

e-UNNAT and Public Service Guarantee Act 2011: Driving Reform in Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the shift towards e-governance in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under the Digital India program, focusing on platforms like Jansugam.jk.gov.in and state.ras.gov.in. These initiatives aim to enhance administrative efficiency and citizen engagement by utilizing Low Code–No Code (LCNC) architecture, facilitating user-friendly service delivery. The Rapid Assessment System (RAS) further improves service quality by incorporating feedback and role-based access control. The e-UNNAT portal, consolidating over 1050 services, exemplifies the region's move to streamline service delivery, while the Public Services Guarantee Act's auto-appeal system ensures timely service and accountability. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, including linguistic diversity, trust in technology, geographical barriers, and digital inequality, particularly in rural areas. This paper proposes a unique model to address these challenges, focusing on localized digital literacy campaigns, multilingual support, and community-based tech support networks. The model also emphasizes infrastructure development in underserved regions to bridge the digital divide. Overcoming these barriers is essential to ensure inclusive, effective e-governance and equitable access to public services in Jammu and Kashmir, ultimately improving governance and citizen satisfaction.

Keywords: Digitalization, e-governance, Operator, Platform, Service

1. INTRODUCTION

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), a region characterized by its unique socio-economic and demographic landscape, presents a diverse population with varying needs and challenges. According to the Census 2011, the population of J&K stood at approximately 12.55 million, with a male population of 6.57 million and a female population of 5.98 million. The state is home to a rich tapestry of ethnic, cultural, and religious communities, with Muslims constituting around 68.3% of the population, followed by Hindus (28.4%), and smaller communities of Sikhs and Buddhists. This diversity contributes to a complex socio-demographic profile that requires tailored governance solutions. Economically, J&K faces challenges such as high unemployment rates, which were recorded at 15.1% in 2011, compared to the national average of 9.6%. The state's economy relies heavily on agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism, with 70% of the population living in rural areas, where access to essential services is limited. Urban areas like Srinagar and Jammu show higher levels of development, with the literacy rate standing at 68.74%, which is lower than the national average of 74.04%. In this context, the region's governance system has historically been marked by inefficiencies and bureaucratic delays. The introduction of digital governance tools, such as e-UNNAT and the Digital J&K Programme, aims to address these socio-economic challenges, enhance accessibility, and bridge the urban-rural divide, fostering a more inclusive and transparent system. However, overcoming these socio-economic and demographic challenges is crucial for maximizing the potential of these digital initiatives.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF E-GOVERNANCE

E-governance, which integrates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into government operations, aims to improve administrative efficiency, transparency, and service delivery. The Government of India, through the Information Technology Act 2000, defines e-governance as the use of web-based applications to enhance access to and delivery of public services. It fosters better engagement between the government and citizens, thus transforming governance into a more accessible, efficient, and transparent system. According to *Yadav & Singh (2012)*, e-governance relies on four pillars: *Connectivity, Knowledge, Database, and Capital*, which are essential for delivering government services through digital platforms. Additionally, Anderson's *PUPREB* concept emphasizes the need for public sector process rebuilding, highlighting that ICT adoption requires commitment and proper governance to deliver better services (*Anderson, 1999*). The role of ICT is critical in overcoming governance challenges, improving policy transparency, and enabling citizen participation. The *Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)*, developed by *Venkatesh et al. (2003)*,

identifies key factors influencing technology adoption, such as effort expectancy, performance expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. These factors are essential for understanding how ICT tools like e-UNNAT can improve public service delivery in Jammu and Kashmir. In this milieu, the present research explores how e-UNNAT, through the lens of the UTAUT model, enhances public service delivery and fosters responsive governance in the region.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anderson (1999) introduced the concept of *Public Sector Process Rebuilding (PUPREB)*, which emphasizes the importance of political will, customer orientation, and balancing individual and collective needs for effective ICT adoption in governance. Anderson critiques traditional *Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)*, arguing that it overlooks crucial cultural and organizational factors. E-governance as the collective regulation of societal activities, extending beyond state functions to involve private sector and civil society partnerships. They emphasize the role of e-Government in promoting transparency and accountability across sectors. Heeks (2001) highlights three key contributions of e-governance: enhancing efficiency, fostering citizen-government engagement, and promoting societal interactions. He underscores the need for robust infrastructure and leadership to overcome implementation challenges in developing countries. He further emphasizes ICT's role in improving government operations, service delivery, and citizen participation. They trace e-governance's evolution, recognizing its potential to transform administrative processes and enhance democracy. Chen et al. (2006) view e-governance as a cost-effective solution to improve communication between government and citizens. They emphasize a coordinated, cost-benefit approach to achieve government goals. e-governance acts as a strategic tool to improve service delivery, operational efficiency, and citizen engagement, reflecting global trends in digital transformation.

Gupta (1966) conducted a diagnostic study of e-governance in India, analyzing the interdependence of ICT, people, processes, and systems. He highlighted the importance of *Business Process Reengineering (BPR)*, change management, and citizen-centric design, emphasizing the need for institutional reforms to make e-governance a thriving reality. Sharma & Gupta (2003) noted the rapid advancement of e-government but warned that disjointed projects lack clear frameworks, undermining progress. They viewed e-governance as a transformative shift, moving governance from bureaucratic systems to a more flexible, collaborative, and transparent model. Shah (2007) identified four stages of e-governance adoption in India, with significant challenges in reaching full integration. He stressed the need for a comprehensive strategy, highlighting a digital divide between rural and urban areas. Malik et al. (2014) emphasized ICT's potential for enhancing government services but noted persistent barriers to effective implementation. They argued for developing robust infrastructure and institutional capability to achieve an inclusive digital governance model. Moreover, they outlined the role of ICT in streamlining government services and enhancing efficiency across G2C, G2B, and G2G interactions.

The literature on e-governance in Jammu and Kashmir emphasizes the region's efforts to enhance governance through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Studies highlight key initiatives such as the establishment of Khidmat Centres, the digitization of land records, and the formation of the Jammu and Kashmir e-Governance Agency (JaKeGA). These initiatives aim to increase transparency, accountability, and service delivery efficiency. However, challenges persist, including poor connectivity, low literacy, and inadequate infrastructure, especially in rural areas. The integration of mobile governance (M-governance) is seen as a promising solution to tackle corruption and improve service access. Additionally, the introduction of digital platforms like Digi-locker and e-UNNAT has streamlined public services. Despite progress, the region requires further development in digital literacy, infrastructure, and user-friendly services to ensure inclusive governance (Naqshbandi & Fazili, 2018; *Economic Times*, 2023).

4. e-Governance: ENABLING GOOD GOVERNANCE

Governments face challenges in delivering services, especially in rural areas, where access to public services is limited. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges, making service delivery more efficient, transparent, and timely (Ahmad & Zehra, 2022). India, as a rapidly growing economy, is transitioning from traditional governance to an e-governance model that emphasizes good governance principles. Good governance, based on principles such as accountability, transparency, public participation, and the rule of law, requires the integration of ICT to improve the efficiency and accessibility of public services (Bala & Verma, 2018). Therefore e-Government, as mentioned above involves the use of electronic tools to enhance communication between government agencies and citizens, leading to more efficient governance.

Elements of Good Governance

UNDP	UNESCAP	ADB
Accountability, Rule of Law, Participation, Consensus	Accountable, Transparent, Follows the rule	Accountability, Transparency, Predictability, Participation
Orientation, Transparency, Effectiveness, Equity Building,	of law, Participatory, Consensus	

Strategic Vision, Efficiency	oriented, Responsive, Equitable and inclusive, Effective and efficient	
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Source: Bala & Verma, 2018

The term "good governance" was first introduced by the World Bank in 1992 and is often associated with strategies to enhance government efficiency. According to the UNDP, good governance includes factors such as accountability, rule of law, participation, and transparency, while the UNESCAP and ADB frameworks also emphasize these principles, with additional factors like predictability and responsiveness (UNDP, 1997; UNESCAP, 2008; ADB, 2008). India has implemented several e-governance initiatives, including the National e-Governance Plan and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), to promote efficient, transparent, and cost-effective services (Bala & Verma, 2018). Jammu and Kashmir has also adopted e-governance to improve public service delivery.

5. e-Governance INITIATIVES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has implemented several e-governance initiatives to improve service delivery and enhance governance across the Union Territory. One key initiative is the Khidmat Centres, which are Common Service Centres (CSCs) under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model in collaboration with Jammu and Kashmir Bank. These centres provide services in e-governance, education, health, and entertainment (Ahmad & Zehra, 2022). Another significant initiative is the State Wide Area Network (SWAN), a robust communication infrastructure connecting government offices at various levels to improve governance. SWAN facilitates efficient communication through voice, data, and video services across J&K. The ICT Labs and CAL Centres project aims to enhance education through smart classrooms and computer-aided learning in J&K schools, with 382 CAL centres and 630 ICT labs established as of 2023 (<https://jakega.jk.gov.in>). The Jammu and Kashmir State Data Centre (SDC) hosts critical government applications and ensures seamless electronic government-to-government, government-to-citizen, and government-to-business services. Additionally, Digital Village Centres bring IT infrastructure to rural areas, ensuring access to government services (<https://jakega.jk.gov.in>). The e-Office initiative replaces the costly and inefficient "Darbar Move" with a digital platform, reducing operational costs and improving administrative efficiency. The Mobile Dost App provides citizens with easy access to government services, news, job openings, and emergency helplines, promoting digital empowerment (Malik, I. A., 2023). These initiatives represent a comprehensive effort by the J&K government to improve public service delivery, enhance transparency, and ensure efficient governance.

6. e-UNNAT: A DIGITAL GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

e-UNNAT (Unified Network for New and Transparent Governance) is a transformative initiative launched by the Jammu and Kashmir Government to enhance governance through digital technologies. The main goal of e-UNNAT is to create an efficient, transparent, and accountable administrative system, improving public service delivery while reducing bureaucratic delays. This project aligns with the Government of India's Digital India program, which seeks to digitally empower citizens and make government services more accessible. e-UNNAT leverages Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to streamline government services, connect various departments and citizens, and enhance communication. It promotes transparency by providing real-time tracking of applications and direct communication between the public and government. The platform is supported by state-of-the-art IT infrastructure, including dedicated data centers and mobile applications, ensuring secure, reliable, and efficient services.

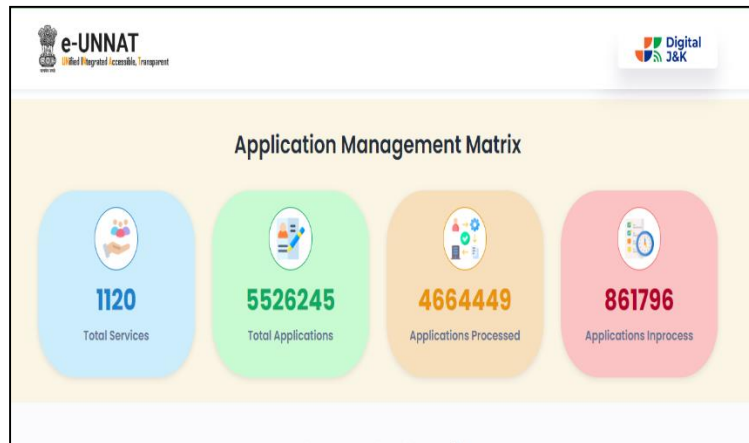
Official Overview of e-UNNAT Website



Source: Official Website of e-UNNAT

The system significantly reduces inefficiencies by automating processes, speeding up application processing, and improving the tracking of government expenditures. It also ensures accountability by monitoring the performance of officials and enabling data-driven decision-making for better resource allocation. Citizens can access various services such as e-filing grievances, applying for government schemes, paying utility bills, and tracking their application statuses.

Application Management Matrix of e-UNNAT (as of 29th February 2024)



Source: Official Website of e-UNNAT

As of February 2024, e-UNNAT has processed over 5.5 million applications, with 84.3% completed successfully. The platform's effectiveness in delivering services highlights its role in modernizing governance in Jammu and Kashmir. However, continuous optimization is needed to address pending applications and further improve system efficiency.

7. PSGA MEETS e-UNNAT: A DIGITAL GOVERNANCE SYNERGY

The Public Service Guarantee Act (PSGA) of Jammu and Kashmir, introduced in 2011, is a crucial legislative framework designed to enhance the delivery of public services in a timely, transparent, and accountable manner. Modeled after the Right to Public Services (RTPS) Act implemented in various Indian states, the PSGA ensures that citizens receive essential government services, such as certificates, licenses, permits, and benefits from government schemes, within specific timeframes (PSGA Official Act, 2011). The primary objective of the act is to improve service efficiency, reduce corruption, and foster a citizen-centric governance model. The integration of e-UNNAT (Unified Network for New and Transparent Governance) with the PSGA represents a significant innovation in the public administration landscape of Jammu and Kashmir. e-UNNAT is a digital platform that facilitates the delivery of services by connecting government departments and providing citizens with real-time access to public services. This platform automates the service delivery process, reduces bureaucratic delays, and ensures the transparency of the entire system, aligning with the core goals of the PSGA (Khajuria, S, 2023).

In March 2023, the Chief Secretary of Jammu and Kashmir launched an auto-appeal feature for PSGA services. This feature allows automatic submission of appeals when services are delayed or denied, significantly enhancing the grievance redressal process (*ibid*). Furthermore, the integration of Rapid Assessment System (RAS) on the e-UNNAT platform allows citizens to provide feedback on service delivery, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement in public services. According to recent reports, over 90% of services under e-UNNAT are delivered within the prescribed timeframes, reflecting a positive shift towards efficient governance (*Greater Kashmir*, 2023). In March 2023, the Jammu and Kashmir government expanded the PSGA to include 102 additional services across several departments. These services now fall under the purview of the PSGA, ensuring timely delivery of critical services like unemployment certificates, land passbooks, and social welfare schemes such as Mumkin and Tejaswini (*Greater Kashmir*, 2023). This expansion further emphasizes the government's commitment to enhancing administrative efficiency and transparency.

Certificate Delivery Status under e-UNNAT

Certificate Delivery Status in e-UNNAT Under PSGA as of 20-September-2024		
1	Certificate Delivered (within PSGA)	2348184
2	Certificate Delivered (PSGA + 7 days)	186637
3	Certificate Delivered (PSGA + 15 days)	138629
4	Certificate Delivered (Beyond PSGA + 15 days)	765853

Source: Official Website of e-UNNAT

As of September 2024, e-UNNAT's data on certificate delivery under the PSGA revealed that a substantial number of certificates (2,348,184) were delivered within the specified timelines. However, delays were noted in a portion of the services, with 765,853 certificates delivered beyond the 15-day deadline. This highlights the ongoing challenges in service delivery and the need for further improvements in the administrative processes (Official Website of e-UNNAT, 2024). Therefore, from the above discussion, it is evident that the PSGA and e-UNNAT are transforming governance in Jammu and Kashmir by leveraging digital platforms to streamline service delivery. Despite significant progress, continued optimization of systems is essential to reduce delays and further enhance citizen satisfaction (*Khajuria, S, 2023*).

8. IMPORTANCE OF E-GOVERNANCE IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

The implementation of e-governance in Jammu and Kashmir has significantly improved the accessibility and efficiency of public services. Through the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) 2.0 and the broader Digital India initiative, the Indian government has accelerated the digital delivery of services, with Jammu and Kashmir at the forefront of this transformation (*Malik, I.A., 2023*). The region's e-governance strategy emphasizes transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, aiming to provide timely and efficient services to all residents, including those from underprivileged backgrounds. A key aspect of this transformation is the shift towards participatory governance, where digital and mobile governance (m-Governance) ensures that citizens can access government services anytime and anywhere. The abolition of inefficient practices, such as the "Darbar Move" (the biannual relocation of government offices), has further streamlined administrative operations and reduced costs (*Greater Kashmir, 2023*). The integration of various services under the e-UNNAT platform—launched in 2022—has simplified service delivery by offering a unified portal that consolidates government services, reducing the need for citizens to navigate multiple platforms. Moreover, the revision of the Public Service Guarantee Act (PSGA), 2011, to include online services is another significant development. The Autoappeal System, part of this revision, ensures that services are delivered on time, automatically escalating cases of delay, thereby enhancing the government's accountability (*Greater Kashmir, 2023*). By imposing fines for delayed services, this system incentivizes timely performance and improves public trust. As of 2023, Jammu and Kashmir has emerged as a leader in e-governance, with over 1,050 citizen-centric e-services, surpassing other states like Kerala and Madhya Pradesh (*Malik, I.A., 2023*). The region's Digital J&K initiative has not only strengthened digital infrastructure but has also set a benchmark for other regions in India, making the governance system more efficient and accessible.

9. CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN J&K

The implementation of e-governance in Jammu and Kashmir faces several significant challenges, which can be broadly categorized into issues related to language, public awareness, technology, geography, and economic constraints. Language diversity poses a major barrier, as most e-government applications are in English, making it difficult for a large portion of the population, particularly in rural areas, to access these services effectively. Public awareness and trust are also critical obstacles, as many citizens are unfamiliar with digital platforms or hesitant to use them, requiring efforts to build confidence in the system. Furthermore, the success of e-governance depends on citizens' trust in the technology, with the government needing to ensure security and prevent misuse. Geographical challenges further complicate matters, particularly in remote areas where infrastructure is underdeveloped and internet connectivity is limited, despite advances in wireless technology. Economic barriers are also significant, as poverty prevents many individuals from affording internet access or necessary devices. Additionally, the adoption of e-governance requires restructuring administrative processes, which often faces resistance from government departments and employees who are reluctant to change. The digital divide, manifesting in unequal access to technology between urban and rural areas, further exacerbates disparities in public service access (*Bala & Verma, 2018*). Financial costs and a lack of political will to invest in e-governance initiatives add another layer of complexity. Finally, privacy and security concerns related to sensitive personal data are critical, as robust measures must be implemented to protect citizens' information. Despite advancements in urban areas, many rural citizens still depend on Common Service Centres (CSCs) to access e-government services, indicating gaps in digital literacy and infrastructure (*Malik, I. A., 2023*). These challenges highlight the complexities involved in the region's e-governance efforts, requiring sustained solutions to

ensure inclusivity and effectiveness.

10. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The integration of e-governance in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) represents a major step towards enhancing administrative efficiency and citizen engagement through digital platforms like Jansugam.jk.gov.in and state.ras.gov.in. These platforms utilize Low Code–No Code (LCNC) and robust feedback mechanisms to improve service delivery. The e-UNNAT portal, consolidating over 1050 services, showcases significant progress in the state's digital governance, reflecting the broader Digital J&K Programme. Despite these advancements, challenges such as language diversity, technological trust, geographic barriers, and unequal access remain. To address these issues, a unique model could involve the implementation of localized digital literacy campaigns in rural areas, integrating multilingual support and offline access points. Additionally, leveraging community-based tech support networks and enhancing infrastructure in remote areas could bridge the digital divide. These measures would ensure inclusive and equitable access to e-governance services, ensuring the benefits reach all citizens across J&K.

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