# Digital Governance: Changing that Red Carpet into a Green One

India's approach and success stories in digital governance show how technology should be used to cover the entire carpet area — From expanding inclusion to the digitally not-so-savvy folks to strengthening interoperability — we have made sure the grass is green, every side

By Pratima H



Observing the tools of Governance in India was like walking in the Museum. Boring. Archaic. Snail-paced. Full of corridors. And a lot of stanchions.

That was some years back.

Today, it may feel like sauntering in the Museum of Tomorrow. For a glimpse of what the future of humanity is going to look like. Dapper. Matrix-like. Fluid. F1-paced. And full of glass skywalks.

But there is more than shiny glass and gilded lilies in this digitalised land. And that's exactly what makes digital governance different from how the world of Big Tech has tapped digital powers.

In governance, and in India, it is not just about accelerating processes but also making sure everyone is covered in the warmth and safety of the technology blanket. It's about democratisation, inclusion and of course, real-time action. It's not about wax. It's about real humans. Especially those who were standing away from the velvet carpets for so many years.

## NO WALLS, ONLY PLANKS

Let's comb through some numbers first. When compared by their aggregate level of digitalisation, India ranked as the third largest digitalised country

> UPI's international expansion, with partnerships in countries like Singapore, France, and Japan, is enabling cross-border digital payments. With upcoming innovations like blockchain, biometric authentication, and voice-enabled transactions, UPI is poised to further simplify and secure digital payments, driving India towards a more digital economy.

**- Raunaq Rakesh,** Aranca

in the world (behind the US and China, and ahead of the UK, Germany and Japan). Also, India has been ranked 12th among the G20 countries in terms of the level of digitalisation of the user. As seen in the 'State of India Digital Economy Report 2024' by ICRIER, India's DPI-led Aadhaar and Unified Payments Interface (UPI) have been helping to scale access to public services among millions of unconnected rural residents. It has been observed that India has made remarkable progress on the use of digital payments, especially in the public sector. Just imagine the scale with this figure: UPI Payments crossed 9.3 billion in volume and Rs. 14.75 lakh crore in value around June 2023 – as per a recent NASSCOM report.

Aadhaar-based authentications made it easy to open a bank account, leading to higher adoption of PMJDY (PM Jan Dhan Yojna), from 44 per cent in 2014 to about 77 per cent of the population gaining access to bank accounts in 2023. No wonder, over 30 countries are either adopting or in early discussions to implement UPI, Aadhar, and Beckn in their respective countries for boosting social & financial inclusion.

It all boils down to India's DPI (digital public infrastructure) foundational stack which has worked as digital utilities and has created foundations for many digital services in the country. The foundation of DPIs is based on the underlying principle of trust in the infrastructure and stakeholders, as spelt out well in the NASSCOM report.

If we zoom out to the global level, the global average value of the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) has improved remarkably, with the proportion of the population lagging in digital government development decreasing from 45 per cent in 2022 to 22.4 per cent in 2024- as spotted in the UN E-Government Survey 2024. The global average EGDI value has risen by 4.59 per cent since 2022 (from 0.6102 to 0.6382), vis a vis an increase of 1.90 per cent during the preceding assessment

### KEY DIGITAL PLANKS

- Aadhar biometric ID
- Unified Payment Interface (UPI)
- AePS (Aadhaar enabled Payment System)
- Fastag RFID mapped with vehicle payment ID
- Open Network for Decentralized Commerce (ONDC)
- Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)
- ESanjeevani and CoWIN
- Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA)
- DigiLocker and Sahamati (For consent-based financial data sharing)
- Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN)
- National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR)
- Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA)
- National Digital Library (NDL)
- IDEA – India Digital Ecosystem for Agriculture
- mParivahan (vehicle registration)
- Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG)
- Unified Farmer Service Platform (UFSP)

period. This survey also notes the positioning of India and Bangladesh above the global EGDI average.

The ICRIER report adds how our digital identity network is amongst the world's largest. India tops the world in terms of the volume of digital transactions, and export of ICT services. We have turned into the largest contributor to global GitHub AI projects. During its G20 Presidency, India was recognised as the champion of DPIs, a new approach to population-scale delivery of public services. Over 4,200 e-government services are provided across the country, recording 160 billion e-transactions in 2023-24.

In other words, whether we are travelling on the road and paying through FastTag or ordering food

> PSU's in general analyse the techno economics of any new technology very carefully before adopting the same. PSUs never shy away from trying out new technology that might help in the overall process.
> **- Sharad Kumar Singh,** SAIL

and using UPI or handling tax via GSTN or fast-tracking any KYC through Aadhar – DPIs have turned into the digital electricity we just cannot live without.

### DIGITAL UTILITIES AND TAPS

India has successfully built digital public infrastructure focused on Digital Identity, Digital Payment, Consent-based Data and Document Sharing, Digital Health, and Education amongst others at scale, avers Devroop Dhar, Founder, Primus Partners. "Aadhaar has enabled almost every Indian to have a verifiable digital identity, which forms a backbone for robust service delivery and benefit management. Presently, more than 138 Cr. Aadhaars have been generated, which makes their availability and usage almost universal. In FY 2024, India witnessed more than 131 billion UPI transactions (more than 10.9 billion transactions per month), which is the highest among any nation in the world.

Raunaq Rakesh, Engagement Lead – Telecom, Media and Technology Sector, Aranca captures how UPI, launched in 2016 by NPCI, has transformed India's payments landscape, handling 78.97 billion transactions worth INR 116.63 trillion in the first half of 2024 alone. UPI's success, fuelled by its zero-fee model and interoperability, is expanding globally, with cross-border payment systems like UPI-PayNow linking India with Singapore and other countries.

### FROM TOLL TO TICKETS TO E-COMMERCE TO PSUS

Another plank connecting many pillars is Open Network for Digital Commerce or ONDC, launched in 2021, which started with food and grocery but quickly expanded into B2B commerce. "With 370,000 sellers across 600 cities, 70 per cent of which are in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, ONDC is democratizing e-commerce for small businesses, adds Rakesh. Its low transaction fees (two to five per cent) and integration with sectors like logistics

and finance make it a critical platform for local sellers and small businesses, providing them with access to national markets."

As to PSUs, they are embracing technology with as much creativity and context as private business enterprises are doing– and without missing a beat.

Take the example of SAIL. The Bokaro Steel Plant has taken up the digitalisation of its legacy processes in a big way. "In that journey, implementation of automation is under progress in the area of manufacturing and the business processes. The existing processes are being evaluated and audited for improvement and in many cases, the entire process is being revamped and replaced by a new process, shares Manager Sharad Kumar Singh. "PSUs never shy away from trying out new technology that might help in the overall process. SAIL, Bokaro Steel Plant is taking a big leap by adopting Industry 4.0 practices and the implementation of various projects involving AI and machine learning is in progress. Data analytics is also being used in various business and manufacturing processes. Integration with other units and partners using APIs is being done."

When it comes to digital lanes, we are not behind anyone else in the use of AI. We have embraced it as bravely and as comprehensively in governance as we have done in private apps and consumer-tech areas. "The use of Gen AI in citizen service delivery has also gained prominence. Organizations such as Railways (IRCTC) and the Income Tax Dept. have been using GenAI chatbots to respond to queries from citizens. The government of India has also come up with the AskSarkar platform, which is a GenAI-based chatbot to interact with citizens and provide more information about schemes and programs." Dhar illustrates.

Imagine how users can effortlessly book railway tickets and make payments using just their voice. Ankush Sabharwal CEO of CoRover is beaming as he shares how IRCTC, and CoRover came out with a new strategy of Conversational Voice