.	The articles are in Hindi or any other foreign language.
The article is fully accessible.	The article is not fully accessible.

The data analysis for this study is narrative data analysis as it will help in assessing the collected narratives aligning with the research areas including electoral digitalisation. The analysis will help in providing insights into influencing the perceptions and key recommendations within electoral reforms.

4. Result and Findings

4.1 Data Extraction Table

Author(s)	Article	Findings
Sriram Rajagopalan and Sriram Ravi*	An Assessment of the Digitalisation of the Electoral Process in India and its Impact on Voter Turnout	This article outlines that the digitalisation of electoral reforms in India, precisely decentralised polling booths, social media exposure, telecommunications and e-mail communications, influence voters and improve voter turnouts. Effective use of digital technologies during elections can enhance communication with voters.
Dr. Akumarthi Nageswara Rao	Changing Strategies of Electoral Processes, Political Participation and Behaviour in Indian Democracy	While analysing the evolving landscape of the electoral process due to the digitalisation of campaigns, the election system and the electoral process, the author of this article outlined the dynamic nature of the Indian electoral process, potential opportunities and challenges of digitalising the Indian electoral process, elections and campaigns.
The Wire	Concerned Over Technology Affecting Electoral Outcomes: Civil Society Outfits to ECI	The article provided detailed knowledge and information about the technology impacting on electoral process. Online campaigning and the usage of emerging technologies such as AI technologies are imposing in influencing the perception of voters. The article identified the usage of facial recognition or video surveillance technology as a key aspect in introducing strict guidelines of recommendation within Electoral Reforms in India.

Akhilesh Kumar Shrivastava	Current Relevance of Electoral System Reforms in India	The article highlighted various key areas, where there is a need to present the Electoral system for overcoming the challenges. Some of the challenges include political pressure, lack of electoral infrastructure in India, and poor impact on misuse of government machinery. The author highlighted the relevancies of implementing technological improvement and thorough digitalisation in implementing the free, fair, and secured election within the country.

4.2 Narrative Analysis, Comparison with Past Studies and Discussion

As stated by Rajagopalan and Ravi (2020), digitalisation in the electoral process and election system supervised by the Election Commission of India is gaining popularity as it enhances awareness among voters and boosts voter participation. According to Rao (2023), digitalisation of the Indian electoral process, election system and political campaigns is happening now. The use of social media platforms and the integration of advanced technologies in the electoral process, political campaigns and election systems to reach out to voters have increased communication and accelerated the spread of information. In terms of challenges, it can be said that the spread of misinformation, fake news, and echo chambers are shaping public opinion and misleading voters. The spread of disinformation can create challenges for voters to make the right decisions. In terms of opportunities, it can be said that the digitalisation of the Indian electoral process, political campaigns and election system allows voters to engage with political leaders and follow their ideologies (Rao 2023). It allows voters to access a wide range of information, verify the information and make the right decisions. It can encourage women to engage in the decision-making process at the grassroots level. On the other hand, Ravinder (2023) outlined that digitalisation of the Indian electoral process, election system and political campaign has certain pros and cons. In terms of potential challenges of digitalisation, it can be said that accessibility problems, security and privacy concerns, digital differences in rural areas and marginalised communities, lack of digital literacy, language barriers, limited digital infrastructure, cybersecurity concerns and limited human interactions can intensify challenges. However, for several reasons, such as increased participation of voters, improved transparency and accountability, effectiveness, advanced communication and inclusionary aspects, digitalisation in the Indian electoral process can be useful (Ravinder 2023).

India is a democratic country, however, there is a wide range of challenges and issues identified including corruption, electoral fraud, and candidates having criminal records. The findings identified the relevancies and importance of implementing fair and free elections as it is the key aspect of practising democracy (Shrivastava 2024). The reform identified the relevancies of maintaining transparency through the imposition of digitalisation within the electoral process of India. India is shifting and moving towards digital governance, and therefore, there is a need for adapting technology effectively impacting the modernisation of the election process. The technological integration will help in voter registration, data management, and voting methods and therefore, strengthen the overall contemporary practices. The recommendation is identified for introducing the relevancies of using voter surveillance in ensuring the smooth conduct of elections. The consideration of the global shift of digitalisation has a significant impact on modernising overall contemporary practices (Shrivastava 2024).

Considering voter turnout trends, it has been identified that the participants/voters who participated in the General Election in 2014 were around 66.4% however, by 2019, it has been identified to increase

by around 67.11% thus, there has been an increase in overall voter trends (Jain 2019). The E-voting awareness campaigns were introduced to ensure and enhance accuracy and transparency (Election Commission of India [ECI] 2024). A vast network of post offices including 1.6 lakh post offices, 1000 digital screens and 1000 ATMs has been considered in the campaigns of election (ECI 2024). In States like Maharashtra and Karnataka, there has been an increase in 3 -5% participation in elections. Digitalisation has a positive turnout as their positive turnout of 83.31% in West Bengal in 2021 and 60.29% in Uttar Pradesh in 2022 (India Votes 2024).

As per the report of Plutusias (2024), the occurrence of fraudulent and fake voting during the elections is increasing and impacting loss of fairness and negative impact on the election process. The implication and integration for electoral reforms will help in ensuring and impacting the security of candidates against the opposition of party candidates and ruling parties inheriting within the political process within India. The implication of technological improvement within the election process would have positive impact on secure and fair election within India.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This study has explored and investigated the significant need and relevancies of imposing Electoral reforms in India and thus, there is a positive and significant future of digitalisation in strengthening the electoral process. The study has discussed the key challenges including fraud, criminal records of candidates and other issues within the election process. There has been significant evidence of the integration of technologies and digitalisation in strengthening the functioning of democracy.

5.2 Recommendations

The following are the key recommendations for overcoming the challenges:

- The key recommendation identified is implementing the digitalisation and integration of technologies such as voter surveillance. The consideration and implementation of tools such as facial recognition tools will help in minimising the fraudulent and increasing the participation of the voters.

- Another identified recommendation includes continual digitalisation and technological advancement within the election process. It will help in increasing awareness among the people and thus, maintaining the transparency and security of the election process.

- The suggestion of implementing online voter registration has a significant aspect in engaging with the voters. It has been identified that user-friendly online platforms will provide easier accessibility to the voters or citizens in measuring and verifying the efficient aspect of the electoral process. It will also help in strengthening and increasing the voter turnout.

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