

AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS RTI ACT: A STUDY AMONG COLLEGE TEACHERS IN MADURAI DISTRICT

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors representing the awareness and attitude towards RTI act and to examine the impact of these variables on the RTI services. . These factors are identified through previous research and each one measured based on 5-point interval Likert scale. Using primary data collection method, 200 questionnaires were distributed to target respondents of customers online purchasing. The responses collected were 147 completed questionnaires representing 73.5 percent response rate. The data were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression.

Key words: RTI act, Awareness, Legal Rights

Introduction

Every human being has an imperative and natural right to information. In a democratic country, everyone has the right to express themselves freely. This right includes the right to form public opinion as well as the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas from public authorities. The availability and appropriateness of information assists citizens in living a dignified life in a civilised society.

Good governance requires access to information. Governance and the Right to Information are so inextricably linked that they appear to be two sides of the same coin. The RTI Act of 2005 was enacted to promote good governance and make actions, decisions, policies, and programmes more transparent.

People's participation in government decisions and free access to information contribute to the transformation of governance into good governance. As a result, it is the government's responsibility to keep citizens informed about daily events within the government. The Indian

parliament passed the Right to Information Act in 2005 in order to promote accountability, transparency, strengthen democratic principles, and reduce corruption.

This act applies to all bodies subject to government notification, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) owned, controlled, or substantially financed by the government. The passage of this act is a watershed moment in the history of good governance. It increases the transparency of government work. This act is a step toward reducing corruption in government. It gives citizens the right to know how their tax dollars are being spent by the government. This act defines information as any material in any form, including records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advice, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, and data material stored in any electronic form.

Several countries have legalised the Right to Information Act under various names. The right to information has been ranked second only to the supreme legislative institution, the parliament, which consists of people's representatives, in order to provide a mechanism to the people from all walks of life with power and sovereignty. These regulations are properly implemented, and the benefits are enjoyed by people in developed countries. Implementations have not yet reached the stage of success, but are facing challenges and obstacles in developing countries such as India. Therefore the specific objectives of this study are to assess the factors representing the awareness and attitude towards RTI act and to examine the impact of these variables on the RTI services.

Review of Literature:

Monika(2021) attempted to investigate citizen awareness of the Right to Information Act in Panchkula, Haryana. The information was gathered from 100 respondents. The findings revealed that citizens are aware of RTI but are less concerned with its proper application.

According to Zahid (2017), the act is a powerful tool for combating corruption. Aside from increasing transparency, it also serves as a deterrent to the arbitrary exercise of public power.

Anjum (2013) examined the current performance of the RTI Act in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as its role in good governance, in her study. According to the author, the right to information is a fundamental right that means the right to obtain information from any public authority. Under the RTI Act, anyone can seek and receive information from any government office, including the Panchayat office, the Municipal Ward Officer's office, the Chief Minister's office, and even the President of India's office.

According to Bhat (2015), the right to information act is an agent of good governance. The RTI makes government more accountable to the people. People are made aware of administration and given the opportunity to participate in decision making. Instead of waiting

for the general public to seek information, governments should voluntarily make all information available to the public.

Caesar (2013) believes that in a responsible government like ours, where all public officials must be held accountable for their actions, there can be no secrets. Individual citizens have had no means to influence the governance structure. In a system riddled with corruption and increasingly indifferent to the plight of the disadvantaged citizenry, the Right to Information has showed promise in terms of empowering citizens to demand accountability and acting as an enforcer of good governance.

According to Chaudhry (2011), the best approach to ensure that residents of India have a substantial access to information is to strictly enforce the Right to Information Act, 2005.

Aishwarya Athira and Vinod (2018) investigated Right to Information Act awareness among Kerala's rural people in the districts of Kottayam, Kollam, Ernakulam, and Palakkad. The data was gathered from 200 respondents using random sampling. Female respondents were found to be more knowledgeable of the Act than male respondents. Furthermore, there is a significant relationship between the respondent's level of awareness and gender. Singh,

Chouhan and Sharma (2012) obtained data from 265 persons chosen at random from Rajasthan's five districts through a field survey. According to the study's findings, one-third of the selected population is significantly aware of the RTI Act, 2005, and this level of knowledge is connected to respondents' location, gender, and educational position.

Method and Procedure

This study attempts to examine the awareness, attitude and satisfaction of respondents towards right to information act. The study adopted a descriptive and cross sectional research approach. The data collection instrument used in this study is a well structured questionnaire. It was distributed to the 200 faculties working in arts and science college teachers in Madurai district and 147 was completed and returned. The responses rate was 73.5%, which is considered to be a reasonable response rate. The study used purposive sampling method for distributing the questionnaire. Each participant was given self-administrative questionnaire containing socio demographic information, including age, gender and usage of right to information act. The constructs and items were generated from previous research papers and were modified to fit Indian context (Ojomo & Atakiti (2018) and Kinross (2011)). Each of the items was evaluated on a five point Likert scale, ranging from one: 'strongly disagree' to five: 'strongly agree'. Furthermore, the questionnaire contains 15 items that are categorized into 4 factors, specifically 1 dependent variable (satisfaction with RTI – 4 items) and 3 independent variables (Awareness on RTI- 5 items; Attitude towards RTI-3 items; Legal Rights - 3 items) The data was analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

In order to identify the important dimensions of RTI act perceptions 15 items were carefully chosen based on prior literature review. The validity of the factor analysis is examined with the values of Kaiser-meyer-ohlin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of Sphericity. The KMO value is .781 and Bartlett's test is significant. The data was then examined using principal components analysis and a varimax rotation. The factor analysis resulted in four important factors. The total number of variables loaded in each factor, its reliability, Eigen value and the per cent of variance explained by the factor are explained in Table 1.

Table 1: Factors Analysis Results

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Factor Loading</i>	<i>Reliability Coefficient</i>	<i>Eigen Value</i>	<i>Variance in Percentage</i>
Awareness on RTI Act	RTI act promotes transparency	0.889	.821	3.678	19.814
	I can access public information on institutional website	0.881			
	RTI empowers citizens to have unlimited access to public information	0.917			
	The standard time for information disclosure according to RTI act is 30 days	0.886			

	I should be very specific on the type of information i need	0.932			
Attitude towards RTI Act	Public authorities are becoming more open and accountable	0.912	.861	2.638	17.325
	Members of the public can have more confidence in the decisions made by public authorities	0.924			
	I am confident that the decisions made by public agencies are for the greater public good	0.956			
Satisfaction with RTI act services	Satisfied with the time taken to process your request for information	0.889	.778	2.554	16.447
	Satisfied with the cost of processing				

	your request for information				
	Satisfied with the timeliness of communication with you about the process	0.834			
	Satisfied with the quality of communication about the process	0.869			
Legal Right	I have the legal right to see information held by a public agency	0.891	.848	2.385	15.902
	I have the legal right to see any information I ask for, subject to certain exemptions	0.844			
	To get information, I have to put in a formal request in writing.	0.839			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .781					
Bartlett's test of Sphericity : Chi Square = 3032.436*					

Extraction Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.	Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.	

* Significant at five per cent level

Table 2: Multiple Regression analysis results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Standardized β	R ²	F Value
Satisfaction with RTI act services	Awareness on RTI Act	0.344*	.542	26.344*
	Attitude towards RTI Act	0.215*		
	Legal Rights	0.237*		

* Significant at five per cent level

To test the hypothesis a multiple regression analysis was carried out to determine the strength of the relationship between multiple independent variables (Awareness on RTI; Attitude towards RTI; Legal Rights) and a single dependent variable (Satisfaction with RTI act services). From table 2, the significantly influencing independent variables on Satisfaction with RTI act services are Awareness on RTI Act ($\beta = 0.344$, $p < .05$), Legal Right ($\beta = 0.237$, $p < .05$) and Attitude towards RTI Act ($\beta = 0.215$, $p < .05$). The F-statistics of 26.344 is significant at the 5% level indicating that this is a highly significant relationship. The three significant independent variables explain the variance in intention to use by 55 %. Table 2 reveals that Awareness on RTI Act ($\beta = 0.344$) is the most influential factor followed by Legal Rights ($\beta = 0.237$).

Conclusion and Recommendations: India, like other developing countries, faces a number of sociopolitical and economic challenges. The collaborative effort of an enlightened citizenry is

one method of addressing such challenges. The Right to Information Act, which allows citizens to inquire about the day-to-day operations of governments and other institutions, would be a strategic asset in achieving the transformation that individuals and groups seek.

The following recommendations were deemed useful based on the study's findings:

Civil society organisations should launch nationwide public education campaigns to educate the public about the provisions and value of the RTI Act in achieving the desired socio-political and economic changes. Such campaigns should go beyond simply focusing on the media. Inter-personal channels, such as seminars/workshops, round table discussions, and conferences held across India's various regions, states, and local government areas, will help to educate citizens about the RTI Act's values.

The general public must be willing to make full use of the RTI Act. Citizens must avoid an ordinary attitude toward the Act. They must embrace the transformation envisioned by the RTI Act. India can only achieve this transformation by aggressively enforcing the RTI Act.

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