"Right to Information Act" – A tool for good governance and social change through Information Technology

[1]P.Chitra and [2]Dr. M. Neelamalar
[1]*Ph. D Research Scholar, Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai*
E-mail: chitra.emedia@gmail.com
Tel: +91-9043651136
[2]*Assistant Professor, Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai*
E-mail: nmalar@yahoo.com
Tel: 9283120950

Abstract— For good governance to exist in both theory and practice, citizens must be empowered to participate in meaningful ways in decision-making processes. They have a right to information and to access. Although widespread accessibility remains a barrier for many countries, one of those ways is through Information Technology (IT) applications such as the Internet. E-governance has emerged as a viable means to address development issues and challenges because citizens find social change through access to information. The paper will outline a detailed analysis on the present usage of Information Technology for the benefit of civil society towards good governance.

Index Terms IT, SNS, Blogs, RTI, Good governance.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The right to information act is popularly known as RTI Act. It has become a very important law that was enacted by the Indian Parliament in recent years. It has been proved as a very powerful tool for common people and social activists to fight against corruption and to have a better control upon officers of various government departments and agencies and also to protect their legal and constitutional rights. The transparency of the public authority information has increased. The secrecy of various kinds of information from public authority has reduced largely and resulted in transparency and accountability for a better democracy.

In the famous 'tryst with destiny' speech on the eve of Indian Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru articulated this challenge as 'the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunities'. Good governance must aim at expansion in social opportunities and removal of poverty. In short, good governance means securing justice, empowerment, employment and efficient delivery of services.

Good governance is beneficial to the continuous growth and well-being of all people in India. The Government of India has placed good governance and inclusive growth at the center of the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The enactments of the Right to Information Act aim at forwarding inclusive growth and better governance. Good governance" is a term that is often used to describe the desired objective of a nation-state's political development. The principles of good governance, however, are not new. Good governance in short is described as anti-corruption, whereas authority and its institutions are accountable, effective and efficient, participatory, transparent, responsive, and equitable. These are the major characteristics of good governance as outlined by the United Nations. RTI is enacted to make India a corruption less country and thus it creates a social change. Web blogs and social networking sites (SNS)

helps the user to express their opinion and also to share their knowledge. RTI is also discussed in various blogs and SNS and hence information Technology could be a tool for bringing good governance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. GOOD GOVERNANCE:
The concept of good governance exists from king's rule. This is being discussed by Sharma (2005) in his article on "Indian Idea of Good Governance - Revisiting Kautilya's Arthshastra". Kautilya's system of governance was quite modern in concept and contemporary in operational guidelines. Just as the philosophy, tenets, advice and suggestions contained in the two ancient epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, have substantial relevance even today in terms of basic principles of statecraft and governance. We find that the most of the basic features of modern day concept of good governance, responsiveness of the government, efficiency of administration, well being and prosperity of the people, overall development of the political community, good quality of life, ethical upwardness and economic affluence – have got prominent place in the thought process and administrative structures postulated by Kautilya in his Arthashastra. The primary objective of the authority has been described as the happiness of the people. All other goals are complimentary and secondary. This not only shows the great concern of the philosopher for the well being of people but also brings forward the 'Indian' model of good governance before the academic society at large.

From ancient history it is understood that the ruler should think good governance as their primary objective. Good governance in present situation is being discussed by Singh (2011) in his paper "The Challenge of Good Governance in India: Need for Innovative Approaches" describes that the citizen

will look up for high quality performance from their county. When good governance is guaranteed, citizens go about their personal business and pursuits with enhanced expectations. On the other hand the bad or indifferent governance will not only restrict opportunities of success but it also can degenerate into conflicts and civil wars. In that condition the personal accomplishments as well as social achievements get severely restricted. Good governance helps create an environment in which sustained economic growth becomes achievable. Conditions of good governance allow citizens to maximize their returns on investment. He also says that the good governance is not by change. It needs to demanded by citizens of the country. Therefore it is necessary to have participatory process.

While Singh says good governance guarantees for a high quality performance of a county, Kumar (2005) in his paper "An Institutional Framework for Good Governance in India" says that information empowerment will lead to good governance in the country. In order to ensure accountability to citizens, one need to be made aware of the standards of services that are available to them. Computerized information systems are good means for disseminating information on government policies, programs and projects. He explains with an example of good governance at Kerala. Like Kerala, other states may consider moving in the direction of starting computerized information centers/e-governance centers in every panchayat. As a step in this direction, states may consider phased development of e-governance centers at the development block and village levels. The other means of effective information dissemination include strengthening public information systems at the grassroots, especially field publicity.

2.2 E-governance and RTI:

The study by Corradini, et al (2007) highlights that Digital identities, profiles and their management enables online interactions and transactions among people, enterprises, service providers and government institutions. In this paper, after having examined the European identity management policies, they explain the differences between digital identity and digital citizenship and introduce digital credentials and also discuss how an identity management framework, composed by shared and standardised services supporting authentication procedures, can change within the e-Government domain. The paper concludes by outlining future trends and the potentiality of the extended digital identity in both public and private sectors. Within an e-Government's domain it is possible to enforce the identity Management framework in a more specific way. The paper also discussed current and foreseeable trends for identity management along with an analysis of important issues and requirements. The study introduced a model of an identity management framework and discussed some of our past and current research activities in this area.

Saxena (2005) is of the opinion that E-governance initiatives in most countries promise a more citizen-centric government and reduce operational cost. Unfortunately most of these initiatives have not been able to achieve the benefits claimed. Often the reason for this failure is a techno-centric focus rather than a governance-centric focus. The paper explores the necessary attributes of a governance-centric initiative under the banner "excellent e-governance", and describes a methodology for ensuring such excellence in e-governance implementations. Excellence in e-governance requires the initiative to be effectiveness-driven and not merely efficiency-driven. This will require the initiative to be led by"good governance".

Roumeen & Islam (2003) explored the link between information flows and governance with the objective to examine how the availability of information may affect governance. This paper examined how the presence of Freedom of Information (FOI) laws may affect how countries govern. The purpose of all such laws is to define a framework for the sharing of information. Economic theory tells us that information is needed to make sound economic and political choices, to monitor agents and reward or punish accordingly. Better availability of economic data and the ability of people to demand and receive the information they need is highly correlated with governance. Governments that do not produce organize and share information will be hampered in policymaking. Good policy requires up-to-date information on the economic situation and also the sharing of information for better coordination, analysis and monitoring.

A few studies have been conducted in Indian Perspective. Koneru (2007) in her study is of the view that E-Governance as a technology-enabled Public Information Services system aids not only in reengineering the structures but also in reorganising the procedures and processes for speedy delivery of services. The demand for e-Governance is growing in consequence of government's ineptness to meet the citizens' needs and rendering services in a timely, cost-effective and corruption-free manner. Moreover, political, economic, social and technological changes and developments ushered e-Governance as a salvation to the shrinking role of Governments in delivering goods and services rapidly. Connectivity, community participation, and content are the prerequisites for designing effective governance.

Singh (2010) in her paper on "Promoting e-Governance through Right to Information: A Case-study of India" opines that the first phase of e-governance is marked by web presence of public institutions and dissemination of information. This will be facilitated by the Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI) and this has been developed as a basic feature of all public services where the service and service provider details are made available in a proactive manner. This information is also being integrated for citizen access through the National and State Portals which provide basic information on Government programmes and services.

3 METHODOLOGY:

The methodology adopted for this study is content analysis. Two prominent blogs and two social networking sites were chosen and the analysis was done

3.1 Web blogs:

There are many blogs that have discussions related to RTI Act. For this research, two blogs were taken for analysis based on the number of users. The two most prominent blogs rtiindia and Indiarti were chosen as they possessed the maximum number of visitors.

3.1.1 RTIindia blog – http://www.rtiindia.org/forum/blogs/

This blog has categories in providing the information, and visitors can read the information shared by the registered user. If the visitors want to share the information on RTI, they can also register and create account in this blog and share information. The categories in which the visitor can access information on the blog are My Experiences, RTI Critic, RTI INDIA New Features, RTI Success Story, My view point on RTI, RTI Act, RTI Application, RTI Replies, First Appeal, Second Appeal, RTI Issues, Income Tax RTI Matter, Provident Fund, RTI Issue, Passport RTI Issue, Cooperative Housing Society RTI Matter, Media and RTI, Central Information Commission, State Information Commission. This blog has a download called RTI toolbar, like other tool bar which provide easy access to links, information. This toolbar also placed on the top of the webpage provide the user easy access on the blog and sites related to RTI. There is a dedicated link called '*Media and RTI*' which covers issues based on media

3.1.2 Indiartiblog – http://indiarti.blogspot.in/

This blog contains information on the success stories, where the success stories explain how the applicants used RTI for receiving information and how they exposed various scams. They also provide information such as NGOs in RTI, RTI helplines, RTI Videos, Resources, Govt websites, PIO and AA list, Rules, Text of the Act, IC websites, Find volunteers in your area, Appeal rules, FAQs, Understanding RTI, RTI as an anti-corruption tool, RTI success stories. For any visitor they can make use this blog for understanding the RTI and helps them to clarify the queries they have. This blog also has archive of success stories from Dec 2005 to Feb 2012. Also this blog provide the visitor a facility to subscribe the post through the subscription of the blog by just providing the e-mail id of the visitor

The blog owner is rtiindia, and the comments are mainly given by two RTI activists namely Karira and Tarus

Table 1: Details of the frequent users of the rtiindia blog

Name of the user	rtiindia	Karira	Tarus
Location	Delhi	Secunderabad	chennai
Total posts	113	33,505	2,131
Post per day	0.07	17.37	1.24
Download of messages	1	42	10
Uploads of messages	39	70	0
Referrals	158	90	4
Helped in posting (rates by	6	80	5
blog)			

There are many people who visit the blog, rtiindia is blog owner, whereas Karira and Tarus are frequent visitors and they are social activists who comment or reply to the queries posted by the blog visitors.

3.1.3 Content taken for analysis from the blog:

The 30 recent discussion are taken for analysis from the blog

3.1.4 Category of topics in rtiindiablog.

The blog has categorized the posts into following topics

- **Media and RTI**: RTI issues that are discussed in media
- **Provident fund RTI issue:** PF issues are discussed and there are queries raised by visitors on how to use RTI for sorting out PF issue
- **RTI issue:** The general RTI issues like filling RTI and reply is not obtained so the visitor asking how to go for appeal or the procedure to approach for court
- **RTI application:** visitor raise query on how to file RTI application
- **Passport RTI issue:** Passport issues are discussed and there are queries raised by visitors on how to use RTI for sorting out passport issue
- **RTI critic:** Criticism on RTI
- **RTI Act:** The RTI Act itself is discussed for arising awareness
- **Uncategorised:** all the other topics discussed are clubbed into this uncategorized group

Table 2: Category of topics in rtiindiablog.

Category	No.of posts	Percentage
Media and RTI	2	6.7
Provident fund RTI issue	1	3.3
My experience	4	13.4
RTI issue	1	3.3
RTI application	1	3.3
Pass port RTI issue	2	6.7
RTI critic	1	3.3
RTI Act	1	3.3
Uncategorised	17	56.7

The category of the message posted are mentioned in the blog.

- Uncategorized means post that are related to RTI, some posts related to consumer awareness and related to education. This has the higher percentage of 56.7 compared to other categories
- Media and RTI and passport RTI issue shares only 6.7% each
- Experience from RTI, it can be either positive or negative shares 13.4% of the posts
- Other categories like provident fund RTI issue, RTI issue, RTI application, RTI critic, RTI Act shares 3.3% each

3.1.5 Category of topics in indiartiblog:

The blog has categorized the posts into following topics

Expose: This category contains post that are related to exposure of scams, or funds remain unutilized by public authorities

Landmark decision: Decision made by the State Information Commission (SIC) or Central Information Commission on the appeal made to them

Success stories: Success stories of visitor on how they used RTI for seeking information

Table 3: Category of topics in indiartiblog:

Category	No.of posts	Percentage
Expose	14	46.7
Landmark decisions	7	23.3
Success stories	9	30

The category of the message posted are mentioned in the blog

- Expose is the category wherein there are many facts that are exposed through RTI, it may be scam, or funds left unutilized and so on. This category takes the highest percentage of 46.7%
- Landmark decision is the category on which the decisions made by court or the information commission either the state or the central decides and give their judgment on some issue which reached them for appeal. This category takes 23.3% of the other categories.
- Success story is the one which is related to the stories that got succeeded through filing RTI application, this category takes 30%

3.1.6 Posts in these two blogs related to social change:
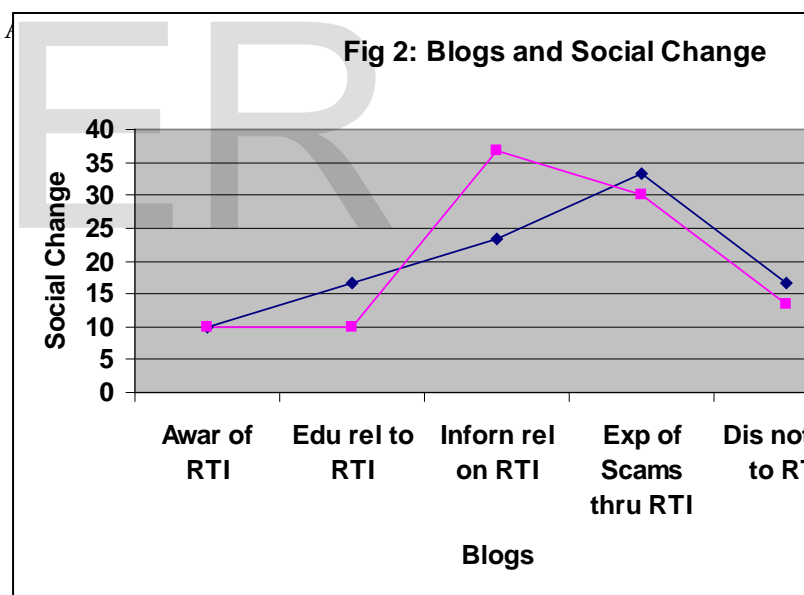
In this research the social change in the blog content is classified into

- **Awareness of RTI:** Awareness that may help the visitor to understand RTI and help them in filing RTI for seeking information they need. From this the visitor may get an idea to seek information through RTI and they can be a responsible citizen.
- **Education related to RTI:** RTI used for education purpose. Bringing a change in the educational sector will definitely impact the future generation for a social change.
- **Information related to RTI:** Information on RTI cases that may help the visitor to understand what is happening in the State Information Commission or Central Information Commission. So that the visitors may get the knowledge on RTI and they can also cultivate idea on filing RTI for seeking justice
- **Exposure of Scams through RTI:** When scams are brought to the awareness of people, politician or government officials may have a fear that this Act may also expose them if they involve in corruption. Also it

will make people aware of the corruption and also help them to fight against corrupt practices and politicians.

Table 4: Posts on the blogs rtiindiablog and indiartiblog related to Social change

Category	rtiindiablog		Indiartiblog	
	No.of posts	Pecentage	No.of posts	Pecentage
Awareness of RTI	3	10	3	10
Education related to RTI	5	16.7	3	10
Information on RTI	7	23.3	11	36.7
Exposure of Scams through RTI	10	33.3	9	30
Discussion not related to RTI	5	16.7	4	13.3

Fig 2: Blogs and Social Change

3.2 Social Networking Sites:

The popularity of any issue or sharing of knowledge and information and creating awareness is done mainly on social networking sites (SNS) in the present scenario. Facebook and twitter are two popular SNS in our country. Social change is made possible through these SNS, hence this research analyses the discussion and content of these SNS related to social change.

3.2.1 Facebook:

In the popular Social Networking site Face book, there exists a open group called 'Right To Information and a Anti corrup-

tion India' which is a Complete Online Community Portal for Right to Information in India, providing rightful interpretation of RTI Act to help Citizens, Officers, Activists, Media, Lawyers, NGO's, Social help Groups and Research scholars.

This page aims at Rightful interpretation of Right to Information Act providing help to Indian Netizens, Officers, NGO's, Lawyers, Social Workers, RTI Activists, Media for publishing news, and Research Scholars. RTI India portal now has more than 3,971 verified users. Thus every day there is some quantum of discussion being carried on by the users. They share photos, news articles, updates on RTI

3.2.2 Twitter:

This is also a popular social networking site where there exists a page

called RTI ACT Right to Information Act Portal India · http://www.rti-

act.com. @rtiact

One more page called RTI INDIA **@rtiindia** Official RTI INDIA Twitter Account. Right to Know- The page support those invoking Right to Information by way of rightful interpretation and community support. India http://www.rtiindia.org

	RTI ACT	RTI India
Tweets	5	792
Following	652	74
Followers	294	3,920

Social change in Social Networking Sites (SNS) with special reference to Facebook and Twitter:

According to the research the social change in the SNS content is classified into

- **Awareness of RTI:** Awareness that may help the visitor to understand RTI and help them in filing RTI for seeking information they need. From this the visitor may get an idea to seek information through RTI and they can be a responsible citizen.
- **Education related to RTI:** RTI used for education purpose. Bringing a change in the educational sector will definitely impact the future generation for a social change.
- **Information related to RTI:** Information on RTI cases that may help the visitor to understand what is happening in the State Information Commission or Central Information Commission. This brings social change when people are given the idea of the appeal procedures at SIC or CIC and also they can also cultivate idea on filing RTI for seeking justice
- **Exposure of Scams through RTI:** Social Chang happens when the scams are brought to the awareness of people, hence politician or government officials may have a fear that this Act may also bring them out if they involve in corruption.

There are various discussions on RTI done on this site. The content of the entire week are taken for analysis. There are 214 posts in the observed week (Jun 8-14).

In twitter there are 96 tweets found, for which the analysis was done

Table 5: Discussions and posts on social change in Social Networking Sites

Category	Facebook		Twitter	
	No.of posts	Percentage	No.of posts	Percentage
Awareness on RTI	119	55.6	50	52.1
Education related to RTI	17	7.9	29	30.2
Information on RTI	55	25.7	12	12.5
Discussions on Scams	23	10.8	5	5.2

When the discussions of the SNS are analysed,

- Awareness on RTI brought by facebook and twitter is of 55.6% and 52.1% respectively
- In bringing social change through discussion on education related to RTI was done more by twitter taking 30.2% whereas facebook has only 7.9%
- Information on RTI, like sharing information about the Act occupies 25.1% by facebook and twitter has got 12.5%
- Discussions on scams are discussed highly by facebook when compared to twitter. They take 10.8% and 5.2% repetively

Recent tweet discussions are mainly on the inclusion of RTI Act in the school syllabus. Some of the interesting tweets posted recently are

prameet dharamshi@PrameetD
The Centre is considering introduction of lessons on various facets of the **Right to Information Act** in the school curriculum.

Vishweshwar Raste@VMRaste
working of rti **to** info in **#india** - **#transparency** in the public life/ affairs is a MUST

@PMOIndia sec 4 of the rti **act** http://www.ndtv.com/video/player/news/transparency-not-really-says-a-man-who-helped-guard-the-right-to-information/238514

Kabir bedi @ikabirbedi says RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT has uncovered dozens of SCAMS. With more citizen activism, THOUSANDS MORE will soon be exposed.

Findings:

- Awareness creation on RTI by rtiindiablog and Indiarti blog are equal and they occupy 10% of the discussions

- Education is discussed more on Rtiindia blog (16.7%) and comparatively less in indiartiblog (10%)
- Giving information on RTI and enlightening the user on the Act is done well by Indiarti blog, as it takes 36.7% whereas rtiindia has got only 23.3%
- Exposure of scam is done well by both these blogs. There is no vast difference in the percentage, rtiindia has got 33.3% and indiarti has got 30%
- Discussions that are not related to RTI are also done very less by both the blogs. Rtiindia has got 16.7% and Indiarti has got 13.3%
- Both facebook and twitter create awareness at the same level on RTI with 55.6% and 52.1% respectively
- In bringing social change through discussing education related on RTI was done more by twitter (30.2%) than facebook (7.9%)
- Information on RTI, like sharing information about the Act was done more by facebook (25.1%) than twitter (12.5%)
- Discussions on scams are discussed highly by facebook when compared to twitter. They take 10.8% and 5.2% respectively

5. Conclusion:

E-governance is the revolution made by ICT in this decade and India has been pushing forward quite well in this technology. Instead of the conventional record keeping on papers, effort such as making offices paperless, moving digital files and executing signatures electronically, e-governance has lowered costs and improves speed and convenience in governance. There is a growing push for transparency in governance and the Right to Information (RTI) Act and activism surrounding it has helped to reveal information aimed at holding officials accountable. In other words, it is necessary to make the information system RTI friendly and to maintain transparency.

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