

## Scammed into Silence: A Study of Digital Arrest Cybercrimes in India Through the Lens of Ai Manipulation, Legal Loopholes, and Socio-Financial Impact

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### ABSTRACT

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the emergence of “Digital Arrest” as a sophisticated form of cybercrime has raised significant concerns. This paper investigates the growing menace wherein cybercriminals exploit technology to impersonate law enforcement or government officials, coercing victims through psychological manipulation and intimidation—often over prolonged video calls. Victims are forced into compliance under the false pretense of legal threats, resulting in financial loss, emotional trauma, and erosion of trust in digital systems. This study delves into the various tactics employed in digital arrest scams, including identity fraud, ransomware attacks, and unauthorized control over digital assets, which effectively create a state of virtual detention. By analyzing real-life case studies, current legal frameworks, and enforcement challenges—especially within the Indian context—this paper reveals critical gaps in cybersecurity and judicial systems. The research further evaluates the responses from the Indian Government, Supreme Court, and High Courts, highlighting ongoing efforts and recommending policy reforms and preventive strategies. Ultimately, this study underscores the urgent need for robust cybersecurity laws, public awareness, and coordinated institutional responses to combat the evolving threat of digital arrest in the modern digital ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Digital Arrest, Cybercrime, Identity Fraud, Ransomware, Legal Impersonation, Psychological Manipulation, Cybersecurity, Virtual Detention, Digital Rights, Law Enforcement Challenges.

### INTRODUCTION

In the age of increasing digital connectivity, cybercriminals are leveraging advanced technologies to perpetrate sophisticated fraud schemes. One of the most alarming among them is the phenomenon known as “**digital arrest**” scams. This cybercrime involves impersonation of law enforcement officials or representatives of government bodies, where the victim is falsely accused of involvement in serious criminal offenses such as money laundering, drug smuggling, or financial fraud.

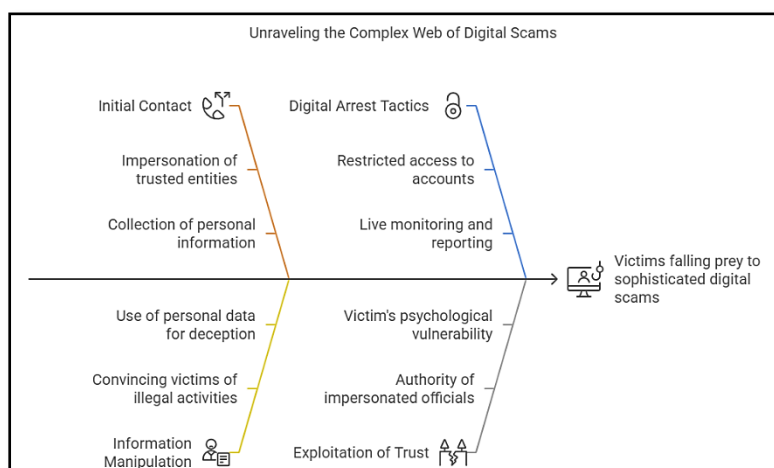


Figure 1: Structure of fraud

The perpetrators typically initiate contact via **VoIP calls, emails, or social media**, claiming to be from legitimate organizations such as the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Enforcement Directorate (ED), RBI, or Interpol**. Victims are told that their name is linked to illegal activities—like drug trafficking, money laundering, or international parcel fraud. They often present fake case numbers, warrants, or identity cards to appear convincing. In a typical digital arrest scam, the victim is **forced to stay on a video call continuously**, during which they are psychologically manipulated, threatened, and coerced into transferring money or sharing sensitive information to “resolve” the fabricated case. In many cases, **scammers use deepfake videos, spoofed caller IDs, and forged legal documents** to lend credibility to their claims.

Victims are then instructed to stay on a **video call**—sometimes for several hours or even days—under the pretense that they are being “monitored.” During this time, they are manipulated into transferring large sums of money, sharing bank details, or purchasing cryptocurrency or gift cards to avoid "legal consequences."

How Do Digital Arrest Scams Work?

Digital Arrest Scams follow a calculated process that combines technological deception with psychological manipulation to trap victims into believing they are involved in serious legal trouble. Here's how the typical scam unfolds. Here’s we showing detailed explanation of How Digital Arrest Scams Work designed in a clean, organized table format for easy understanding and presentation:

Table 1 Process of digital arrest scam

Stage	Description	Methods Used	Real Example / Notes
1. Initial Contact – The Hook	Victim receives a fake call or message posing as an official authority	- VoIP/spoofed international numbers- WhatsApp/Telegram calls- Emails with fake seals- SMS with fake case IDs- Impersonated social media DMs	<i>Mumbai, 2023:</i> Woman scammed via fake customs call about a parcel (Indian Express)[1.]
2. False Allegations – Creating Panic	Scammer accuses the victim of crimes like money laundering or drug trafficking	- Claims of suspicious Aadhaar/PAN use- Fake FIRs, summons, ID cards- Screenshots of seized items- Spoofed caller ID and fake documents	Used to shock and destabilize the victim emotionally
3. Isolation – Digital Detention	Victim is held on long video calls under the illusion of being monitored	- Video calls via WhatsApp, Zoom, Skype- Told not to speak to others- Calls last for hours or days	<i>Delhi, 2024:</i> Victim kept on video call for 10+ hours (The Hindu)[2]
4. Intimidation – Psychological Pressure	Scammer uses threats to force compliance and obedience	- Threats of arrest, media exposure- Claims call is being recorded- Told to act fast to "prove innocence"	Fear is used to override logic and force hasty decisions
5. Extortion – Financial Exploitation	Victim is forced to pay money or provide sensitive information	- Bank transfers, UPI, crypto, gift cards- Asked for Aadhaar, bank login, OTP- Multiple payments demanded	Victim may pay to avoid fake "legal action" or "penalty"
6. Aftermath – Disappearance & Realization	Scammer vanishes after receiving money; victim realizes the fraud	- Victim is blocked- Contact cut off- Scam discovered after family or police intervene	Difficult to trace as scams often operate from outside India

Escalation of Cybercrime in India

The past five years have witnessed a significant surge in **digital arrest scams** across India, characterized by fraudsters impersonating law enforcement officials to extort money from unsuspecting victims. This analysis delves into the trends, financial impacts, and contributing factors associated with these scams. Data from the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) indicates a **tripling** of digital arrest scam incidents between 2022 and 2025.

Table 2 Digital Arrest Scams & Related Cybercrimes in India (2022–2025)

Year	Reported Cases	Total Defrauded Amount (₹ Crore)	Notable Change
2022	39,925	₹91.14 Cr	Baseline Year
2024	1,23,672	₹1,935.51 Cr	Cases tripled, defrauded amount ↑ 21x
2025 (till Feb)	17,718	₹210.21 Cr	Already over 18% of 2024's cases in 2 months

The data regarding the surge in digital arrest scams and related cybercrimes in India was presented by **Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar**, in a written reply to the **Rajya Sabha**. The statistics were sourced from the **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP)**. [5]

The role of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** in amplifying the threat cannot be overstated. Tools like voice cloning, deepfake technology, and real-time face masking have enabled scammers to convincingly impersonate real officials, fabricate documents, and create realistic video environments that dupe even digitally literate individuals. This abuse of AI introduces profound challenges for detection, prevention, and legal attribution.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The landscape of cybercrime in India has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades, evolving from basic email frauds and phishing attacks to highly sophisticated scams involving ransomware, identity theft, financial fraud, and now, digital arrest scams. Initially, cyber offenses were relatively limited in scope and often stemmed from low-level phishing emails or hacking attempts. However, the rapid digitalization driven by government initiatives like Digital India has expanded the nation's digital footprint, simultaneously exposing users to increased vulnerabilities.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), cybercrime incidents have surged by 129% between 2017 and 2020, from 21,796 cases in 2017 to 50,035 in 2020. Fraud made up over 60% of these cases, followed by crimes involving extortion and sexual exploitation. The crime rate per lakh population rose from 3.3 in 2019 to 3.7 in 2020, highlighting the growing digital threat environment in India (NCRB, 2020). [4]

With the shift to remote work, online education, and digital payments post-pandemic, cybercriminals have adapted and refined their techniques. Scams like digital arrests reflect this evolution, wherein criminals impersonate law enforcement officers and psychologically coerce victims into compliance under fabricated legal pretenses. Artificial Intelligence has added a dangerous layer of sophistication to cybercrimes. While AI-driven systems help in fraud detection and cybersecurity enforcement, they are increasingly being weaponized by criminals. In digital arrest scams, voice cloning, deepfake videos, and spoofed identities are used to create convincingly real interactions. The use of AI has created a pressing need for enhanced digital literacy and legislative upgrades, as traditional law enforcement tools are often inadequate in detecting such high-tech deceptions. Several studies have highlighted the emerging role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in facilitating cybercrimes, particularly digital arrest scams. The following literature provides valuable insights into various dimensions of these cybercrimes, from psychological manipulation to legal challenges and technological countermeasures.

According to Jones and Patel provide an in-depth analysis of the psychological tactics used by cybercriminals in executing digital arrest frauds. Their study draws from social psychology and behavioral economics theories, explaining how scammers exploit fear, authority, and uncertainty to manipulate victims. [15] The use of official-like voices, threatening language, and fabricated evidence enhances the credibility of scams, forcing victims into compliance. Kumar and Singh focus on technological innovations that can be used to counter digital arrest scams. The study discusses the development of advanced security protocols, encryption methods, and AI-based systems capable of detecting fraudulent communications, voice spoofing, and deepfake content. It highlights the growing importance of AI not just as a threat vector but also as a tool for defense in cybersecurity. [12] Gupta and Sharma [7] present a comparative analysis of legal frameworks concerning digital arrest scams across various jurisdictions. Their research outlines the challenges faced in prosecuting cybercriminals due to jurisdictional limitations, anonymity, and technological advancements. The study further suggests strategies to strengthen legal mechanisms for dealing with AI-driven cybercrimes. Kumar [9] provide an extensive overview of digital crimes in India, including the increasing incidents of digital arrest scams. The study elaborates on the challenges encountered by law enforcement agencies in tracing and prosecuting offenders. It also discusses the socio-economic impact of such crimes on victims and organizations within the Indian context. According the Singh and Verma examine the existing legal framework to combat cybercrimes in India, with a particular focus on digital arrest scams. The research evaluates the effectiveness of the Information Technology Act, 2000, and related provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in addressing new-age cyber threats, emphasizing the need for legal reforms to tackle AI-driven crimes effectively.[13] The prevalence of digital fraud, including impersonation techniques such as digital arrest scams, has seen a significant rise globally. The study explores case studies and trends in cybercrime, emphasizing how cybercriminals are constantly evolving their techniques to exploit individuals and organizations. The research identifies digital arrest as a growing threat in the modern cyber landscape.

A Europol Report (2022) stated that AI-based tools are increasingly used to automate and scale scams, making them harder to detect. In India, several reports have confirmed the use of AI-generated voice calls and doctored video calls in digital arrest frauds, contributing to a sense of fear and legitimacy. Victims are often kept on video calls for hours—under constant surveillance—mimicking real interrogation or detention. [8] The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed modern life, revolutionizing communication, commerce, and access to information. However, with these benefits, there has also been a substantial increase in cybercrimes, where cybercriminals exploit technological developments to commit various illegal activities globally. One of the most alarming and emerging forms of such cybercrimes is the "Digital Arrest" scam — a deceptive practice that preys on individuals' lack of awareness regarding legal procedures Kuzior, A., Tiutiunyk, I., Zielińska, A., & Kelemen, R. [11]. In these scams, fraudsters often impersonate law enforcement officers or government officials and use fear-based manipulation and psychological pressure to exploit victims Dilek, Çakır, & Aydın, [10]. Cybercriminals commonly utilize advanced social engineering techniques, including the creation of fake legal documents, spoofed calls, and fake arrest warrants, to establish a false sense of authority and urgency. As a result, victims are coerced into disclosing sensitive personal information or making financial payments out of fear of legal consequences.

### Objective of Study

- To analyze the tools, planning, and techniques cybercriminals use in online arrest scams.
- In order to analyze the emotional, mental, and financial impact of digital arrest scams on the victims.
- To study national and global digital arrest scam case studies.

- To analyze the effectiveness of preventive measures, laws, and cyber security measures in avoiding digital arrest scams.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research methodology to analyze the concept of digital arrest scams and the strategies used by cybercriminals. The research is primarily based on secondary data collected from various authentic sources such as research journals, scholarly articles, government reports, cybercrime case studies, and news portals. Data was gathered using online platforms like Google Scholar, Research Gate, SSRN, and Cyber Security Journals and NEWS article to understand the nature, techniques, and impacts of digital arrest scams. Qualitative data analysis techniques such as content analysis and comparative study were applied to examine the emotional, financial, and psychological effects of these scams on victims. Additionally, case studies were analyzed to understand the real-life incidents of digital arrest scams in India and across the globe. The study also evaluates the legal framework and preventive measures implemented to combat such cybercrimes

## Major National Case Studies of Digital Arrest Scams in India

All the below-mentioned cases are referred from various credible news articles. The case summaries have been prepared based on *secondary data* collected from these news sources. The purpose of this compilation is for educational and research use only.

Table 3 Different Cyber Case Summary

S.No	Victim Description	Location	Amount Lost	Scam Details	Rescue / Action Taken	Source
1	Dubai-based Entrepreneur (Mr. Oberoi)	Bhopal	Nil	Impersonation by fake TRAI & CBI officials via video call	Friend reported to police; scam averted	The Times of India
2	77-Year-Old Woman	South Mumbai	₹3.8 crore	Told a parcel in her name contained drugs; kept on 24x7 video call for 1 month	Daughter alerted police	<a href="#">Indian Express</a>
3	IT Executive, Age 59	Pune	₹6.29 crore	CBI impersonation, money laundering claim	Filed FIR after realizing fraud	<a href="#">Times Now News</a>
4	Software Engineer (Female)	Gwalior	₹6 lakh	Accused of drug trafficking, interrogated for 9 hrs on video call	Suspected fraud, reported to police	<a href="#">India Today</a>
5	Advocate Jagmohan Shrivastava	Bhopal	₹16 lakh	Parcel to Beijing with MDMA drugs; forced to open new bank account	Not clearly mentioned	<a href="#">Dainik Bhaskar</a>
6	Nurse	Khandwa, MP	₹50,000	Digitally arrested for 21 hrs; accused of laundering	Neighbors informed police	<a href="#">The Quint</a>
7	Student, IIT Bombay	Mumbai	₹7.29 lakh	Phone misused for illegal acts; NOC trick	Realized fraud after research	<a href="#">India TV News</a>
8	Vardhman Group Head	Ludhiana	₹7 crore	Virtual courtroom scam with fake CJI; fake court orders shown	Not recovered; ongoing probe	<a href="#">The Print</a>
9	Woman, Age 50	Noida	₹11.11 lakh	Accused of laundering; detained over Skype for 10 hrs	Lodged complaint	<a href="#">Hindustan Times</a>
10	Woman, Age 23	Faridabad	₹2.5 lakh	Fake customs officer accused her of human trafficking	Not mentioned	Zee News

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### Common Patterns in Digital Arrest Frauds

An analysis of various recent digital arrest fraud cases in India reveals certain common patterns used by cybercriminals. In most of the incidents, fraudsters posed as officials from reputed law enforcement or government agencies like TRAI, CBI,

ED, Mumbai Cyber Crime Branch, or Customs Department. The victims were falsely accused of involvement in illegal activities such as drug trafficking, money laundering, or fraudulent financial transactions using their Aadhaar or bank details. The scammers would use psychological tactics to create fear and panic in the minds of victims by threatening them with arrest, imprisonment, freezing of bank accounts, or legal actions. Once the victim was terrified and isolated, fraudsters forced them into long video calls (termed as "Digital Arrest") to control them and prevent them from seeking help.

### Use of AI and Technology in Fraud

A notable trend in these cases is the increasing use of advanced technology tools by cybercriminals. Fraudsters are now leveraging AI-based techniques to make their scams more convincing:

- **Voice Cloning:** Some victims reported receiving calls where the fraudster's voice exactly matched the voice of known officials or even their family members, leading to confusion and trust.
- **Deepfakes:** Fraudsters created fake video calls showing fabricated arrest warrants, court orders, and even virtual courtrooms with impersonated judges, making the entire setup look highly authentic.
- **Spoofed Numbers & Fake Emails:** Calls appeared to be coming from genuine government helpline numbers or law enforcement agencies, increasing the credibility of the scam.

These technological tools are rapidly transforming cybercrime, making it difficult for victims to differentiate between genuine and fake communication.

### Financial and Emotional Impact on Victims of Digital Arrest Frauds

Victims are often tricked into transferring huge amounts of money, sometimes wiping out their entire life savings, business capital, or even taking loans under pressure. Fraudsters use fear tactics, accusing victims of involvement in criminal activities like money laundering, drugs, or cybercrimes. This creates extreme panic, anxiety, and mental pressure among victims. Many victims are forced to stay isolated during the fraud, being warned not to contact family or friends, which increases their helplessness and vulnerability. Along with financial losses, victims also suffer emotional trauma, stress, sleeplessness, and depression. In many cases, their mental health deteriorates due to shame, guilt, and trust issues after realizing the fraud. Moreover, the recovery of lost money is very difficult despite filing police or cybercrime complaints, adding to the victim's frustration. The fear of social embarrassment and legal complications further discourages victims from reporting these incidents. The emotional disturbance often extends to family members, creating financial instability and mental stress within households. Overall, the impact of digital arrest scams goes far beyond monetary loss, leaving long-lasting emotional scars on the victims.

### Legal Implications of Digital Arrest Scams

- **Violation of Cyber Laws:** Digital arrest scams involve multiple cybercrimes such as identity theft, impersonation, financial fraud, and illegal data collection, which fall under the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 in India.
- **Use of IPC Sections:** Scammers can be charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) like cheating (**Section 420**), criminal intimidation (**Section 503**), and impersonation (**Section 416**).
- **Challenges in Cross-Border Crimes:** Many digital arrest scams are operated from foreign countries, making it difficult for Indian law enforcement agencies to trace, investigate, and arrest the accused due to jurisdiction issues and lack of international legal cooperation.
- **Lack of Specific Provisions:** Currently, there are no specific laws directly addressing "digital arrest scams" in India, making it difficult for victims to get fast and appropriate legal remedies.
- **Role of Cyber Cells and CERT-In:** Victims can report these crimes to local cyber cells or the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), but limitations in technical expertise, resources, and international coordination often delay justice.
- **Difficulty in Recovery of Money:** Even if the scam is reported, recovering the lost money is challenging because funds are quickly transferred across multiple accounts or converted to cryptocurrency.
- **Limited Awareness of Legal Rights:** Many victims are unaware of their legal rights and the process of filing cybercrime complaints, which further delays action against scammers.



Reasons for Rise in Digital Arrests in India

- **Surge in Digital Transactions:** The rapid growth of digital payments, online banking, and e-commerce platforms has increased the number of potential targets for fraudsters, making people more susceptible to scams.
- **Lack of Digital Security Awareness:** Many people in India are still unaware of basic cybersecurity practices, such as verifying caller identity, not sharing personal information, and recognizing fraud indicators, which makes them easy targets.
- **Advancement in Fraud Techniques:** Scammers are now using advanced technology like AI-based voice cloning, fake video calls, professional-looking documents, and spoofed caller IDs, which makes their fraud appear legitimate and difficult to detect.
- **Southeast Asia as a Hub for Digital Arrest Fraud:** A large network of these scams is operated from Southeast Asian countries like Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. Weak local law enforcement, limited international cooperation, and poor regulation in these regions make it easier for fraudsters to operate without fear of punishment.

Legal and Policy Review

Existing Indian Laws and Their Limitations:

- **Information Technology Act, 2000:** The IT Act covers crimes like identity theft, hacking, phishing, and online fraud. However, it does not specifically address "digital arrest scams" or AI-driven fraud.
- **Indian Penal Code (IPC):** Sections like 419 (cheating by impersonation), 420 (cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property), and 506 (criminal intimidation) are used in such cases. But proving these crimes in the digital space is often difficult.
- **Limitations**
  - Lack of specific provisions for AI-based fraud, voice cloning, or deepfake scams.
  - Jurisdictional challenges in cases involving international fraudsters.
  - Slow investigation process due to limited technical expertise.
  - Poor digital awareness among police and victims.

Comparison with International Legal Frameworks

Table 4 Camparision between different laws related to cyber crime

Country/Framework	Key Legal Provisions	Strengths	Weaknesses
European Union (GDPR)	Strong privacy and data protection laws	Strict penalties for misuse of personal data	Focused more on privacy than fraud prevention
United States (CFAA, Wire Fraud Law)	Covers unauthorized access, fraud using communication devices	Strong enforcement agencies like FBI, Cyber Crime Task Forces	Limited to crimes within U.S. jurisdiction
Singapore (Cybersecurity Act)	Strong laws on critical infrastructure and fraud	Advanced cyber forensic techniques	Focus more on infrastructure protection
India (IT Act, IPC)	Covers basic cyber fraud and cheating	Broad coverage of online crimes	Outdated provisions for modern fraud methods

Role of Police and Cyber Cells in Victim Support and Prevention

- **Dedicated Cyber Cells:** Established in major cities to handle cybercrime complaints.
- **Helpline Numbers:** National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal ([www.cybercrime.gov.in](http://www.cybercrime.gov.in)) and 1930 helpline for financial fraud.

- **Challenges**

- Lack of technical training among police.
- Limited infrastructure for cyber forensic investigation.
- Delayed response time in many cases.

- **Preventive Measures**

- Awareness campaigns on social media and TV.
- Collaboration with banks and telecom operators to block scam accounts and numbers.
- Training programs for law enforcement on AI-driven fraud and digital scams.

### **Social and Ethical Implications**

Digital arrest scams have significant social and ethical implications that directly impact individuals and society at large. These scams primarily operate through fear-based manipulation, creating psychological pressure on victims by impersonating police or government officials. Victims often suffer from stress, anxiety, embarrassment, and in some extreme cases, even depression due to financial loss and public shame. Moreover, such scams lead to a serious erosion of trust in law enforcement agencies and digital systems, making people hesitant to respond to genuine calls from officials. The rise of these scams also highlights a crucial gap in digital literacy and societal readiness. Many people, especially in rural or less digitally-educated regions, lack awareness about online fraud prevention measures, making them easy targets. Ethically, these scams exploit fear, innocence, and lack of knowledge, creating a need for stronger awareness programs, ethical digital practices, and improved digital education to prepare society against such frauds.

### **Recommendations**

→ **Strengthening Legal Provisions and Fast-Track Procedures:**

There is a need to update and strengthen existing cyber laws in India to specifically address digital arrest scams. Special provisions for quicker reporting, investigation, and resolution of such cases through fast-track cybercrime courts can help victims get justice faster.

→ **Mandatory AI-Awareness Campaigns:**

The government and private sectors should organize nationwide awareness campaigns focused on educating citizens about AI-based fraud techniques like voice cloning, deepfakes, and fake video calls. This will help individuals to identify and avoid falling victim to such scams.

→ **Training for Law Enforcement in AI-Based Cybercrime:**

Police and cyber cell officials should be given regular training in the latest digital fraud trends and AI technologies. This will enhance their ability to handle complex cyber fraud cases and guide victims more efficiently.

→ **Encouraging Public-Private Partnerships in Cybersecurity:**

Collaborating with private cybersecurity firms, technology experts, and telecom companies can improve fraud detection systems, trace scam calls, and develop preventive technology. Such partnerships can ensure faster response and stronger cybersecurity infrastructure across the country.

### **CONCLUSION**



The study of digital arrest scams in India highlights the alarming rise of new-age cybercrimes that exploit fear, technology, and social engineering techniques to target innocent individuals. The key findings from the analysis indicate that fraudsters follow common patterns, such as impersonating police officers or government officials, using fake legal documents, AI-generated voices, and spoofed caller IDs to create panic and fear among victims. These scams have not only resulted in massive financial losses but also caused severe emotional and psychological trauma to the victims.

Despite the seriousness of these crimes, there are clear limitations in India's current legal and enforcement mechanisms. While laws like the IT Act, IPC sections related to cheating, and cybercrime provisions exist, they are often inadequate to deal with highly sophisticated AI-driven frauds operating across international borders. Comparisons with international frameworks like GDPR or U.S. cyber laws show that India needs to upgrade its policies to match global best practices.

Another major concern is the lack of digital literacy among citizens, making them easy targets for scams. There is an urgent need for widespread AI-awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to inform people about emerging cyber threats. The role of police and cyber cells also needs to evolve through specialized training focused on handling AI-based fraud cases effectively.

In conclusion, combating digital arrest scams requires a multi-dimensional approach involving legal reforms, technological solutions, and public awareness. The situation calls for an integrated national cybersecurity strategy that fosters collaboration between government bodies, law enforcement agencies, private cybersecurity firms, and the general public. Only through proactive efforts in lawmaking, technology adoption, and education can India create a safer digital environment and protect its citizens from falling victim to such sophisticated scams.

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