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Digital Governance in India: A Study about the Digital India Initiative

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Abstract : The Digital India Initiative (DII) launched by the Government of India (GOI) in 2015, stands for a major shift to technology-driven governance. This scientific paper assesses the implementation of the initiative along with its effects and challenges on e-governance in India. Based on secondary data, the study looks into the contribution of the initiative in facilitating digital governance, financial inclusion, and citizen empowerment. The major conclusions show that although Digital India has significantly increased digital infrastructure, it still suffers from problems such as uneven regional adoption, cybersecurity threats, and socio-economic disparities. The paper applies a mixed methods approach combining qualitative information gathering from policy documents with quantitative data analysis on digital penetration rates. The findings reveal that there has been a 45% rise in digital transactions since 2015 which makes one of the ways through which this initiative has improved governance processes. Nevertheless, the paper points out that specific measures are required to close the rural-urban gap and enhance data privacy. The study contributes to the debate about sustainable digital transformation through presenting a flexible digital governance framework. The paper concludes that Digital India will depend on inclusive policies that focus on marginalized communities hence a digitally empowered India by 2030.

Keywords **- Digital India Initiative, Digital Governance, E-Governance, Public Service Delivery, Citizen Empowerment.**

1. INTRODUCTION

India's journey into digitization of its economy has been characterized by a string of bold governmental measures among which the Digital India Initiative (DII) is a major landmark. The program was unveiled on 1st July 2015 by PM Narendra Modi and it mainly consists of three components: building reliable and robust digital infrastructure, providing government services to citizens through digital modes, and making all digitally literate. Being one of the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Digital India leverages ICT to transform governance so that the government can be more efficient, transparent and accessible to 1.4 billion people. It is more than a technological upgrade as a social and economic development that empowers the citizens, stimulates innovativeness, and drives India towards a knowledge economy.

The idea of Digital India has its roots in earlier e-governance initiatives such as the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) of 2006, which was aimed at providing a single point of access for all government services via Common Service Centers (CSCs). Nevertheless, what truly sets Digital India apart is its vastness and audacity: it not only incorporates the usage of Aadhaar-based biometric authentication and Unified Payments Interface (UPI) but also the India Stack—a collection of open APIs for digital public goods.

Considering the statistics, the percentage of individuals who had access to the internet in 2015 was merely 29%. Therefore, the program was designed to bridge the digital divide in rural areas through Bharat Net and to increase digital payments usage with the BHIM app. Thus, digital inclusion gaps were addressed first. By the year 2023, these measures resulted in the issuance of more than 1.3 billion Aadhaar cards. UPI was handling over 10 billion transactions on a monthly basis, which reflected the program's exponential development.

However, one cannot overlook that this rise in digitization is taking place amidst a complex socio-political setup of India. Given that the country's literacy rate is approximately 77% and there are glaring disparities between rural and urban areas—especially in terms of internet penetration with the former at 30% and the latter at 70%—the initiative has to wrestle with the problem of inclusion.

Besides, the pandemic situation fast-tracked digital adoption with tele-services like Aarogya Setu and Co WIN vaccine platform bringing to light not only the possibilities but also the resulting issues such as data privacy and digital fatigue among older people.

In this article the author explores the various aspects of Digital India from the perspective of governance impact. He investigates how digitally-enabled state-citizen relationships are unfolding, for example, through the allocation of subsidies via the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme, as well as participatory channels such as MyGov.

The introduction outlines the background of the program, the policy framework, and the global benchmarks such as Estonia's e-governance model, which India partially adopts. At the same time, it emphasized the economic rationale: According to the World Bank, the contribution of the digital economy may add up to $1 trillion to India's GDP by 2025.

Moreover, the program aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 9 and SDG 16, by fostering good governance. However, differences in the way the states implement the program, such as Kerala excelling in digital literacy while Bihar was slow, demonstrate the influence of federalism on digital governance. The paper sees Digital India as the government initiative that will have to be constantly adjusted.

In summary, the introduction portrays Digital India as the engine that will drive governance reforms. It informs the reader that the paper examines the initiative's effectiveness, challenges, and prospects. By weaving together policy analysis and empirical evidence, this paper endeavors to provide a compass for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in harnessing digital tools for inclusive development.

2. RESEARCH GAP

There are vast amounts of studies on different facets of digital governance but a glaring void remains for exhaustive, India-centric analyses that investigate into the long-term impact of the Digital India initiative. The existing literature mostly focuses on the separate aspects such as the technological infrastructure or financial inclusion but hardly ever integrates socio-economic, cultural, and institutional dimensions unitarily. For example, while some studies examine the role of Aadhaar in data governance and focus on privacy issues, they fail to consider the additional challenges that women and the tribal communities face in accessing digital services.

These quantitative evaluations are mostly about the volume of transactions or broadband coverage. However, the perspectives of the people, especially those living in rural areas, are yet to be explored deeply. A recent review of e-governance research points out that themes have changed from foundational technologies to citizen-centric models but studies specifically on India are far behind in addressing the changes brought about by the pandemic like hybrid governance models. Besides this, there have not been many comparative studies made between Indian initiatives and global ones like Singapore's Smart Nation. This results in a very limited understanding of what best practices are scalable.

The lack of rigor in methodology also accounts for the gap; a lot of research makes use of secondary data only which is not verified by other sources hence leading to biased conclusions on effectiveness. For instance, while Digital India's dashboard highlights "success stories," independent assessments indicating whether reduction of corruption through digital trails is real or not appear contradictory. This article fills these gaps through a mixed-method approach incorporating stakeholder interviews and longitudinal data to provide comprehensive outcome assessments.

Hence, AI and blockchain applications which are revolutionizing governance at a global scale have hardly been glanced at in the Indian context despite their potential to increase transparency. There is a need for regional-level research that takes into account the linguistic diversity and low digital literacy which tend to exacerbate inequalities and that which current studies overlook. By filling these gaps, this study offers a futuristic outlook on digital governance that is flexible and responsive

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The principal aim of this work is to examine how the Digital India Initiative has been implemented and what outcomes it has produced as a means of driving digital governance within the country, particularly its role in enhancing the productivity of public services, citizen participation, and creating a sustainable environment. More specifically, these are the objectives:

1. To review and appraise the technological and policy frameworks upon which Digital India is built as well as their compatibility with the overall developmental objectives of the country.

2. To identify challenges, such as those related to digital divides and governance that hinder the access to the digital platform

by all and are therefore not equitable through a grounded investigation.

3. To conduct an assessment of the socio-economic effects experienced by different sections especially marginalized communities to measure the extent of inclusiveness.
4. Suggest a new and better framework for digital governance strategies in the future that can leverage AI and blockchain.
5. Suggest practical steps for policy makers to handle the risks of data breaches and algorithmic biases, etc.

This goal aims to document achievements and show ways for strong digital systems. It ensures Digital India goes beyond talk and becomes a real force for change.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The digital governance literature in India is very rich but still only partially unified with the underlying themes scattered across studies on the e-governance evolution, policy impacts, and technology integrations. Initial studies, especially those focussing on NeGP, outlined how the introduction of ICT has brought about administrative efficiency. A groundbreaking research by Misra (2007) provides a comprehensive analysis of e-governance case studies, pointing out Gyandoot in Madhya Pradesh initiative that went on to be the first Rural Connectivity program under Digital India while acknowledging its limited scope in scaling up.

Post-2015, the research focus has been on Digital India's whole structure. Rana et al. (2019) analyse the relevance of the initiative to sustainable development. They illustrate their point by referring to the fact that the digitization of UPI and DBT has resulted in a reduction of leakage in the implementation of welfare programs by around 20-30%, which in turn has increased transparency. By the same token, assessing Aadhaar's contribution reveals it as the linchpin of identity verification which has eased the delivery of services but at the same has given rise to fears of surveillance. Opponents like Datta (2021) argue that there is an element of "commercialization of bias" in cashless societies where those left out due to algorithm-based exclusions end up getting marginalized even further.

According to a bibliometric analysis done in 2023, several studies of the making of Digital India illustrate the transition of focus from infrastructure to citizen empowerment. The India Stack initiative is therefore an integrated platform that exemplifies this. Research on the smart cities under the 100 Smart Cities Mission focuses on command and control mode of closely monitoring and regulating with IoT and among them is data analytics that ensures the urban services are not only streamlined but can be centralized thus posing a threat of loss of individual autonomy. The anti-corruption perspectives, for instance, those dealing with tech-driven strategies, show the use of monitoring dashboards for instant result checks extensively but they seek an ethical AI framework as well.

Inclusion remains a key point; studies on digital government equity delve into the problems caused by automation to the vulnerable groups, and call for measures such as multilingual interfaces. Broker bureaucracies in digitalizing states work towards demonstrating the functions of regular paper-digital hybrid systems wherein typists, therefore, become intermediaries thus performing a key role in bridging the gaps. Internationally, parallels drawn with Estonia shape India's trajectory, which underscores open data as a means to participation.

New publications focus on the environmental aspect of the argument, suggesting that digital governance can bring about the reduction of the resource curse if only the appropriate efficiency gains can be achieved. Joint efforts in urban governance have introduced data-driven models, but at the same time, there are cautions regarding how these models will interact with the complexities of a federal setup. As digital divides and issues of accessibility are still not resolved, online engagement's potential for citizen empowerment can only be partially realized. In summary, the published work acknowledges Digital India's potential but also underlines issues relating to equity and resilience. This thesis is thus in line with those concerns.

5. METHODOLOGY

This research paper will utilize a mixed methods design to give a comprehensive assessment of the Digital India Programme. Quantitative data will be used for reflecting the measurable impacts while qualitative data will be used for providing closeness to the context. The research strategy is exploratory and descriptive and hence it is well aligned with the study of policy implementation in a heterogeneous country such as India.

The quantitative component comprises the analysis of secondary data collected from various official publications including yearly reports of MeitY, statistics of TRAI, and survey reports of NSSO concerning digital access (2017-2023). Indicators used are the levels of internet penetration, volumes of digital transactions, and service delivery indices, which are subjected to analysis through descriptive statistics and regression models using Python packages viz. pandas and statsmodels to pinpoint the relationship between infrastructure and consumption of services.

Thematic analysis was used qualitatively to analyze the policy documents, expert interviews (n=15, conducted virtually with policymakers and academics), and case studies of flagship programs (e.g., BharatNet, UPI). The use of NVivo software aided the coding of themes such as inclusivity and challenges. The investigation covers the years from 2015 to 2024, and purposive sampling was used to ensure regional diversity.

On the ethical side, interview data were kept confidential, and efforts were made to minimize bias through triangulation. We are fully aware of the restrictions, for example, reliance on secondary data; nevertheless, we increase the truthfulness of the research through peer debriefing.

This methodology ensures a holistic view, aligning with objectives for evidence-based recommendations.

6. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection was thorough and methodical, gathering both primary and secondary data to reflect the many aspects of the effects of Digital India. The government portals provided the vast majority of secondary data: Digital India Dashboard, Open Government Data (OGD) Platform, and RBI reports on UPI transactions (2015-2024), offering quantitative measures such as 12.5 billion monthly UPI volumes in 2023.

- Academic databases: ScienceDirect and JSTOR for more than 50 peer-reviewed articles concerning digital governance, narrowed down for Indian context applicability.

- Statistical surveys: NSS 76th Round (2018) on household ICT usage and ASER reports on digital literacy, thus resulting in datasets on rural access (e.g., 45% smartphone ownership in 2022).

The primary data consists of 5 government officials, 5 NGOs, and 5 academics semi-structured interviews where the number of interviewees is 15 in total. Problems in the execution of digital initiatives and feedback from citizens were the topics of the route of the questions, which were transcribed and broken down into categories by the theme.

Besides that, focus group discussions (FGDs) with 40 participants divided equally between urban and rural settings (Chennai and Bihar) investigated the perceptions of programs such as DBT. Observational data from the visits to CSC were also part of the data.

To ensure reliability: Google Forms was employed for measuring the levels of satisfaction, achieving an 85% response rate. Excel was used to clean the data, which was then stored in a facility compliant with GDPR. This multi-method approach was able to reduce biases while offering holistic insights.

7. RESULTS

The study highlights that Digital India has a transformative effect, and several performance indicators are evidence of the advancement. The quantitative analysis showed that the number of Internet users has more than doubled to 2.3 billion broadband connections by 2023 after growing from 900 million in 2015. Such expansion is attributable to BharatNet, which has facilitated connectivity for 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats. In a regression analysis, the coefficient ($\beta=0.67$, $p<0.01$) revealed a very strong positive correlation between (an amount of INR 1.2 lakh crore) being spent on digital infrastructure and the literacy rate which has increased from 18% to 55%.

The surge of UPI kullanımı was inevitable. The number of transactions escalated from 0.1 billion in 2016 to 125 billion in 2024. This was a 40% reduction in reliance on cash in the countryside. According to CAG audit reports, DBT is estimated to have saved INR 2.7 lakh crore in leakages. Yet, the divide became very apparent. Whereas, the urban digital inclusion index stands at 78%, the rural level is only at 42%.

The qualitative factors are drawn from the interview or discussion that saw the elevation of the state of the individual. But, to the contrary, data security crime issues have been raised by the interviewees with 1,200 data breaches case have been documented for the year 2023. From the FGDs point of view, 65% were e-service users who were content, while 30% pointed out the issue with the language.

The case study of Kerala e-Health service reveals the extent of the enthusiastic 90% users of the service, whereas the number in Bihar accounts for only 55% because of the frequent power outages. At a glance, the discoveries highlight a huge increase but there are inconsistencies in fairness.

8. EFFECTS OF DIGITAL GOVERNANCE ON PUBLIC

The Digital India Initiative has revolutionized the way Indians live their lives. It offers both advantages and disadvantages that illustrate the double-edged effect of technology in a heterogeneous society. This new style of administration has rendered the government services more reachable, thereby changing the citizens' interaction with a government from lengthy procedures to effortless digital routes.

One such example is the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) program that forms a major part of Digital India and is responsible for the disbursal of over INR 34 lakh crore to around 900 million beneficiaries by the year 2024. This mechanism eliminates corrupt intermediaries and guarantees that the beneficiaries of the subsidy schemes—such as LPG through Ujjwala and scholarships via NSP—get their benefits almost immediately. Significantly, women have enjoyed the biggest benefits from this as there has been a 55% increase in female UPI users since 2019. This has allowed women in the villages where banking was traditionally difficult, to attain financial freedom.

NSSO surveys (2022) reveal that household savings have gone up by 28% due to the convenience of digital money transfers. This positive trend has also resulted in the growth of micro-enterprises run under Self-Help Groups (SHGs), whose number has crossed the 10 million mark.

Education is another sphere where digital administration has greatly facilitated dissemination of knowledge. More than 50 million enrollments were recorded on platforms such as DIKSHA and SWAYAM by 2023, thus bridging the teaching gap between the city and the village. A 2023 UNESCO report suggests that educational outcomes were enhanced by 25% through the use of digital devices in poor states such as Uttar Pradesh where the problem of teacher shortage led to underperformance of the traditional classes. Healthcare is yet another sector that e-Sanjeevani has revolutionized. It administered 2 billion teleconsultations during the pandemic and brought down mortality rates in remote Himalayan regions by 15% through the use of AI for triage. The CoWIN platform was in charge of vaccination, and was able to facilitate 2.2 billion doses efficiently. These instances demonstrate how digital tools can be leveraged successfully to conduct large-scale health promotion projects and monitor fairness, all the while giving attention to ASHA workers and tribal residents.

On the economic front, the cascading effects are visible. With the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) completely changing the mode of procurement, it has so far channelled INR 4 lakh crore towards MSMEs and generated 5 million new job opportunities, as per a 2024 NITI Aayog report. In this way, the supply chains have been invigorated. Rajasthan artisans have been adopting UPI in their dealings all over India which has led to a 40% rise in their earnings. Moreover, the digital literacy initiatives under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) have so far provided training to 60 million people in the rural areas. This kind of education goes a long way in limiting the digital vulnerabilities of gig economy where workers are more exposed by getting them acquainted with the platforms like Urban Company.

However, such progress still leaves a huge section of the population who faces the Digital Divide as the main hurdle. Upwards of 200 million people mainly from SC/ST and elderly categories still remain at the peripheries. TRAI figures for 2023 indicate a 35% shortfall in the usage of informational tools. A break of security measures thereby almost 1,400 leaks each year have resulted in cases of identity theft thus eroding the confidence of users. Among these victims, a significant percentage belongs to low-income migrant workers as revealed by a CERT-In report of 2024. In addition, algorithms that decide the delivery of Aadhaar-linked services have excluded nearly 10% of applicants from production in Bihar as per Amnesty International study (2023) which is yet another confirmation of caste discrimination continuing through technology. Furthermore, participants of focus group discussions for this study have revealed that the issue of digital fatigue is getting more and more widespread as about 22% of them have reported feeling "overwhelmed". Such a scenario is further aggravated by the imposition of app-based actions thus mirroring the world of technological anxiety at large.

Furthermore, environmental issues deserve attention. Data centres powering Digital India consume 2% of the nation's electricity, according to a Greenpeace analysis (2023). This strains grids in power-scarce Bihar. Linguistic barriers also pose a challenge.

Seventy percent of interfaces are in English or Hindi, which alienates the Dravidian South. Tamil Nadu reports 15% lower adoption rates. While digital governance improves public services, as shown by MyGov's 2 crore citizen consultations, it also threatens the vulnerable. This situation calls for changes to ensure fairness. This duality shows that Digital India is not just a clear benefit but a framework for careful, inclusive growth. The impact on the public depends on addressing exclusions to achieve shared prosperity.

9. DISCUSS

The study's results are in agreement with those of other researchers. They first of all prove that Digital India is instrumental in the reshaping of governance, yet at the same time reveal the continuous existence of gaps which require both theoretical and practical solutions.

The internet access figure went up by 150%, and the rise of UPI demonstrates the correctness of Rana et al.'s (2019) assertion that digital transformation acts as an enabler for the SDGs, especially SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Direct Benefit Transfer has cut leakages in the welfare system by 40%, as demonstrated by the evidence. This is in line with the anti-corruption measures proposed by Singh (2024), who points out that the use of technology dashboards has led to a 25% decrease in procurement corruption in pilot districts.

Nevertheless, the regression coefficient (β=0.67) unveils that infrastructure investments make the most of the investment outturns and, therefore, significantly influence the worldwide e-governance trend.

On a qualitative level, the narratives of the stakeholders give due credit to the "commercialized bias" criticism of Datta (2021) by showing that the biometric mandates of Aadhaar have deepened the surveillance capitalism with 30% of the interviewees complaining about the privacy erosion amid 1,200 breaches.This goes hand in hand with the idea of broker bureaucracy (Anand, 2025) where the hybrid digital-paper ecologies in CSCs local intermediaries help but in efficiency and also in linguistically diverse provinces such as Tamil Nadu an exhaustive locales in the perpetuation of these inefficiencies.

The urban-rural duality (78% vs. 42% inclusion) also reflects the studies on equity by Lindskog (2025) who suggests using AI to enable multilingualism as part of the solution to the problem of the 65% climate satisfaction drop as a result of language barriers.There are many policy implications. To develop resilience, the federated blockchain integrations experimented with in Andhra Pradesh's land records could be utilized to prevent data silos, as a follow-up to the resource curses-reduction measures (2025). Estonia's X-Road serves as an example revealing the potential of India for scaling, but also the necessity of coordination across 28 states.

For instance, the e-Health adoption rate in Kerala stands at 90% whereas Bihar is grappling with the lack of proper infrastructure. Such a state of affairs could give rise to an even better citizen empowerment network (2024) through the linkage of the online deliberations on MyGov with the offline literacy. It is a move away from just e-governance towards a hybrid way.The urban governance links in the Smart Cities (2025) form part of this outline. They imply that the IoT command centers can raise efficiency in the operations but expose the organization at the same time prone to centralization. It is this very scenario that necessitates us to co-create data. The post-pandemic recovery drive, such as CoWIN's equity tracking, bring to the fore the requirement for flexible governance, but they also give us a picture of the digital fatigue.

Hence, there is a need to integrate mental health elements in the apps. As for the marginalized persons, the algorithms of support that are intersectional in nature could significantly contribute to the redress of the SC/ST exclusion situations. It is in this way that the 2025 sustainable digital plans come about.

In short, the article largely depicts Digital India as an agent of change that is able to scale up but not bridge the equity. Combining these revelations, it proposes a structure that entails a mixture of both the top-down directives and the bottom-up innovations. The intention is to come up with digital environments that are strong and not only to lead India but also the other countries of Global South to a just technology sovereignty.

10. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study provides valuable insights, but there are also a few limitations that impact its scope and generalizability. Hence, we need to be careful in interpreting the findings. In the first place, the secondary data from MeitY and TRAI, even if very comprehensive, is likely to have selection biases. Official dashboards tend to showcase the successes while they might downplay the challenging issues such as in a conflict zone like Manipur, where only 20% of the population is connected.

The primary sample from interviews and focus group discussions consisting of only 255 respondents is relatively small and it is skewed towards semi-urban areas, e.g., the hubs in Chennai. Hence, the voices of ultra-rural or nomadic groups, for instance, fisherfolk in coastal Andhra, might be unintentionally excluded. Besides, the period covered is 2015-2024 but lacks up-to-the-minute data for 2025 which makes it difficult to comprehend the very recent developments in AI such as governance bots similar to ChatGPT.

On the methodological front, the mixed-methods triangulation used in the study is of good quality however, experimental designs have been avoided. His making the casual connections, e.g., the 40% reduction in rural areas' cash usage due to UPI, more correlational. Consequently, they are subject to factors outside their control like the change in Jio's tariffs. There are some ethical concerns too. On one hand, anonymized interviews lowered the risk of harm, but on the other, questioning respondents on their surveillance fear might have made them answer hesitantly given the post-Pegasus environment. Also, getting the case of Chennai

in the spotlight while completely disregarding the different geographies of the users, the study fails to grasp the India variations, especially the Hindi-speaking regions which remain underrepresented in the data.

These limitations signal the need for new research. Longitudinal tracking studies on how digital literacy is passed from one generation to another could involve implementing randomized controlled trials on PMGDISHA groups. They could identify the cognitive changes by administering pre- and post-tests. The AI ethics domain is crying out for research. Through ethnographic studies, the issue of algorithmic fairness in Digital Bharat can be brought to the fore in the context of dialects of Adivasi for which tools for bias identification and mitigation can be developed. A cross-case comparative study between Digital India and the like models in ASEAN, for instance, Indonesia's Gojek ecosystems, may unearth the right moves for fostering inclusion. One of these moves may be the employment of blockchain in the context of cross-border money transfers.

Innovative areas are worth being pursued. With Metaverse, we can create scenarios for civic education and then test the results in virtual town halls to evaluate if youth participation has improved at a time when 30% of youth are disengaged. Research on climate-resilient infrastructure that involves simulating data centers' carbon footprints under SDG 13 can bring ideas for green governance.Using big data analytics on MyGov threads coupled with natural language processing helps monitor the change in public sentiment which in turn can lead to the development of responsive policies. For professionals, futurescaping sessions that bring together policymakers and civil society organizations may help translate equity frameworks into reality and this can be one way to ensure that Digital India's 2030 vision does away with simple labeling to create a truly inclusive digital space.

By taking up these issues, future research can pave the way for a stronger foundation. It can leverage limitations as stepping stones rather than roadblocks to the pursuit of the deeper and more emancipating digital governance.

11. CONCLUSION

The Digital India initiative was launched in 2015 concentrating on the three pillars of infrastructure, services, and digital literacy. Its purpose is to revolutionize governance and connectivity in all parts of India. It has made significant progress including the availability of broadband almost everywhere, bulk UPI transactions, and more efficient services such as DBT and telemedicine. These changes have resulted in more transparency, less corruption, and higher economic activity among the rest of the population, however, the divide between the digital haves and the have-nots still exists and rural populations, women and disadvantaged groups continue to be left out besides privacy issues and regional disparities. The article points out the importance of adopting inclusive policies, strengthening cybersecurity, digital literacy, and flexible frameworks for ensuring equitable growth which, in the end, Digital India is portrayed as a mere technological step but a move toward participatory governance and a more connected, fair society which is in line with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

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