

Good Governance in The Digital Age: Exploring The Impact of e-UNNAT in Kulgam District of Jammu and Kashmir

Muzamil Shafi¹, Dr. Manvendra Singh²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Government and Public Administration, Lovely Professional University, Punjab
Email ID: khwajamuzamil511@gmail.com

²Associate Professor and Head of Department, School of Social Sciences and Languages, LPU

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the impact of e-UNNAT in promoting good governance in Kulgam District, Jammu and Kashmir. It highlights the role of e-governance in improving government services, particularly in terms of accessibility and efficiency. The concept of e-governance has emerged as a transformative tool in improving governance processes in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. In context to statistical analysis, people in the Kulgam district have witnessed the benefits in service delivery and transparency under the shadow of e-UNNAT; however, gaps in awareness and inclusivity remain. A noticeable gender imbalance and lack of outreach suggest the need for more effective communication. The findings align with the theoretical framework emphasizing the importance of ICT in governance but stress the need for continuous engagement, better infrastructure, and improved service delivery to maximize e-UNNAT's potential.

Conceptualizing e-governance

According to *World Bank*, e-governance has the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses and governance institutions at large. e-governance is aimed at delivering public services in cost-effective and real time mode and makes governance institutions transparent and responsive in delivering public services. *Pankaj (2010)* defines e-Governance as the profound transformation of governance processes driven by the continuous and rapid integration of advanced digital technologies into society. This evolution opens up numerous opportunities to enhance the quality of services provided to citizens. In view of *Kalsi et al. (2009)*, the use of ICT has altered the socio-economic interactions across the globe. New chances for global growth and development have been ushered in by ICT. The state and federal governments have begun to take steps to develop new facets of social and economic advancement. According to *Sharma & Gupta (2003)*, the e-government movement is advancing quickly as countries make use of new electronic communication tools like the Internet. ICTs have a major role to play in assisting in the accomplishment of good governance objectives. Enhancing government procedures first, followed by fostering connections among citizens and third, fostering external relationships. Information technology has given the government's services more momentum in the current environment. *Javid, A. and Lone, R. A. (2019)* have termed e-governance a generous marvel as it brought a revolution in all the spheres of governance. E-governance plays a central role in economic development and the initiative is supported by national and international agencies. In this milieu, *Mehraj and Kaur (2018)*, have outlined that with the help of ICT, the pursuit for decentralized and people centered governance could be fostered. The fostering should be led by emergence of competing technologies, larger user base and appropriate institutional mechanism.

Theorizing e-governance

e-governance is an acronym for electronic governance that can be defined as the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in governance for providing government services. e-governance is aimed at utilizing ICT at various levels of governance, public sector and beyond for the purpose of enhancing governance (*Garg, P., 2008*). *UNESCO* in its policy

framework terms e-governance a wider concept than e-government as it brings new concepts of citizens: both in terms of citizen's needs and responsibilities. Moreover, e-governance primarily aims to empower citizens in the realm of policy making and service delivery. *Shah* in his viewpoint has termed e-governance as application of ICT to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability in the governance operations and to empower citizens through access and use of information. *Anderson* has proposed the concept of PUPREB (Public Sector Process Rebuilding) to reflect the needs of citizens, officials and policy makers. In his view, without steering and commitment, the adoption of ICTs cannot deliver better services (*Anderson, 1999*). e-governance provides citizens with opportunities to under the broad spectrum of policies and encourage them to voice their opinion on policy issues. Under the ambit of e-governance, citizens are entitled to avail/gain access to public services whenever and wherever they want (*Anderson et al., 2015*). The applicability of Information Technology is by 'Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)'. Developed by *Venkatesh & Others* in their work 'User Acceptance of Information Technology: Toward a Unified View', the theory explains the user's intentions of using ICT and there are four key constructs including effort expectancy, performance expectancy, social influence and enabling conditions that are supportive for an individual to make use of Information Technology (*Venkatesh et al., 2003*). However, the UTAUT has been developed through the review mechanism of eight models including "Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)" that states when a user is exposed to new technological innovations, there are assorted factors that determine their decision about how and why to make use of technology (*David, 1989*). In the above milieu, the enabling environment and supportive conditions are must for garnering greater efficiency in the governance operations using the ICT.

Intersectionality of e-governance and Good Governance

The World Bank first used the term "good governance" in 1992. The terms "governance" and "good governance" were frequently used synonymously to describe a strategic instrument for quickly attaining overall growth. It is believed that governance is more suitable than good governance. Put another way, we talk about "good governance" when novel strategies and tools are taken into consideration to enhance the efficiency of government. Positively interpreting both, we speak about "good government (*Ahmad & Zehra, 2022*)." In the words of *Kumar*, Good Governance is a complex process which requires a wide range of factors, including the ability to enhance government processes, connect individuals and build social engagement (*Kumar, 2017*). Modern technology is being adopted by governments worldwide to help solve the problem of service delivery and promote good governance (*Ahmad & Zehra, 2022*). India, one of the world's fastest-growing economies, is transitioning from a system of government to one based on e-governance and good governance. The creation of good governance is currently a major topic of discussion among academics, international development agencies, social scientists, and development workers (*Bala & Verma, 2018*). Openness, accountability, public participation, and the rule of law are the core tenets of good governance. These can only be attained by using ICT in government agencies to streamline the public service system, which is a major challenge in contemporary countries. The use of electronic tools to promote communication both inside and between government departments and public is known as e-Government (*Garg, 2008*). To bring the fundamental transformation into the governance mechanism and to provide the transparent and cost effective services to public, diverse set of policy measures have been enacted by Government of India. The key initiatives include National e-governance plan, e-office, Banking, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), Digitalization of Public Distribution Service (PDS), e-Panchayat and others (*Bala & Verma, 2018*).

e-UNNAT: A Transformative Initiative

Jammu and Kashmir has undergone a significant overhaul in its governance mechanisms, emerging as the first union territory to fully transition into e-Governance. This transformation has resulted in approximately 400 public services being digitized and made accessible through online platforms. Notably, these services are equipped with quality assurance measures and mechanisms to solicit feedback from users (*Economic Times: Online: January-17-2023*). The government's endorsement underscores the administration's commitment to leveraging technology to improve service delivery and ensure accountability. This initiative reflects a significant step towards enhancing citizen-centric governance in Jammu and Kashmir through the effective utilization of digital platforms and IT solutions. Reports from the service portal, e-UNNAT, indicate that over 90% of public services are consistently delivered on schedule. The integration of 445 services within the e-UNNAT portal facilitates real-time service provision, with applicants able to provide feedback through the Rapid Assessment System (RAS), thereby gauging public satisfaction levels effectively. This system not only ensures prompt service delivery but also enhances transparency and accountability in governance. The utilization of e-UNNAT underscores a proactive approach by the administration to leverage digital platforms for optimizing service delivery mechanisms and improving overall public service performance. Such initiatives are pivotal in modernizing administrative processes, fostering citizen trust, and addressing challenges related to service delivery efficiency in the contemporary digital age (*Khajuria, S: The Times of India: Online: March 05 2023*). Considering the digital influx in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, it has surpassed all other States and Union Territories in the country in terms of number of online services offered to citizens, with 1050 citizen-centric e-services announced on the e-UNNAT portal. With 1050 online services, J&K has surpassed Kerala which provides 911 e-governance services and Madhya Pradesh who offers 1010 e-governance services. It is noteworthy that the number of online services under the "Digital J&K Programme," which was put into mission mode has skyrocketed rapidly from the year 2021 to 1050 (*Malik, I. A., 2023*). The shift to e-Governance marks a pivotal step towards modernizing administrative processes in Jammu and Kashmir, aiming to improve service delivery efficiency and transparency. By leveraging digital platforms, the union territory has aimed to simplify interactions between citizens and government agencies, ensuring faster and more responsive service delivery. This initiative underscores the commitment to harnessing technology to enhance governance effectiveness and citizen satisfaction, setting a precedent for other regions to emulate in embracing digital transformation for public service administration (*Economic Times: Online: January-17-2023*).

Research Methods and Techniques

The study aims to explore the impact of e-UNNAT in Kulgam District of Jammu and Kashmir, focusing on good governance in the digital age. This is an analytical study, which seeks to examine how e-UNNAT has affected governance practices in the district, evaluating its effectiveness, challenges, and benefits. A sample size of 300 respondents is selected, ensuring representation from various groups and genders across the district. The study employs a simple random sampling technique, ensuring that every individual in the target population has an equal chance of being selected. This approach minimizes bias and ensures the results are statistically representative of the population. Data collection is primarily done through a questionnaire designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative insights. The questionnaire includes closed-ended questions to assess the impact of e-UNNAT on governance, digital accessibility, public participation, and government service delivery. Open-ended questions allow respondents to provide additional insights on challenges and improvements they have encountered with e-UNNAT. For data analysis, the study utilizes SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

All the analysis as derived from SPSS has been presented under given tabulations:

Data Interpretation and Analysis

Data interpretation and analysis in this study involve the use of SPSS to examine the responses from the 300 respondents. Descriptive statistics have summarized the data, providing insights into different socio-demographic variables and accessibility of e-UNNAT thereby. This analysis will help determine the strength and nature of the impact of e-UNNAT on good governance in Kulgam District, supporting informed conclusions and recommendations.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

S. No.	Gender of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	284	94.7
2	Female	15	5.3
3	Any Other	00	00
Total		300	100%

The majority of respondents are male, comprising 94.7% of the total sample, whereas females constitute only 5.3%. There are no respondents identifying as "Any Other." This analysis provides a clear overview of the gender distribution among respondents regarding e-UNNAT in Kulgam district, enabling insights into the demographic composition of the survey sample.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

S. No.	Age of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
1	18-30 Years	182	60.7
2	31-40	67	22.3
3	41-50	42	14.0
4	>50 Years	9	3.0
Total		300	100%

The data analysis focuses on the age distribution of respondents participating in the study. The majority of respondents fall within the 18-30 years' age bracket, comprising 60.7% of the sample. Those aged 31-40 years constitute 22.3%, while respondents aged 41-50 years and those over 50 years represent 14.0% and 3.0% of the sample, respectively. This distribution highlights a predominance of younger adults in the study cohort. Understanding these age demographics is crucial for interpreting how different age groups perceive and engage with the subject matter under investigation, providing insights into generational perspectives and potential implications for policy or program interventions aimed at specific age cohorts.

Table 3: Awareness Regarding e-UNNAT in J&K

S. No.	Awareness Regarding e-UNNAT in J&K	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	134	44.7
2	No	166	55.3
3	Can't Say	00	00
Total		300	100%

The data on awareness regarding e-UNNAT in Jammu & Kashmir indicates that 55.3% of respondents are not aware of the platform, while 44.7% have some knowledge of it. The absence of respondents in the "Can't Say" category suggests a clear-cut division between those who are aware and those who are not. This distribution highlights a significant gap in awareness, with a majority of the population unfamiliar with e-UNNAT. Addressing this gap through targeted outreach and education could be crucial for increasing engagement and improving the platform's impact in the region.

Table 4: e-UNNAT Makes Government Services Accessible

S. No.	e-UNNAT Makes Government Services Accessible	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strongly Disagree	03	2.5
2	Disagree	03	2.5
3	Neutral	29	21
4	Agree	63	47
5	Strongly Agree	36	27
Total		134	100

Based on the survey data, perceptions regarding the e-UNNAT initiative making government

services more accessible in Kulgam district are predominantly positive. A combined 74% of respondents either agree (47%) or strongly agree (27%) that e-UNNAT has enhanced accessibility to government services. This positive sentiment is contrasted by a smaller segment of respondents, with 2.5% each strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with the statement. Additionally, 21% of respondents remain neutral on the matter. The data indicates a general acknowledgment among a majority of respondents that e-UNNAT has played a significant role in improving the accessibility of government services in Kulgam district. Such insights can guide further improvements and initiatives aimed at enhancing digital service delivery and accessibility across similar regions, potentially addressing concerns of those who remain neutral or express disagreement.

Table 5: e-UNNAT Improves Transparency in Governance

S. No.	e-UNNAT Improves Transparency in Governance	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strongly Disagree	01	01
2	Disagree	03	2.5
3	Neutral	63	47
4	Agree	32	24
5	Strongly Agree	35	25.5
Total		134	100%

According to the survey results, opinions regarding whether e-UNNAT has improved transparency in the governance mechanism in Kulgam district are varied. A significant portion of respondents, comprising 50.5% (25.5% strongly agree and 25% agree), perceive that e-UNNAT has indeed enhanced transparency. On the other hand, 3.5% of respondents disagree (2.5% disagree and 1% strongly disagree), and 47% remain neutral on the matter. The data suggests a notable positive perception among those who agree or strongly agree that e-UNNAT has contributed to greater transparency in governance. However, a substantial portion of respondents adopting a neutral stance indicates that there may be room for improvement in communication or awareness regarding the transparency benefits brought about by e-UNNAT. Addressing these perceptions could further strengthen trust and engagement with the governance mechanisms facilitated through the initiative in Kulgam district.

Table 6: e-UNNAT Facilitates Faster and Efficient Public Service Delivery

S. No.	e-UNNAT Facilitates Faster and Efficient Public Service Delivery	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strongly Disagree	11	8
2	Disagree	17	13
3	Neutral	22	16
4	Agree	48	36
5	Strongly Agree	36	27
Total		134	100%

Based on the survey data, opinions are divided regarding whether e-UNNAT facilitates faster and more efficient delivery of public services. A combined 63% of respondents either agree (36%) or strongly agree (27%) that e-UNNAT contributes to faster and more efficient service delivery. Conversely, 21% of respondents either disagree (13%) or strongly disagree (8%) with this statement. Additionally, 16% of respondents remain neutral on the matter. The data suggests a positive perception among a significant portion of respondents that e-UNNAT improves the speed and efficiency of public service delivery. However, the presence of respondents who disagree or are neutral indicates potential areas for improvement in enhancing service delivery effectiveness through the initiative. Addressing these perceptions could further bolster confidence in e-UNNAT's role in facilitating efficient public service delivery.

Table 7: e-UNNAT Paves the way for Inclusive Governance

S. No.	e-UNNAT Paves the way for Inclusive Governance	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strongly Disagree	00	00
2	Disagree	07	5
3	Neutral	68	51
4	Agree	32	24
5	Strongly Agree	27	20
Total		134	100%

According to the survey data, opinions regarding whether e-UNNAT has paved the way for inclusive governance in the region are diverse. A combined 44% of respondents either agree

(24%) or strongly agree (20%) that e-UNNAT has contributed to inclusive governance. Conversely, 5% of respondents disagree, and a majority of 51% remain neutral on the matter. These results suggest that while there is some positive perception of e-UNNAT's role in promoting inclusive governance, a significant portion of respondents have yet to form a strong opinion or see tangible evidence of its impact in this area. Addressing neutrality through increased awareness and highlighting specific instances of inclusive governance facilitated by e-UNNAT could potentially enhance perceptions and strengthen its role in fostering inclusive governance practices in the region.

Results and Discussions

The results of this study highlight the perceived impact of e-UNNAT in promoting good governance in Kulgam District, Jammu and Kashmir. The analysis reveals several key insights into the role of e-governance in enhancing government services. Descriptive statistics indicate that while the majority of respondents (94.7%) are male and predominantly young (60.7% are between 18-30 years), there is a noticeable gender imbalance, with females comprising only 5.3%. Awareness about e-UNNAT is split, with 55.3% of respondents unaware of the platform, suggesting a gap in outreach and information dissemination. Regarding e-UNNAT's effectiveness, the data indicates that 74% of respondents agree or strongly agree that it has made government services more accessible. This aligns with theoretical perspectives on e-governance, which emphasize the role of ICT in improving service delivery and transparency (*Sharma & Gupta, 2003; Javid & Lone, 2019*). However, while transparency is also perceived positively by 50.5% of respondents, nearly half (47%) remain neutral, pointing to a potential gap in communication about the initiative's transparency benefits. Similarly, 63% of respondents believe that e-UNNAT has facilitated faster and more efficient public service delivery, yet 21% remain dissatisfied or neutral, indicating areas for improvement in service efficiency. In terms of inclusive governance, the findings are mixed, with 44% agreeing that e-UNNAT has contributed to more inclusive governance, but 51% remaining neutral. This suggests that while e-UNNAT has made strides in inclusivity, more efforts are needed to demonstrate its impact. These findings align with the theoretical framework, which suggests that ICT-driven governance, while transformative, requires supportive infrastructure and continuous citizen engagement to maximize its effectiveness (*Anderson et al., 2016*). Overall, e-UNNAT is viewed as a positive development, but there are significant opportunities for enhancing awareness, engagement, and service delivery efficiency.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The adoption of the e-UNNAT portal in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which consolidates over 1050 online services, marks a substantial leap from the mere 35 services available in 2019. This platform is part of the broader Digital J&K Programme, designed to enhance governance efficiency by integrating multiple services into a single, accessible portal. J&K's commitment to digital governance is also reflected in its efforts to replace outdated practices with modern, citizen-centric solutions like the Public Services Guarantee Act's auto-appeal system, which enforces timely service delivery and accountability. However, challenges remain, including language diversity, technology trust, and geographical barriers. Overcoming these hurdles is essential for ensuring that e-governance benefits are equitably distributed and effectively meet the needs of all citizens, particularly in remote and underserved areas.

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