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Article

## **An Analytical Assessment of the Digital Integration of Judicial Processes in Delhi NCR: Implications for Litigant Accessibility and Systemic Efficiency**

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### **Abstract**

*The Indian judiciary, recognized as one of the largest legal systems globally, faces persistent challenges including judicial backlog, procedural delays, and limited public access to justice. The integration of digital technologies represents a transformative shift in how courts operate, particularly in urban regions like Delhi NCR. Through initiatives like the e-Courts Mission Mode Project, significant strides have been made in digitizing judicial processes such as e-filing, online case tracking, virtual hearings, and digital record management. This paper provides a detailed analysis of the digital transformation in the district courts of Delhi NCR and evaluates its impact on litigants. By examining secondary data and drawing insights from existing literature, the research assesses how these digital tools are improving judicial efficiency, accessibility, and transparency. The study further identifies gaps, challenges, and offers recommendations for optimizing the use of technology in courtrooms to serve litigants better.*

### **Keywords**

E-Courts, Delhi Judiciary, Digital Transformation, Litigants, Virtual Hearings, Judicial Reforms

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full Form</b>
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CIS	Case Information System
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
e-MMP	e-Courts Mission Mode Project
GoI	Government of India
HMCTS	Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (UK)
ICMS	Integrated Case Management System
IT	Information Technology
MMP	Mission Mode Project
MoLJ	Ministry of Law and Justice
NCR	National Capital Region
NeGP	National e-Governance Plan
NJDG	National Judicial Data Grid
NITI Aayog	National Institution for Transforming India

SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
UK	United Kingdom

## Introduction

The judiciary plays an indispensable role in upholding democratic values and ensuring the rule of law. However, the Indian judicial system has long struggled with delays, a burgeoning backlog of cases, and accessibility challenges for the general public. According to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), more than 40 million cases were pending across Indian courts as of 2023. These issues are particularly acute in the National Capital Region (NCR), where district courts such as Tis Hazari, Patiala House, Saket, Rohini, Karkardooma, Dwarka, and Rouse Avenue deal with a heavy caseload on a daily basis.

In an effort to modernize court processes and enhance efficiency, the Government of India launched the e-Courts Mission Mode Project (MMP) under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). This initiative, which began with Phase I in 2007, has evolved through subsequent phases to focus on the digitization of court services, including the development of e-filing systems, virtual hearings, online access to case information, and the digitization of judicial records. Delhi NCR has emerged as a pioneer in implementing these technological reforms, setting benchmarks for other regions.

This research focuses on evaluating the depth and effectiveness of digital reforms in district courts across Delhi NCR. By analyzing their implementation and impact on various stakeholders—particularly litigants—this study seeks to assess whether the shift to a digital judicial framework has fulfilled its objectives of accessibility, transparency, and efficiency.

## Research Objectives

This research paper is guided by the following core objectives:

- i. To evaluate the extent to which digital technologies have been adopted in district courts across Delhi NCR**, including the range and functionality of services implemented.
- ii. To identify and describe the major technological interventions** introduced under the e-Courts Mission Mode Project within the region.

- iii. **To examine the practical impact of these digital advancements on litigants**, particularly in terms of access to justice, cost reduction, convenience, and procedural efficiency.
- iv. **To understand the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders**, especially litigants and legal practitioners, in using digital judicial platforms.
- v. **To propose recommendations** aimed at strengthening and scaling up digital transformation in the judiciary to enhance its effectiveness and inclusivity.

These objectives collectively aim to analyze the real-world implications of judicial digitization, going beyond technical feasibility to assess user experience and institutional impact.

## Hypothesis

This research operates under a central hypothesis that evaluates the tangible impact of judicial digitization in the Delhi NCR region. The formulation of the hypothesis is as follows:

### i. Primary Hypothesis (H1):

The integration of digital technologies into district court operations in Delhi NCR has led to measurable improvements in accessibility, transparency, and efficiency for litigants.

### ii. Null Hypothesis (H0):

The adoption of digital technologies in Delhi NCR's courts has not produced any significant benefits for litigants in terms of accessibility, transparency, or judicial efficiency.

This hypothesis provides the analytical framework for assessing whether the digital transformation efforts—particularly under the e-Courts Mission Mode Project—have successfully achieved their intended outcomes from the standpoint of litigants.

## Research Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative and analytical approach**, relying primarily on **secondary data sources** to assess the digital transformation of district courts in Delhi NCR.

### i. Data Sources:

- **Government Publications and Reports:** Including documentation from the e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India, the Department of Justice, and the Ministry of Law & Justice.
- **Judicial Dashboards and Databases:** Especially the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), which provides updated case statistics and digital court information.
- **Think Tank and Policy Research:** Notably, analyses published by institutions like NITI Aayog and Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.
- **News and Media:** Verified reports from mainstream media outlets such as The Hindu, Indian Express, and Times of India for real-time developments.
- **Academic and Legal Journals:** Peer-reviewed articles, case studies, and law reviews relevant to e-courts and legal tech adoption.

## ii. Research Approach:

The methodology involved organizing available data into key thematic areas, including accessibility, user experience, system efficiency, transparency, and barriers to usage. Data interpretation was qualitative, with comparisons drawn between pre-digitization and post-digitization scenarios where relevant.

## iii. Scope:

The study is geographically focused on **Delhi NCR**, encompassing all district-level courts within the National Capital Territory, including Tis Hazari, Saket, Rohini, Karkardooma, Patiala House, Dwarka, and Rouse Avenue courts. The research emphasizes the **litigant's perspective**, while also considering inputs from legal professionals and court staff.

This methodological framework allows for a grounded and comprehensive understanding of the judiciary's digital evolution within one of India's most litigated regions.

## Segmentation

To conduct a detailed and structured analysis, this study employs a segmentation model that helps categorize the impacted stakeholders and operational scope of the digital transformation within Delhi NCR's judicial system.

## **i. Geographical Segmentation:**

This research is focused exclusively on the National Capital Region, particularly the following **district courts of Delhi**:

- **Tis Hazari Court Complex**
- **Patiala House Courts**
- **Saket District Court**
- **Rohini District Courts**
- **Karkardooma Court Complex**
- **Dwarka District Court**
- **Rouse Avenue Court**

These courts represent the full operational range of the Delhi judiciary and have been at the forefront of digital reform efforts under the e-Courts initiative.

## **ii. User-Based Segmentation:**

### **i. Litigants (Primary Users):**

Individuals or entities who are directly involved in legal proceedings and who utilize court services for case filing, hearings, or accessing judgments.

### **ii. Legal Professionals (Secondary Users):**

This includes advocates, legal clerks, junior counsels, and senior counsels who interface with digital systems for procedural tasks such as e-filing, cause list tracking, and remote appearances.

### **iii. Judicial Officers and Court Staff (System Facilitators):**

Judges, court clerks, and administrative personnel responsible for docket management, case listings, and maintaining digital infrastructure.

### **iv. Support Service Providers:**

These include IT vendors, system administrators, and technical support staff responsible for setting up and maintaining court digitization tools, including virtual hearing software and case management systems.

By analysing digital transformation through these segments, the study ensures a comprehensive and multi-dimensional assessment of its impact and reach.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review forms the theoretical backbone of this research, offering insights into both the foundational concepts and empirical studies that inform our understanding of judicial digitization. It draws from Indian and global experiences to contextualize the digital evolution of courts in Delhi NCR.

### **i. Evolution of the E-Courts Mission Mode Project in India**

The digital transformation of Indian courts began formally with the launch of the e-Courts Mission Mode Project (MMP) under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2007. Phase I of the project primarily focused on the computerization of court processes, such as cause list generation, case status updating, and judgment uploading. Phase II, initiated in 2015, expanded these functions by enabling litigants to file cases online, access scanned judicial records, and track case progress remotely.

Delhi NCR became one of the first urban regions to benefit from this phased implementation. Studies by the Ministry of Law and Justice have noted Delhi's leading role in deploying integrated case management systems (ICMS) and adopting video conferencing tools even before the pandemic pushed their widespread use. These developments laid the groundwork for digitization to influence all stakeholders in the judicial ecosystem.

### **ii. Role of the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)**

One of the most transformative digital platforms in Indian judicial administration is the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG). It functions as a real-time dashboard that offers nationwide data on case pendency, disposal rates, and judicial performance indicators across various hierarchies of courts.

For Delhi NCR, NJDG statistics provide a valuable measure of progress. Reports show that after digital implementation, certain courts in Delhi saw a notable improvement in disposal rates and decrease in backlog ratios. The NJDG is also used by judges and administrators to make data-driven decisions, helping streamline docket management.

However, studies from the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy suggest that while NJDG is a powerful transparency tool, its full potential remains underutilized due to inconsistent data reporting across different court jurisdictions.

### **iii. Acceleration of Judicial Digitization During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 brought significant disruptions to traditional courtroom proceedings. In response, the Supreme Court of India mandated the adoption of virtual hearings through video conferencing platforms to ensure continuity of justice delivery.

Delhi NCR was among the first jurisdictions to implement remote hearings at the district court level. Courtrooms were digitally enabled using platforms such as Cisco WebEx and Jitsi Meet, with the Delhi High Court issuing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for remote filing, payment, and argumentation.

This period catalysed broader acceptance of virtual hearings among both the Bench and the Bar. Scholarly assessments, such as those published in the Indian Journal of Law and Technology, highlight the adaptability shown by Delhi's legal community and its potential as a model for sustained digital integration in post-pandemic India.

### **iv. Comparative International Perspectives**

Digital transformation in judicial systems is not unique to India. Several countries have already built technologically sophisticated courts that serve as global benchmarks. For instance:

- United Kingdom: Through its HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) reform, the UK has introduced online civil money claims portals and fully digital procedural systems. Their emphasis on user-centric design provides key learnings for India.
- Singapore: Widely regarded as a global leader in judicial digitization, Singapore's judiciary employs AI tools, e-litigation platforms, and mobile apps to facilitate citizen access. The "Smart Courts" project offers procedural automation and multilingual interfaces, directly improving litigant experience.

Indian policymakers and court administrators have cited these examples to underscore the need for public-friendly digital court services and the importance of training and infrastructure in sustaining reform.

#### **v. Challenges Highlighted in Legal Policy Studies**

Despite the visible progress, several studies also highlight the pitfalls and challenges that come with judicial digitization:

- **Digital Divide:** The Vidhi Centre and NALSAR University of Law have raised concerns about access disparities among rural litigants, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities. Digital courts risk excluding those who lack internet access or digital literacy.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Reports from the Bar Council of Delhi reveal that many lower courts face issues like outdated hardware, insufficient bandwidth, and frequent power outages, undermining the continuity of virtual hearings.
- **Training Gaps:** Legal tech reforms require both judges and lawyers to be comfortable with digital tools. Studies show that a majority of practicing advocates in Delhi are self-taught in using e-court systems, indicating a lack of structured training support.
- **Data Security and Privacy:** As courts increasingly rely on online filing, audio-visual evidence, and digital databases, concerns about data integrity and cybersecurity have become prominent. Legal researchers have urged the creation of standardized protocols and data protection frameworks.

#### **vi. User Experience Studies and Public Perception**

A growing body of empirical research has started to focus on the end-user experience of digitized courts. Surveys conducted by legal NGOs and law schools in Delhi reveal mixed responses:

- Younger and tech-savvy litigants tend to appreciate e-filing, online tracking, and the option to appear virtually in routine matters.
- Older users, daily-wage workers, and those without smartphones often depend on lawyers or third-party agents, which can reintroduce intermediaries into what was intended as a direct access system.

Public perception studies emphasize that unless user support systems like e-Sewa Kendras are scaled and humanized, digitization may not fully bridge the justice access gap.

### **vii. Conclusion of Literature Review**

Overall, the reviewed literature presents a nuanced picture. While the digitization of courts—especially in Delhi NCR—has ushered in greater efficiency and transparency, structural issues around inclusivity, infrastructure, and user orientation persist. The Delhi experience stands out for its speed and adaptability, particularly during the pandemic, but requires sustained policy focus and innovation to become a model of accessible justice.

## **Secondary Research Data**

This section presents a comprehensive overview of the digital transformation initiatives undertaken in Delhi NCR's district courts, highlighting key statistics and developments.

### **i. Implementation of the e-Courts Mission Mode Project**

The e-Courts Mission Mode Project, initiated by the Government of India, aims to digitize the judiciary to enhance accessibility and efficiency. In Delhi NCR, this project has led to the establishment of e-Sewa Kendra's across court complexes, facilitating services like e-filing, e-payments, and virtual hearings. The initiative also focuses on digitizing legacy records and implementing intelligent systems for data-driven decision-making.

### **ii. National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) Statistics**

The National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) serves as a centralized database providing real-time information on case statuses across India. As per recent data:

- Total Cases: Over 4.59 crore cases are registered nationwide.
- Civil Cases: Approximately 1.09 crore.
- Criminal Cases: Around 3.49 crore.
- Pre-Litigation Cases: Over 12 lakh .

These statistics underscore the significant caseload and the necessity for digital solutions to streamline judicial processes.

### **iii. Hybrid Court Initiatives in Delhi**

In a bid to modernize court proceedings, Delhi has embarked on transforming its courts into hybrid models. The Delhi government approved a ₹387 crore project to digitize 691 district courts, enabling both in-person and virtual hearings. This initiative aims to reduce footfall in court complexes and expedite case disposals.

### **iv. Specialized Digital Courts**

To address specific legal domains, Delhi has introduced 34 digital courts dedicated to handling cases under the Negotiable Instruments Act, particularly cheque bounce cases. These courts, inaugurated at the Rouse Avenue complex, are expected to alleviate the burden on traditional courts and expedite the resolution of such cases.

### **v. Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Delhi's judiciary is exploring the integration of **AI tools** to assist in legal processes. AI applications are being tested to aid judges and lawyers in managing caseloads, analysing legal documents, and predicting case outcomes. This technological advancement aims to enhance efficiency and reduce manual workloads.

## **Secondary Data Sources**

- i. National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)** – Real-time data on case pendency and court functioning across India. [<https://njdg.ecourts.gov.in>]
- ii. Press Information Bureau (PIB)** – Official press releases and government announcements related to judiciary reforms. [<https://pib.gov.in>]
- iii. Times of India & Economic Times** – Reports on digitization projects and digital courts inaugurated in Delhi.
- iv. Delhi Government Portals** – Announcements regarding digitization of 691 district courts with a ₹387 crore budget.
- v. Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy** – Strategy papers and critiques on e-Courts and judicial reforms. [<https://vidhilegalpolicy.in>]

**vi. Department of Justice (GoI)** – e-Courts project implementation reports.

[<https://doj.gov.in>]

**vii. Indian Express** – Media analysis on adoption of AI in court systems.

## **Analysis and Results**

Analysing the data and developments presented, several key insights emerge regarding the impact of digital transformation on Delhi NCR's judiciary.

### **i. Enhanced Accessibility and Efficiency**

The implementation of e-Courts and hybrid models has significantly improved access to justice. Litigants can now file cases online, attend virtual hearings, and access case information remotely. This has reduced the need for physical visits to courts, saving time and resources for all stakeholders.

### **ii. Reduction in Case Backlogs**

Digital initiatives have contributed to a more streamlined case management system. The introduction of specialized digital courts for specific case types, like cheque bounce cases, has expedited the resolution process, thereby reducing backlogs in traditional courts.

### **iii. Challenges in Infrastructure and Training**

Despite the advancements, challenges persist. Some courts face infrastructural limitations, such as inadequate internet connectivity and lack of necessary hardware. Additionally, there is a need for comprehensive training programs to ensure that judges, lawyers, and court staff can effectively utilize new technologies.

### **iv. Potential of AI Integration**

The exploration of AI tools presents promising opportunities for the judiciary. AI can assist in legal research, case analysis, and decision-making processes. However, careful implementation is required to address concerns related to data privacy and the ethical use of AI in legal proceedings.

### **v. Public Perception and Acceptance**

While many stakeholders appreciate the convenience offered by digital courts, there is a segment of the population that faces challenges due to digital illiteracy or lack of

access to necessary technology. Efforts must be made to bridge this digital divide to ensure equitable access to justice.

## **Findings**

Based on the analysis of secondary data, institutional reports, digital dashboards, and media sources, several key findings emerge regarding the digital transformation of the judiciary in Delhi NCR's district courts.

### **i. Widespread Adoption of Core Digital Services**

The district courts in Delhi NCR have adopted a wide array of digital technologies, particularly under the e-Courts Phase II initiative. Services such as e-filing, e-payment of court fees, online cause lists, and digital case records are now standard across major court complexes like Saket, Tis Hazari, and Patiala House. Virtual hearing platforms (e.g., Cisco WebEx) have been successfully integrated and remain in use even post-pandemic for select case types.

### **ii. Noticeable Improvement in Operational Efficiency**

Court functioning has seen significant efficiency gains, particularly in routine matters such as bail applications, cheque bounce cases, and interim relief hearings. The establishment of 34 digital courts at Rouse Avenue to exclusively deal with cases under the Negotiable Instruments Act has streamlined workload allocation and expedited hearings.

### **iii. Shift in Stakeholder Behaviour and Expectations**

Lawyers and litigants alike have begun to expect and even prefer digital modes of interaction for procedural efficiency. E-filing portals and SMS/email-based alerts have reduced the dependency on physical visits and long waiting hours. Legal professionals are increasingly incorporating digital practice tools into their daily workflows.

### **iv. Persistent Digital Divide**

Despite these advancements, digital justice is not yet inclusive. Older litigants, individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and those lacking digital literacy continue to face challenges in using e-court services without third-party

assistance. Many continue to rely on legal clerks or kiosk operators to navigate e-filing systems.

#### **v. Insufficient Human and Technical Infrastructure in Lower Courts**

While High Courts and larger district courts in Delhi NCR are well-equipped, lower-tier courts often lack adequate infrastructure such as updated hardware, high-speed internet, and backup servers. Frequent technical interruptions during virtual hearings have also been reported by advocates.

#### **vi. Lack of Uniform Training Mechanisms**

There is no institutionalized training framework for advocates, judicial officers, or support staff on how to best use digital systems. Many users operate these platforms through informal peer training or trial-and-error learning. This results in inconsistent user experiences and inefficiencies.

#### **vii. Positive Impact on Transparency and Accountability**

With online cause lists, public access to court orders, and real-time tracking of case status through the NJDG, transparency in the judicial process has improved. It has become harder to manipulate case listings or delay proceedings without oversight.

## **Recommendations**

To ensure that the digital transformation of Delhi NCR's judiciary continues in a sustainable and inclusive manner, the following policy and operational recommendations are proposed:

### **i. Develop an Integrated Training Ecosystem**

A structured and mandatory training module should be developed for:

- Judicial officers, on how to manage hybrid courts and interpret digital case records.
- Lawyers, especially those less familiar with technology.
- Court staff, including clerks and registrars, who are often first-line support for litigants.

These modules should be available in Hindi and English and could be delivered through a dedicated e-Courts Learning Portal.

### **ii. Expand and Modernize Infrastructure**

The Delhi government's initiative to digitize 691 courts should be complemented with a rigorous technical audit to ensure:

- High-speed broadband connectivity
- Reliable power backup and cybersecurity protocols
- Maintenance contracts for software and hardware

Investment in digital kiosks and self-help centres in every district court should be prioritized to bridge the accessibility gap for non-tech-savvy users.

### **iii. Create a Legal-Tech Helpdesk for Litigants**

Establish a Digital Justice Support Cell in each court complex that can:

- Assist litigants in filing petitions online
- Help track cases or download orders
- Translate complex legal instructions into simple language

This will enhance the user-friendliness of digital courts for marginalized or first-time litigants.

### **iv. Promote Public Awareness and Digital Literacy**

There should be a targeted campaign to inform the public about:

- How to access court information online
- How to use virtual hearing links
- How to access cause lists or payment portals

This can be accomplished through short videos, posters in court complexes, and partnerships with community-based legal aid centers.

### **v. Prioritize Accessibility for Differently-Abled Litigants**

All digital services should be tested for compliance with accessibility standards (e.g., screen reader compatibility, voice-based navigation) to ensure that visually impaired or differently-abled individuals are not excluded from the justice system.

### **vi. Institutionalize Hybrid Hearings**

Rather than abandoning virtual hearings post-pandemic, courts should retain hybrid functioning for:

- Procedural hearings
- Bail arguments
- Case management conferences
- Filing objections or interim reliefs

This can significantly reduce congestion in courtrooms and speed up case flow.

## **Future Applicability**

The digital transformation seen in Delhi NCR's judiciary serves as a model for judicial reform in urban India, with potential applications in other metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad.

### **i. Replicable Model for Other States**

The e-Courts infrastructure and hybrid court implementation in Delhi NCR can serve as a blueprint for other regions. States with lower internet penetration or limited resources can adapt Delhi's model incrementally, beginning with pilot courts.

### **ii. Scope for AI-Driven Justice Tools**

As AI technology evolves, its application in the judiciary may include:

- Automated transcription of court hearings
- Summarization of legal arguments
- Predictive modelling for bail or sentencing decisions

Delhi NCR can act as a test bed for ethical AI in judiciary, if protocols for fairness, privacy, and accountability are clearly defined.

### **iii. Potential Integration with Citizen Portals**

To streamline citizen services, digital court platforms could be linked with existing government portals such as DigiLocker, Aadhaar, and India Stack, enabling litigants to upload verified documents seamlessly.

#### iv. Redefining Legal Education and Practice

As courts evolve technologically, law schools and Bar Councils must revise curricula to include:

- Training in e-filing
- Virtual court ethics
- Use of digital evidence

This will create a new generation of lawyers who are prepared for tech-enabled practice.

### Conclusion

The judiciary of Delhi NCR has taken significant steps towards modernization through the integration of digital technologies. From e-filing to virtual hearings and real-time data access via the NJDG, the system has become more accessible, transparent, and efficient. However, this transformation is not without its shortcomings—digital exclusion, infrastructural inadequacies, and lack of training continue to pose serious challenges.

What emerges from this study is a clear recognition that while technology can streamline justice, it must be implemented in an inclusive and carefully governed manner. Digital courts are not merely a pandemic workaround but a fundamental reimagining of how justice can be delivered in a fast, fair, and participatory way.

The Delhi NCR experience sets a compelling precedent for judicial systems across India. It demonstrates that with the right mix of policy, infrastructure, and people-centric design, the courts of the future can become engines of both efficiency and equity.

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