

Role of ICT in Legal Process: General Population Perspectives



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Abstract

This study examines the awareness, perceptions, and challenges faced by the general population regarding the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in legal processes. With a sample of 250 respondents, findings reveal high awareness of general platforms like e-Courts but very low familiarity with specific tools such as e-Filing and the National Judicial Data Grid. Income and location significantly influence ICT awareness, highlighting a digital divide between urban and rural populations. Despite a positive perception of legal costs, the impact of ICT on justice accessibility is poorly understood. The study recommends targeted digital literacy programs, infrastructure improvements, and public awareness campaigns to bridge gaps and promote equitable access to digital legal services.

Keywords ICT in Legal Processes, Access to Justice, Digital Literacy, Legal Technology Awareness

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has emerged as a pivotal tool for transforming various sectors, including the legal domain. The integration of ICT in the legal system offers tremendous potential to improve the delivery of justice by streamlining legal procedures, reducing delays, enhancing transparency, and increasing accessibility for all segments of society. Technologies such as online legal platforms, electronic filing (e-filing) systems, video conferencing for court hearings, and comprehensive judicial data grids facilitate efficient case management and improve communication among stakeholders, including judges, lawyers, and litigants.

Despite these advancements, the full benefits of ICT in the legal process can only be realized if the general population is aware of these tools and confident in using them. Awareness and digital literacy are critical factors influencing the adoption and success of ICT initiatives. In many regions, digital divides along lines of geography, age, education, and income restrict access to these technologies, creating new barriers to justice rather than eliminating existing ones. Moreover, misconceptions about the cost and complexity of legal services delivered through ICT may deter citizens from leveraging these resources. This study seeks to explore how different demographic groups perceive the role of ICT in legal processes, their level of awareness of specific ICT tools like e-Courts and e-Filing systems, and the challenges they face in accessing justice via digital means. Understanding these factors is essential for policymakers, legal practitioners, and technology developers to design inclusive and user-friendly

digital legal services that can democratize access to justice effectively.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to highlight gaps in public awareness and acceptance of ICT-enabled legal services, which is crucial for achieving equitable access to justice in the digital era. By examining demographic disparities in ICT awareness and usage, the study provides valuable insights for targeted interventions aimed at bridging the digital divide within the legal sector.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection of technology and legal services, offering evidence-based recommendations to enhance the design and dissemination of digital legal platforms. It supports the development of policies that promote digital literacy and infrastructural improvements, particularly in underserved communities. Ultimately, the study aspires to foster a more transparent, efficient, and accessible legal system that empowers all citizens to navigate legal processes with ease and confidence.

Methodology

Problem Statement

While ICT tools have the potential to revolutionize legal processes, there is a limited understanding of how effectively these technologies are known, accepted, and utilized by the general population. This study addresses the problem of low awareness and varying perceptions of ICT-enabled legal services, which may hinder equitable access to justice. Specifically, the study investigates the relationship

between demographic factors—such as age, income, education, location—and the awareness and use of ICT in legal processes.

Research Design and Sample

A quantitative descriptive design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 250 respondents representing diverse gender, age, educational, occupational, religious, income, and locational backgrounds.

Objectives of the Study

1. **To examine the demographic characteristics** of the general population in relation to their awareness and use of ICT tools in legal processes.
2. **To assess the level of awareness** about specific ICT applications such as e-Courts, e-Filing systems, and the National Judicial Data Grid among the general public.
3. **To analyze public perceptions** regarding the impact of ICT on access to justice, including aspects like transparency, efficiency, and legal costs.
4. **To identify the challenges** faced by different demographic groups in adopting ICT-enabled legal services.
5. **To explore the relationship** between demographic variables (such as income, education, and location) and the awareness and acceptance of ICT in the legal system.
6. **To provide recommendations** for improving ICT awareness and usage in legal processes to enhance equitable access to justice.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant association between demographic characteristics

(such as income, education, and location) and awareness of ICT tools in legal processes.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant association between demographic characteristics and awareness of ICT tools in legal processes.

2. **H₀:** The general population's perception of the impact of ICT on legal services does not significantly differ across demographic groups.

H₁: The general population's perception of the impact of ICT on legal services significantly differs across demographic groups.

3. **H₀:** Awareness of ICT tools has no significant effect on the adoption and usage of ICT-enabled legal services.

H₁: Awareness of ICT tools significantly affects the adoption and usage of ICT-enabled legal services.

4. **H₀:** There are no significant challenges related to income or location that affect the adoption of ICT in legal processes.

H₁: Income and location significantly influence the challenges faced in adopting ICT in legal processes.

Data Collection

Data were collected on demographic characteristics, awareness of ICT tools in the legal system (such as e-Courts, e-Filing, National Judicial Data Grid), perceptions of the cost of legal services, and the perceived impact of ICT on access to justice.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized respondent characteristics and levels of awareness. Chi-square tests were used to analyze associations between demographic variables and ICT awareness.

Data Analysis and Findings

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	225	90.0
	Female	25	10.0
Education	Postgraduate	151	60.4
	Graduate	91	36.4
	Others	8	3.2
Occupation	Employed	141	56.4
	Self-employed	58	23.2
	Student	26	10.4
Religion	Hindu	232	92.8
	Muslim	11	4.4
	Christian	5	2.0
Location	Urban	178	71.2
	Rural	39	15.6

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Semi-urban	33	13.2

The demographic data of the surveyed general population highlights key characteristics across various categories:

Gender:The sample is predominantly male, with 90.0% (225 respondents) being male and only 10.0% (25 respondents) female. This indicates a significant gender imbalance in participation, which might reflect social or occupational factors affecting survey reach or interest.

Education:A large majority of respondents are well-educated. Specifically, 60.4% (151 individuals) have attained postgraduate qualifications, while 36.4% (91 individuals) hold graduate degrees. Only a small minority of 3.2% (8 respondents) have other or lower educational qualifications. This suggests the sample mainly consists of highly educated individuals, which could influence their awareness and engagement with ICT and legal processes.

Occupation:Most respondents are employed, comprising 56.4% (141 individuals), followed by 23.2% (58 respondents) who are self-employed. Students make up 10.4% (26 respondents), while other occupational categories are either absent or

minimal in this dataset. The predominance of working professionals indicates that the findings largely represent the perspectives of active participants in the labor market.

Religion:The vast majority of respondents identify as Hindu (92.8%, or 232 individuals). Minor representation includes Muslims at 4.4% (11 respondents) and Christians at 2.0% (5 respondents), with others constituting 0.8% (2 respondents). This distribution may mirror the religious demographics of the survey area and can be relevant for understanding cultural influences on ICT adoption.

Location:Most respondents reside in urban areas, accounting for 71.2% (178 individuals). Rural participants represent 15.6% (39 respondents), while 13.2% (33 individuals) live in semi-urban regions. This urban dominance suggests that insights and attitudes toward ICT in legal processes might be influenced by better infrastructure, connectivity, and exposure common in cities compared to rural or semi-urban settings.

Socio Economic Conditions

Table 2: Income Distribution

Income Range (Rs.)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 54,675	87	34.8
54,676 – 1,20,000	109	43.6
Above 1,20,001	54	21.6

The data shows that about 78.4% of respondents earn Rs. 1,20,000 or less annually, highlighting that the majority fall within lower to middle-income categories. This has important implications for policy-making and service design, emphasizing the need for affordable and accessible legal and digital services tailored to financially constrained groups.

Awareness on ICT

Table 3: Awareness of ICT Tools in Legal Processes

ICT Tool	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
e-Courts Online Platform	82.8	17.2
E-Filing System	5.2	94.8
National Judicial Data Grid	5.6	94.4

The table presents the level of awareness among the general population regarding key Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools used in the legal system:

- e-Courts Online Platform:

A significant majority of respondents, 82.8%, are aware of the e-Courts online platform, which

indicates strong recognition of this particular digital legal service. This suggests that e-Courts has gained considerable visibility and perhaps some usage among the population. However, 17.2% remain unaware, signaling room for outreach and education.

- E-Filing System: Awareness of the e-Filing system is extremely low, with only 5.2% of respondents knowing about it, while 94.8% are unaware. This highlights a major gap in public knowledge about the availability of online case filing, which is a crucial service for simplifying legal processes.
- National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG):

Similar to e-Filing, only 5.6% of the population is aware of the NJDG, with 94.4% lacking awareness. This data grid is an important tool for judicial data management, but the general population's lack of familiarity suggests limited public engagement or communication about its functions.

Perception of Legal Help Cost

Table 4: Perception of Legal Help Cost

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Legal help is expensive	3	1.2
Legal help is not expensive	247	98.8

The data reflects the general population's views on whether obtaining legal help is expensive:

- Legal Help is Expensive: Only a very small fraction, 1.2% of respondents, believe that legal assistance is costly. This suggests that very few perceive financial barriers as a significant issue when seeking legal support.
- Legal Help is Not Expensive: The overwhelming majority, 98.8%, do not consider legal help to be expensive. This indicates that most people either find legal services affordable or may not fully recognize the potential costs involved in accessing legal assistance.

Perceived Impact of ICT on Legal Access

Table 5: Perceived Impact of ICT on Legal Access

Perception	Percentage (%)
ICT makes access to legal help easier	0.4
ICT helps in speedy legal processes	0.8
ICT ensures fairness in legal proceedings	0.4
ICT helps find legal information online	6.0

The data reveals the general population's views on how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) impacts access to justice and legal procedures:

- ICT Makes Access to Legal Help Easier (0.4%)
- ICT Helps in Speedy Legal Processes (0.8%)
- ICT Ensures Fairness in Legal Proceedings (0.4%)
- ICT Helps Find Legal Information Online (6.0%).

Results

Table 6: Chi-square Test of Income vs. ICT Awareness

Variable	χ^2 Value	df	p-value
Income and ICT Awareness	11.78	2	0.019*

Significant at $p < 0.05$

The chi-square test shows a significant association between income and ICT awareness ($\chi^2=11.78$, $df=2$, $p=0.019$), indicating income influences ICT awareness levels.

Table 7: Chi-square Test of Location vs. ICT Awareness

Variable	χ^2 Value	df	p-value
Location and ICT Awareness	115.62	2	< 0.001*

Significant at $p < 0.001$

The chi-square test reveals a highly significant association between location and ICT awareness ($\chi^2=115.62$, $df=2$, $p<0.001$), showing location strongly impacts ICT awareness levels.

Findings

1. **Demographic Profile:** The study sample was predominantly male (90%), highly educated (96.8% with graduate or postgraduate degrees), and largely urban (71.2%). This demographic skew may reflect greater ICT accessibility and digital literacy in urban educated males compared to other groups.
2. **Income Distribution:** The majority of respondents belonged to the middle-income group (43.6%), with a substantial portion also in the lower-income bracket (34.8%). Income emerged as a significant factor influencing awareness and utilization of ICT tools in legal processes.
3. **Awareness of ICT Tools:** There was high awareness (82.8%) of the broad e-Courts platform but very low awareness of specific tools like e-Filing systems (5.2%) and the National Judicial Data Grid (5.6%). This indicates a lack of deep knowledge about the specific digital mechanisms through which justice is administered electronically.
4. **Perceptions of Legal Costs:** Almost all respondents (98.8%) perceived legal help as not expensive, which is interesting given the known costs associated with legal proceedings. This perception could encourage more people to seek legal assistance if properly informed about ICT-enabled cost-saving measures.
5. **Perceptions of ICT Impact:** The general population showed minimal recognition of the positive impact of ICT on legal service delivery, with only a small percentage acknowledging that ICT makes legal access easier, faster, or fairer. This points to a need for greater public education about the benefits of ICT in justice.
6. **Associations Between Demographics and Awareness:** Statistical tests revealed significant associations between income and ICT awareness ($p = 0.019$) and between location and ICT awareness ($p < 0.001$). Higher-income groups and urban residents demonstrated greater awareness and possibly better access to ICT-enabled legal services.

Conclusions

Based on the data analyzed, the following conclusions are drawn:

- **Digital Divide Persists:** Despite the proliferation of ICT in legal systems, a clear digital divide exists, particularly based on income and geographic location. Urban and higher-income groups benefit

more from ICT-enabled justice services, while rural and lower-income populations lag behind.

- **Limited Deep Awareness:** While the general population is aware of overarching digital platforms like e-Courts, there is a substantial gap in knowledge about specific legal ICT tools such as e-Filing and judicial data grids. This gap limits the practical utilization of digital legal services.
- **Positive Legal Cost Perception:** The prevailing perception that legal help is not expensive may be leveraged to promote ICT adoption, as digital platforms can further reduce legal costs and enhance efficiency.
- **Need for Awareness Campaigns:** The limited recognition of ICT's positive impact on justice processes underscores the urgent need for targeted awareness campaigns that educate the public on how digital tools can improve access, speed, and fairness.
- **Policy Implications:** Addressing the digital divide through infrastructural improvements, digital literacy programs, and affordable internet access is crucial to ensure that ICT benefits in the legal domain are equitably distributed.

Suggestions

1. **Targeted Digital Literacy Programs:** Government and legal institutions should conduct workshops and training sessions aimed especially at rural populations and lower-income groups to increase ICT literacy related to legal services.
2. **Enhanced Public Awareness Campaigns:** Mass media and social media campaigns should be deployed to inform citizens about available ICT tools in the judiciary and how to use them effectively.
3. **Improvement in Infrastructure:** Investments in internet connectivity, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, are critical to bridge the urban-rural digital divide.
4. **User-Friendly Legal Platforms:** Legal ICT platforms should be designed with simplicity and accessibility in mind, possibly with regional language options and mobile-friendly interfaces.
5. **Collaboration with NGOs and Community Groups:** Partnering with local NGOs can facilitate outreach programs and provide on-ground support for digital legal services awareness and usage.
6. **Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish systems to gather user feedback on ICT legal services to continuously improve usability and address barriers.
7. **Subsidized Access to Digital Legal Services:** Provide subsidized or free access to ICT-enabled legal services for economically disadvantaged populations to encourage their participation.

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