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DIGITAL INDIA: OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

*"**Digital India**" programme is flagship programme of the government of India with a vision to transfer India into digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. This paper helps understand the challenges that might barricade the successful implementation of the program in rural areas and then recommend suggestions to successfully implementation digital India programme. there are many challenges in implementing the digital India programme like proper Implementation, Illiteracy, Electronics Manufacturing, broadband connectivity, IT for Jobs, infrastructure facility etc. But if we mentally prepared for the changes and challenges in implementing the policy, only then it would be possible to change it to reality.*

KEY WORDS: *Digital India, challenges, digital empowerment, job opportunities.*

INTRODUCTION

Digital India was launched by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi on 1 July 2015, in an order to create participative, transparent and responsive government. At the time of launching this scheme Narendra Modi said that "E-Governance is going to change into M-Governance." With the launch of Digital India programme, the government is taking a big step forward to transform the country into a digitally empowered knowledge economy. The vision of Digital India programme 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 Ministry of Communications and IT is the main agency to implement the programme and Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL) which executes the National Optical Fiber Network project will be the custodian of Digital India (DI) project.

CONCEPT OF DIGITAL INDIA

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. This is also known as 'The Internet Economy' or Internet of Everything (IOE).

VISION OF DIGITAL INDIA

The main vision of Digital India initiative is to 'transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy'.

- To achieve this vision, the government has marked three Vision Areas, viz.:
  - Making digital infrastructure as a utility to every citizen.
  - Making Governance and public services on demand.
  - Making citizens digitally empowered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gulati examined the opportunities that would pave the way for achieving the program's aim of making India the preferred choice for digital activities by both global and domestic investors and also how far the "Digital India" model can prove to be an attraction for the investors to invest in the sectors which are yet to achieve their full potential in India. He concluded that India should focus more on developing domestically led connectivity, promoting research and innovation-led development to establish itself strongly on the international stage as an economic superpower and particularly a thriving technological hub.

Singh discussed initiatives made in India towards digital access to information and the role of several programs in bridging the digital divide. He concluded that India has made encouraging efforts to bridge the gap by initiating a number of projects and programmed for rural and remote locations, a lot more needs to be done to bring the people into the information society. All that is required is strong determination among people, good policy–makers and political support to bridge the digital divide.

Tharayil and K R discussed the concept of digital divide in general and the Indian scenario in particular. Major challenges in the path towards digital opportunity such as poverty, illiteracy, political instability, and poor ICT infrastructure are highlighted. Key initiatives in bridging the digital divide in India are explored in detail. The more significant role of rural libraries in bridging the digital divide in India is proposed.

Das mentioned India's latent capabilities in bridging the digital divide paradigm. Government at the Centre is doing a good job indeed, taskforce on IT and software has been set up, IT policy has been formulated along with the announcement of telecom reforms in 1999 attracting greater participation from private sector, etc. In spite of these achievements, the country faces several challenges. There is a widespread under nourishment; the infant mortality rate has been deteriorating. Approximately 40% of the people live without electricity, safe drinking water and sanitary facilities. Gender inequality and increasing unemployment are other issues of concern. Only a mere 3.63% have access to telephone and even lesser ie well below 1% of the population have access to a PC. We need more sustainable efforts on employment

generation that requires the economy to grow not less than 10-12% to create new jobs for the increasingly unemployed youth. Above all a grass-root level initiative and a collective effort in the attitude towards bringing change in the way we operate. What not - an exhaustive list of things to be done!

Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella intends to become India's partner in Digital India program. He said that his company will set up low cost broadband technology services to 5lakhs villages across the country.

Impact of Digital India by 2019

- Broadband in 2.5 lakh villages, universal phone connectivity.
- Net Zero Imports by 2020 400,000.
- Public Internet Access Points Wi-Fi in 2.5 lakh schools, all universities; Public Wi-Fi hotspots for citizens Digital Inclusion: 1.7 Cr trained for IT, Telecom and Electronics Jobs.
- Job creation: Direct 1.7 Cr. and Indirect at least 8.5 Cr.
- E-Governance & eService's: Across government.
- India to be leader in IT use in services - health, education, banking.
- Digitally empowered citizens - public cloud, internet access.

Research Methodology This research paper is based on secondary data and information is collected from the internet journals, research papers and expert opinions on the same subject matter.

MAJOR TARGETS OF THE PROGRAMME

(i) To create a digital infrastructure as a utility to every Indian citizen. This includes providing high-speed internet, mobile phone and bank account enabling participation in digital & financial space, shareable private space on a public cloud, and creating a safe and secure cyber space.

(ii) The programme aims to take digital literacy to the next level, and will focus on finding ways to encourage people to opt for cashless financial transactions.

(iii) The initiative also aims at seamless integration across departments/jurisdictions, and ensuring availability of services in real time from online and mobile platforms.

OBJCETIVES OF RESEARCH

This paper helps understand the opportunities through digital India as well as understand the challenges that might barricade the successful implementation of the program and then recommend suggestions to successfully implementation digital India programmes.

OPPORTUNITIES

Broadband Highways:

250000 Gram Panchayats connected through high speed internet by December 2016 with the investment of Rs 32,000 crore; Nationwide internet infrastructure through National Optic Fibre Network (NOFK) by 2016.

Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity:

It will be connected all the remaining 42300 villages which are unconnected through mobile telephony with the investment of Rs 16000 crore by the financial year 2018.

National Rural Internet Mission:

This programme will provide government services to all Gram Panchayats through Common Service Centres (CSCs) by March 2017 with the investment of Rs. 4750 crore; also, 150000 Post-Offices are to become Multi-service Centres by 2016.

E- Governance:

This programme simplify government business processes by introduction of IT, online interface and tracking across departments, integration of services and platforms-UIDAI, Payment Gateway, Mobile Platform etc, public grievance redressal through IT.

Information for All:

It provides online hosting of data and proactive engagement with citizen through social media and web portals such as MyGov.in; citizen will have open access to information and open data platform.

Electronic Manufacturing:

Digital india progromme will provide Net Zero imports by 2020 through increased level of local manufacturing of electronic items such as: Set Top Boxes, VSATs, Mobiles, Consumer and medical Electronics, Smart Cards etc.; efforts will be made to provide clarity on taxation, incentives, skill development and government procurement.

Training and Job Creation:

Under this programme students in small towns and villages trained for IT sector jobs; the target is training of 1 crore students in next five years to make them IT ready workforce; Setting up BPOs in each North Eastern State; Telecom service providers will train 500000 people in five years to create a Telecom ready rural workforce to cater to their own needs.

Early Harvest Programme:

All Universities mode of communication- to secure e-mail services across all departments of government; Biometric cross the country will be connected through Wi-Fi by December 2015; e-mail to be the primary.

CHALLENGES

The Digital India project, no doubt is one of the grandest projects till date because it embraces all the government machinery and departments in its fold; its aim is to create a truly participatory democracy with the use of digital technology; its target is to connect more than 120 crore Indians with their Government so that they could avail services and benefits of government services in real time and also get their grievances redressed in quick time. But there are many challenges face to successfully implementing the Digital India programme.

Integration of technology and language

India is a diversified country, in terms of language, culture, laws which vary from states to states complete integration, that is integration of technology and language is one of the main challenges the mission would face in its implementation.

Implementation

The entire programme is designed as a top level model on the technological front. There is hardly any guidance on how to implement the same on the ground level to make it successful. To be precise, most of the nine pillars of the programme are directly related to high-end consumers and not for 70% (almost, according to 2013 – 2014 survey) of the rural population in India. Deploy W-Fi Centers & Hotspot: BSNL's (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd) mass deployment of Wi-Fi hotspots across the country. If the government pushes BSNL to ensure at least one hotspot per village, it can do wonders and experience the positive outcome. However, if the selection of the hotspot locations were those populated by mostly tribal, backward castes, minorities and geographically difficult areas, then the impact can bring a new era in our country.

Illiteracy

Thirty-seven percent of adult Indians are illiterate which translates to 287 million people—the highest in the world. The report notes that such a high illiteracy rate acts as a major roadblock in expanding the reach of the Internet. Awareness about the Internet and ability to operate a computer is low among Indians, adding to the worries.

"Illiterate farmers are unable to benefit from myriad existing services that provide weather forecasts and market prices through text messages or other digital means," the study notes.

Electronics Manufacturing

As of now, India stands to import three quarters of the $400bn worth of electronics products it will consume in the next five years. Hardware exports as of now are still under $10bn. This calls for a very big ramp-up in local manufacturing.

IT for Jobs

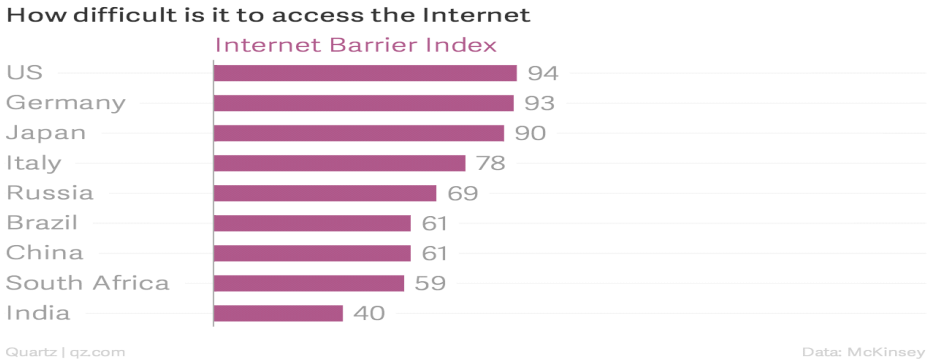
Among the plans: Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) locations in every north-eastern state, 300,000 service delivery agents to be trained for IT services, and 500,000 rural workers to be trained by telecom operators for their own needs.

The challenge here is not just the numbers, but quality. The technology sector increasingly finds that the dwindling manpower resources available for its jobs are under-trained and mismatched to its needs.

Poor connectivity

The report estimated that India needs over 80 lakh hotspots as against the availability of about 31,000 hotspots at present to reach the global level of one Wi-Fi hotspot penetration for every 150 people. "For digital technology to be accessible to every citizen, significant efforts are needed to customize apps and services to cater to local needs. Finding vendors who can provide such applications have become a challenge," the report pointed out.

With the proliferation of cloud-based services like DigiLocker, data security has emerged as a major Challenge, revealed the report.



Infrastructure

Digital India aims to have broadband network that will span India's cities, towns and 250,000 villages by end – 2016, along with centers called the national information infrastructure.

Experience show that it is empty communication and content, not pipes that drive network usage and manufacturing content is not government strength.

Security

Each and every citizen of India would have all the personal details online including bank details, Income tax details, PAN details which might be vulnerable if not secured properly. In case this is breached, then any individual would lose the privacy of the data and would be compromised.

Finance

Though there are resources with India but there is a huge capital cost which is to be invested and the fruits of the investment will be received after few years.

RECOMMENDATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

Improve IT Literacy

Improving IT literacy is very important because the entire mass who is using internet should know how to secure his/her online data. Providing proper usability guidance of Anti-Virus software and its role in securing the records should happen simultaneously.

Security

It is necessary to overcome all the challenges mentioned above with the help of a proper IT security solution like E-Scan. With so many people connected to such numerous networks, data security will definitely become one of the priorities of the Government. Since all the departments like Income Tax, LIC, Election Commission, Passport Dept. – will have ample sensitive data of citizens, thus there is a high possibility of data breaches once majority of the population become digitally literate. E-Scan Anti-Virus products for home users, small and medium business and even corporates can offer complete protection to the networks and successfully materialize the dream of an ideal “Digital India”!

Encourage collaboration with the private sector

Effective collaboration with the private sector is critical to the development of the digital infrastructure. Innovative engagement models that ensure commercial viability needs to developed jointly through consultation with industry bodies. This will encourage private sector participation and ensure a better response to infrastructure RFPs. In addition, startups need to be incentivized for the development of the last mile infrastructure and localized services and applications.

Provide broadband facility

Satellite communication solutions could be used to speed up broadband access in rural and remote areas. For instance, banks can use VSAT technology to connect remote ATMs, remote branches that need instant access to customer data. It could be used as a last mile connectivity solution in rural areas which lack telecom networks. Another example could be of the navigational system NAVIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation), which can have applications in terrestrial, aerial and marine navigation, disaster management, vehicle tracking and fleet management, integration with mobile phones, precise timing, mapping and geodetic data capture, terrestrial navigation aid for hikers and travellers and visual/ voice navigation for drivers.

CONCLUSION

To make India fully digitalized overcome the challenges mentioned above. Government should provide high speed internet, Encourage collaboration with the private sector; Effective collaboration with the private sector to the development of the digital infrastructure, organize digital education programme in rural areas.

To get the fruits of the Digital India initiative, there should be efficient inter-governmental coordination. Although the Department of Electronics and IT (Deity) is leading it forward, there is an active

involvement of telecommunication, justice, finance and planning, health department et al. Without a smooth teamwork between them, this mission would never be implemented to its full strength.

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