TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS IN PARLIAMENTARY PROCESSES: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

"The Technological advancements in parliamentary practices have shown great improvement in publication and dissemination of parliamentary information. Understanding the impact of technological advancements in parliamentary processes is of paramount importance. As societies struggle with evolving challenges, leveraging technology has become imperative for enhancing efficiency, ensuring transparency, and fostering increased public engagement.

Over the last 20 years, there have been increasing efforts to use dedicated digital tools to facilitate this process. In addition to these dedicated digital parliamentary information tools, a range of other digital channels are now popularly used to create and disseminate information about parliaments and politicians through social media platforms and online news & media websites.

The nature of communication between citizens and parliamentary institution has evolved significantly with the beginning of the internet and corresponding social media channels to the extent that a state that would have seemed impossible only 30 years ago. The technological advancement is now effectively channelized to communicate information to and fro directly.

The speed at which new space for political and official discourse has established online has outpaced the abilities of lawmakers to regulate. A large part of society is still in the early stages of understanding how the communication of official (and unofficial) political and parliamentary information is shaping societies and institutions. The aim of the technological advancements in parliamentary process is to illuminate the importance of introducing and disseminating information relating to politics and government. As societies navigate the working of modern governance, the incorporation of technology into parliamentary processes has emerged as a pivotal and dynamic.

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This research paper is based on an extensive review of secondary data, that delves into the historical evolution, current applications, and future prospects of technological advancements within parliamentary systems. Through an exploration of electronic voting systems, digital documentation and archiving, and online public engagement platforms, this paper aims to unravel the multifaceted impact of technology on efficiency, transparency, and public participation in parliamentary proceedings. Case studies from diverse global contexts provide insights, and the recommendations drawn from this analysis offer guidance for policymakers navigating the complexities of technological integration.

Introduction:

In the present era of digital environment, the progress across various sectors is completely dependent on technology. The parliament being one of the pillars of democratic governance, have also been prone to the digital transformation. The advancements in technology have played very important role in upgrading and modernizing parliamentary processes by enhancing efficiency, ensuring transparency, thereby strengthening citizen engagement.

An in-depth transformation with a very strong support of technological advancements leading to dynamic parliamentary processes have witnessed tracing the historical trail. A complete change in conventional methods of governing legislative affairs is evident to such an extent that the antiquated paper-based systems have changed to the digital age. This transition signifies a model shift in the way democracy functions. Like the other institutions, the parliament also have been making extensive use of information technology in the same pace as it is used in the society.

For several years it has been realized that the expectations of people have enhanced much more, in the way of transparency, easy access, accountability and efficiency – from all the institutions, including Parliament. People expect a fully equipped portal, which will provide its mandates, activities, history, organizational structure and functions.

The main advantages in the use of technology which has revolutionized and modernized parliaments worldwide are as follows:

1.   Technology has revolutionized parliaments which handles the communication and manages the information. The old paper-based functioning is replaced by seamless and streamlined processes for sharing documents, managing sessions, and conducting legislative study & research.

Vital information and data as required can be accessed by the Members of Parliament (MPs) at their fingertips which enables them to make informed decision-making, thereby providing efficient governance.

2.   The manual voting processes have been replaced by digital voting systems in many areas of parliaments. The electronic voting has allowed faster and more accurate vote counting, it has reduced the chances of human error, it enables participation of every voter from the remote area also. It also allows the MPs to cast their votes from anywhere accommodating their busy schedule.

3.   The contribution of technology has enhanced the transparency and accountability within the parliaments. The access to Online platforms and websites enable citizens to access parliamentary proceedings, debates, voting records and ensures citizens to stay informed about legislative activities. It also allows citizens to witness live streaming of sessions and also decision-making processes in real-time. This will instill trust in citizens and promote their engagement with the parliamentary processes and developments.

4.   The COVID-19 pandemic has made us realize the significance of technology in parliaments. Virtual and remote meetings were the need of the hour for maintaining continuance of parliamentary functions amid lockdowns and travel restrictions. It allowed MPs to attend the Video conferencing platforms which enabled MPs to participate in decision making discussions and debates remotely from anywhere.

5.   The transformation of technology has progressed simultaneously with the way parliaments have involved with citizens to gather input of the people. In order to facilitate the public consultations and enabling citizens to express their opinions on legislation and policy matters, online portals, social media platforms, and interactive websites have played very important role. The members of parliament can make a judgment of public sentiment, conduct surveys, and receive feedback within very less time, which allow them for a prompt and effective democratic process.

6.   The digital transformation is a crucial and advantageous undertaking for parliaments, serving as both a necessity and an opportunity. It is indispensable because, in the face of a dynamic world, parliaments must adapt to stay relevant. Ignoring societal changes is not a viable option. Concurrently, it provides an opportunity for parliaments to enhance their efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency, establishing a closer connection with citizens.

7.   Acknowledging these imperatives and opportunities, parliaments worldwide, irrespective of their size or location, are actively embracing digital transformation. This guide is designed to

assist parliaments in navigating their digital journey, offering practical insights without imposing rigid directives. Each parliament must make informed choices based on its specific circumstances, objectives, and capabilities. The guide outlines key considerations, drawn from the experiences of leading parliaments in this field and the lessons learned from digital transformations in other sectors.

Historical Development:-

1) Initial Technological Exploration: - The use of technology in parliamentary processes dates back to the early stages of experimenting with electronic voting machines and basic digital documentation. This section examines the initial obstacles encountered and the gradual acceptance of technological tools in parliamentary proceedings.

2) Shift to Digital Age:- With the onset of the digital era, there was a significant change. The move from paper-based to digital documentation not only improved record-keeping but also paved the way for more advanced technological interventions. This research paper explores the substantial impact of this shift to digital practices on parliamentary processes.

Rationale of the study

Understanding the impact of technological advancements in parliamentary processes is of great importance. Leveraging technology has become imperative for enhancing efficiency, ensuring transparency, and fostering increased public engagement. The expectations of the people demand increased access, transparency, accountability and efficiency from all its institutions, including Parliament. The people expect a fully up-to-date website for each institution, which would cover its mandate, activities, history and organizational structure.

The technology has played very important role in Modernizing parliaments, which cannot be underestimated. The technology has revolutionized parliamentary processes by streamlining the communication and developing system for information management to enable digital voting and enhance transparency, it has empowered citizens to engage actively in free and fair governance, improved efficiency, and enhanced greater accountability. Going forward, the integration of technology which is continuously making a mark on the parliamentary process will undoubtedly shape the future of parliaments all over the world, creating more inclusiveness and participatory democratic systems.

Expectations of people from the parliaments and governments:

The expectations of people have increased to a great extent which is possible only with the help of Technological Advancements in Parliamentary Processes.

a) Timely response / information from Government through an online source in a very short time. In the earlier days we used to wait for several weeks to get a response to a letter to the government, but now we expect a response electronically in a very short time.

b) An up-to-date information is expected by people through a website which should be perfectly structured and user friendly that will give all the expected information. The expectation goes a little higher from which it is expected that the website must have very good features of search capabilities and the information should be easily accessible by an ordinary citizen. The parliamentarian expects availability of information on legislation and individual Parliamentarian.

c) Interaction / dialogue with elected officials and the policy process which includes items which are easy to access by the Parliamentarians via e-mail and committee websites where public input can be easily accommodated.

d) The people are expecting the accountability from the parliament about their actions. The accountability includes the transparency in decision-making, financial accountability and most responsiveness to public inquiries.

e) People always expect parliament should work towards the development of our country, in the both ways socially and economically. Which may involve the initiatives towards the education improvement, healthcare, infrastructural development and will increase the overall standards of living.

Challenges and Opportunities: -

Challenges:-

Digital Inequality: -A significant challenge lies in the unequal access to technology. While online platforms offer new avenues for civic engagement, the digital divide could exclude certain demographics, limiting their participation in parliamentary processes.

Cybersecurity Concerns: -As parliamentary activities transition to digital platforms, the risk of cyber threats and attacks increases. Protecting sensitive information and ensuring the integrity of online processes become paramount challenges.

Misinformation and Disinformation: - The rapid dissemination of information online can lead to the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Distinguishing between credible and false information poses a challenge in maintaining the reliability of digital platforms for civic engagement.

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Opportunities:-

Enhanced Accessibility:- Online platforms provide an opportunity to make parliamentary processes more accessible to a wider audience. Virtual participation can enable citizens who may face geographical or physical barriers to engage actively in discussions and decision-making.

Real-time Public Feedback:-Technology allows for immediate public feedback on legislative proposals. This creates an opportunity for lawmakers to gauge public sentiment, enhancing the democratic decision-making process.

Transparent Governance:-Digital platforms offer the chance to increase transparency in parliamentary proceedings. Live streaming, open data, and digital records can contribute to a more transparent governance structure, fostering trust between citizens and their representatives.

Impact of emerging technologies on parliamentary proceedings: -

Technological advancement in the parliament will enhance the efficiency of parliamentary work. It makes various impact as mentioned below: -

Digital Transformation: -Transitioning from traditional paper-based processes to digital platforms, emerging technologies streamline administrative tasks, documentation, and communication in parliamentary settings.

Virtual Participation: -Facilitating remote collaboration, video conferencing, and virtual meeting platforms enable lawmakers to engage in parliamentary proceedings from diverse locations. This enhances accessibility, allowing representatives to participate even when physically attending sessions is not possible.

Data Analytics:-Empowering lawmakers with advanced data analytics tools accelerates the analysis of vast information. This aids evidence-based decision-making by providing insights into public opinion, historical data, and potential impacts of proposed policies.

Public Engagement:-Amplifying opportunities for public engagement, emerging technologies enable citizens to express opinions, participate in discussions, and provide feedback on legislative matters through social media, online forums, and interactive platforms.

Transparency and Accountability:-Contributing to greater transparency, technologies implement open data initiatives, providing accessible information on legislative activities, voting records, and policy details to foster public trust and accountability.

Cybersecurity Challenges: -The increased reliance on digital platforms introduces cybersecurity challenges. Safeguarding sensitive information and ensuring the integrity of legislative processes become crucial to address security concerns.

Automation and efficiency: -Streamlining routine parliamentary tasks, automation technologies reduce manual efforts, enhancing overall efficiency. This allows lawmakers to focus more on critical issues and policy analysis.

*Electronic Voting Systems:-*Replacing traditional manual voting methods, electronic voting systems expedite decision-making processes, contributing to more accurate and transparent voting outcomes.

*Blockchain Technology:-*Employed for secure and tamper-resistant recordkeeping in parliamentary proceedings, blockchain technology ensures the integrity and authenticity of legislative documents and transactions

*Artificial Intelligence:-*Assisting lawmakers in analyzing complex policy implications, predicting outcomes, and identifying potential risks associated with proposed legislation, AI tools play a role in enhancing policy analysis.

Suggestions:-

Technological advancement in the parliamentary process still needs some more progress in the implementation at various levels. For the efficient implementation following are suggestions-

1) The use of technological advancement should start from a small scale at specific areas and then expand slowly to ensure a smooth transition.

2) The law maker and staff should get easy to access training for the better and effective use of technology.

3) Establish quick response technical support to minimize disruptions.

4) Online data protection policies need to be enforced by parliament for robust data protection and should conduct regular audits.

5) By keeping database accessible more transparency can be maintained.

6) The parliament should make and create adaptable policies and accommodate technological changes.

   All the above said practices and policies aim to make technology integration in parliamentary processes to be efficient, secure and beneficial for all.

Conclusion: -

In the essence, our exploration into the influence of technological advancements on parliamentary processes reveals a profound transformation. The integration of technology, from digital platforms to data analytics, has redefined how lawmakers operate and engage with the public. Paperless operations and virtual participation have streamlined administrative tasks, making parliamentary

proceedings more accessible. Data analytics tools empower decision-making through insights into public opinion and policy impacts. Social media and online platforms amplify public engagement, while open data initiatives enhance transparency. However, challenges like cybersecurity must be addressed to fully harness the benefits of technology in parliamentary settings. Overall, our findings underscore the significant and positive impact of technology, offering new opportunities for efficiency and public participation.

Implication and Future Research:-

The practical implications of our research point towards the need for proactive measures in addressing cybersecurity challenges and ensuring inclusive access to technology. Policymakers should consider robust data protection policies and accessibility measures to make parliamentary processes secure and inclusive. Future studies could delve deeper into the evolving dynamics between technology and parliamentary governance, exploring the long-term impacts and fine-tuning strategies for a more seamless integration. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of specific technologies, such as AI and blockchain, in parliamentary decision-making processes could offer valuable insights. Continuous research is crucial to adapt strategies, policies, and technologies in this ever-evolving landscape, ultimately enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of parliamentary governance in the digital era.