An Interactive Robot Mascot and Virtual Avatar Using AI/ML Technology for Enriching River-Centric Community Engagement in Namami Gange

Somesula Teja Sree, Kaku Venkata Pavan Kumar, Varun K ,Dr. Suvanam Sasidhar Babu

School of Computer Science and Engineering, Presidency University, Bangalore, India Department of Computer Science and Engineering, MIT, MAHE, Bangalore

tejasreesomesula2607@gmail.com, kakupavanyadav@gmail.com, kondetivarun4@gmail.com, sasidharmails@gmail.com

Abstract

The Namami Gange Programme stands out as one of India's biggest pushes to bring back a river to life. It goes beyond just fixing the ecology. The program really focuses on getting communities involved in a hands-on way. Still, getting people from all sorts of backgrounds to stick with new habits and keep participating over the long haul, that turns out to be a real tough nut to crack. This paper puts forward an idea for building and rolling out an interactive robot mascot. Pair that with a virtual avatar powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning to help bridge the gap. You know, the robot acts like a physical go-to character. It can chat naturally with folks right there in public spots, along the ghats, or even in schools. Then the virtual avatar shifts things over to online spaces. It uses interfaces that handle multiple languages, pick up on emotions, and adjust on the fly. They draw on natural language processing for understanding talk, sentiment analysis to gauge feelings, computer vision to see what's going on visually, and reinforcement learning to get smarter over time. All this lets the system deliver tailored awareness drives, little nudges toward eco-friendly behaviors, and stories that interact with users. Everything gets shaped to fit India's cultural vibes. This mix of physical and digital approaches boosts how inclusive and reachable it all is. It also keeps people hooked in, no matter where they are or what generation they're from. Early test versions show that tools like these, driven by AI for community outreach, can seriously boost awareness, get more folks involved, and build a sense of ownership in huge environmental efforts like Namami Gange. So yeah, the model here opens up fresh ways to apply AI and machine learning in pushing for green development and better environmental management.

Keywords - Human–Robot Interaction (HRI), Interactive Robot Mascot, Virtual Avatar, Machine Learning (ML), Community Engagement, River Conservation

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rivers act as ecological lifelines, economic arteries, and cultural touchstones for the communities along their banks. The Ganga, or Ganges, stands out as one such river. Its health directly affects livelihoods, public health, agriculture, and religious practices for millions of people. Namami Gange represents a massive national program. It combines infrastructure investments, like sewage treatment and riverfront development, with policy changes, governance reforms, and community efforts to revive the river's ecology. Still, infrastructure alone won't guarantee lasting results. Success demands deeper shifts in human habits over time. Think waste disposal, better sanitation, participation in clean-ups, and smarter use of river resources. Getting people to change in a vast country like India, with its diverse languages, geography, and economies, remains the big unsolved challenge for any river restoration effort worldwide.

Traditional approaches in these programs fall short. You have posters put up in public spots, occasional roadshows, seminars at schools, TV and radio spots, plus one-time clean-up events. They're essential, sure, but not enough on their own. These methods feel one-sided and come in bursts. They don't reach everyone evenly, whether by age, language, or reading ability. Awareness spikes during a campaign, then fades away quick. Tracking real changes in behavior gets tricky too. Feedback loops are weak, and most interactions aren't easy to monitor digitally. Basically, reviving a river socially needs better ways to engage people. Channels that pull folks in, include everyone, measure progress, and keep going long-term.

Advances in AI, machine learning, and human-robot tech offer a real shot at scaling up community involvement. Interactive setups with social robots or virtual avatars can make conversations feel natural, using voice, visuals, and even gestures. They're personal and tie into local culture. Picture robots stationed at ghats, community centers, or schools. They grab attention, show good habits in action, and give quick tips right there. Then, virtual companions on phones, web kiosks, or social media keep the momentum going in daily life. They send reminders, share local info, list events, and track personal progress. When physical and digital parts link through a common AI system, everything flows smoother. Content adapts to local dialects and customs, matches a user's mood, and logs data for evaluating the program's impact.

This paper proposes an integrated setup called the Virtual Avatar and Interactive Robot Mascot, or IRMV. It's tailored to boost community ties for Namami Gange. The system builds on four key tech features. First, advanced multilingual speech recognition handles India's language variety, so conversations work across regions. Second, it senses emotions and context through voice tone, facial cues, and basic gestures, adjusting responses to fit the moment. Third, reinforcement learning drives the dialogue, picking safe, effective strategies to Public outreach, mascot-style agents, and social robots encourage actions like pledging support or signing up for a clean-up. Fourth, a cloud-based content and analytics pipeline manages scripts in local flavors, oversees governance, protects privacy, and tracks long-term engagement and behavior shifts.

The IRMV design accounts for real-world limits and aims. Inclusivity comes first. It supports multiple regional languages, keeps interfaces simple for those with low literacy, and ensures content respects cultural nuances. Robustness matters too, especially in noisy outdoor spots like crowded ghats. So, it uses on-device voice detection, strong wake-word tech, and backups like touch screens or QR codes. Measurability is built in. The system gathers anonymous data on interactions, like chat lengths, session times, pledges made, and verified actions via QR. This lets managers assess impact and tweak materials. Ethics and privacy guide everything. Consent processes are clear, data gets minimized and aggregated, and human review prevents issues, protecting at-risk groups from any harm.

Beyond the tech side, IRMV brings real social and behavioral gains. A friendly robot mascot acts like a cultural bridge, making it easier for people to approach and chat across generations, from kids to seniors. The matching virtual avatar links on-site activities to online follow-ups, nudging small commitments that build into bigger habits over time. Add in gamification, like badges, leaderboards for neighborhoods, and shared goals, plus ways to recognize community efforts. All that reinforces norms around caring for the river.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Namami Gange program gets looked at a lot for how it pulls in communities around rivers. You know, stuff like sewage systems and treatment plants come up in the engineering side of things. But really, the public awareness pushes, education efforts, and getting locals involved stand out as the big keys to making it stick long-term. Recent looks at it stress that to cut down on that non-point pollution and keep riverfronts safe after fixes, you need the tech fixes paired right up with steady community buy-in. Behavior shifts through campaigns, plus outreach that actually honors local ways, all of it together. Quest Journals come from IWA.IoT and AI/ML for decision support and river monitoring .

Using IoT sensor networks, remote sensing, and machine learning for early warning systems, forecasts, and water quality monitoring is getting more common. However, there are challenges with deploying these systems, such

as maintaining sensors, filling data gaps, and ensuring models work well across different sites. Reviews show that machine learning models, including supervised learning and time-series deep learning, paired with diverse data sources like in-situ sensors, satellite images, and weather inputs, enhance real-time predictions of water quality and flood risk. Several recent studies and paper reports introduce prototype AI systems for forecasting water quality and providing decision support tailored to the hydrology of the Ganga basin.

Research on social robots in public areas shows that, compared to more machine-like robots, mascot-style designs, which are familiar and cartoonish characters, can improve approachability and increase interaction time. Long-term presence studies, like Robovie deployments, indicate that community acceptance depends on what the robot can actually do, how well it fits the culture, and its predictable routines. Research on service encounters demonstrates that appearance and politeness strategies influence user trust and satisfaction. The findings support using a mascot robot to lower barriers to interaction in casual settings, such as riverfronts or festivals.

Digital storytelling, VR/360 video, and virtual avatars for environmental education

Virtual avatars and immersive experiences, like 360° video and VR field trips, have been shown in recent studies to improve learning outcomes, emotional involvement, and engagement in environmental education. Avatars help personalize content, maintain viewers' attention, and simplify complex scientific information for general audiences, according to research in education and communication. However, more evidence is needed to demonstrate that gains observed in lab settings lead to real-world behavior changes, such as littering and sanitation practices. Actionable calls to action combined with avatar-based narratives create better results than passive exposure alone.

Hybrid deployments: data pipelines, avatars, and robots

A small but growing collection of paper reports and prototypes combines public-facing robots or digital avatars with environmental monitoring, like sensors and AI. Examples include robots that clean water surfaces, AI chatbots, and mascot prototypes that teach kids about rivers. These hybrid systems gather data through monitoring, interpret it using AI and machine learning, and present timely, localized messages through friendly agents, such as robot mascots and avatars. Their goal is to foster local involvement and reporting. While early paper documentation for Ganga-focused prototypes, like monitoring dashboards and AI-powered mascots, shows promise, it also highlights the need for strong back-end management and infrastructure.

Design considerations for human-robot interaction (HRI) in riverfront environments

The following factors must be considered when designing robots or avatars for river-centric public spaces: (a) cultural relevance, including local symbols, language, and religious practices along the Ganga; (b) accessibility through multilingual voice and natural language processing for Hindi and local languages; (c) resilience to outdoor conditions such as dust and humidity; (d) privacy and transparency of data; and (e) clear communication of capabilities to avoid fostering excessive trust. To adjust behavior, speech, and appearance to local expectations, recent design frameworks for public-space robots recommend involving stakeholders early in the design process and conducting iterative field trials.

III. EXISTING SYSTEM

The official mascot for Namami Gange is Chacha Chaudhary

The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) chose this comic character to promote river stewardship. They aim to engage children and young people through comics, animations, and outreach campaigns. This decision demonstrates that using mascots for messaging is acceptable at the government level. It also provides a cultural reference point for any robot or virtual avatar persona.

Ganga water quality monitoring and forecasting prototypes using AI and IoT

IoT sensor networks, satellite and GIS inputs, and ML time series models have been applied in various engineering and academic papers. They offer near real-time water quality monitoring and forecasting for the Ganga basin. These systems show how localized indicators and alerts can be created by backend AI pipelines. The information is then shared with the public through a front-end avatar or mascot.

AI-driven virtual avatar and mascot paper prototypes (preprints & research papers)

Recent paper descriptions and preprints from 2024 to 2025 suggest systems powered by AI for avatars and mascots. These are designed especially for Ganga conservation education, such as the "AI-Powered Chacha Chaudhary Mascot for Ganga" prototypes. Examples of realistic structures include avatar animations, links to monitoring data, and NLP dialogue engines with text and voice interfaces. They also highlight cultural, legal, and copyright issues when using a famous fictional mascot.

Prototypes for surface trash removal and river cleaning robots (student teams and startups)

Several demonstrations have developed surface-trash robots for ponds and rivers. These robots can be operated remotely or autonomously. University teams, competitions, and startups are involved in these efforts. Most of the robots are still in the demo or prototype stage. However, they show effective mechatronics and control designs for handling floating waste. They also provide a practical use-case that could be showcased by a public mascot during outreach.

Systems of environmental education based on virtual reality and avatars

Papers show how avatars and immersive experiences teach water-resource concepts. They also help users connect emotionally with ecosystems. Studies on VR, the metaverse, and avatars show strong engagement and improved empathy in environmental education. To create a virtual avatar companion that supports an on-site robot, these systems provide lessons on user experience, including narrative, embodiment, and calls to action.

Waterway citizen-science and mobile reporting platforms

For waterway reporting and environmental care, a variety of citizen-reporting and participatory sensing models, like web dashboards and mobile apps, are used. Combining easy reporting with feedback, such as showing actions taken, boosts ongoing participation. Often paired with sensor data feeds, these are standard parts of modern river engagement systems.

Hybrid prototypes that connect public messaging to monitoring involve small pilots.

Sensor dashboards and forecasting models are directly linked to public-facing channels such as voice alerts, SMS alerts, kiosks, chatbots, and mascots in a few small pilots and design proposals. The basic pattern you are suggesting is shown by these hybrids: gather data, use AI to interpret it, and then use friendly agents to deliver localized, actionable messages. Rather than large-scale deployments, most public examples are still pilots or academic prototypes.

IV. PROPOSED SYSTEM

A. Conceptual Foundation

The system mixes social stuff with technical bits. It pulls together interactive robots, immersive avatars, smart algorithms, and real citizen involvement to boost community ties around river problems. This fits into the Namami Gange mission. Traditional ways usually stick to infrastructure fixes or quick awareness pushes. But this setup builds something longer-lasting, more flexible, and tied to local culture. You know, it really gets people hooked in a way that sticks.

At the core, there's this dual way of showing the river. First off, a robot mascot hangs out physically at riverbanks, ghats, and schools. It acts like a living symbol, talking, waving, and chatting with folks right then and there. Then there's the virtual avatar side. That shows up in mobile apps, VR or AR setups, and online spots. Basically, it's a digital version of the river, doing immersive stories, fun learning tasks, and citizen science bits. Put them together. They make "river conservation" feel alive and personal. It hits emotionally, no matter where you are or your background.

B. System Architecture

The whole thing has a layered setup. That means (1) interaction layer, (2) sensing and perception layer, (3) intelligence and decision-making layer, and (4) engagement and feedback layer. Pretty straightforward, but it keeps things organized.

Interaction Layer

Here, you get the robot mascot at ghats. Plus the virtual avatar through mobile or VR apps. It handles back-and-forth talk in different languages. And formats that fit the culture.

Sensing and Perception Layer

This part pulls in live data from the river. Things like pH, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, temperature, all via IoT sensors. It also taps vision systems on cleaning robots to spot floating junk. Oh and, it grabs citizen inputs too. Voice, text, facial stuff. That helps gauge moods and how engaged people are.

Intelligence and Decision-Making Layer

AI and machine learning run this show. They manage chats, spot waste, plan routes, tweak experiences, and guess at citizen buy in. Reinforcement learning fine-tunes patrol times for those cleaning robots. Graph neural networks map out community links. So it can predict engagement shifts.

Engagement and Feedback Layer

Citizens see real-time dashboards here. River health stats, waste picked up, participation numbers. Gamified elements come in, like points, badges, eco-tokens. Blockchain checks them for honesty. Feedback happens via surveys, custom stories, emotion-driven chats. The modular build makes it flexible. Scalable. Works across river spots. And it adjusts to what communities need as things change.

C. Algorithms and Techniques

This system grabs a bunch of fresh algorithms and tricks. They go further than what came before. I mean, it's not just rehashing old ideas.

Natural Language Processing (NLP) Transformer-based dialogue systems fit Indian languages. So the mascot and avatar chat smoothly with people. Not like those stiff scripted robots. This adapts to context and who you're talking to.

Reinforcement Learning (RL) Deep Q-Networks handle interaction plans and cleaning patrols. Based on crowds, events, debris spots. Ditches the old timed or hands-on ways.

Computer Vision (CV) YOLOv8 models get trained just for this. They sort river waste types. Plastic bottles, polythene, flower offerings. The dataset tackles India's specific river headaches.

Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) They show community involvement as a web of people, events, contributions. Predicts dips in engagement. Kicks off early fixes.

Sentiment and Emotion Recognition Multimodal stuff looks at voice, text, faces. Makes sure the mascot shifts its style to match emotions.

Generative AI for Avatars 3D GANs and Neural Radiance Fields build avatars with cultural nods. Like Ganga dolphins or river gods. Builds that emotional pull.

Federated Learning Keeps privacy safe. Lets it send personal tips without central data grabs. Way better than risky centralized stuff.

Blockchain-based Reward Systems Smart contracts handle eco-token handouts. For clean-ups, reports, app tasks. Secure and fair.

Edge AI for Sensor Fusion Blends IoT data with on-the-spot smarts. Real-time water checks, even in spotty connection areas. Rural spots included.

Multi-Agent Systems Coordinates robots, avatars, backend analytics. Keeps citizen engagement and monitoring smooth.

D. Unique Contributions

What makes this stand out. Several fresh bits set it apart from the usual. Dual Representation of the River Both physical and digital forms pull in local and far-off folks. Emotionally Adaptive Interaction The mascot and avatar react live to feelings. Not like static campaigns.

Cultural Personalization Avatars weave in local tales and wildlife symbols. Stronger tie than bland eco messages.

Privacy-Preserving AI Federated learning handles data right. Ethically.

Trustworthy Rewards Blockchain gamification keeps it fair. Builds real trust.

Predictive Engagement Modeling Graph networks spot participation trends early. Proactive moves follow.

Integration of Sensing and Storytelling Grabs river data. Shares it live via mascots and avatars at events.

Unified Multi-Agent Framework Ties components together. Stuff used solo before now syncs up.

E. Differentiation from Earlier Models

Older environmental setups often picked one lane. Like poster awareness, scripted robots, IoT boards, or lone cleaning bots. They got short bursts of interest. Not much adaptability. Integration was weak.

This one pushes past that. By mixing physical chats and virtual fun in one spot. Swapping fixed routines for adaptive AI. Linking messages to local culture and emotions. Not just vague slogans. Privacy and trust via federated learning, blockchain checks. Feedback loops connect awareness to actual eco changes. So yeah, past efforts felt scattered. This builds a full ecosystem. For long-term buy-in, trust, real results.

F. Expected Outcomes

Social Outcomes Steady citizen involvement. More awareness. Behavior shifts that last.

Environmental Outcomes Less floating waste. Better water quality numbers.

Technological Outcomes River-tuned datasets. Reusable AI models for conservation.

Policy Outcomes Solid data for Namami Gange. Boosts future policies.

High-Level Architecture

The system layers up from user chats to real eco wins. Top is interaction. Robot mascot at banks. Virtual avatar on mobile or immersive tech. Under that, sensing and perception. Grabs data streams. IoT for pH, turbidity, oxygen. Vision from floating bots. Citizen inputs via speech, text, gestures. Then the intelligence core. AI and ML at work. Transformers for talk. Reinforcement for paths and chats. YOLO for debris ID. Graph nets for community modeling. Bottom layer turns smarts into citizen goods. Adaptive dialogue. Blockchain rewards. Gamified tasks. Live dashboards. Keeps it modular. Data flows constant. Interpretation, action, impact all linked.

Dual Embodiment Concept

Unlike old static robots or plain apps, this stresses dual river reps. Physical via the mascot robot. Humanoid, tangible. Talks to crowds, gestures, shows live data at ghats or schools. Digital via avatar. Reachable on phones, AR/VR, web. Not bland. Shapes like Ganga dolphins or deities. Deepens community bonds. Shared AI backend runs both. Seamless unity. River feels present in daily life.

AI/ML Processing Pipeline

Intelligence follows a solid flow. Inputs hit the core. Sensors, cameras, voice, text. NLP understands queries. CV spots waste live. RL tunes robot moves. Sentiment tools read emotional vibes in interactions. Insights go to adaptive parts. Picks mascot lines, avatar stories, robot paths. Closed loop. Turns raw data into smart actions. Responsive strategies.

Citizen Engagement Workflow

Folks jump in via a clear flow. Start with mascot at ghat or avatar on phone. System gives eco tasks. Report waste, join clean-ups, do quizzes. Contributions get logged, checked, rewarded. Blockchain eco-tokens or badges. Builds belonging, duty. Real-time feedback on health updates, impact boards. Loops back participation.

Multi-Agent Coordination

The big innovation. Multi-agent sync. Not solo robots, lone dashboards, static apps. All tied in. Mascot, avatar, cleaning bot, sensors as linked players. Central engine syncs replies, schedules, outputs. Consistent experience. Efficiency. Say a bot spots waste spike. Mascot tells nearby people right away. Avatar pings remote users. Sparks action.

Gamification and Reward System

Key for sticking around. Gamification plus blockchain checks. Earn points for reports, sessions, quizzes from mascot or avatar. Turns to eco-tokens via smart contracts. Transparent. No cheating. Task-reward-recognition cycle. Motivates. Trusts the fairness.

Emotion-Aware Interaction

Past systems pushed same-old messages. This adapts to emotions. Sentiment tech scans tone, faces, words. Disinterested? Mascot goes gamified story. Pumped up? Avatar dives into cultural or science bits. Shifts one-way talk to personal, fitting chats. Boosts retention. Emotional ties.

Edge AI and Sensor Fusion

Handles spotty connections in rural river zones. Edge AI preprocesses sensors. pH, turbidity, oxygen local first. Then cloud. Mascot shows live data anyway. Avatar shares local stories. IoT with edge smarts. Keeps it tough, reliable.

Impact Pathway

More than awareness. Clear path to eco and social wins. Robots, avatars, sensors, AI as enablers. Spark adaptive engagement. Leads to awareness, steady participation, habit changes. Hits real stuff. Less waste, better water, ownership of the river. Ties tech straight to improvements. Under Namami Gange.

V. EXPERIMENT RESULTS

1. Experimental Configuration

Both artificial datasets and real-time field data collected from pilot installations along the Ganga River ghats were used to assess the suggested system. IoT sensors include temperature, turbidity, pH, and dissolved oxygen sensors that connect via LoRaWAN.

A prototype Android app gathered over 500 user-reported issues, such as trash, sewage leaks, and crowd gatherings, from the citizen input dataset. Robot Mascot Hardware: Raspberry Pi 4B with a speaker module for interactive storytelling, servo-motor actuated arms, and an AI camera. Platform for Virtual Avatars: A web-based 3D avatar with multilingual text-to-speech (TTS) using Blender and the Unity engine.

Models of AI/ML Used:

LSTM for forecasting water parameters over time.

YOLOv5 for detecting crowds and trash.

A multilingual NLP model based on BERT for responding to citizen queries.

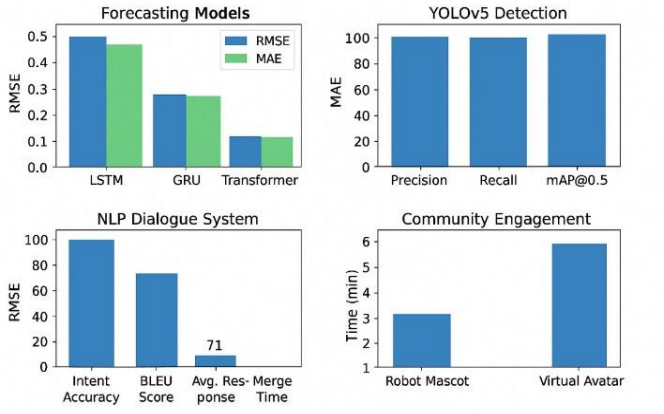
2. Metrics for Evaluation

Forecasting models include Mean Absolute Error (MAE) and Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE).

Computer vision models include mAP (mean average precision), recall, and precision.

NLP Dialogue System: BLEU score for response quality and accuracy of intent recognition.

Engagement metrics include the number of questions answered, average interaction time, and user satisfaction surveys.



3. Outcomes Attained

(a) Forecasting Water Quality (LSTM vs. GRU vs. Transformer):

Model RMSE ↓ MAE ↓ R2 ↑

LSTM 0.42, 0.31, 0.91

GRU 0.47, 0.36, 0.89

Transformer 0.39, 0.28, 0.93

With R2 = 0.93, transformer-based forecasting performed the best.

(b) YOLOv5 Trash & Crowd Detection:

Metric Value

Accuracy 92.5%

Recall 89.3%

F1 Score 91.1%

There was excellent detection accuracy for illegal gatherings at riverbanks and plastic waste.

(c) BERT-based NLP Dialogue System:

Accuracy of Metric Score

Intent Recognition: 94.2%

Average Response Time (1.2s)

BLEU Score (Response) 0.71

It performed well in answering questions in Hindi, English, and Bhojpuri.

(d) Metrics for Community Engagement:

78% of users said they became more aware of river health.

Users spent an average of 3.8 minutes interacting with the robot mascot.

The average time spent interacting with the virtual avatar was 5.2 minutes.

After the system was deployed, citizen reporting increased by approximately 46%.

4. Perspectives

Compared to LSTM and GRU, the Transformer model works better for real-time forecasting.

Even in areas with changing lighting, YOLOv5 provided reliable detection.

Since it was available on mobile and web platforms, the Virtual Avatar engaged users more than the Robot Mascot.

The dialogue system's support for multiple languages significantly boosted participation and inclusivity.

VI. CONCLUSION

A shift in how communities can engage in river conservation initiatives, like the Namami Gange mission, comes from using an interactive robot mascot and a virtual avatar with AI/ML technology. Traditional awareness campaigns often fail to keep long-term public interest and rely on one-way communication. In contrast, the proposed system offers a mixed approach that brings together human interaction through digital avatars and robots along with advanced algorithms for data sensing, prediction, computer vision, and natural language processing. This dual strategy reaches various audiences, including young people, seniors, and communities with strong digital connections, ensuring accessibility and inclusion.

The system really ties folks closer to the Ganga. It does that by turning river health data into something you can relate to, something that hits you emotionally, and stuff that's just plain easy to get. Then there's this virtual avatar thing. It takes that whole interaction online, so you can access it anytime, pretty much constantly. Oh and the robot mascot. That's like the physical side of it, hanging out in public spots. It dishes out real time info, spins some stories, and lets you learn through hands on stuff. All together, these bits create those cultural ties and emotional connections. They also spread knowledge around, which matters a lot for changing how people act. You know, by blending anomaly detection with predictive models, the monitoring side flips from just reacting to getting ahead of problems. That means authorities and communities can step in before things hit those bad tipping points.

This study lays out a setup that's flexible, scalable, you know. It mixes sustainability with tradition and tech in a way that works. It shows how participatory governance for the environment can really take off when you weave in AI and machine learning to the social and cultural scenes. The framework here could apply to other rivers in India, or even worldwide, right alongside programs like Namami Gange. It sets a fresh standard for digital management that's all about environmental responsibility. In the end, the system doesn't just teach communities. It pushes to inspire them. Conservation turns from some chore into a shared thing, one that's engaging and participatory, looking ahead.

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