Digital Locker: A Step To Digital Empowerment In India

Hoimonti Banerjee, Mohit Kumar Nandi
State Aided College Teacher, Assistant Teacher
Department of Political Science
Tehatta Sadananda Mahavidyalaya, Purba Bardhaman, India

Abstract : This paper is an attempt to examine the policy of 'Digital Locker' as a part of India's dream to become a knowledge economy and digital power. Digital Locker is one of the crucial steps towards digital transformation to reach India's goal embedded in the Digital India Programme launched in July 2015. Since now more attention is paid to the needs of the consumer. If the Services can be digitized it will be more fruitful. Digital Locker is a flagship initiative of Ministry of Electronics and IT under 'Digital India Programme'. Digital Locker aims to 'Digital Empowerment' of Indian citizen and its enhance to the country towards a paperless governance. The basic question that may be raised: Does Digital Locker empowers the citizens to grab the fruits of good governance based on transparency and accountability? If so, what role may the policy of Digital Locker take? What are the challenges towards the proper execution of Digital Locker? The purpose of this paper is to discuss recent uses, trends, purpose and pros and cons of Digital Locker applications.

Key Words : Digital India, Transparency, Policy, Accountability

Every Policy is a goal oriented and action oriented course of action, whatever it is private or public. Public policy is the framework of laws, regulations and actions of government's implementation to achieve social and economic goals. In recent times digitization of public policy has become very popular. Digital India Programme was launched on 1st July, 2015 to enable digital delivery of service to citizens.

If we look at the theoretical background of this project, we see that it has emerged as a result of globalization and the neoliberal economy. New liberal economy rejects the idea of large sector, doubts of the government's capacity and blame on public bureaucracy and believes in citizen centric private sector superiority and emphasizes market competition in service delivery. After the Second World War the administrations in developed countries were totally collapsed and government failed to deliver welfare schemes due to shortages of fund and the idea of welfare state system was broken down. As a result of this, a new aspect of public administration has been emerged, which came to be known as New Public Management. New Public Management is an approach to running public services both local and national levels.It's aims was to make governance more transparent, consumer – oriented from which the concept of good – governance evolved. This idea was spread in developing countries because these countries did not want to lose public trust on public administration because they wanted to reconstruct the, socio economic condition of people. India as a developing country was no exception and India also walked the path of good governance. Now a days whole world is dependent on technology and all information is now available in one click, so good governance must be transformed into digital governance. In a country such a huge population like India, this digital platform is a means of direct communication between administration and the people.

The Digital India Programme was launched by the Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on 1st July, 2015 to enable digital delivery of services to citizens. This Policy aims to remodel India into a knowledgeable economy and digitally empowered society with good governance for citizens and promotes transparency and accountability in public services.

This project includes providing high-speed internet, mobile phone and bank account enabling participation in digital and financial space, shareable private space on a public cloud and creating a safe and secure cyber space.

One such digital service of Digital India Programme is Digital Locker applications. Digital Locker system is to minimize usage of physical documents and enable their e-sharing via registered repositories. This policy helps us to connect with government and technologies. Digital Locker is a flagship initiative of Ministry of Electronics and IT under 'Digital India Programme'. Digital Locker aims to 'Digital Empowerment' of Indian citizens and it's enhances to the country towards a paperless governance.

The basic questions or objective that may be raised:

- Does Digital Locker empower the citizens to grab the fruits of good governance based on transparency and accountability?
- If so what role may the policy of Digital Locker take?
- What are the challenges towards the proper execution of Digital Locker?

Literature Review: The findings from the literature are presented below:

Gulyani and Pasricha (2020) in his study states that to bringing transparency in governance Digital India Programme includes digital technologies via mobile applications and cloud computing to ensure that all government services and information are available anywhere, anytime and on any device.

Kapoor (2018) in her study concluded that how Digital India initiative saving a person's time as well as money by using documents electronically with the help of Digilocker which will be available for them 24 x 7 without any charge.

Yadav (2021) in her study states that Digital India Programme provides a chance for citizens in digital freedom to do trade in India and encouraged to new start-ups and India offers is a big business opportunity for global companies.

Mohanta, Debasish and Nanda (2017) in their study states that Digilocker system have not only brought changes to the governance but also contributing to the environment changes. By reducing the use of paper it also helps to greener workplaces and thus leading to a greener ecosystem for new generation.

Research Methodology: For the research study purpose secondary data has been used to express the changes done in the digital world. It is based on secondary data, which is taken from various internet articles, published journals and various government portals.

One of the important outcome of Digital India Programme is the Digital Locker Applications. It is a cloud based programme. It is a secure dedicated personal electronic clous space available for storing the documents. A smart mobile phone is required to use this Digi Locker service. If a person have a valid mobile then Digilocker can be activated. To activate it a person can access it from the government's own Digilocker website or download the Digital Locker applications from the Goggle Play Store.

Now one need not to take his/her documents, marks sheet, PAN card, voter card, driving license etc in his/her folder and be vigilant round the clock for their security due to misplace or theft. A person can save his time as well as money by using his documents electronically with the help of Digilocker, which will be available for him 24×7 without any charge. These documents can be digitally signed using the e-sign facility at ease, which is similar to the process of self attestation. Digilocker does not share user's data with third parties.

The beta version of the service was rolled out in February 2015 and was launched to the public by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 1st July 2015. Storage space for uploaded legacy to documents was initially 100 MB. Individual files are limited to 10 MB.

In July 2016, Digital Locker recorded 2013 million users with a repository of 2.413 million documents. The number of users saw a large jump of 753,000 new users in April.When the central government urged municipal bodies to use Digilocker to make their administration paperless.

From 2017, the facility was extended to allow students of the ICSE board to store their class X and XII certificates in Digilocker and share them as required.

ICICI Bank has integrated is retail internet banking platform with 'Digital Locker' which is an initiative of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity).

Kotak Mahindra Bank also started providing access to Digilocker system from within it's net banking facility.

Over 108 hospitals including TATA Memorial Hospital were planning to launch this app for storing cancer patient's medical reports and documents.

In 2023 Government of India integrated passport application form with Digilocker. Now a days Indian Railways and Airports accepts digital AADHAR card through Digilocker as valid I'd proof.

Now The e-locker in west Bengal government called Banglar cloud is an initiative by our honorable chief minister Srimati Mamata Banerjee .It aims to digitally store citizen's documents and all kinds of certificates safely and aims at digital empowerment of entrepreneurs and citizens providing access to authentic document anytime anywhere.

Digilocker is currently used by 279.63 million users and has issued 6.74 billion documents so far.

Benefits of Digilocker:

- Through this policy citizens can keep all their personal information and documents with them anywhere and anytime.
- It is much more secure than paper documents.
- It has also made the work of the administration much easier as the administration no longer has to store bundles of paper.
- All the information is now at the finger tips with just one click.
- It has increased the working speed of the administration as well as made the administration more transparent and accountable to the citizens which is promoting the concept of good governance and the success of new public management.
- Digital Locker allows users to store the document in pdf, jpeg, png, bmp, and GIF format within the limit of 1 MB per document.
- Digilocker has the potential to significantly reduce the cost of delivering public services by digitizing and centralizing citizen records, this will result in reduced staffing requirements and other operational expenses of the governments.
- Digilocker is a accessible to all Indian citizens including those in rural areas and can be easily accessed.
- This app has made urban and rural India digitally literate.
- Digilocker acts as a powerful tool in fighting corruption. The online process of uploading and verifying documents on the platform eliminates any human interaction. Thus no more bribing officials to renew our lost documents.

Disadvantages of Digilocker:

The objective or vision of Digilocker was to make India digital. Where people are becoming more dependent on soft document than hard documents. Like every artificial intelligence or online platform there are some limitations and risks in using this Digilocker.

- The Success of every project depends on how successful the project can be at the ground level of the society. India is such a big country a large part of it's population lives in villages still many of them are illiterate, making them digitally literate is very difficult.
- Now that every citizen's identity documents like AADHAR card, PAN card, bank details, phone number are linked with each other and OTP is required before using various online services, various unscrupulous people are taking advantage of this digitization process to commit cyber crime with people's personal information.
- When a digitally illiterate citizen takes the help of a middle man or a third party to enjoy various online services, he is at risk of being cheated by those third party.

Conclusion: The ultimate success of any kind of project or scheme does not depend only on administrative performance but in order to get success it is necessary to increase the utility and acceptance of that kind of project or scheme among the people from different strata of society. Only then this kind of project will be a key to success to the future generations. A large number of people is not aware of the advantages of this project. In order to raise consciousness of this project among the public government should run mass campaign through print media, electronic media, social media. Though a campaign named Prime Minister's Rural Digital Literacy was launched to literate rural people digitally but it failed to reach people. So rural self government should come closer to make this scheme successful.

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