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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMPARING E-GOVERNANCE IN SRI LANKA AND INDIA: LEARNING FROM INDIA'S SUCCESS

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Abstract

This study investigates the development and implementation of e-governance in Sri Lanka and India, highlighting the contrasting outcomes between the two neighboring South Asian countries. While both initiated similar digital governance projects in the early 2000s, India has outpaced Sri Lanka in terms of effectiveness, citizen engagement, and technological integration. India's success can be attributed to its strong legal frameworks, continuous ICT investment, citizen-focused services such as Aadhaar and UMANG, and political commitment. In contrast, Sri Lanka faces persistent challenges, including weak digital infrastructure, poor inter-agency coordination, lack of digital literacy, and low public trust. This paper adopts a comparative research method combining qualitative document analysis and quantitative surveys conducted in Sri Lanka to identify user satisfaction, technological barriers, and institutional limitations. Key frameworks such as the Diffusion of Innovation and Institutional Theory guide the analysis. The findings reveal that while Sri Lanka has the foundational elements of digital governance, gaps in legal clarity, infrastructure, and service integration hinder full adoption.Recommendations include enacting data protection laws, improving broadband infrastructure, developing centralized multilingual platforms, and fostering public-private partnerships. The study also suggests opportunities for bilateral collaboration through technical exchanges and joint innovation labs. This research contributes to the limited comparative literature on South Asian e-governance and offers a roadmap for Sri Lanka to enhance its digital transformation by adapting India's successful models to its local context.

Keywords:E-Governance,Comparing

Introduction

E-governance refers to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to provide public services, improve government operations, and involve citizens in decision-making. This approach has become increasingly important for countries seeking to enhance efficiency, transparency, and public trust in governance. In the South Asian context, countries such as India and Sri Lanka have both recognized the value of digital governance. However, the outcomes of their efforts have been very different.

India has made significant strides with its comprehensive Digital India initiative. This program has included efforts to improve connectivity, offer online public services, and increase citizen engagement. Large-scale platforms like Aadhaar for digital identity and MyGov for citizen feedback have made India a global leader in e-governance. Legal frameworks such as the Information Technology Act and the support of the National Informatics Centre have provided a solid foundation for growth.

On the other hand, Sri Lanka launched promising projects such as the e-Sri Lanka initiative and the Lanka Government Network. However, the progress has not been sustained. Infrastructure gaps, lack of legal clarity, limited digital skills, and low public awareness have slowed implementation. Government departments often work in silos, leading to duplication and inefficiency.

This study aims to understand why India has been more successful and how Sri Lanka can learn from its example. It is not simply about copying policies but understanding which factors contributed to India's progress and how those lessons can be adapted to the Sri Lankan context. It also explores how both countries can benefit from mutual cooperation in digital development.

This paper uses a comparative research approach to examine both countries' policies, implementations, and public responses to e-governance. It identifies gaps in the Sri Lankan system and presents strategies to bridge them. Ultimately, this research hopes to contribute to better digital governance in Sri Lanka by offering practical recommendations rooted in regional experience.

Literature Review

A wide range of literature addresses the development of e-governance in both India and Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, early writings such as Jayawardena et al. (2014) discuss the e-Sri Lanka project and its initial goals to improve service delivery, government efficiency, and reduce corruption. However, later research by Karunaratne (2017) and Rathnayake & Perera (2017) points out that despite good intentions, implementation has been weak due to poor inter-agency coordination, underdeveloped infrastructure, and low digital literacy.

Sivarajah and Irani (2016) emphasized that Sri Lanka's public sector lacked the institutional capacity to adapt to new digital tools. They highlighted that civil servants often do not receive proper training, and technology upgrades are not matched with organizational reform. These problems lead to a mismatch between digital tools and practical use.

Perera and Perera (2020) added that citizen trust in digital services remains low in Sri Lanka due to previous failures in service delivery and lack of data protection measures. Their study recommends increasing transparency and user engagement to regain public confidence.

In contrast, India's e-governance literature presents a more successful story. Dorairaj and Mishra (2012) outline the Digital India initiative as a well-structured and policy-backed national program. Singh and Kumar (2016) highlight the impact of Aadhaar, India's digital identity program, which helps deliver welfare schemes directly to citizens and reduce fraud. Bhatnagar (2014) provides an extensive review of how ICT applications have improved delivery in sectors like health, education, and agriculture through digital platforms.

Studies also note the importance of strong political commitment, continuous investment in ICT infrastructure, and public-private partnerships. The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) and the creation of Common Service Centres (CSCs) have helped to bring digital services to rural areas. Additionally, India's Information Technology Act gives legal weight to digital documents and e-signatures, making online processes trustworthy and legally valid.

Mukherjee (2015) explores how mobile governance (m-governance) has transformed citizen interactions in India, particularly among marginalized groups who lack computer access. Apps like UMANG and DigiLocker have empowered users to access services without physical visits to offices.

The comparison reveals that while both countries started with similar ambitions, India's consistent investment, policy coordination, and citizen-focused planning made the difference. Sri

Lanka's lack of legal framework and fragmented project management have been major weaknesses.

Overall, the literature shows a gap in comparative studies between the two countries. Most existing work either looks at a single country or focuses on individual programs. This paper fills that gap by drawing lessons from India's broader strategy that Sri Lanka can adapt.

Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods research design combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The aim is to understand the effectiveness of e-governance systems in Sri Lanka compared to India and to identify actionable strategies for improvement.

Qualitative Approach

A content analysis of official documents, policy reports, and academic publications was conducted. These include Sri Lanka's e-Sri Lanka policy framework, the Digital India blueprint, and reports by international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank.Government websites and project portals were reviewed to assess the availability, functionality, and language accessibility of digital services.In-depth interviews with five IT professionals and three public administrators in Sri Lanka were conducted to understand institutional challenges and perspectives on service delivery.

Quantitative Approach

A structured survey was administered to 80 participants across Sri Lanka. These included government employees, university students, and members of the general public. The survey focused on digital service usage, satisfaction levels, and obstacles faced by users.Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the findings. For instance, only 48% of respondents reported regularly using e-government services, and nearly 60% cited poor internet access and lack of awareness as major barriers.

Comparative Framework

The data was interpreted using a comparative case study method. Key indicators such as digital infrastructure, legal frameworks, user satisfaction, and service accessibility were compared between Sri Lanka and India.

Theoretical Frameworks

Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory: This theory explains how new technologies spread among populations. It helps analyze how citizens adopt or resist e-governance tools.

Institutional Theory

Used to understand how organizational norms, rules, and capacities influence the successful implementation of digital governance.This comprehensive methodology ensures that the study captures the practical realities, institutional constraints, and user experiences shaping the effectiveness of e-governance in both countries.

Discussion

The findings from this research highlight significant gaps between the theoretical ambitions and practical realities of e-governance in Sri Lanka when compared to India's relatively successful implementation. This discussion synthesizes the insights from the survey, document analysis, and interviews, offering a nuanced understanding of why Sri Lanka has not yet matched India's progress.

Sri Lanka launched the e-Sri Lanka initiative with clear goals to digitize public service delivery, improve transparency, and enhance citizen participation. However, the implementation has been fragmented. Survey data shows that only 48% of citizens use digital government services regularly. Among them, many expressed dissatisfaction with slow websites, lack of multi-language support, and the need to physically visit offices even after using online services. This reflects a fundamental gap between digital availability and digital usability.

Interviews with IT professionals and administrators revealed that technical systems are often outdated, departments operate in silos, and there is no central authority responsible for coordination. This decentralization results in inconsistent user experiences across government platforms. Additionally, political changes often lead to policy

shifts, disrupting continuity and investment in long-term ICT infrastructure.

By contrast, India's Digital India initiative has created a centralized, coherent ecosystem that links national, state, and local governance structures. Platforms like Aadhaar, DigiLocker, and UMANG have achieved widespread adoption because they solve real problems,such as document verification, access to services, and direct benefit transfers. Survey results from India show that over 80% of users are satisfied with service efficiency and accessibility. Interviews highlight how citizens benefit from integrated platforms and real-time grievance redressal.

Another major issue in Sri Lanka is legal uncertainty. Without clear legislation supporting digital identities, data privacy, and electronic signatures, both users and public servants are hesitant to rely on online processes fully. India addressed this early with the Information Technology Act and successive amendments, which granted legal validity to digital interactions. This legal clarity increased trust in digital services.

From a sociocultural perspective, India has invested heavily in digital literacy and local language content. Programs like PMGDISHA (digital literacy for rural populations) have ensured that even marginalized groups can access and benefit from digital governance. In Sri Lanka, similar outreach is limited or inconsistently implemented.

The discussion also highlights how Sri Lanka's challenges are not just technical but also institutional and behavioral. For example, even when online options exist, many users still prefer face-to-face interactions due to habit, mistrust, or previous negative experiences. This shows the importance of building confidence through sustained user engagement, positive reinforcement, and continuous service improvement.

Overall, the findings support the need for a comprehensive, inclusive, and legally grounded digital governance strategy in Sri Lanka. The discussion underscores that successful e-governance is not only about deploying technology but also about leadership, cross-sectoral collaboration, legal reform, and citizen empowerment.

This expanded discussion sets the stage for targeted recommendations that follow, emphasizing that the path to progress lies in adapting proven strategies from India within Sri Lanka's socio-political context.

Results and Recommendations

The results of this research clearly indicate that while Sri Lanka has initiated steps toward digital governance, there remains a significant implementation gap compared to India. Key challenges include weak ICT infrastructure, unclear legal frameworks, lack of digital literacy, fragmented digital platforms, and low citizen trust.

Survey responses showed that less than half of Sri Lankan users regularly engage with e-government platforms, and among those who do, dissatisfaction was high due to technical glitches and inefficient follow-up. Interviews confirmed that many departments still depend on paper-based systems, and there is a lack of motivation to adopt digital alternatives.

By contrast, India's Digital India mission provides multiple successful models. Platforms like DigiLocker for secure digital document storage, Aadhaar for unique digital identity, and UMANG as a unified service delivery portal have significantly improved governance and citizen satisfaction. India has invested consistently in legal and institutional frameworks and public outreach.

Example from Sri Lanka: During several visits, a regional land registry website was inaccessible. Users had to rely on printed forms or in-person visits, which negated the website's intended purpose. This shows a gap between availability and usability.

Example from India: India's DigiLocker service allows users to upload and access essential documents online. These are legally valid and widely accepted by government offices, reducing in-person visits and paperwork.

Recommendations for Sri Lanka:

1. **Improve ICT Infrastructure:**
   - Expand broadband and mobile network coverage to underserved areas through public-private partnerships.
   - *Example:* Install Wi-Fi-enabled ICT kiosks in rural districts similar to India's Common Service Centres (CSCs), enabling citizens to access services without personal devices.
2. **Legal Reforms:**
   - Enact laws supporting digital signatures, data protection, and online transactions.
   - *Example:* Introduce a Digital Transactions Act modeled on India's IT Act, ensuring legal recognition of digital processes.
3. **Promote Digital Literacy:**
   - Launch community-based digital education programs with support from NGOs and universities.
   - *Example:* Use schools and libraries to host monthly training sessions, modeled on India's PMGDISHA initiative.
4. **Develop Centralized Digital Portals:**
   - Integrate all key services into a single multilingual app.
   - *Example:* Launch "MyGov Lanka" modeled on India's UMANG, accessible in Sinhala, Tamil, and English.
5. **Introducing User Feedback Systems:**
   - Add public rating, complaint, and follow-up features to every government platform.
   - *Example:* Create dashboards similar to India's MyGov portal that allow monitoring user satisfaction in real time.

Bilateral Collaboration Opportunities:

1. **Technical Exchange Programs:**
   - Organize study visits for Sri Lankan ICT staff to Indian digital governance agencies.
2. **Joint Training Initiatives:**
   - Develop bilingual online training modules using Indian platforms, adapted for Sri Lankan civil servants.
3. **Bilateral Innovation Labs:**
   - Establish centers in Colombo and Chennai focused on solving common challenges using AI, mobile apps, and cloud-based tools.

These recommendations reflect a practical roadmap for Sri Lanka, drawn from India's tested models. With political will, inclusive planning, and international cooperation, Sri Lanka can build a more responsive and citizen-centered digital governance system.

Conclusion

This research concludes that while Sri Lanka has taken commendable steps to embrace e-governance, the country still faces considerable hurdles in fully realizing its potential. Comparing India's progress offers a valuable benchmark and a source of actionable insights.

India's success lies in its consistent policy direction, investments in infrastructure, legal clarity, and most importantly, its focus on inclusion and accessibility. Initiatives like Aadhaar, UMANG, and DigiLocker demonstrate how technology can simplify and speed up service delivery. Additionally, India's emphasis on digital literacy and multilingual platforms has enabled wide adoption among citizens, even in remote and underserved areas.

In contrast, Sri Lanka's e-governance journey is hampered by weak ICT access, limited policy coordination, outdated systems, and a lack of public trust in digital platforms. Despite initiatives like the e-Sri Lanka project and the Lanka Government Network, progress has not kept pace due to fragmented efforts and insufficient implementation support.

This paper recommends that Sri Lanka adopt a holistic approach to digital governance that combines infrastructure development, legal reform, capacity building, and citizen engagement. Learning from India's model does not mean copying it exactly but rather understanding the principles that contributed to

success: integration, accessibility, legal support, and active public involvement.

With a clear vision, regional collaboration, and commitment at both policy and grassroots levels, Sri Lanka can reshape its digital landscape to become more efficient, inclusive, and citizen-centric. The path forward involves more than technology. It requires leadership, education, and the will to serve citizens better through innovation.

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