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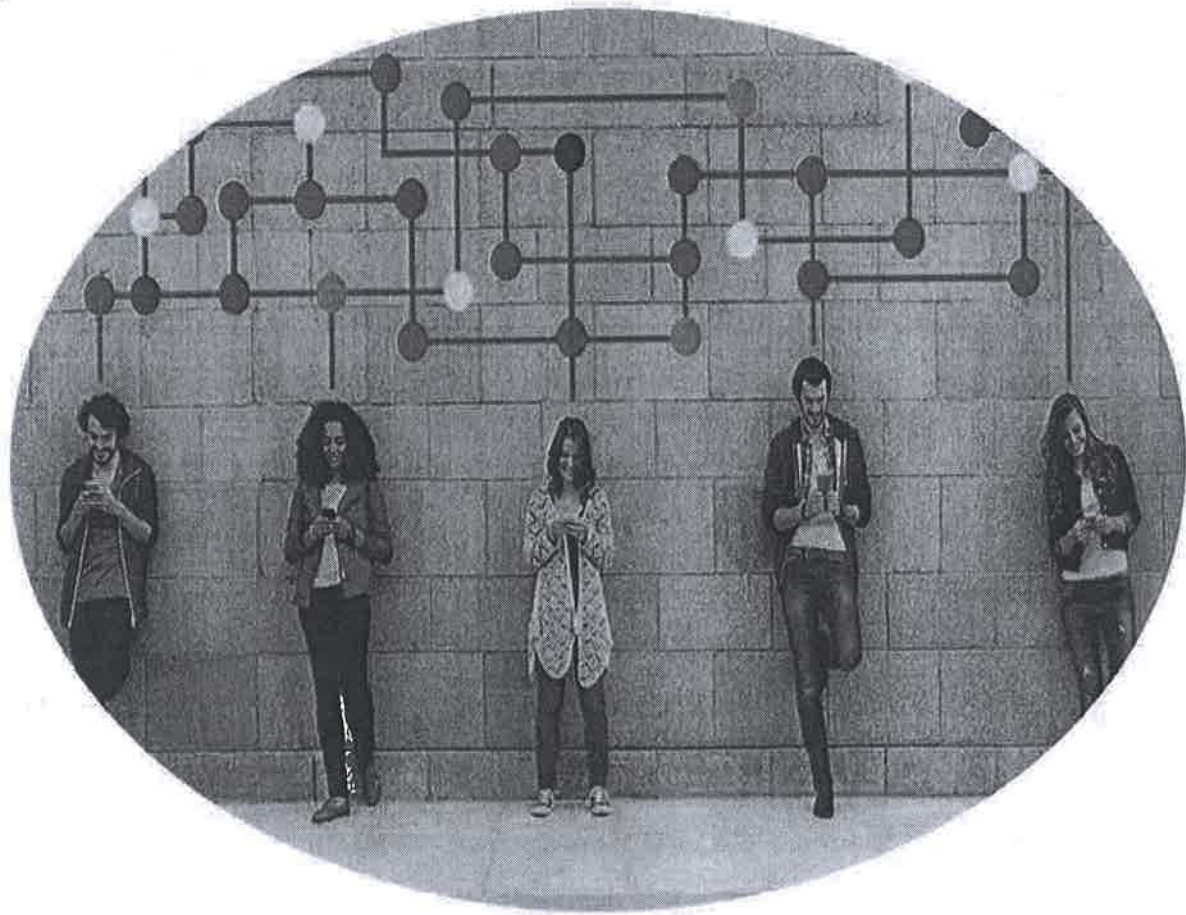


King's Circle, Matunga, Mumbai – 400 019.

Tel.: +91 22 2404 3927/28 | Telefax: +91 22 2404 3933 Website : [www.gnims.edu.in](http://www.gnims.edu.in) | Email : [conference2018@gnims.com](mailto:conference2018@gnims.com)

ISSN No.: 2278– 7801 | Impact Factor IJIF (2017) 4.107 / Impact Factor PIF (2017) 4.125

# SPECIAL ISSUE: DIGITAL ADOPTION FOR CONSUMER DELIGHT



संस्मरण

SANSMARAN

Management Research Journal

Annual Research Conference

17<sup>th</sup> February, 2018

*Suman D. J. Paul*  
Coordinator, IQAC  
NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts,  
Commerce & Science  
Nerul - 400 706.



*[Signature]*  
Principal  
NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts, Commerce & Science  
Nerul, Navi Mumbai - 400706

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Coordinator, IQAC  
NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts,  
Commerce & Science  
Nerul - 400 706.



Principal  
NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts, Commerce & Science  
Nerul, Navi Mumbai - 400706

## Issues & Challenges faced in Digitalization of Courts

*Adv. Dr. Sumathi Gopal, Advocate High Court, Mumbai*

### **Abstract:**

The biggest issues faced by judiciary in the country are to reduce the delay in the court process and remove the backlog of cases. The digitalization of court is 'environmentally friendly', but also it ensures quick disposal of existing cases. Digitalization of court is a broad term and may be understood as referring to digitalization of both records and court process. Digital records are normally free of charge and accessible without restriction, a proper regulation of digitalized court system would ensure that only appropriate authorities are capable of making necessary changes, such as amending or uploading court orders, in the portal with a view to preventing online fraud. It will bring massive turnaround practice in legal battle which is heavily reliant on paper based model. It will take time before the entire court system becomes digital. Once it is digitalized it will bring great relief to the litigants at one click.

**Key Words:** Digitalization, Eco friendly, Litigant, Portal, Court, Relief

### **Introduction**

The biggest issues faced by judiciary in the country are to reduce the delay in the court process and remove the backlog of cases. The judiciaries in most countries however face similar problems. Cost, delay and complexity in the court system were identified in the UK as the major problems with civil justice process in 1997, which eventually resulted in the subsequent reforms and the overture of the Civil Procedure Rules (CPR), 1997. The digitalization of court is 'environmentally friendly', but also it ensures quick disposal of existing cases. Digitalization of court is a broad term and may be understood as referring to digitalization of both records and court process. As part of the digitalization process, the court documents, if hand-written or computer composed have to be scanned and produced in a portal, which should be password secured in case of private and confidential information.

However, the benefit of digitalization can be accrued by litigants only if the online citation is taken by the courts as authoritative as paper references in case law journals. The digital system therefore has to be taken as effective on the parties to whom the orders are addressed, such as the prison authority who should be able to release a prisoner based on the order found online in the appropriate portal. While digital records are normally free of charge and accessible without restriction, a proper regulation of digitalized court system would ensure that only appropriate authorities are capable of making necessary changes, such as amending or uploading court orders, in the portal with a view to preventing online fraud.

As far as the digitalization of process is concerned, the litigants should be able to keep themselves updated with court schedules online. Filing of cases and submitting e-documents will reduce the pile of papers in lawyer's chambers and court offices. This will consequently increase efficiency and reduce delay and complexity.

*Sumathi Gopal*  
**Coordinator, IQAC**  
NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts,  
Commerce & Science  
Nerul - 400 706



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*Sumathi Gopal*  
**Principal**  
NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts, Commerce & Science  
Nerul, Navi Mumbai - 400706

Witness depositions may be recorded and in cases of urgency video recording of witness testimony may be admitted. This will fill the time gap of witness summoning, rendering the disposal of cases quicker. In addition, the case filing and management process, if found online through a digitalized system, will become more transparent and automatic, thereby reducing the possibility of individual adverse influences on a particular case.

However, what is more difficult than the concept of digitalization is its implementation. It will bring massive turnaround practice in legal battle which is heavily reliant on paper based model. This will require uninterrupted internet connection throughout the courts and appropriate training for the judges and staffs for the new system. It will be difficult at the outset to make everyone familiar with the digitalized court system, for the concept is relatively new and requires technical knowledge; also it will start off as costly.

It is indeed a matter of great success that the digitalization of courts in Bangladesh has already started, while many western countries are still in the process of transformation to the digital model. The daily 'cause list' of both High Court Division and Appellate Division cases can now be found in the website of Supreme Court of Bangladesh together with the judgment and orders in the same place, allowing litigants and lawyers to access the requisite materials themselves. It will take time before the entire court system becomes digital. Once it is digitalized it will bring great relief to the litigants at one click.

#### **Aims and Objectives of the Research Paper**

- a. To analyze response of Indian judiciary to digitalized court '
- b. To compare the position of pending matter before & after introduction of digitalization in court
- c. To suggest remedial measures to improve disposal of the matters quickly

#### **Need for the study:**

A lot of information, however, has to be made public for the better access to justice and facilitate the litigation process and outcome. This can be ensured by uploading every court order in the respective portals or websites. Search terms should not be confined to case numbers and may extent to contents of the documents including the names of the parties to a particular case. Thus the court records must be scanned, indexed, catalogued, archived and at times hyper-linked in order to navigate through the available materials.

#### **Scope of the Study:**

The study will classify information of respondents, awareness about the digitalized court room & usage of the e-Courts portal, economic cost (direct & indirect), availability of infrastructure mentioned under the project components, quality of services, problems and challenges, feedback on computerization of courts and suggestions for further improvements.

**Coordinator, IQAC**  
**NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts,**  
**Commerce & Science**  
**Nerul - 400 706.**



**Principal**  
**NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts, Commerce & Science**  
**Nerul, Navi Mumbai - 400706**

### Research Methodology:

The study is based on the secondary data through Committee report, journals & News papers

### Analysis & Findings on the basis of secondary data:

1. The court should designate the advocates & litigants to file their fresh petitions/ suits & pending case related documents. Digitalization will help the litigants to file papers without many hurdles & will enable the litigant to submit their petitions & assisting in filing the documents at ease.
2. There can be separate portal for criminal & civil case. Similarly a separate counter can be maintained by respective court for civil & criminal suits. The officer in-charge will help the litigants in filing through digitalization.
3. "All the documents filed here will be scanned to prepare a digital record. The copy of documents submitted will then be sent to the respective court. For new cases, the case number will be allotted digitally.
4. Earlier, each advocate had to visit the respective court and file all the documents, which were not maintained in digital form. The storage of these documents was a challenge for the court administration.
5. To know the next dates fixed by the presiding officer, the advocates had to keep visiting the court.
6. Digital copies of the documents be maintained, the centralized system will also update details about the next date of hearing and the nature of documents submitted on the court website. This can be viewed by the lawyers without having to visit the respective courtroom to know the next hearing date.

### Benefits of e-Courts

- Allows electronic monitoring of court-wise case pendency and other key monitoring parameters with reference to courts.
- Greater control over management of cases leads to faster disposal of cases and reduction in pendency.
- Decrease in the time and effort on daily operational activities and a reduction in the movement of litigants to courts.
- Efficient and effective service delivery in consonance with access to justice for all, ensuring fast and fair trials.
- Citizen can avail of services at the Judicial Service Centre or access the information through the Web at any time and from anywhere.

### Government Initiatives

In an effort to expedite justice delivery, the Government is planning to digitize all of the 15,000 subordinate courts across the country. This reform would not only provide judgments and track proceedings online, but also act as a check on unwarranted adjournments allowed by judicial officers. Information like the next date of hearing, submission of number of witnesses, past proceedings, etc. will be capable of being accessed from any part of the globe.

All judgments are to be made available online latest by 6 pm on the same day, similar to the practice followed in the Supreme Court and all high courts. "All old cases, pendency and

*Sunil Kumar*  
**Coordinator, IQAO**  
**NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts,**  
**Commerce & Science**  
**Nerul - 400 706.**



*Sunil Kumar*  
**Principal**  
**NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts, Commerce & Science**  
**Nerul, N. C. 400 706**

those disposed of are being updated in the data grid. Already data entry of four Crore cases have been completed and uploaded of which details of 1.6 Crore cases are available online as they have been connected with the national data grid." Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat are yet to be connected with the national grid because the software used by them is different from the ones used by the national data grid. These were the first states to have started computerization.

The Government is likely to connect all legal service authorities and stated judicial academies with the national grid in the second phase of this e-courts project. This is being considered as one of the biggest judicial reforms, aiming at fulfilling the agenda of accelerating justice delivery, as well as easy access of related information

### **Initiative taken by the court in India: Delhi High Court gets e-court system in India**

New Delhi: In an attempt to speed up the legal process, the Delhi High Court (HC) has introduced the first e-courtroom in India. This is also an eco-friendly move by the HC to replace paper files with a sleek LCD screen and a touch screen handbook. Many paper files in the court of Justice S Ravindra Bhatt have now been digitalized and judges can directly access them on a display monitor. The court aims to digitalize all the documents within a couple of years, the pilot project went on smoothly on day one. On the first day, 33 cases were listed in which around 18 were disposed of within the first two hours, which would have normally taken the whole day. The LCD touchscreen was used by the judge to make corrections and certified the copy using his digital signature.

Currently, the court has digitalized approximately 5.5 Crore papers pertaining to various cases. It is also considering recording the statement of witnesses through video-conferencing to avoid procedural delays. Even the lawyers were happy about this new initiative, because the proceedings were conducted without any technical issues and the process was simpler. The advocates & senior members of the court opined that legal fraternity can get rid of bulky files. Legal professional need to carry only a USB device or CD regarding the case, which is much easier for lawyers & Counsels who appeared in the e-court. However, there were some who still preferred to use paper files, which is an option given to them before they get used to accessing the data on their digital devices.

### **Conclusion:**

Skilled personnel should be hired on a permanent basis. There should be an option for entering the case number, so that the registration number and the case number do not mismatch. Dot matrix printers should be replaced by copier machines. The main suggestions include improvement in infrastructure, recruitment of technical manpower, rigorous and continuous training, power back-up, and discontinuation of the parallel mode of work. The supply of computers in all related rooms in a court complex beyond courtrooms should be made available. It would help integrate the judiciary system which, in turn, would be able to provide services in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The litigants without computer knowledge also require guidance at the judicial service center. According to the litigants, the entire computerized system should be easy enough to be handled by the common people. An SMS service for case-related information may also be promoted among litigants. The future

of the e-Courts project would be such that a litigant would become able to file a case from home.

#### Recommendations:

- It is expected that better quality of infrastructure along with appropriate training to the associated staff would significantly improve the quality of service delivery in the Indian judiciary.
- To assess the performance of the e-Courts, it is important to get feedback from judicial officers on the following aspects: their awareness of computerization in court complexes in addition to awareness about different components of computerization in court rooms, their opinion on the availability and sufficiency of the required infrastructure, computer training on the specialized software, the Case Information System, and the impact of computerization on different components.
- It is important to get the suggestions on further modifications of the Case Information System and the specialized software installed.
- Concerned personnel should be trained to use the software so that the system runs successfully

#### Limitations of the Study:


This study is based only on the basis of the secondary data & not primary data. So the findings & suggestion is recommended on the basis of the available data.

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**Coordinator, IQAC**  
NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts,  
Commerce & Science  
Nerul - 400 706.



  
**Principal**  
NCRD'S Sterling College of Arts, Commerce & Science  
Nerul, Navi Mumbai - 400 706