

Digital India: Role of Digitalization in Sustainable Development

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Abstract: Government has rightfully been liberalizing the Indian economy across many sectors – but without a different approach for digital, the open route in the nascent digital sector may destroy local entrepreneurship just as it is starting. The just-approved Digital India project, seeking to deliver all government services electronically in less than four years, has already thrown up object lessons whose implications go far beyond the future of the project itself. The project is vital for the future well-being of every Indian. The information technology industry will be given a boost, too. And it has the benefit of building on an already successful pilot project.

Keywords: Digital, Cashless Transaction, Online, Cellular.

Introduction

Digital India is a campaign launched by the Government of India to ensure that Government services are made available to citizens electronically by improved online infrastructure and by increasing Internet connectivity or by making the country digitally empowered in the field of technology.

It was launched on 2 July 2015 by Prime Minister. The initiative includes plans to connect rural areas with high-speed internet networks. Digital India consists of three core components. They are:

1. Development of secure and stable Digital Infrastructure
2. Delivering government services digitally
3. Universal Digital Literacy

Digital India was launched by the Prime Minister of India on 2 July 2015 with an objective of connecting rural areas with high-speed Internet networks and improving digital literacy. The vision of Digital India program is inclusive growth in areas of electronic services, products, manufacturing and job opportunities etc. and it is centered on three key areas Digital Infrastructure as a Utility to Every Citizen, Governance & Services on Demand and Digital Empowerment of Citizens.

The Government of India entity Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL) which executes the National Optical Fiber Network project will be the custodian of Digital India (DI) project. BBNL had ordered United Telecoms Limited to connect 250,000 villages through GPON to ensure FTTH based broadband. This will provide the first basic setup to achieve towards Digital India and is expected to be completed by 2017.

The government is planning to create 28,000 seats of BPOs in various states and set up at least one Common Service Centre in each of the gram panchayats in the state.

The 2016 Union budget of India announced 11 technology initiatives including the use data analytics to nab tax evaders, creating a substantial opportunity for IT companies to build out the systems that will be required. Digital Literacy mission will cover six crore rural households. It is planned to connect 550 farmer markets in the country through the use of technology.

Out of 10% English speaking Indians, only 2% reside in rural areas. Rest everyone depends on their vernacular language for all living their lives. However, as of now, email addresses can only be created in English language. To connect rural India with the Digital India, the Government of India impelled email services provider giants including Gmail, office and rediff to provide email address in regional Languages. The email provider companies has shown positive sign and is working in the same process. An Indian based company, Data Xgen Technologies Pvt Ltd, has launched world's first free linguistic

email address under the name 'DATAMAIL' which allows to create email ids in 8 Indian languages, English; and 3 foreign languages – Arabic, Russian and Chinese. Over the period of time the email service in 22 languages will be offered by Data XGen Technologies.

Services

The Government of India hopes to achieve growth on multiple fronts with the Digital India Programme. Specifically, the government aims to target nine 'Pillars of the Digital India' that they identify as being:

1. Broadband Highway
2. Universal access to Internet
3. Public Internet Access Programme
4. E-Governance – Reforming Government through Technology
5. E-Kranti - Electronic delivery of services
6. Information for All
7. Electronics Manufacturing
8. IT for Jobs
9. Early Harvest Programmes

Some of the facilities which will be provided through this initiative are Digital Locker, e-education, e-health, e-sign and national scholarship portal. As the part of Digital India, Indian government planned to launch Botnet cleaning centers.

DigiLocker facility will help citizens to digitally store their important documents like PAN card, passport, mark sheets and degree certificates. Digital Locker will provide secure access to Government issued documents. It uses authenticity services provided by [Aadhaar](#). It is aimed at eliminating the use of physical documents and enables the sharing of verified electronic documents across government agencies. Three key stakeholders of DigiLocker are Citizen, Issuer and requester.

[Attendance.gov.in](#) is a website, launched by [PM](#) on 1 July 2015 to keep a record of the attendance of Government employees on a real-time basis. This initiative started with implementation of a common Biometric Attendance System (BAS) in the central government offices located in Delhi.

[MyGov.in](#) is a platform to share inputs and ideas on matters of policy and governance. It is a platform for citizen engagement in governance, through a "Discuss", "Do" and "Disseminate" approach.

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Mobile app is being used by people and Government organizations for achieving Shreyank the goals of Swachh Bharat Mission. E-Sign framework allows citizens to digitally sign a document online using Aadhaar authentication. The E-Hospital application provides important services such as online registration, payment of fees and appointment, online diagnostic reports, enquiring availability of blood online etc. National Scholarship Portal is a one step solution for end to end scholarship process right from submission of student application, verification, sanction and disbursal to end beneficiary for all the scholarships provided by the Government of India. [e-Sampark](#) is a mechanism to contact citizens electronically, sending informational and public service messages via [e-mails](#), [SMSs](#) and outbound dialing.

At the launch ceremony of Digital India Week by Prime Minister in Delhi on 1 July 2015, top CEOs from India and abroad committed to invest ₹224.5 lakh crore (US\$3.5 trillion) towards this initiative. The CEOs said the investments would be utilized towards making smartphones and internet devices at an affordable price in India which would help generate jobs in India as well as reduce the cost of importing them from abroad.

Leaders from Silicon Valley, San Jose, California expressed their support for Digital India during PM Narendra Modi's visit in September 2015. Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, changed his profile picture in support of Digital India and started a chain on Facebook and promised to work on WiFi

Hotspots in rural area of India. Google committed to provide broadband connectivity on 500 railway stations in India. Microsoft agreed to provide broadband connectivity to five hundred thousand villages in India and make India its cloud hub through Indian data centres. Qualcomm announced an investment of US\$150 million in Indian startups. Oracle plans to invest in 20 states and will work on payments and Smart city initiatives. However back home in India, cyber experts expressed their concern over internet.org and viewed the Prime Minister's bonhomie with Zuckerberg as the government's indirect approval of the controversial initiative. **The Statesman** reported, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's chemistry with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg at the social media giant's headquarters in California may have been greeted enthusiastically in Silicon Valley but back home several social media enthusiasts and cyber activists are disappointed." Later the Prime Minister office clarified that net neutrality will be maintained at all costs and vetoed the Basic Internet plans

Role of ICT

It is being thought that there needs to be more research on the actual worth of these multi million dollar governments and ICT for development projects. For the most part, the technological revolution in India has benefited the already privileged sectors of Indians. It is also difficult to scale up initiatives to affect all Indians, and fundamental attitudinal and institutional change is still an issue. While much ICT research has been conducted in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat, poorer states such as Bihar and Orissa are rarely mentioned.

Several academic scholars have critiqued ICTs in development. Some take issue with technological determinism, the notion that ICTs are a sure-fire antidote to the world's problems. Instead, governments must adjust solutions to the specific political and social context of their nation. Others note that technology amplifies underlying institutional forces, so technology must be accompanied by significant changes in policy and institutions in order to have meaningful impact.

The programme has been favoured by multiple countries including the US, Japan, South Korea, the UK, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

The government's push towards moving to a cashless economy calls for greater focus on digital infrastructure. Growth of the digital economy depends on building network capacity. The current push towards digital transactions leverages the high penetration of mobile phones: over a billion subscribers — netting out multiple subscriptions, the number of phone users would be smaller of who about 35% use smart phones.

In India, the mobile phone will be the predominant mode of transitioning to the digital economy. Inability to meet the rising demand for network capacity will place severe constraints on the move to and growth of the digital economy. One of the constraining factors is the lack of sufficient spectrum available to mobile use.

According to the Cellular Operators Association of India reports that compared to international standards, operators in India possess significantly smaller amounts of spectrum, approximately 13 MHz on average. It is low compared to other Asian countries such as Bangladesh (37.4 MHz) and Malaysia (75 MHz). Not only is spectrum scarce, it is also fragmented, overpriced and inflexible. The current push to digital transactions on account of demonetisation has meant increased congestion on a limited spectrum capacity.

To deploy more spectrum for actual use by telecom subscribers, more must be allocated and at a price that is affordable. So, if the government is serious about a digital economy, it must design policy that will make use of scarce and valuable spectrum in a more efficient manner.

Companies such as Flipkart, Snapdeal and Ola which saw strong growth in the last few years, are faltering today at the hands of intense competition with deep pockets from Amazon and Uber, which are able to deploy cash and technology from the US into India. Similarly, India's digital advertising economy is dominated by Google and Facebook, which would jointly capture more than 75% of all digital advertising revenues.

Conclusion

While many investors were excited at Digital India's arrival, many are now walking away, viewing India simply as a digital colony of global digital businesses like Amazon and Alibaba. This is leaving India's largest digital success stories in precarious positions. The likely outcome is that they will not be able to compete with global balance sheets. Cashless India will attract a surgical strike from the hackers and if we rush for digital monetary transactions without adequate firewalls there is a distinct possibility of enemies of India can bring down our economy to its knees. If that happens people of India will lose their money and faith in the digital economy. The government of India has taken some steps in this direction by asking the banks and financial entities to report a breach without wasting time. However, then the blame game will start. Let us initiate a serious discussion and an action plan before being attacked.

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