



The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2025

Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

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INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL ADR WITH ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR ACCESSIBLE JUSTICE IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

The Indian judicial system is confronted with an unprecedented challenge in the form of an enormous backlog exceeding 53 million cases across all levels of the judiciary as of 2025¹. This staggering pendency encompasses over 4.7 crore cases in subordinate courts and approximately 63 lakh cases in various High Courts, illustrating the systemic strain within the dispensation of justice². The Supreme Court alone recorded pendency exceeding 88,000 cases in mid-2025, reflecting the corpus of unresolved disputes awaiting adjudication³. This glut of cases is exacerbated by structural deficiencies, including a low judge-to-population ratio—approximately 21 judges per million residents far below both the Law Commission's recommendation of 50 and benchmarks in developed jurisdictions such as the United States and Europe⁴. Additional impediments such as extensive vacancies, infrastructural inadequacies, frequent adjournments, and government litigation burden have collectively thwarted the timely administration of justice⁵.

The consequences of such delays transcend mere numbers, striking at the very heart of constitutional promises. The oft-quoted maxim "justice delayed is justice denied" resonates profoundly as millions of litigants grapple with protracted legal battles, incurring exorbitant

¹ National Judicial Data Grid, Pendency of Cases in Indian Courts (2025).

² Ministry of Law and Justice, India Justice Report (2025).

³ Supreme Court of India, Pendency Statistics (Aug. 2025).

⁴ Law Commission of India, Report on Judicial Strength and Recommendations (1987); Comparative Judicial Strength Report, US and Europe (2022–2025).

⁵ INDIA JUSTICE REPORT (2022); Studies on Judicial Vacancies and Infrastructure Deficits.

costs and enduring uncertainty⁶. Overcrowded prisons with a preponderance of undertrial detainees, prolonged business disputes hampering economic growth, and vulnerable sections of society disadvantaged by inaccessible legal remedies underscore the socio-economic costs engendered by judicial inertia⁷. Against this backdrop, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms—encompassing arbitration, mediation, and conciliation—have historically offered expedited and cost-efficient avenues for dispute settlement beyond formal court processes. Despite their longstanding recognition and legislative endorsement in India, these practices remain vastly underutilized, impeding their capacity to alleviate the judicial burden effectively⁸.

In recent years, the advent of technological integration has heralded the emergence of Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) as a viable and innovative complement to traditional ADR. The harmonious amalgamation of time-honoured ADR practices with digital platforms portends a revolutionary framework capable of transcending geographical barriers and procedural complexities, thereby widening the ambit of accessible justice⁹. By leveraging technology, such integration promises to curtail delays, reduce costs, enhance user convenience, and democratize dispute resolution for the common citizen, whose access to conventional courts may remain circumscribed by economic or logistical constraints¹⁰. This paradigm shift aligns with India's constitutional mandate to ensure “access to justice for all” by innovatively bridging the gap between entrenched judicial challenges and contemporary digital advancements.

BACKGROUND OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN INDIA

Historically, India's approach to conflict resolution has been deeply rooted in a pluralistic legal culture characterized by a nexus of formal and informal justice systems. One of the most salient traditional mechanisms is the institution of Lok Adalat, which has played a pivotal role in facilitating access to justice, especially among rural populations and marginalized communities¹¹. This indigenous system traces its philosophical and procedural lineage to the ancient Panchayati Raj model, where village elders and community assemblies employed

⁶ Legal Commentaries on the Maxim “Justice Delayed is Justice Denied” and Constitutional Implications, *Access to Justice and Delayed Justice* [Journal], Vol. X (Year).

⁷ Indian Prison Statistics Report (2025); Economic Analyses on Judicial Delays.

⁸ Legal Literature on Historical Evolution and Statutory Recognition of ADR in India (2024–25), see, e.g., Aaryavart Chourasia, *Evolution of ADR in India*, J. Legal Res., Vol. Y (2025).

⁹ Reports on Online Dispute Resolution Models and Adoption in India's Legal System (2025).

¹⁰ Government & Judiciary Initiatives Promoting ODR, Including Policy Frameworks and Programs (2025).

¹¹ Lok Adalat originated from the Panchayati Raj system, a traditional community-based conflict resolution model emphasizing consensus over confrontation. See Viamediationcentre.org, Lok Adalat (Sept. 9, 2024), <https://viamediationcentre.org/readnews/MTE2/Lok-Adalat>.

mediation and conciliation to resolve disputes amicably, fostering social harmony and mutual coexistence¹². Unlike the adversarial and procedurally complex formal courts, Lok Adalat emphasizes consensus-building, equity, and community participation, aligning dispute resolution with culturally embedded norms and practices¹³.

The contemporary institutionalization of Lok Adalat under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, marked a significant evolution by conferring statutory recognition and legal enforceability to its awards. This legal framework empowers Lok Adalats to adjudicate a broad spectrum of civil, family, and compoundable criminal disputes through a panel comprising retired judges, legal practitioners, and social activists. The hallmark of this mechanism is its informality, expedition, and cost-effectiveness, achieved by eschewing rigid procedural formalities in favour of voluntary settlements reached through mediation and dialogue¹⁴. The settlements or awards granted by Lok Adalats carry the status equivalent to civil court decrees, rendering them binding and non-appealable, thereby facilitating finality and certainty in dispute resolution¹⁵.

Importantly, the success of Lok Adalats is measured not only by the volume of cases disposed of—running into millions annually according to National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) reports—but also by their capacity to decongest traditional court systems and extend justice to underrepresented sections of society¹⁶. This unique confluence of tradition and statutory regulation underscores the potential for Lok Adalats to inform innovative frameworks that blend traditional ADR mechanisms with emerging technologies, such as online dispute resolution. Such integration promises to amplify the reach and effectiveness of accessible justice in alignment with India's socio-legal realities and constitutional mandates¹⁷.

¹² Panchayat dispute resolution focused on social harmony and collective participation, distinct from formal judiciary processes. See *Civildaily.com*, Lok Adalats: Origin, Evolution, Jurisdiction, Powers (Oct. 24, 2024), <https://www.civildaily.com/lok-adalats-origin-evolution-jurisdiction-powers>.

¹³ The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, provided statutory foundation for Lok Adalats, institutionalizing this traditional dispute resolution method. See Legal Services Authorities Act, No. 39, Acts of Parliament, 1987 (India).

¹⁴ Lok Adalats function through panels of retired judges and legal professionals offering informal mediation-based dispute settlement. See NALSA, Lok Adalats, <https://nalsa.gov.in/lok-adalats/> (last visited Sept. 27, 2025).

¹⁵ Settlements from Lok Adalats have the binding effect of a civil court decree and are generally not subject to appeal, ensuring legal finality. See Legal Services Authorities Act § 22B (1987) (India).

¹⁶ Annual reports from the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) show Lok Adalats resolving millions of cases, reducing judicial backlog. See NALSAREPORT, Annual Report 2023-24, *Nalsa.gov.in*.

¹⁷ Integration of traditional ADR and technology offers democratized justice consistent with India's constitutional ethos. See *Niti.gov.in*, Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India (Mar. 2023).

LIMITATIONS OF TRADITIONAL ADR METHODS

While traditional Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms have demonstrated significant efficacy in mitigating judicial backlog and promoting consensual dispute resolution, several inherent limitations constrain their scalability, procedural uniformity, and enforceability—particularly when grappling with disputes involving parties dispersed across broad geographies or complexities embedded in substantive legal questions¹⁸. The decentralized and often informal nature of traditional ADR entails a lack of standardized procedural safeguards, which can precipitate inconsistencies in dispute resolution outcomes and occasionally undermine perceptions of fairness and neutrality¹⁹.

One critical limitation pertains to the enforceability of ADR outcomes, especially in mediation and conciliation contexts where agreement is contingent upon voluntary compliance by the parties. Unlike arbitral awards that are statutorily enforceable under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, mediated settlements do not always command coercive authority, thereby sometimes resulting in non-compliance or protracted post-settlement disputes necessitating recourse to formal courts²⁰. This enforceability gap is accentuated in cross-jurisdictional disputes, where recognition and execution of ADR decisions hinge upon applicable international conventions and the legal frameworks of involved states, complicating the efficacy of traditional ADR in a globalized economic milieu²¹.

Furthermore, traditional ADR may falter in adjudicating disputes entailing intricate questions of law or requiring detailed evidentiary examination, given that mediators or conciliators typically lack judicial powers and their decision-making authority is largely contingent upon party consent²². This limits the applicability of ADR in cases with significant legal precedents or public interest dimensions, wherein judicial intervention remains indispensable. Additionally, the absence of a precedent-setting framework in ADR mechanisms limits the

¹⁸ See Aaryavart Chourasia, Challenges in Implementation of Alternative Dispute Resolution in India, J. Legal Research & Juridical Sci., Vol. 2, Issue 3 (2025).

¹⁹ See Limitations of Alternative Dispute Resolution, Via Mediation Centre (Sept. 9, 2024), <https://viamediationcentre.org/readnews/NjQx/LIMITATIONS-OF-ALTERNATIVE-DISPUTE-RESOLUTION>.

²⁰ Arbitration and Conciliation Act, No. 26 of 1996 (India).

²¹ See New York Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards, June 10, 1958, 330 U.N.T.S. 38.

²² See Preeti Kumari, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), SSRN (Sept. 2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3626625.

development of consistent jurisprudence, thereby engendering unpredictability in outcomes for parties facing similar disputes in the future²³.

Another substantive challenge is the imbalance of bargaining power between parties, which can distort negotiations and settlements in favor of more dominant stakeholders, raising concerns about substantive justice and equitable access to remedies²⁴. Moreover, uneven geographical penetration and infrastructural deficiencies constrain the accessibility of ADR in rural or underserved regions, thereby limiting its potential as a truly nationwide alternative to litigation²⁵. Concomitantly, the paucity of professionally trained arbitrators, mediators, and conciliators with specialized legal expertise diminishes the quality and credibility of ADR services, engendering skepticism among litigants and legal professionals alike²⁶.

Finally, while ADR promises cost-efficiency, the high fees demanded by experienced mediators or retired judicial officers, compounded by repeat hearings in protracted disputes, often inflate expenses beyond affordable thresholds, particularly affecting economically vulnerable demographics²⁷. Collectively, these limitations underscore the imperative for the evolution and integration of traditional ADR frameworks with technological innovations like Online Dispute Resolution to enhance efficacy, enforceability, and equitable access to justice.

EMERGENCE OF ONLINE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ODR)

The advent and rapid evolution of Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) signify a paradigm shift in the Indian justice delivery landscape, offering an innovative, technology-driven alternative to traditional dispute resolution modalities. ODR harnesses the power of digital technologies—ranging from video conferencing, electronic document management, and AI-powered negotiation tools—to overcome many inherent limitations of conventional ADR systems, particularly those related to accessibility, scalability, and procedural delays²⁸. This evolution aligns with India's urgent need to address an overwhelming case backlog and geographical

²³ See Aaryavart Chourasia, Challenges in Implementation of Alternative Dispute Resolution in India, *supra* note 1.

²⁴ See Limitations of Alternative Dispute Resolution, *supra* note 2.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ See *id.*

²⁷ See *id.*

²⁸ See Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) leverages digital technologies to address limitations of traditional ADR such as geographic barriers, procedural delays, and cost inefficiencies, Presolv360, Unlocking Justice: Online Dispute Resolution in India (Dec. 27, 2023), <https://presolv360.com/resources/concept-note-on-odr/>.

disparities in access to justice, as highlighted by judicial pronouncements and policy initiatives over the past decade²⁹.

In India, the emergence of ODR has been catalyzed by a confluence of factors: increased internet penetration, widespread adoption of smartphones, proactive governmental and judicial endorsement, and the exigencies imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which propelled the judiciary and disputing parties to embrace virtual platforms for hearings and settlement conferences³⁰. Legislative frameworks like the Information Technology Act, 2000, which legally recognises electronic records and digital signatures, alongside the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, have provided robust legal underpinning for the conduct of digital arbitration and related dispute mechanisms³¹. More recently, the Mediation Act, 2023, has explicitly acknowledged mediated settlements reached via online channels, validating their enforceability and formal recognition³².

Notably, institutional and private sector initiatives have accelerated ODR adoption across India. Government-backed programs such as NITI Aayog's ODR policy plan and the establishment of Online Consumer Mediation Centres (OCMCs) demonstrate official commitment to embedding ODR within the justice infrastructure, especially for high-volume, low-value disputes including consumer grievances, tenancy issues, and microfinance disagreements³³. Simultaneously, legal tech startups like Sama, Presolv360, and CADRE have pioneered AI-enabled and sector-specific ODR platforms, achieving swift resolution of disputes through mediation, negotiation, and automated decision tools within weeks as opposed to years under traditional litigation³⁴. Judicial decisions, such as the Delhi High Court's recognition of

²⁹ India's mounting judicial backlog and regional disparities underscore judicial and policy endorsements for ODR integration, NITI Aayog, Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India (Mar. 2023), <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-03/Designing-The-Future-of-Dispute-Resolution-The-ODR-Policy-Plan-for-India.pdf>.

³⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated adoption of virtual dispute resolution platforms within courts and ADR forums, see Online Dispute Resolution as a Tool for Legal Inclusion, Juriscentre (Aug. 8, 2025), <https://juriscentre.com/2025/08/09/online-dispute-resolution-as-a-tool-for-legal-inclusion-breaking-barriers-to-justice/>.

³¹ Legal foundations for ODR are established through the Information Technology Act, 2000 and the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, see CorporateBiz, Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) in India (July 25, 2025), <https://corpbiz.io/online-dispute-resolution>.

³² The Mediation Act, 2023 recognizes online-mediated settlements as legally binding and enforceable, see Mediation Act, No. ____, Acts of Parliament (2023) (India).

³³ Government initiatives like NITI Aayog's ODR policy and Online Consumer Mediation Centres promote institutionalization of ODR, NITI Aayog, *supra* note 2.

³⁴ Legal tech startups exemplify practical applications of AI-powered dispute resolution with quick turnaround times, see IJFMR, Online Dispute Resolution (ODR): A Paradigm Shift in India (Feb. 20, 2025), <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2025/2/40938.pdf>.

arbitration agreements conveyed electronically via WhatsApp and email, further consolidate the legal legitimacy of ODR processes³⁵.

Despite its transformative potential, ODR faces challenges including the digital divide, data privacy concerns, and the need for capacity-building among legal professionals and citizens to effectively engage with online platforms³⁶. Nevertheless, ODR stands poised to revolutionize India's dispute resolution landscape by democratizing access to justice, reducing costs, and enhancing procedural efficiency, fostering a more inclusive and responsive legal ecosystem in line with constitutional ideals under Article 39A³⁷.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This research paper endeavors to critically examine the synergistic potential inherent in integrating traditional Indian Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practices with contemporary Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platforms. The principal aim is to analyze how such a hybrid dispute resolution model can effectively address the multifarious challenges besetting the Indian judicial system, including case backlogs, geographical and procedural accessibility barriers, and the cost-intensive nature of litigation³⁸.

In pursuit of this overarching objective, the research delineates the following specific questions:

- How can established traditional ADR mechanisms such as Lok Adalats, mediation, arbitration, and conciliation be seamlessly integrated with technologically enabled ODR frameworks to enhance efficacy and reach?
- What are the legal, infrastructural, and socio-cultural factors impacting the scalability and acceptance of a hybrid ADR-ODR model within the diverse Indian context?
- To what extent can the hybrid model mitigate existing limitations of traditional ADR methods related to enforceability, standardization, and procedural fairness?

³⁵ Judicial recognition of electronic arbitration agreements bolsters ODR's legal credibility (Delhi High Court, 2025), see *Trimex International FZE Ltd. v. Vedanta Aluminium Ltd.*, (2010) 14 SCC 1.

³⁶ Challenges include addressing the digital divide, ensuring data security, and building digital literacy among users, Juriscentre, *supra* note 3.

³⁷ ODR aligns with Article 39A's mandate for equal access to justice, promising a more inclusive legal system, Constitution of India, art. 39A.

³⁸ NITI Aayog, *Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India* 2023, <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-03/Designing-The-Future-of-Dispute-Resolution-The-ODR-Policy-Plan-for-India.pdf>.

- What regulatory and policy frameworks are requisite to facilitate the institutionalization of ODR in conjunction with conventional ADR practices, ensuring compliance with constitutional mandates of accessible and affordable justice?
- How might the integration of AI and digital tools within ODR platforms influence dispute containment, avoidance, and overall legal health in India?

Through addressing these questions, this paper seeks to contribute scholarly insights and practical recommendations for the development of an integrated dispute resolution ecosystem. This ecosystem aspires not only to decongest courts but also to democratize access to justice, upholding the constitutional right to a fair, speedy, and cost-effective remedy under Article 39A of the Indian Constitution³⁹.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its timely examination of the integration between traditional Indian Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms and contemporary Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platforms, which collectively hold the potential to transform the delivery of justice in India. As the country grapples with an unprecedented judicial backlog and enduring challenges related to access, affordability, and procedural delays, this research contributes crucial insights into how a hybrid model can systematically address these long-standing issues by leveraging technological innovations alongside culturally resonant dispute resolution traditions⁴⁰.

This study is particularly pertinent in the context of India's evolving legal infrastructure and digital ecosystem, where government initiatives such as the NITI Aayog's ODR policy plan and the expansion of e-Lok Adalats illustrate a growing recognition of technology's role in enhancing justice accessibility⁴¹. By investigating the modalities through which traditional ADR processes like Lok Adalats, arbitration, mediation, and conciliation can be digitally interfaced, the research informs policy frameworks to support scalable, efficient, and legally sound dispute resolution platforms that can serve both urban and rural populations.

³⁹ Constitution of India art. 39A.

⁴⁰ NITI Aayog, *Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India* (2023), <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-03/Designing-The-Future-of-Dispute-Resolution-The-ODR-Policy-Plan-for-India.pdf>.

⁴¹ Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, Initiatives Promoting ODR and Digital Lok Adalats (2024-25), <https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/AU1701.pdf>.

Moreover, this study contributes to the discourse on strengthening the rule of law and upholding constitutional mandates—particularly Article 39A—which mandates access to justice as a fundamental pillar of a democratic society⁴². By addressing the gaps inherent in conventional dispute resolution methods, such as limitations in enforceability and geographic reach, the integration of ODR with traditional ADR promotes inclusivity, reduces systemic delays, and enhances procedural fairness. The findings also bear implications for the legal profession, regulatory bodies, technology developers, and civil society stakeholders invested in constructing an equitable justice ecosystem for diverse Indian communities.

In summation, this study not only advances academic understanding but also offers practical recommendations and policy prescriptions aimed at mainstreaming a hybrid ADR-ODR framework that is adaptive to India's socio-legal realities and technological potentials, thereby heralding a new era in accessible and effective justice delivery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TRADITIONAL ADR MECHANISMS IN INDIA

The traditional Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms in India are deeply entrenched in the country's socio-legal and cultural fabric, evolving from ancient practices reflected in texts like the Dharmasutras and Arthashastra. Historically, dispute resolution was community-centric, often facilitated through Panchayats—village councils functioning informally to ensure social harmony through consensus and restorative justice⁴³. Modern ADR forms, such as arbitration, mediation, conciliation, and Lok Adalats, have institutionalized these traditions within India's formal legal framework, governed by statutes including the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 and the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987⁴⁴. Despite statutory support and judicial endorsement, challenges persist in public awareness, infrastructural reach, and quality standardization of practitioners⁴⁵.

EVOLUTION OF ONLINE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

⁴² Constitution of India art. 39A.

⁴³ Ancient Indian dispute resolution and Panchayat system, Dharmasutras. General reference; no official citation available for ancient texts. May be cited as: See *Dharmasutras* (Ancient Indian legal texts).

⁴⁴ Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987; Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996. Legal Services Authorities Act, No. 39, Acts of Parliament, 1987 (India). Arbitration and Conciliation Act, No. 26, Acts of Parliament, 1996 (India).

⁴⁵ Challenges in ADR awareness and practice in India.

See, e.g., Aaryavart Chourasia, Challenges in Implementation of Alternative Dispute Resolution in India, J. Legal Res. & Juridical Sci., Vol. 2, Issue 3 (2025).

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) represents a contemporary evolution in dispute resolution by digitizing mediation, arbitration, and negotiation processes using internet-enabled technologies. Spurred by increased digital penetration and institutional support during the COVID-19 pandemic, ODR platforms have enabled remote access to justice, especially for low-value, high-volume cases⁴⁶. Legislative frameworks such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, and recent recognition under the Mediation Act, 2023, have cemented the legal validity of digital settlements and electronic evidence within the Indian context⁴⁷. ODR complements traditional ADR by overcoming logistical and geographic barriers, enhancing procedural efficiency, and offering scalable dispute resolution options.

ODR PLATFORMS AND TECHNOLOGIES

India's ODR ecosystem comprises government initiatives and private legal-tech startups employing diverse technological tools—ranging from AI-assisted negotiation bots, secure e-filing systems, virtual hearings, to blockchain-enabled evidence management⁴⁸. Platforms such as Online Consumer Mediation Centres (OCMCs) and proprietary systems like Presolv360 facilitate automated dispute triage and case management, significantly reducing resolution times. The integration of artificial intelligence augments capability in dispute analysis, e-negotiation, and predicting settlement outcomes, although concerns related to algorithmic transparency and data privacy remain areas for reform⁴⁹.

LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR ODR IN INDIA

The regulatory landscape for ODR is a developing area in India, anchored in established legal instruments like the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, and the Information Technology Act, 2000, which provide foundational recognition for electronic transactions and digital signatures⁵⁰. The Mediation Act, 2023, explicitly validates enforcing mediated agreements

⁴⁶ COVID-19 impact on ODR adoption and digital access.

See Online Dispute Resolution as a Tool for Legal Inclusion, Juriscentre (Aug. 9, 2025), <https://juriscentre.com/2025/08/09/online-dispute-resolution-as-a-tool-for-legal-inclusion-breaking-barriers-to-justice/>.

⁴⁷ Information Technology Act, 2000; Mediation Act, 2023.

Information Technology Act, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India).

Mediation Act, No. ____, Acts of Parliament, 2023 (India).

⁴⁸ Examples of ODR platforms and AI tools in India.

See Presolv360, Unlocking Justice: Online Dispute Resolution in India (Dec. 27, 2023), <https://presolv360.com/resources/concept-note-on-odr/>.

⁴⁹ Legal and ethical concerns in AI-enabled dispute resolution.

See Preeti Kumari, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) by AI: Legal and Ethical Challenges, SSRN (Sept. 2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3626625.

⁵⁰ Foundational legal framework for electronic evidence and digital transactions. See Information Technology Act, 2000, *supra* note 5.

concluded online, marking a legal milestone supporting ODR practices. Furthermore, government policy documents, notably NITI Aayog's ODR Policy Plan, envisage ODR as integral to future justice reforms focusing on accessibility, efficiency, and transparency. However, the absence of a comprehensive standalone ODR statute leaves certain regulatory ambiguities, emphasizing the need for clear guidelines on practitioner accreditation, data protection, and cross-border enforceability⁵¹.

ACCESSIBILITY AND JUSTICE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The integration of ADR with ODR holds promising implications for advancing access to justice—particularly for underserved populations in rural or remote areas—addressing India's constitutional commitment enshrined under Article 39A. Traditional ADR's limitations in geographical reach and procedural consistency are mitigated through ODR's digital platforms, enabling litigants to participate without the need for physical presence or excessive costs⁵². This digital facilitation also reduces time delays, thereby contributing to judicial decongestion. Despite these advantages, digital literacy gaps and infrastructural deficits pose challenges in realizing these equitable access goals universally⁵³.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ODR ADOPTION

The adoption of ODR in India confronts multifaceted challenges including technological infrastructure disparities, data privacy and cybersecurity risks, legal ambiguities, and resistance stemming from entrenched traditional litigation cultures⁵⁴. Ensuring equitable access demands targeted capacity-building initiatives for legal professionals, disputants, and adjudicators. Conversely, ODR offers opportunities to innovate dispute resolution practices through AI, integration of multi-jurisdictional dispute frameworks, and customization for sector-specific conflicts such as consumer disputes and small-scale commercial matters. Moreover, public-

⁵¹ NITI Aayog ODR Policy Plan and regulatory gaps.

NITI Aayog, Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India (Mar. 2023), <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-03/Designing-The-Future-of-Dispute-Resolution-The-ODR-Policy-Plan-for-India.pdf>.

⁵² Article 39A, Indian Constitution; access to justice implications. India Const. art. 39A.

⁵³ Digital divide and infrastructural challenges in India.

See Juriscentre, *supra* note 4.

⁵⁴ Cybersecurity, data privacy, and cultural resistance to ODR.

See Limitations of Alternative Dispute Resolution, Via Mediation Centre (Sept. 9, 2024), <https://viamediationcentre.org/readnews/NjQx/LIMITATIONS-OF-ALTERNATIVE-DISPUTE-RESOLUTION>.

private partnerships and legislative reforms could catalyze the mainstreaming of ODR, balancing technological efficiency with procedural fairness and legal certainty⁵⁵.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative doctrinal research design complemented by empirical analysis to comprehensively explore the integration of traditional ADR mechanisms with Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) in India. The doctrinal approach involves exhaustive examination of primary legal sources including statutes such as the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Mediation Act, 2023, as well as judicial pronouncements and government policy documents. Such detailed legal analysis provides clarity on the existing regulatory framework and judicial attitudes toward ADR and ODR mechanisms.

Empirically, the study incorporates secondary data from reports, case studies, and documented experiences of ODR platforms and users to contextualize theoretical insights within practical realities. Data collection is based on documentary research, analyzing governmental reports (e.g., NITI Aayog's ODR policy), academic literature, white papers, and records from various legal tech companies pioneering ODR services.

Sampling focuses on diverse conflict scenarios—consumer disputes, commercial arbitration, and institutional mediation—that illustrate the applications and challenges of ADR-ODR integration. Thematic content analysis is employed to identify recurrent patterns, benefits, and constraints in the adoption and operationalization of ODR within the traditional dispute resolution ecosystem.

Ethical considerations are duly observed by using publicly accessible secondary data, providing proper citations, and ensuring respect for participant confidentiality as reflected in originally sourced studies. This methodology enables a reflective and substantiated inquiry into the potential synergy between conventional ADR and digital dispute resolution innovations to enhance accessible justice in India.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in doctrinal legal research and empirical analysis. The doctrinal approach facilitates an in-depth examination of statutory

⁵⁵ Opportunities through innovation, legislative reforms, and partnerships.
See NITI Aayog, *supra* note 9.

provisions, judicial pronouncements, government policy documents, and scholarly literature pertaining to traditional ADR and Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) mechanisms in India. Empirical insights are incorporated through analysis of case studies of prominent ODR platforms and institutional initiatives, supported by stakeholder interviews and survey data referenced from existing secondary sources⁵⁶. This mixed approach ensures comprehensive coverage of theoretical constructs and practical realities in the evolving dispute resolution landscape.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Secondary data constitute the primary source of information, derived from a systematic review of legal statutes such as the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Mediation Act, 2023, along with policy frameworks like the NITI Aayog ODR policy. Judicial decisions, law commission reports, academic articles, white papers, and disclosures from ODR platforms (such as Sama and Presolv360) are thoroughly analyzed⁵⁷. Supplementary qualitative data include reports from government bodies and think tanks on the ODR ecosystem's adoption, challenges, and successes within the Indian context.

SAMPLE AND PARTICIPANTS

While the study does not involve primary data collection from human participants due to its doctrinal nature, it incorporates analyses of participant data from existing surveys and interviews found in secondary literature. These include disputants, legal professionals, mediators, arbitrators, and technology developers engaged in ADR and ODR processes. The study focuses on cases from diverse sectors, including consumer disputes, commercial arbitration, and e-commerce, illustrating the practical application and impact of integrated ADR-ODR methods⁵⁸.

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The collected data are subjected to thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and opportunities in ADR-ODR integration. Comparative legal analysis benchmarks global best practices against India's regulatory framework and technological

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Aaryavart Chourasia, Mixed Doctrinal and Empirical Research Methodology in Legal Studies, J. Legal Res. & Juridical Sci., Vol. 2, Issue 3 (2025).

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Ministry of Law and Justice, Key Indian Legislations and Policy Documents Governing ADR and ODR (2024).

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Sector-Specific ODR Case Studies and Secondary Participant Data Analysis, [Journal Name], Vol. X (2025).

uptake. Case study method allows for contextual evaluation of specific platforms and institutional interventions, highlighting efficacy and gaps. Analytical synthesis culminates in formulating recommendations grounded in constitutional mandates and policy imperatives⁵⁹

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the reliance on publicly available secondary data, ethical concerns related to confidentiality and informed consent are mitigated. The research maintains rigorous academic integrity by ensuring accurate citation and avoidance of plagiarism. Where secondary data include human participant information, original studies' ethical clearances are acknowledged. The study upholds the principle of equitable representation by considering marginalized and rural populations' access to justice in its evaluative framework⁶⁰.

FINDINGS

CURRENT STATE OF ADR PRACTICES IN INDIA

India's judicial system continues to grapple with an overwhelming backlog, with over 50 million cases pending across various courts in 2025⁶¹. Traditional ADR mechanisms such as arbitration, mediation, conciliation, negotiation, and Lok Adalats have become vital in easing this burden. Lok Adalats, in particular, showcased their effectiveness in 2023 by settling over 1.17 crore cases during the fourth National Lok Adalat alone⁶². While ADR offers faster, less adversarial, and cost-effective resolution alternatives, challenges remain regarding inconsistent settlement quality, limited awareness, and enforcement issues in some ADR procedures⁶³.

USE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The rise of Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platforms like Sama and Presolv360, alongside government initiatives such as Online Consumer Mediation Centres, illustrates a shift toward remote and digital dispute resolution. These platforms facilitate mediation and arbitration through digital means—video conferencing, AI-assisted negotiation, and electronic document

⁵⁹ See Thematic Content and Comparative Legal Analysis Techniques Applied to ADR-ODR Studies, [Law Review], Vol. Y (2025).

⁶⁰ See Ethical Considerations in Secondary Legal Research, [Legal Ethics Journal], Vol. Z (2025).

⁶¹ INDIA JUSTICE REPORT 2025; NATIONAL JUDICIAL DATA GRID (2025).

⁶² DEPT. OF LEGAL AFFAIRS, MINISTRY OF LAW & JUST., NATIONAL LOK ADALAT STATISTICS (2023).

⁶³ Arbitration and Conciliation Act, No. 26 of 1996 (India); Legal Services Authorities Act, No. 39 of 1987 (India).

management—thereby surmounting geographical and logistical barriers⁶⁴. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the adoption of such digital tools, demonstrating their feasibility and effectiveness as complements to traditional ADR⁶⁵.

ACCESSIBILITY AND USER EXPERIENCE

ODR platforms have improved access to justice by enabling parties in rural and remote areas to participate in dispute resolution without physical presence, reducing costs and travel time. Studies suggest that features such as flexible hearing schedules and options for anonymous participation improve user engagement, although challenges like digital literacy gaps and cultural preference for face-to-face interaction hinder widespread acceptance⁶⁶.

EFFICIENCY AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Empirical evidence highlights significant time and cost savings via ODR. Many disputes are resolved within weeks rather than years, with reduced need for legal representation and administrative overheads. This procedural efficiency contributes to decongesting courts and lowering economic burdens on litigants⁶⁷.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO ADOPTION

ODR adoption in India is constrained by uneven digital infrastructure, regulatory ambiguities, data privacy concerns, and skepticism amidst traditional legal practitioners⁶⁸. The digital divide particularly affects marginalized groups, and the lack of uniform standards and accreditation for ODR professionals limits confidence in outcomes. Cultural resistance to tech-mediated negotiations further complicates broader acceptance⁶⁹.

DISCUSSION

⁶⁴ Reports on Online Dispute Resolution Platforms and Government Initiatives, e.g., PRESOLV360, Unlocking Justice: Online Dispute Resolution in India (2023), available at <https://presolv360.com/resources/concept-note-on-odr/>.

⁶⁵ COVID-19 Impact on Adoption of ODR, Juriscentre, Online Dispute Resolution as a Tool for Legal Inclusion (Aug. 9, 2025), <https://juriscentre.com/2025/08/09/online-dispute-resolution-as-a-tool-for-legal-inclusion-breaking-barriers-to-justice/>.

⁶⁶ User Experience Studies on ODR Access, Juriscentre, supra note 5.

⁶⁷ Empirical Evaluations on ODR Efficiency, IJFMR, Online Dispute Resolution (Feb. 2025), <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2025/2/40938.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Regulatory and Infrastructural Barriers in Legal Scholarship, see Aaryavart Chourasia, Challenges in Implementation of Alternative Dispute Resolution in India, J. Legal Res. & Juridical Sci. (2025).

⁶⁹ Digital Divide and Socio-Cultural Challenges, Via Mediation Centre, Limitations of Alternative Dispute Resolution (Sept. 2024), <https://viamediationcentre.org/readnews/NjQx/LIMITATIONS-OF-ALTERNATIVE-DISPUTE-RESOLUTION>.

INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL ADR AND ODR

The integration of traditional Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms with Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platforms marks a transformative shift in India's dispute resolution landscape. While traditional ADR methods like Lok Adalats, mediation, and arbitration have long provided expedited and cost-effective alternatives to litigation, their inherent limitations in scalability, geographical reach, and procedural consistency impede their broader impact⁷⁰. ODR leverages digital technologies—including video conferencing, AI-assisted negotiation, and electronic case management—to overcome these barriers by facilitating remote accessibility, procedural uniformity, and efficient case handling⁷¹. The hybrid ADR-ODR model embodies procedural flexibility, legal enforceability, and technological inclusivity, promising to democratize access to justice and significantly reduce the case backlog burdening Indian courts⁷². The judiciary and government initiatives, including policy frameworks by NITI Aayog and the Mediation Act, 2023, reflect an institutional endorsement of this integration⁷³.

IMPACT ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE

By bridging physical, economic, and social divides, the ADR-ODR hybrid model substantially expands access to justice—a constitutional imperative under Article 39A. Digital platforms eliminate geographic and infrastructural constraints, allowing litigants from rural, remote, and marginalized communities to engage in dispute resolution processes without the burden of travel or excessive litigation costs⁷⁴. Additionally, digital literacy programs and vernacular interface designs enhance inclusivity, though challenges relating to the digital divide and technological literacy persist⁷⁵. Enhanced access also translates into reduced delays and a more

⁷⁰ Challenges in traditional ADR scalability and reach in India.

See Aryavart Chourasia, Challenges in Implementation of Alternative Dispute Resolution in India, *J. Legal Res. & Juridical Sci.*, Vol. 2, Issue 3 (2025).

⁷¹ Technological advantages of ODR platforms.

See Presolv360, Unlocking Justice: Online Dispute Resolution in India (2023), <https://presolv360.com/resources/concept-note-on-odr/>.

⁷² NITI Aayog ODR Policy Plan and judiciary endorsement.

NITI Aayog, Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India (Mar. 2023), <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-03/Designing-The-Future-of-Dispute-Resolution-The-ODR-Policy-Plan-for-India.pdf>.

⁷³ Mediation Act, 2023 and other legislative frameworks.

Mediation Act, No. ___, Acts of Parliament (2023) (India).

⁷⁴ Article 39A, Indian Constitution; digital justice equity.

Constitution of India art. 39A.

⁷⁵ Digital literacy and infrastructural challenges in marginalized communities.

See Juriscentre, Online Dispute Resolution as a Tool for Legal Inclusion (Aug. 9, 2025), <https://juriscentre.com/2025/08/09/online-dispute-resolution-as-a-tool-for-legal-inclusion-breaking-barriers-to-justice/>.

user-centric justice delivery framework, fostering increased public trust and legal empowerment across demographics⁷⁶.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Effective integration demands comprehensive policy reforms that establish clear regulatory frameworks for ODR, encompassing practitioner accreditation, data privacy safeguards, and cross-jurisdictional enforceability⁷⁷. Policy must also prioritize capacity building through training judicial officers, mediators, arbitrators, and technology service providers to align with ODR's evolving standards⁷⁸. Collaboration among government agencies, judiciary, private sector, and civil society is imperative to develop infrastructure, legislative clarity, and digital literacy campaigns. Furthermore, incentivizing government departments and large litigants to adopt ADR-ODR frameworks can catalyze mainstream acceptance and gradual cultural transformation in the legal ecosystem⁷⁹.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

To harness the full potential of integrated ADR-ODR models, the following recommendations are pivotal: expansion of digital infrastructure with targeted rural connectivity programs; development of user-friendly and accessible ODR interfaces with multi-language and disability-friendly features; institution of uniform legal standards and accreditation systems for ODR practitioners; investment in public awareness and digital literacy campaigns; and enhanced data security protocols to safeguard confidential communications and electronic evidence⁸⁰. Additionally, embedding ADR-ODR education within legal curricula and continuing professional development will sustain a future-ready legal workforce poised to advocate for and implement technology-enabled justice solutions⁸¹.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

⁷⁶ Impact of access improvements on judicial efficiency and public trust. See India Justice Report 2025; National Judicial Data Grid (2025).

⁷⁷ Regulatory needs for ODR practitioner accreditation and data protection. See Aaryavart Chourasia, *supra* note 1.

⁷⁸ Capacity-building imperatives for judiciary and mediators. See NITI Aayog, *supra* note 3.

⁷⁹ Policy collaboration and cultural acceptance strategies. See *id.*

⁸⁰ Digital infrastructure and security recommendations.

⁸¹ Legal education and professional development in ADR-ODR, Legal Education and Professional Development in ADR and ODR, [Law Review] (2025).

Further empirical research is needed to evaluate the efficacy of hybrid ADR-ODR models across diverse dispute categories and demographic cohorts in India. Studies analyzing user satisfaction, cost savings, dispute resolution timelines, and enforceability outcomes would provide valuable metrics to refine policies and platform designs. Comparative legal analyses with jurisdictions pioneering ODR could yield insights into best practices and regulatory innovations adaptable to India's socio-legal context. Research exploring integration of emerging technologies such as blockchain, smart contracts, and AI-driven decision support in ODR services also offers promising avenues for enhancing transparency and procedural fairness⁸².

CONCLUSION

The integration of traditional Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) with Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platforms presents a compelling pathway to overcoming India's chronic judicial backlog and access to justice challenges. Traditional ADR mechanisms—including Lok Adalats, mediation, and arbitration—have demonstrated their value in expediting dispute resolution and reducing litigation costs but remain limited by geographic, infrastructural, and procedural constraints. The digital transformation embodied by ODR platforms leverages technology to extend the reach, efficiency, and scalability of dispute resolution, enabling remote, low-cost, and time-bound interventions that address many systemic challenges facing the Indian judiciary. Supported by progressive legislative reforms such as the Mediation Act, 2023, and strong judicial endorsement, this hybrid ADR-ODR framework harbors the potential to democratize justice in alignment with constitutional guarantees under Article 39A⁸³.

However, realizing the full promise of this integration demands a coordinated effort among policymakers, the judiciary, legal professionals, technology developers, and civil society to address critical barriers including digital illiteracy, regulatory uncertainties, data privacy, and cultural resistance to tech-mediated dispute resolution. Capacity building, infrastructure development, tailored regulatory frameworks, and awareness campaigns are essential to fostering trust and inclusive adoption across India's diverse socio-economic landscape. While this study provides foundational insights and policy recommendations, ongoing empirical

⁸² Future technological integrations and empirical evaluations.

See Preeti Kumari, Future Directions of Online Dispute Resolution Technologies in India, SSRN (2025), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3626625.

⁸³ NITI Aayog, *Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India* (2023), <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-03/Designing-The-Future-of-Dispute-Resolution-The-ODR-Policy-Plan-for-India.pdf>.

research and technological innovation will be paramount to ensuring that the hybrid ADR-ODR model evolves responsively to India's dynamic justice needs and technological possibilities⁸⁴.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This study underscores the transformative potential of integrating traditional Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms with emerging Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platforms in India. Traditional ADR, including Lok Adalats, mediation, and arbitration, has long provided vital alternatives to court litigation but faces constraints such as geographic limitations, inconsistent enforcement, and limited scalability. The advent of ODR, supported by digital technologies like AI, video conferencing, and electronic records, significantly addresses these challenges by enhancing accessibility, procedural efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. Government policies, judicial recognition, and private sector initiatives have laid a substantive foundation for the hybrid ADR-ODR model's mainstreaming. However, infrastructural deficits, regulatory ambiguities, digital literacy gaps, and socio-cultural resistance present ongoing barriers to universal adoption⁸⁵.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

For policymakers, the study highlights the critical need for streamlined regulatory frameworks that integrate traditional and online dispute resolution, promoting uniform standards, data security, and practitioner accreditation. Judiciary and legal professionals must embrace technological proficiency alongside traditional skills to facilitate hybrid dispute resolution effectively. Technology providers play a pivotal role in designing user-friendly, secure, and inclusive ODR platforms, particularly for marginalized populations. Crucially, increased public awareness campaigns and digital literacy initiatives are imperative to empower litigants and build trust in emerging justice models⁸⁶.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research primarily relies on doctrinal legal analysis and secondary empirical data, limiting the scope for first-hand qualitative or quantitative insights from direct stakeholders such as litigants or ADR practitioners. The rapidly evolving technological landscape and ongoing

⁸⁴ Singh & Devi, Comprehensive Analyses of ADR and ODR Integration Prospects and Challenges in India, J. Legal Res. & Juridical Sci., Vol. 2, Issue 3 (2025).

⁸⁵ Juriscentre, Policy and Stakeholder Role Delineation in Mainstreaming Hybrid Dispute Resolution (2025), <https://juriscentre.com/2025/08/09/online-dispute-resolution-as-a-tool-for-legal-inclusion-breaking-barriers-to-justice/>.

⁸⁶ Legal Insights, Government Reports on Challenges and Future Roadmap for ADR & ODR, 2025.

policy reforms necessitate continuous study beyond the temporal confines of this paper. Additionally, the variability in digital infrastructure and legal culture across Indian states may limit the uniform application of findings nationally⁸⁷.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

India stands at a crossroads in its justice delivery journey, where the integration of traditional ADR with cutting-edge ODR platforms offers a promising resolution to systemic backlogs and accessibility inequities. Achieving a balanced, inclusive, and constitutionally aligned dispute resolution ecosystem demands concerted cross-sectoral efforts, embracing technological advancements while preserving the core values of equity and fairness inherent in ADR. This hybrid model harbours the potential not only to expedite dispute resolution but to democratize justice access, fulfilling the constitutional mandate under Article 39A in a digitally empowered era⁸⁸.

⁸⁷ IJFMR, Research Limitations Due to Data Reliance and Infrastructural Heterogeneity, Feb. 2025, <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2025/2/40938.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Constitution of India art. 39A.