

A Critical Examination on the Impact of the Right to Information on Transparency and Accountability

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Abstract: *This paper highlights the major impact and limitations of the right to information act on transparency and accountability, to gather public agreeability on certain categories of information that cannot be disclosed and to gain public opinion on the impact of the right to information on a country's economic growth. The Right to Information Act (RTI Act) is a crucial legislation that was enacted in India in 2005 with the aim of promoting transparency and accountability in the functioning of government institutions. It has allowed citizens to obtain information about government policies, decisions, and actions, thus enabling them to hold public officials accountable. By providing a mechanism for accessing information, the Act has helped in exposing corruption, inefficiency, and maladministration within the government system. The Central Information Commission serves as the apex appellate authority to hear appeals and complaints regarding the implementation of the Act at the central level. State Information Commission is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the RTI Act at the state level. The United Kingdom has the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which provides individuals the right to request and access information held by public authorities. Scotland has a separate Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 that covers public authorities in Scotland. This is an empirical research conducted using a simple random sampling method and collected a poll of 210 responses from the general public. According to the findings, the majority of the respondents agree that the right to information has helped to expose corruption and facilitated the country's economic growth and governance. The major findings indicate that improving service delivery and empowering citizens are the major impact of the Right to information act and lack of awareness and limited scope are the major limitations of the study. The majority of the respondents agree that certain information cannot be disclosed as a means to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the nation*

Keywords: Transparency, accountability, digitization, corruption, social justice

I. INTRODUCTION

The Right to Information Act (RTI Act) is a crucial legislation that was enacted in India in 2005 with the aim of promoting transparency and accountability in the functioning of government institutions. The Act empowers citizens by granting them the right to access information held by public authorities. Since its implementation, the RTI Act has significantly impacted India's transparency and accountability landscape. One of the key impacts of the RTI Act has been the promotion of transparency in governance. It has allowed citizens to obtain information about government policies, decisions, and actions, thus enabling them to hold public officials accountable. By providing a mechanism for accessing information, the Act has helped in exposing corruption, inefficiency, and maladministration within the government system. It has played a crucial role in unveiling various scams and irregularities, leading to public scrutiny and demands for corrective measures. The Central Information Commission serves as the apex appellate authority to hear appeals and complaints regarding the implementation of the Act at the central level and Moreover, the RTI Act has empowered marginalized and disadvantaged communities to seek information about government schemes, entitlements, and welfare programs. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS): The MKSS, a



grassroots organization based in Rajasthan, played a pivotal role in advocating for the right to information in India. In the 1990s, the MKSS launched a movement demanding transparency and accountability in governance. Several public interest litigations were filed in the 1990s and early 2000s, demanding the right to information as a fundamental right. These cases, such as the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India (2002), played a significant role in shaping the discourse around the right to information and increasing awareness about its importance.

The various factors affecting the right to information including Lack of awareness about the provisions and procedures of the RTI Act remain a significant challenge. Many citizens, particularly those from marginalized communities, may not be aware of their rights or how to exercise them. There can be resistance from government officials and public authorities in providing information. Some officials may be hesitant to disclose information due to concerns about accountability, potential exposure of wrongdoing, or bureaucratic inertia. This resistance can manifest in delays, denials, or incomplete responses to RTI applications, undermining the effectiveness of the Act. The RTI Act emphasizes proactive disclosure of information by public authorities. However, the extent and quality of proactive disclosure vary across different government departments and agencies. RTI applications and delays in the disposal of appeals and complaints pose challenges to the effective implementation of the RTI Act.

The governmental initiatives include, Right to Information Act, 2005: The enactment of the RTI Act itself was a significant governmental initiative. The Act provides a comprehensive legal framework for citizens to access information held by public authorities. Central Information Commission (CIC): The Central Information Commission is a statutory body established under the RTI Act. It serves as the apex appellate authority to hear appeals and complaints regarding the implementation of the Act at the central level. State Information Commissions (SICs): Alongside the CIC, each state in India has a State Information Commission responsible for overseeing the implementation of the RTI Act at the state level. Online RTI Portals: The government has launched online RTI portals at the central and state levels to facilitate the filing of RTI applications and appeals. These portals streamline the application process, reduce paperwork, and enable citizens to track the status of their applications. The government conducts awareness campaigns to promote the right to information and educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities. These campaigns involve mass media, social media, community-level outreach programs, and partnerships with civil society organizations.

The current trend in the right to information involves the digitization of records and the availability of online platforms for filing RTI applications and appeals have gained momentum. Several government agencies, including the central and state information commissions, have introduced online portals to facilitate the submission and tracking of RTI requests. This trend has made the process more accessible, efficient, and transparent for citizens. Some government departments have implemented electronic record management systems and digitized their archives, making it easier to retrieve and provide information in response to RTI requests.

The right to information is recognized and protected in varying degrees across different countries worldwide. While the specifics may differ, the common objective is to promote transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment. United States: The United States has the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which grants the public the right to access information held by federal agencies. Each state also has its own public records laws, ensuring access to state and local government information. United Kingdom: The United Kingdom has the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which provides individuals the right to request and access information held by public authorities. Scotland has a separate Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 that covers public authorities in Scotland. Canada: Canada has the Access to Information Act, which allows individuals to request and obtain information held by federal government institutions. Sweden: Sweden has a long history of transparency and access to information. The Swedish Freedom of the Press Act, dating back to 1766, protects the right to access official documents and has been influential in shaping freedom of information laws globally. The aim of the study is to identify the major impact and limitations of the Right to information act on transparency and accountability, to gather public agreeability on certain categories of information that cannot be disclosed, and to gain public opinion on the impact of the right to information on a country's economic growth.



OBJECTIVES

- To identify the major impact of the right to information on transparency and accountability.
- To identify the major limitations of the right to information act.
- To analyze public agreeability on certain categories of information that cannot be disclosed.
- To analyze the public opinion on the impact of the right to information on a country's economic growth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rob Jenkins & Anne Marie Goetz (2010) This article looks at how this campaign came to be and how it carries out its objectives. After that, it examines how the MKSS experience and the larger movement it inspired have affected current discussions in three areas: participatory development, human rights, and, of course, anti-corruption. (Jenkins and Goetz)

Agrawal Chetan (2012) The effectiveness of India's Right to Information (RTI) Act as a tool to fight corruption is examined in this essay. To promote transparency and effective government, the RTI Act was enacted in October 2005. The report concludes that the RTI Act has been successful in eliminating information asymmetries and exposing corruption based on content analysis and depth interviews with a small number of bureaucrats and activists. Since the RTI Act's adoption, public employees have improved their responsiveness and commitment to providing excellent service. (Agrawal)

Pradip Thomas (2009) One aspect of the information revolution that is starting to affect domestic governance and development in fields like e-governance, e-commerce, and e-health is the rise of India as a worldwide player in software development, IT, and call center operations. ("Bhoomi, Gyan Ganga, E-Governance and the Right to Information: ICTs and Development in India")

Lal B. Suresh (2011) The information and communication technology (ICT) revolution has created new potential for social and economic progress, but it has also offered new challenges, issues and difficulties. It has an impact on all facets of society and can shape and improve a wide range of developmental applications in the social, industrial, and agricultural sectors. (Website)

Devendra Dilip Potnis (2014) Access to information has received the majority of attention in research on digital inclusion. However, merely having access to information has little value unless the intended recipient is also capable of using it. This study addresses a vacuum by examining how low-income female mobile phone users in rural India use information. It lists and models the six steps of the information use process. (Potnis)

Priyanka Pandey (2009) This study analyses data from a cluster randomised control experiment in 610 villages to assess the effect of a community-based information campaign on academic performance. In order to enlighten the community about its state-mandated roles and obligations in school management, the campaign consisted of eight or nine public meetings in each of the 340 treatment villages spread over three Indian states. ([No Title])

Arathi Chitla (2012) Information and communication technologies have been integral to development since the early 1990s. In the age of globalisation, India uses ICTs to spread the word about its development initiatives and connect with the underprivileged to improve their quality of life. This study discusses the effectiveness of e-governance and the use of ICT in the fight against poverty. ([No Title])

Marcio Giannini Pereira (2011) Rural electrification initiatives are a common part of development efforts in underdeveloped nations. The evaluation of such programmes, and consequently of their social, economic, environmental, and energy implications on the target population, particularly on underdeveloped villages located in distant places, is, however, hampered by a number of issues. ("Evaluation of the Impact of Access to Electricity: A Comparative Analysis of South Africa, China, India and Brazil")

Baljinder Kaur, Rama Verma (2009) The purpose of this essay is to discuss how the central library at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi uses its electronic resources and services. The purpose of the paper is to identify these users of electronic information services, as well as how frequently and where they utilise the services. The users are also prompted to indicate whether they prefer an electronic or print journal format. (Kaur and Verma)

Rajendra Kumar (2007) We discover that the speed at which the villages access some of these services is positively correlated with the availability of local Internet facilities that provide governmental services to citizens. We find a favourable link between two of these Internet services—obtaining birth certificates for children and submitting applications for old age pensions—in a study of an Indian rural Internet project. ([No Title])

Alasdair Roberts (2010) Numerous country laws recently passed that are similar to the U.S. Freedom of Information Act include India's Right to Information Act (RTIA), which was enacted in 2005. The author estimates that during the RTIA's first two and a half



years of operation, Indian individuals submitted roughly 2 million information requests, drawing on a number of significant studies looking at the act's implementation. (Roberts)**Smita Srivastava (2010)** The UPA (United Progressive Alliance) Government proudly passed the Right to Information Act 2005. It promoted the Act as a turning point in India's democratic development. Five years have gone since the RTI was passed, yet implementation progress is far from flawless. As a result, the effect on the mindset, attitude, and behavioural patterns of the public authority and the populace is not what was anticipated. ([No Title])**Sharma, Prashant (2012)** The national Right to Information (RTI) Act was passed in 2005, and its passage has been produced, consumed, and celebrated as a significant democratic deepening event in India, both in terms of the process leading to its enactment (arising from a grassroots movement) and its outcome (fundamentally altering the citizen-state relationship). This thesis challenges this account and suggests that there may be more nuance to the explanatory variables driving this occurrence than previously thought. (P. Sharma, The Right to Information Act in India: The Turbid World of Transparency Reforms).**Sahina Mumtaz Laskar (2016)** Participatory democracy cannot exist without management that is transparent and accountable. To survive in the social framework of the society and preserve the democratic balance, every citizen requires information, which is like breathing. In India, the Right to Information (RTI) was created by judicial decisions, establishing it as a Fundamental Right under Article 19(1). ([No Title])**Aradhana Sharma (2013)** This article focuses on the limits and contradictory logic of state openness in the neoliberal era and how the RTI law is being both applied and undermined in India through routine bureaucratic proceduralism. Indian law protecting free information has roots in neighbourhood grassroots movements. (A. Sharma)**Sharmendra Chaudhry (2011)** Information freedom is the foundation of democratic administration. The democratic process must function properly for this right to exist. The freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(A) of the constitution, which is recognised as the first condition of liberty, is inextricably linked to the right to information. It holds a privileged place in the hierarchy of rights, supporting and defending other rights. (Chaudhry)**Prashant Sharma (2014)** In terms of the procedure that resulted in its enactment (arising from a grassroots movement) and its outcome (fundamentally altering the citizen-state relationship), the national Right to Information (RTI) Act's enactment in 2005 has been produced, consumed, and celebrated as a significant event of democratic deepening in India. This book makes the argument that the explanatory reasons surrounding this occurrence might be more intricate than previously thought. (P. Sharma, Democracy and Transparency in the Indian State)**Habib Zafarullah (2021)** This article evaluates how such laws have been implemented in four Asian nations—India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Thailand—to determine whether the results have benefited the objectives of open government (OG). Based on a thorough analysis of the conceptual literature, secondary sources, and official publications, it demonstrates that, although having many promising characteristics, RTI laws have not fared well in terms of the general concept of OG. (“Error - Cookies Turned Off”)**Dr. Roopinder Oberoi (2013)** Transparency is a potent and innovative idea. Participatory democracy cannot exist without management that is transparent and accountable. Government secrecy encourages citizen disbelief in the administration, and openness destroys the wall of secrecy that those in authority have erected to keep out the common people. Without open governance and readily available accurate and verifiable information, transparency cannot be achieved. ([No Title]).**Jeannine E. Relly (2009)** The findings also imply that countries aiming for openness may signal to businesses that their governments are aware of the international standard of transparency by enacting access-to-information laws and implementing electronic government, even though these circumstances alone may not be enough to increase public perceptions of government transparency. (“Perceptions of Transparency of Government Policymaking: A Cross-National Study”)

III. METHODOLOGY

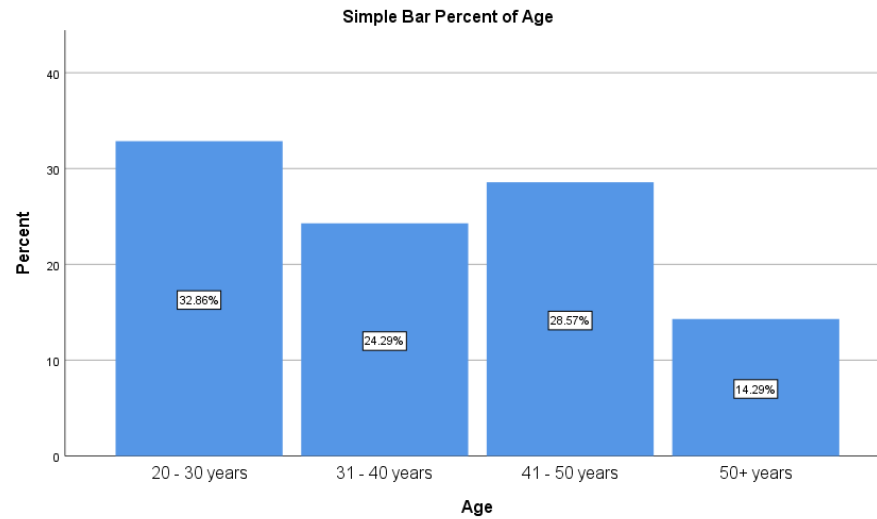
The current research is based on the researcher's own primary data as well as secondary material from books, articles, journals, and other internet sources. The author used a simple random sampling method to conduct empirical research, and the poll received 210 responses from the general population. Demographic statistics include respondents' age group, gender, work experience, employment status, and educational qualifications. The dependent variables include the role of Right to information in reducing corruption, major impact of right to information, major limitations of right



to information, specific categories of information and right to information on economic growth. Statistical tools used SPSS - Single bar graphs, Cluster bar graphs.

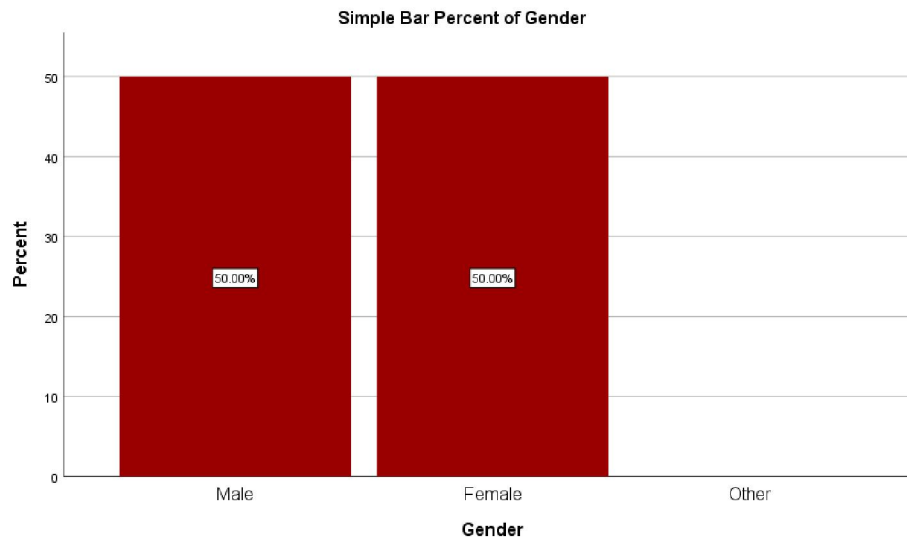
IV. ANALYSIS

FIGURE 1



LEGEND: The figure shows the age group of the respondents.

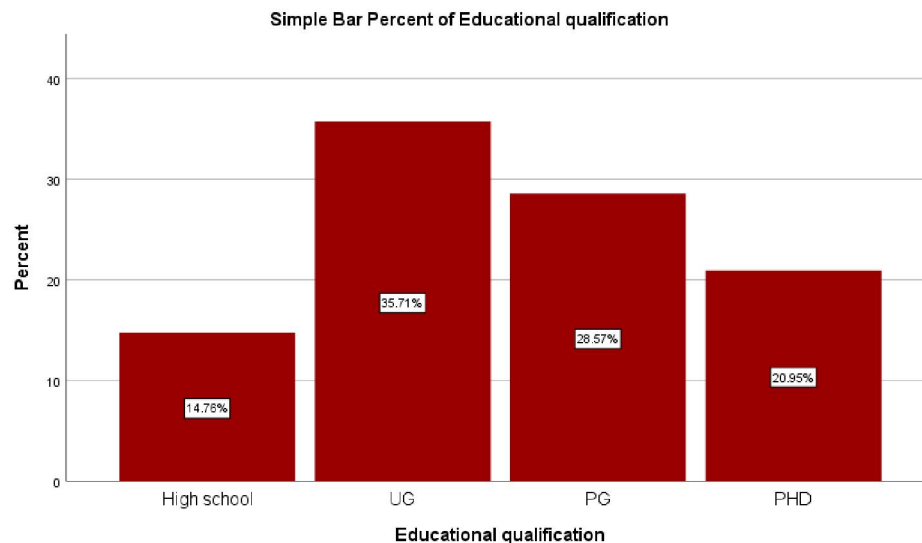
FIGURE 2



LEGEND: The graph shows the gender of the respondents

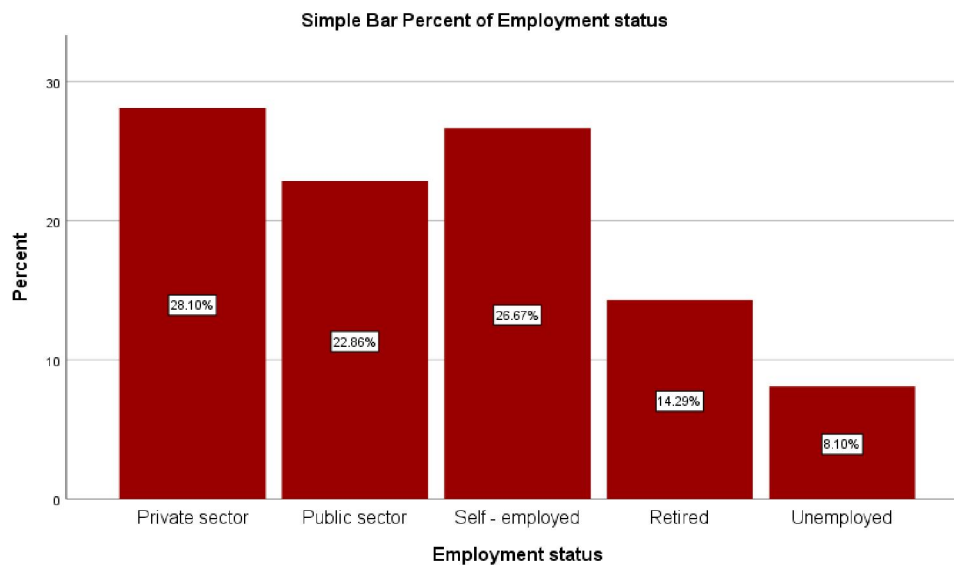


FIGURE 3



LEGEND: The graph shows the educational qualification of the respondents.

FIGURE 4



LEGEND: The graph depicts the employment status of the respondents.



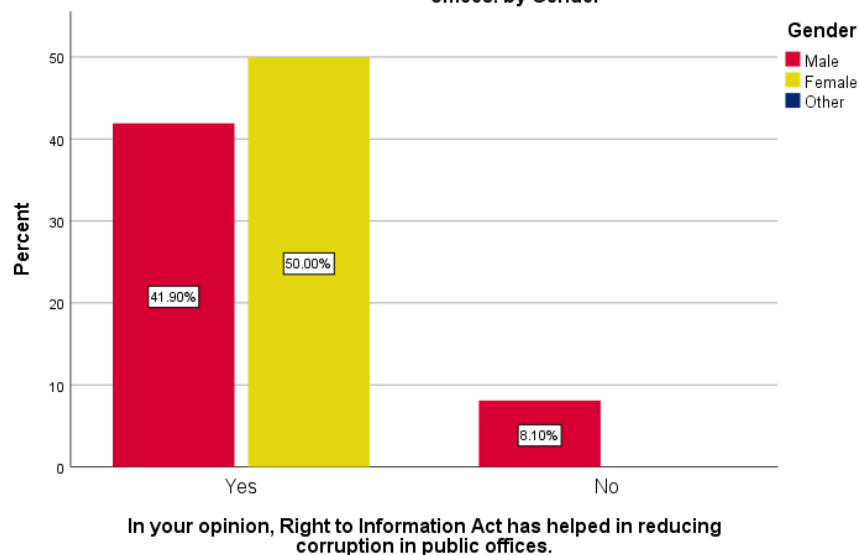
FIGURE 5



LEGEND: The graph shows the work experience of the respondents.

FIGURE 6

Clustered Bar Percent of In your opinion, Right to Information Act has helped in reducing corruption in public offices. by Gender

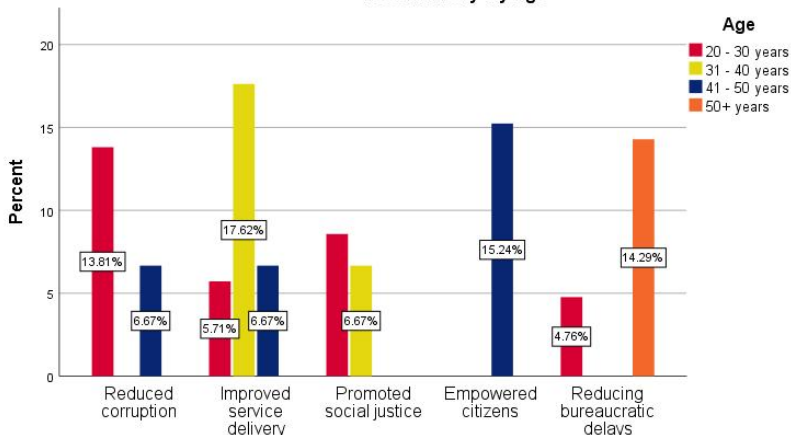


LEGEND: This graph shows public opinion on the role of the right to information in reducing corruption.



FIGURE 7

Clustered Bar Percent of In your opinion, state the major impact of right to information on transparency and accountability by Age

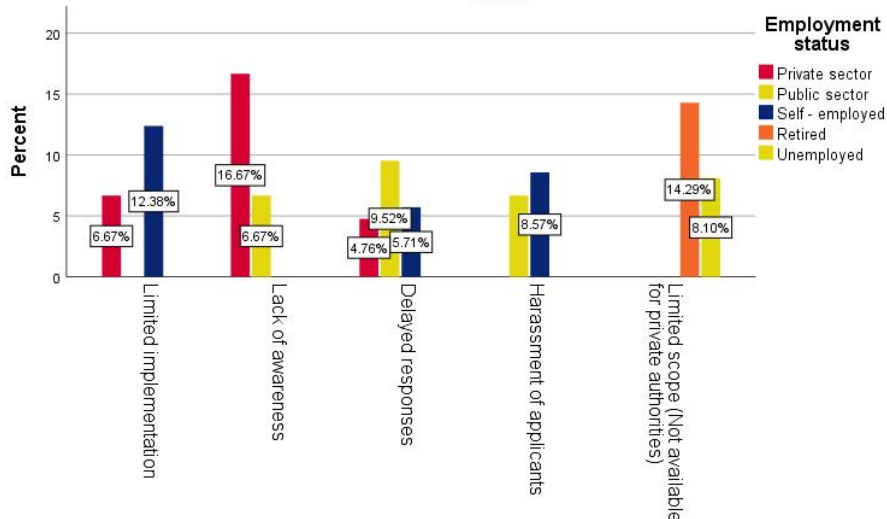


In your opinion, state the major impact of right to information on transparency and accountability

LEGEND: The graph depicts the public opinion on the major impact of the right to information act.

FIGURE 8

Clustered Bar Percent of In your opinion, state the major limitation of right to information by Employment status



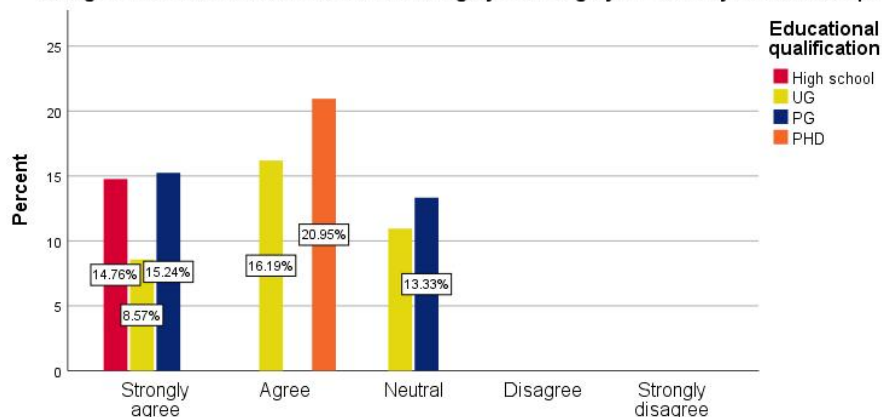
In your opinion, state the major limitation of right to information

LEGEND: The graph depicts the public opinion on the major limitations of the right to information act.



FIGURE 9

Clustered Bar Percent of State your agreeability, "Certain categories of information cannot be disclosed under the Right to Information Act to protect the security, strategic, scientific, or economic interests of the State and foreign relations that would affect the sovereignty and integrity of India". by Educational qualification

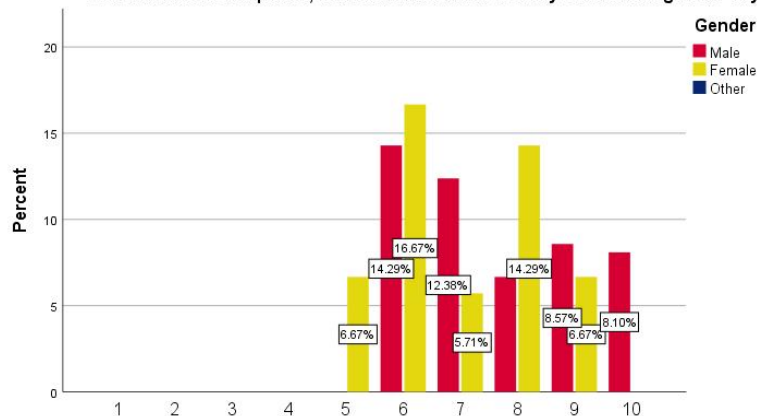


State your agreeability, "Certain categories of information cannot be disclosed under the Right to Information Act to protect the security, strategic, scientific, or economic interests of the State and foreign relations that would affect the sovereignty and integrity of India".

LEGEND: The graph shows the public agreeability on restrictions on confidential information under the right to information act.

FIGURE 10

Clustered Bar Percent of Rate on a scale of 1-10, "Right to Information Act has improved India's governance, infrastructure development, and contribute to the country's economic growth". by Gender



Rate on a scale of 1-10, "Right to Information Act has improved India's governance, infrastructure development, and contribute to the country's economic growth".

LEGEND: The graph shows the public opinion on the impact of the right to information on a country's economic growth.



V. RESULTS

FIGURE 1: Out of the 210 respondents 32.86% of the respondents are between the age group of 21-30 years. **FIGURE 2:** Out of the 210 respondents 50% of the respondents are male and the rest 50% of the respondents are female. **FIGURE 3:** Out of the 210 respondents 35.71% of the respondents are educationally qualified in UG and 28.57% of the respondents are educationally qualified in PG. **FIGURE 4:** Out of the 210 respondents 28.10% of the respondents are currently employed in the private sector and 26.67% of the respondents are currently self-employed. **FIGURE 5:** Out of the 210 respondents 62.38% of the respondents have more than 6+ years of work experience. **FIGURE 6:** Out of the 210 respondents 50% of the female respondents and 41.90% of the male respondents agree that the Right to information act has helped in reducing corruption in public offices. **FIGURE 7:** Out of the 210 respondents 17.62% of the respondents between the age group of 31-40 years think “improved service delivery” and 15.24% of the respondents between the 41-50 years think “empowered citizens” is the major impact of the right to information on transparency and accountability. **FIGURE 8:** Out of the 210 respondents 16.67% of the respondents who are currently employed in the private sector think “lack of awareness” and 14.29% of the respondents who are retired think “limited scope (not available for private authorities)” is the major limitation of rights to information. **FIGURE 9:** Out of the 210 respondents 20.95% of the respondents who are educationally qualified in PHD and 16.19% of the respondents who are educationally qualified in UG agree that certain categories of information cannot be disclosed under the right to information act to protect the security, strategic, scientific, or economic interests of the state and foreign relations that would affect the sovereignty and integrity of India. **FIGURE 10:** Out of the 210 respondents 16.67% of the female respondents and 14.29% of the respondents have rated 6 on a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) for the statement regarding “right to information act has improved India’s governance, infrastructure development and contribute to the country’s economic growth”.

VI. DISCUSSION

Figures 1 - 5 analyze the respondents in various categories like age group, gender, educational qualification, employment status, and work experience which plays a significant role in understanding their response towards their knowledge on the right to information and its impact on increasing transparency and accountability in India. In the figures, the majority of the respondents are between the age group of 20-30 years, and the respondents are equally divided between male and female. The majority of the respondents are educationally qualified in Undergraduate. The majority of the respondents are currently employed in the private sector followed by self employment and have more than 6+ years of work experience. Upon analyzing **Figure 6** we can conclude that both the male and the female respondents agree that the Right to information act has helped in reducing corruption in public offices. Upon analyzing **Figure 7** we can conclude that the majority of the respondents between the age group of 31-40 years think improved service delivery and another group of respondents between the 41-50 years think empowered citizens are the major impact of the right to information on transparency and accountability. Upon analyzing **Figure 8** we can conclude that the majority of the respondents who are currently employed in the private sector think lack of awareness and another group of the respondents who are retired think limited scope (not available for private authorities) is the major limitation of rights to information. Upon analyzing **Figure 9** we can conclude that the majority of the respondents who are educationally qualified in PHD and another group of the respondents who are educationally qualified in UG agree that certain categories of information cannot be disclosed under the right to information act to protect the security, strategic, scientific, or economic interests of the state and foreign relations that would affect the sovereignty and integrity of India. Upon analyzing **Figure 10** we can conclude that the majority of the female respondents and another group of the respondents have rated 6 on a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) for the statement regarding right to information act has improved India’s governance, infrastructure development and contribute to the country’s economic growth.

VII. LIMITATIONS

The sample size of this study is only 210 people, which is a significant restriction. This small sample size is insufficient to completely comprehend and draw conclusions on the understanding of the right to information act and its impact on



India's transparency and accountability. Another significant problem is that these responses come from only one city, which is insufficient data when compared to the entire country because different cities may have different regulations, systems, opinions, and perspectives on the importance and impact of the right to information.

VIII. SUGGESTION

Increased efforts should be made to raise awareness about the RTI Act among citizens, especially in marginalized communities. Conducting widespread awareness campaigns, providing information through multiple channels, and collaborating with civil society organizations. Citizens need to be educated on the process of filing RTI applications, the nuances of the Act, and their rights. Leveraging technology can improve the efficiency and accessibility of the RTI process. This can include the development of user-friendly online portals for filing applications and appeals, provision of real-time status updates on applications.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Right to Information (RTI) Act has significantly impacted India's transparency and accountability landscape. Since its enactment in 2005, the RTI Act has empowered citizens, exposed corruption, and enhanced government accountability. The RTI Act has been instrumental in exposing instances of corruption, irregularities, and maladministration. The RTI Act has created a framework for greater accountability in government functioning. The RTI Act has brought transparency to governance by enabling citizens to access information held by public authorities. It has also triggered reforms and improvements in administrative practices. According to the findings, the majority of the respondents agree that the right to information has helped to expose corruption and facilitated the country's economic growth and governance. The major findings indicate that improving service delivery and empowering citizens are the major impact of the right to information act and lack of awareness and limited scope are the major limitations of the study. The majority of the respondents agree that certain information cannot be disclosed as a means to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the nation.

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