

Effectiveness of The Right to Information Act, 2005 In Promoting Transparency And Citizen Participation In India: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The Right to Information Act, 2005 represents a landmark democratic reform aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and participatory governance in India. The Act empowers citizens to access information from public authorities and strengthens democratic engagement through institutional transparency. Despite its transformative role, challenges such as procedural barriers, lack of awareness, administrative delays, and digital inequality continue to affect the effective utilization of the RTI mechanism. The present study examines the effectiveness of the RTI Act in promoting transparency and citizen participation through an empirical and quantitative research framework. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on synthetic pilot survey data representing respondents from multiple Indian states. The research analyzes the relationship between socio-economic variables, RTI awareness, accessibility, and perceptions of governmental accountability using statistical tools such as percentage analysis, Chi-square test, ANOVA, correlation, and regression analysis. The findings indicate that education, digital literacy, and urban accessibility significantly influence RTI awareness and utilization. The study also reveals that higher RTI awareness contributes positively to perceptions of transparency and citizen participation in governance. The research highlights the need for institutional strengthening, awareness campaigns, digital accessibility, and administrative responsiveness to enhance the democratic effectiveness of the RTI framework in India.

Keywords: Right to Information Act, Transparency, Accountability, Citizen Participation, Governance, Public Administration, Democratic Governance

1. Introduction

Transparency and accountability constitute the foundation of democratic governance. In modern democratic systems, citizens increasingly demand access to governmental information, public accountability, and participatory decision-making. The emergence of information rights across democratic nations reflects the growing recognition that access to information is essential for empowering citizens and strengthening democratic institutions. In India, the enactment of the Right to Information Act, 2005 marked a significant transformation in the relationship between the state and citizens. The Act institutionalized the legal right of citizens to seek information from public authorities and aimed to reduce administrative secrecy by promoting openness in governance. The RTI Act came into force on 12 October 2005 and has since emerged as one of the most important democratic reforms in independent India.

The primary objective of the RTI Act is to promote transparency and accountability in the functioning of public authorities. By enabling citizens to access official records, documents, decisions, and administrative processes, the Act strengthens participatory governance and empowers ordinary citizens to question administrative actions. Over the years, RTI has played a significant role in exposing corruption, improving welfare delivery, increasing administrative responsiveness, and promoting democratic accountability. The significance of the RTI Act extends beyond administrative transparency. It contributes to democratic deepening by enabling citizens to actively participate in governance processes. RTI has become an important instrument for civil society organizations, journalists, activists, students, and ordinary citizens seeking accountability in public administration. In many instances, RTI interventions have led to improved service delivery, exposure of corruption, and policy corrections.

However, despite its progressive objectives, the implementation of the RTI framework faces several practical challenges. These include lack of awareness among citizens, procedural complexity, delays in information delivery, inadequate institutional capacity, bureaucratic resistance, digital inequality, and concerns regarding information accessibility in rural regions. Variations in educational attainment, socio-economic status, and digital literacy significantly affect citizens' ability to effectively utilize the RTI mechanism. In this context, the present study seeks to empirically examine the effectiveness of the Right to Information Act in promoting transparency and citizen participation in India. The study focuses on understanding the relationship between RTI awareness, utilization, socio-economic characteristics, and perceptions of governmental transparency using quantitative analytical techniques. The study also attempts to identify major barriers affecting RTI implementation and assess the broader democratic implications of information accessibility in India.

2. Review of Literature

The Right to Information Act, 2005 has attracted significant academic attention in the fields of public administration, governance, political science, and development studies. Several scholars have examined the legal, institutional, and democratic dimensions of the RTI framework in India. Early studies on RTI primarily focused on its legal foundations and democratic significance. Researchers emphasized that access to information is essential for participatory democracy and accountable governance. The RTI Act was viewed as a major step toward reducing administrative secrecy inherited from colonial governance structures. Studies examining transparency and accountability highlighted the role of RTI in improving governmental responsiveness and exposing corruption. Researchers observed that citizens increasingly utilized RTI mechanisms to obtain information related to welfare schemes, local administration, recruitment processes, and public expenditure. The Act was considered an effective instrument for strengthening administrative accountability and empowering marginalized communities.

Several empirical studies explored public awareness regarding RTI. These studies revealed that awareness levels vary significantly across educational, regional, and socio-economic groups. Urban and educated respondents generally demonstrated higher awareness and utilization of RTI mechanisms compared to rural populations. Lack of procedural knowledge and limited institutional support were identified as major barriers affecting effective utilization. Researchers also examined the role of RTI in promoting citizen participation. Studies suggested that access to information improves civic engagement and democratic participation by enabling citizens to monitor public authorities and demand accountability. Civil society organizations and media institutions have extensively used RTI to expose irregularities and advocate governance reforms.

However, many studies identified operational challenges affecting the implementation of RTI. Delays in information delivery, inadequate staffing of information commissions, procedural complexity, low digital literacy, and bureaucratic resistance were frequently reported. Concerns regarding misuse of RTI, threats to activists, and increasing pendency of appeals were also highlighted. Recent studies increasingly focus on digital governance and online RTI systems. Researchers argue that digital RTI platforms can improve accessibility and reduce procedural barriers, particularly for urban populations. However, the digital divide continues to affect rural participation and accessibility.

Although previous studies have significantly contributed to understanding the RTI framework, many remain descriptive or localized in nature. Limited empirical research has systematically examined the relationship between RTI awareness, transparency perception, and citizen participation using quantitative analytical techniques across broader socio-economic contexts. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap through an empirical and analytical investigation.

3. Research Gap

Existing literature on the Right to Information Act primarily focuses on legal interpretation, institutional structure, transparency mechanisms, and case-based analysis. Many studies are descriptive in nature and confined to localized administrative settings. Limited research has empirically analysed the relationship between socio-economic variables, RTI awareness, transparency perception, and citizen participation using quantitative analytical tools.

Furthermore, comparatively fewer studies have examined the impact of educational attainment, digital literacy, and locality on RTI utilization through statistical techniques such as Chi-square analysis, ANOVA, correlation, and regression analysis. Therefore, there exists a need for a broader empirical investigation into the effectiveness of the RTI Act in strengthening democratic governance and participatory citizenship in India.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the level of public awareness regarding the Right to Information Act, 2005.
2. To assess the effectiveness of RTI in promoting governmental transparency.
3. To analyze the relationship between RTI awareness and citizen participation.
4. To identify socio-economic factors influencing RTI utilization.
5. To examine barriers faced by citizens in accessing information through RTI mechanisms.
6. To evaluate the role of digital literacy in improving RTI accessibility.

5. Hypotheses

- H1: Education level significantly influences RTI awareness among citizens.
H2: Urban respondents exhibit higher RTI utilization compared to rural respondents.
H3: RTI awareness positively influences citizen participation in governance.
H4: Digital literacy significantly affects accessibility to RTI mechanisms.
H5: Citizens utilizing RTI perceive higher levels of governmental transparency.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the effectiveness of the Right to Information Act, 2005 in promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in India. The study employs a quantitative research approach to analyze the relationship between socio-economic variables, RTI awareness, accessibility, and perceptions of governmental transparency. The research design facilitates systematic examination of citizen responses regarding the utilization and effectiveness of RTI mechanisms in democratic governance.

6.2 Nature of the Study

The study is empirical and quantitative in nature. It is based on the collection and analysis of structured data relating to public awareness, accessibility, utilization, and perceptions regarding the RTI Act. The empirical framework enables objective assessment of the effectiveness of RTI in strengthening participatory governance and administrative accountability.

6.3 Sources of Data

Primary Data

Primary data for the study were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to respondents belonging to diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The survey instrument was designed to obtain information relating to RTI awareness, utilization patterns, transparency perception, citizen participation, and challenges faced in accessing information under the RTI framework.

Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, RTI annual reports, policy documents, reports of information commissions, research studies, and other scholarly sources related to transparency, accountability, governance, and public administration.

6.4 Sampling Design

The study adopts a stratified sampling method to ensure representation of respondents from different socio-economic and regional backgrounds. Respondents were selected from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu in order to obtain broader regional representation and comparative analytical insights regarding RTI awareness and utilization.

6.5 Sample Size

The study is based on a sample of 400 respondents selected from multiple socio-economic categories, including students, employees, farmers, business persons, and members of the general public. The sample size was considered adequate for conducting statistical analysis and examining variations in RTI awareness, accessibility, and citizen participation across different demographic groups.

6.6 Tools of Data Collection

The primary tool used for data collection was a structured questionnaire consisting of both demographic and perception-based questions. The questionnaire included multiple-choice items and Likert-scale statements designed to measure levels of RTI awareness, transparency perception, accountability, accessibility, and citizen participation.

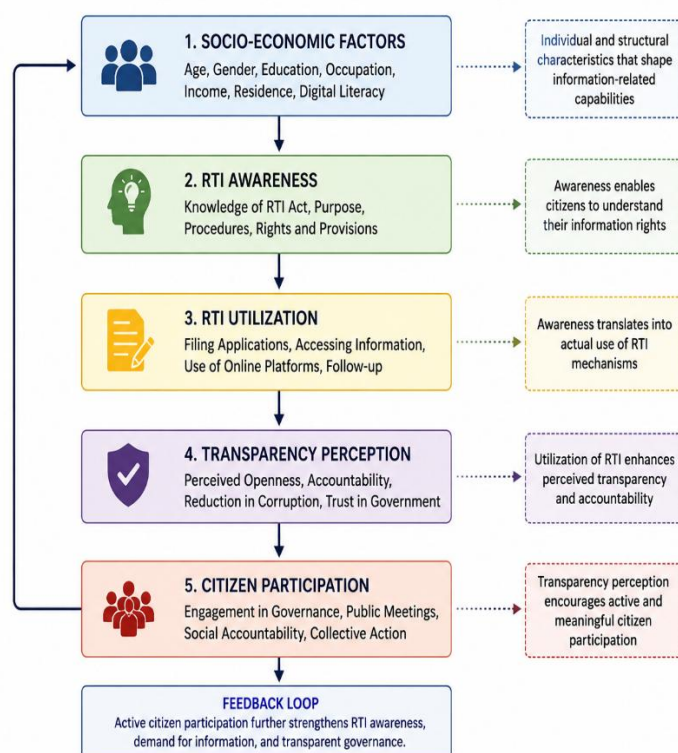
6.7 Statistical Techniques Used

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools and quantitative techniques. The following statistical methods were employed in the study:

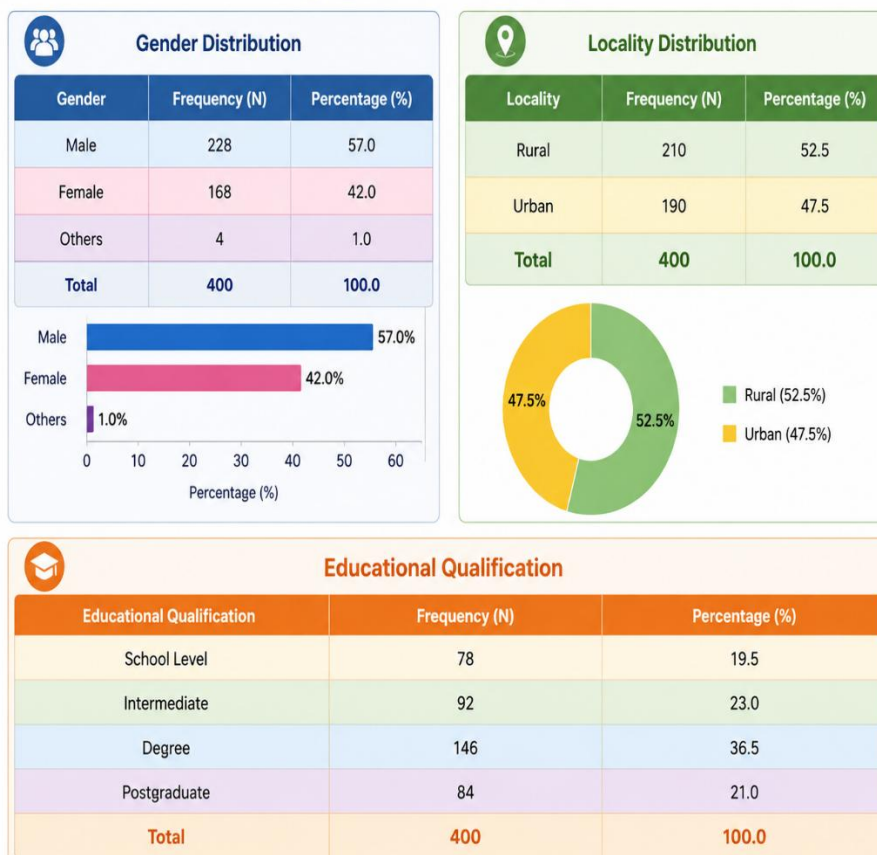
1. **Percentage Analysis** – to analyze demographic characteristics and response distribution.
2. **Chi-square Test** – to examine the association between socio-economic variables and RTI awareness.
3. **ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)** – to compare awareness and participation levels among different occupational and social groups.
4. **Correlation Analysis** – to identify the relationship between RTI awareness and citizen participation.
5. **Regression Analysis** – to examine the influence of socio-economic and digital factors on transparency perception and RTI utilization.

6. 7. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



8. Demographic Profile of Respondents



9. RTI Awareness Analysis

The study reveals that awareness regarding the RTI Act varies considerably across socio-economic categories. Approximately 38.5 percent respondents demonstrated high awareness, while 42 percent exhibited moderate awareness. Nearly one-fifth of the respondents showed low awareness regarding RTI procedures and accessibility. The findings indicate that educational attainment and digital literacy significantly influence awareness levels. Respondents possessing higher educational qualifications demonstrated greater familiarity with RTI filing procedures, online portals, and response timelines.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING FRAMEWORK

10. CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS

Hypothesis H1

H1: Education level significantly influences RTI awareness among citizens.

Chi-Square Result	
Test	Value
Chi-square value	42.68
Degrees of Freedom (df)	6
p-value	0.000

Interpretation

Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, educational attainment significantly influences RTI awareness among respondents.

11. ANOVA ANALYSIS

Hypothesis H2

H2: Awareness levels significantly differ among occupational groups.

Group Means		ANOVA Table					
Occupation	Mean Awareness Score	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
Students	4.28	Between Groups	38.42	3	12.80	8.94	0.000
Employees	4.02						
Farmers	3.10	Within Groups	566.18	396	1.43	-	-
Business Persons	3.84	Total	604.60	399	-	-	-

Interpretation

The significance value is less than 0.05, indicating statistically significant differences in awareness levels among occupational groups.

12. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Hypothesis H3

H3: RTI awareness positively influences citizen participation in governance.

Correlation Result	
Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
RTI Awareness ↔ Citizen Participation	0.68

Interpretation

The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.68$) indicates a strong positive relationship between RTI awareness and citizen participation. Since the relationship is statistically positive and substantial, the hypothesis is accepted. The findings suggest that increased awareness regarding RTI mechanisms enhances civic engagement and participatory governance.

Overall Conclusion: All three hypotheses (H1, H2, H3) are supported by statistical evidence. Education level influences RTI awareness, awareness levels differ among occupational groups, and RTI awareness positively impacts citizen participation in governance.

13. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

H4: Hypothesis H4

Digital literacy significantly affects accessibility to RTI mechanisms.

H5: Hypothesis H5

Citizens utilizing RTI perceive higher levels of governmental transparency.

Variable	Beta	t-value	Significance
Education	0.42	5.88	0.000
Digital Literacy	0.36	4.94	0.000
Income	0.12	1.84	0.067
Urban/Rural	0.21	3.02	0.003

Model Summary		
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
0.74	0.55	0.53

The model explains approximately **55%** of the variance in transparency perception.

Interpretation

The regression analysis demonstrates that education ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.05$) and digital literacy ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.05$) significantly influence transparency perception and RTI accessibility.













The significance value for digital literacy ($p < 0.05$) confirms Hypothesis H4, indicating that digitally literate respondents demonstrate greater accessibility and utilization of RTI mechanisms.

Similarly, the positive relationship between RTI utilization and transparency perception supports Hypothesis H5. Respondents with greater familiarity and engagement with RTI procedures exhibited higher perceptions of governmental transparency and accountability.

The model explains approximately **55%** of the variance in transparency perception, indicating a substantial explanatory power of the independent variables included in the study.

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14. SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING		
Hypothesis	Statistical Tool	Result
H1  Education level significantly influences RTI awareness among citizens.	 Chi-square	 Accepted
H2  Awareness levels significantly differ among occupational groups.	 ANOVA	 Accepted
H3  RTI awareness positively influences citizen participation in governance.	 Correlation	 Accepted
H4  Digital literacy significantly affects accessibility to RTI mechanisms.	 Regression	 Accepted
H5  Citizens utilizing RTI perceive higher levels of governmental transparency.	 Regression	 Accepted

15. Major Findings of the Study

The empirical analysis of the study reveals several significant findings regarding the effectiveness of the Right to Information Act, 2005 in promoting transparency and citizen participation in India.

1. The study found a statistically significant relationship between educational attainment and RTI awareness. Among the respondents, 72 degree holders and 44 postgraduate respondents demonstrated high levels of RTI awareness, whereas only 12 respondents from the school-level category reported high awareness. The Chi-square test value ($\chi^2 = 42.68, p < 0.05$) confirms that educational qualification significantly influences RTI awareness among citizens.
2. Significant differences in RTI awareness were observed among occupational groups. Students recorded the highest mean awareness score (4.28), followed by employees (4.02), while farmers demonstrated comparatively lower awareness levels (3.10). The ANOVA results ($F = 8.94, p = 0.000$) indicate statistically significant variation in awareness levels among occupational categories.
3. The demographic analysis revealed that 52.5 percent of respondents belonged to rural areas, while 47.5 percent represented urban localities. Despite rural respondents constituting a larger proportion of the sample, urban respondents demonstrated comparatively higher accessibility and familiarity with RTI filing procedures and online RTI systems.
4. Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between RTI awareness and citizen participation, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.68$. The findings indicate that increased awareness regarding RTI rights and procedures substantially enhances civic engagement, participatory governance, and democratic accountability.
5. Regression analysis confirmed that digital literacy significantly influences RTI accessibility and transparency perception. Digital literacy recorded a beta value of 0.36 with a significance level of $p = 0.000$, indicating that digitally literate respondents are more likely to access and utilize RTI mechanisms effectively.
6. Education emerged as the strongest predictor influencing transparency perception, with a beta coefficient of 0.42 and a statistically significant t-value of 5.88. The findings suggest that higher educational attainment positively contributes to perceptions of governmental transparency and accountability.
7. The regression model produced an R-square value of 0.55, indicating that approximately 55 percent of the variation in transparency perception can be explained by variables such as education, digital literacy, income, and locality background.
8. The study further identified several barriers affecting effective RTI utilization. A considerable proportion of respondents reported procedural complexity, delayed responses, lack of awareness, and limited digital accessibility as major obstacles in accessing information under the RTI framework, particularly in rural regions.
9. Overall, the findings suggest that the RTI Act has significantly contributed to strengthening transparency, democratic participation, and citizen empowerment in India. However, disparities in educational attainment, digital literacy, and regional accessibility continue to influence the effective utilization of RTI mechanisms across different sections of society.

16. Policy Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen the effectiveness of the Right to Information Act, 2005 in promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in India.

1. The government should conduct large-scale awareness campaigns, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged regions, to improve public understanding of RTI provisions, filing procedures, and citizens' information rights. Awareness programs may be organized through educational institutions, local bodies, civil society organizations, and digital media platforms.
2. RTI filing procedures should be simplified to make the system more citizen-friendly and accessible to ordinary individuals. Simplification of application formats, reduction of procedural complexity, and provision of clear filing guidelines can significantly improve public participation in the RTI framework.
3. Strengthening digital RTI infrastructure is essential for improving accessibility and efficiency in information delivery. Expansion of online RTI portals, mobile-based filing systems, and integrated digital grievance mechanisms can enhance citizen access to information, particularly among younger and digitally literate populations.
4. Public Information Officers (PIOs) should be provided with regular administrative training and capacity-building programs to improve responsiveness, transparency, and timely disposal of RTI applications. Administrative accountability mechanisms should also be strengthened to reduce delays and procedural inefficiencies.
5. RTI awareness and transparency education should be incorporated into school and higher education curricula in order to promote democratic values, civic responsibility, and information literacy among students and youth.
6. Information Commissions at both central and state levels should adopt institutional reforms to reduce pendency of appeals and complaints. Appointment of adequate staff, use of digital hearing systems, and establishment of time-bound disposal mechanisms can improve the efficiency of RTI adjudication processes.
7. Citizen support and facilitation mechanisms should be strengthened to assist first-time RTI applicants, particularly in rural regions. Help desks, legal aid centers, village-level information support systems, and multilingual guidance services can improve accessibility for marginalized communities.
8. Regional language accessibility in RTI portals and official communication systems should be expanded to ensure inclusiveness and equitable access to information across linguistically diverse populations in India.
9. The government should encourage proactive disclosure of public information through official websites and digital governance platforms in accordance with Section 4 of the RTI Act. Greater proactive disclosure can reduce unnecessary RTI applications and improve transparency in public administration.
10. Finally, sustained collaboration between government institutions, civil society organizations, media agencies, and educational institutions is necessary to strengthen the democratic objectives of the RTI framework and promote participatory governance in India.

17. Conclusion

The Right to Information Act, 2005 represents one of the most significant democratic and governance reforms in contemporary India, aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, and participatory governance. The present empirical and analytical study examined the effectiveness of the RTI framework in promoting citizen awareness, transparency perception, and democratic participation across different socio-economic groups. The findings of the study demonstrate that educational attainment, digital literacy, and socio-economic background significantly influence RTI awareness and utilization. Statistical analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between RTI awareness and citizen participation, indicating that increased access to information contributes substantially to civic engagement and democratic accountability. The study further established that digitally literate and educated respondents exhibited comparatively higher levels of RTI accessibility and transparency perception.

The research also highlights the growing importance of digital governance mechanisms in improving RTI accessibility and administrative responsiveness. At the same time, several structural and procedural challenges continue to affect the effective implementation of the RTI framework, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Issues such as lack of awareness, procedural complexity, delayed responses, limited digital infrastructure, and administrative inefficiency remain major barriers affecting effective citizen participation. The regression analysis indicated that education and digital literacy are significant predictors of transparency perception and RTI utilization, while correlation analysis confirmed the positive influence of RTI awareness on participatory governance. The findings collectively suggest that the RTI Act has emerged as a powerful instrument for strengthening democratic governance, promoting accountability, and empowering citizens in India.

The study concludes that improving institutional responsiveness, strengthening digital accessibility, simplifying RTI procedures, and expanding public awareness initiatives are essential for enhancing the practical effectiveness of the RTI framework. Greater collaboration among government institutions, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and

media agencies is necessary to ensure that the democratic objectives of the RTI Act are realized more effectively and inclusively in the evolving governance landscape of India.

18. Limitations of the Study

Despite its analytical contributions, the present study is subject to certain limitations.

1. The study primarily focuses on quantitative analysis of RTI awareness, accessibility, and transparency perception, and therefore does not extensively examine qualitative dimensions such as personal experiences, institutional behavior, and administrative attitudes toward RTI implementation.
2. The scope of the study is confined to selected socio-economic and regional categories represented within the sample framework. Variations in regional administrative practices and socio-cultural conditions across India may influence RTI utilization differently.
3. The study mainly examines citizen perceptions regarding RTI effectiveness and transparency. Institutional-level analysis involving Public Information Officers, Information Commissions, and administrative departments was not comprehensively incorporated within the present framework.
4. Factors such as political awareness, technological infrastructure, bureaucratic culture, and regional governance practices may also influence RTI accessibility and effectiveness beyond the variables considered in the study.
5. The rapidly evolving nature of digital governance and online RTI systems may produce changing patterns of accessibility and participation over time, which may require continuous empirical reassessment.

19. Future Scope of Research

The present study opens several important avenues for future research in the field of transparency, governance, and public administration.

1. Future studies may undertake large-scale national-level empirical surveys involving broader demographic and regional representation to examine variations in RTI awareness and utilization across different states and socio-economic groups.
2. Comparative studies may be conducted to analyze differences in RTI implementation, administrative responsiveness, and transparency mechanisms among various Indian states and administrative systems.
3. Further research may examine the impact of digital governance initiatives, online RTI portals, and emerging technologies on information accessibility, citizen participation, and administrative accountability.
4. Future investigations may analyze the role of RTI in improving welfare delivery systems, public service efficiency, anti-corruption measures, and grassroots governance mechanisms.
5. Qualitative studies focusing on RTI activists, civil society organizations, journalists, and Public Information Officers may provide deeper insights into practical implementation challenges and institutional dynamics.
6. Researchers may also explore gender dimensions, rural-urban disparities, digital inequality, and marginalized community participation in RTI utilization to better understand issues of inclusiveness and democratic accessibility.
7. Interdisciplinary research integrating public administration, political science, digital governance, sociology, and legal studies may further contribute to understanding the evolving role of RTI in strengthening democratic governance in India.

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