



TRANSFORMING INDIA INTO A DIGITALIZED SOCIETY: MAJOR CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Digital India stands for transforming India into a digitally empowered knowledge economy. It is a dream which is created by the Government of India to ensure that government services are made available to citizens electronically, even in remote areas, by improving online infrastructure and by increasing Internet connectivity. The programme has one mission and one target that is to take nation forward digitally and economically. The initiative will enable people to get engaged in the innovation process which is needed by the economy to move forward. This paper attempts to highlight the different challenges faced by the Digital India Programme. It describes the different opportunities of the programme for the people of the country.

Keywords: Digital India, Infrastructure, Challenges, Opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, information and communication technologies (ICT) continue to proliferate at incredible speed. Digitalization is one of the most fundamental periods of transformation we have ever witnessed. Digital India was a flagship programme launched by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi on 1 July 2015 - with an objective of connecting rural areas with high-speed internet networks and improving digital literacy. The vision of this programme is to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. It is one of the biggest steps by government of India to motivate the citizen of the country and connect Indian economy to knowledge savvy world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on the secondary data and the information is retrieved from the internet via journals, research papers and expert opinions on the same subject matter.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

1. To study the concept of digital India programme.
2. To study the opportunities of the programme for the people of the country.
3. To study the various challenges faced by the Digital India Programme in its implementation.

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DIGITAL INDIA

'Digital India' is a central programme to make India ready for a knowledge-based future.

Vision Areas of Digital India The Digital India programme is centred on three key vision areas:

1. Digital Infrastructure as a Utility to Every Citizen: This includes:

- To provide high speed Internet connectivity as a core utility for delivery of services to citizens.
- To provide digital identity that is unique, lifelong, online and authenticable to every citizen.
- Providing mobile phone and bank account enabling citizen participation in digital and financial space.
- Easy access to a Common Service Centre.

2. Governance and Services on Demand:

- Seamless integration across departments or jurisdictions
- Ensuring availability of services in real-time from online & mobile platforms
- To make all citizen entitlements portable and available on the cloud
- To digitally transformed services for improving ease of doing business
- Leveraging Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) for decision support systems & development

3. Digital Empowerment of Citizens:

- To empower citizen through universal digital literacy.
- To provide universal accessible digital resource.
- To make available digital resources / services in Indian languages.
- To provide collaborative digital platforms for participative governance.
- Citizens not required to physically submitting Govt. documents / certificates.

NINE PILLARS OF DIGITAL INDIA PROGRAMME

Under Digital India programme, 9 key initiatives are in progress ,which are as follows

1. Broadband Highways

The aim is to cover 250000 villages Panchayat under National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) by December 2016. Nationwide internet infrastructure (NII) would integrate the network and cloud infrastructure in the country to provide high speed connectivity and cloud platform to various government departments up to the panchayat level.

2. Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity

The aim is to increase network penetration and to provide mobile connectivity to 44000 villages by 2018 with investment of RS 16000.

3. Public Internet Access Programme

One Common Service Centre (CSC) would be provided to each gram panchayat and 150,000 Post Offices are proposed to be converted into multi service centres.

4. E Governance

IT would be used to make the delivery of government services more effectively. There would be integration of services and platform-UIDAI, Payment Gateway, Mobile Seva platform, Public redressal etc., through IT. All information would be available in electronic form.

5. EKranti

The aim is electronic delivery of services to people be it education, health, financial inclusion or justice.

6. Information for AllMyGov.in

is a website launched by the government to facilitate a 2-way communication between citizens and the government. It is a medium to exchange ideas or suggestion with government. The citizen would have open access to information through open data platform.

7. Electronics Manufacturing

The government is focusing on zero imports of electronics by 2020 through local manufacturing of items such as smart energy meters, micro ATMs, mobile, consumer and medical electronics. Government is also taking several steps to promote manufacturing and investment in electronics sector by providing clarity on taxation, incentives skill development etc.

8. IT for Jobs

The aim is to train 10 million people in towns and villages for IT sector jobs in five years. It also aims to provide training to three lakh service delivery agents as part of skill development to run viable businesses delivering IT services. It also focuses on training of five lakh Rural Workforce on Telecom and Telecom related services and setting up of BPOs in each North-eastern state.

9. Early Harvesting Programmes

Government plans to install Wi-Fi facilities in all universities across the country. All books will be converted into e books. Email will be made the primary mode of communication within government. Biometric Attendance System will be installed in all central government offices where recording of attendance will be made online.

BENEFITS OF DIGITAL INDIA PROGRAMME

Digital India programme is the beginning of digital revolution. It is a big initiative to empower people of the country. Main benefits of this programme are:

1. The digital India mission would make all the government services available to people of country through common service delivery outlets. This would lead to inclusive growth by enabling access to education, healthcare and government services to all the citizens of the country. People can get better advice on health services. Those who can't afford school/colleges can get chance to online education.
2. There would be more transparency as all the data would be made online and would be accessible to citizens of the country.
3. E-Governance will help in reducing corruption and getting things done quickly.
4. Digital locker facility will help citizen to digitally store their important documents like Pan Card, passport, mark sheets etc.
5. It will help in getting things done easily. For example when we need to open an account, we will give official details of our digital locker, where they can verify our documents. By this we can save time and the pain of standing in long queues for getting our documents would be reduced.
6. It will help in decreasing documentation and reducing paper work.
7. Digital India mission is away for cashless transactions.

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8. It can help small businesses. People can use online tools to expand their business.
9. It can play a key role in GDP growth. According to analyst the digital India could boost GDP up to \$1 trillion by 2025. According to World Bank report a 10% increase in mobile and broadband penetration increases per capita GDP by 0.81% and 1.31% respectively in developing countries.

CHALLENGES

More than a year has been passed since Digital India mission has been announced but it is facing multiple challenges in successful implementation. Few of the challenges are

1. High level of digital illiteracy is the biggest challenge in the success of digital India programme. Low digital literacy is key hindrance in adaptation of technologies. According to ASSOCHAM-Deloitte report on Digital India, November,2016, around 950million Indians are still not on internet.
2. Making Digital India scheme known and creating awareness among common masses about its benefits is also a great challenge.
3. It is a mammoth task to have connectivity with each and every village, town and city. Connecting 250000 Gram Panchayat through National Optical Fibre is not an easy task. The biggest challenge is ensuring that each panchayat point of broad band is fixed up and functional. It is found that 67% of NOFN points are non functional even at the pilot stage.
4. A key component under this vision is high speed of internet as a core utility to facilitate online delivery of various services. India has low internet speed. According to third quarter 2016 Akamai report on internet speed, India is at the105th position in the world in average internet speed. This rank is the lowest in entire Asia Pacific region.
5. According to ASSOCHOM- Deloitte report, the issue pertaining to taxation and regulatory guidelines have proved to road block in realizing the vision of Digital India. Some of the common policy hurdles include lack of clarity in FDI policies have impacted the growth of ecommerce.
6. The biggest challenge faced by Digital India programme is slow and delayed infrastructure development. India's digital infrastructure is comprehensively inadequate to tackle growing increase in digital transactions. India needs over 80 lakh hotspots as against the availability of about 31000 hotspot at present to reach global level, according to ASSOCHOM-Deloitte report.
7. The private participation in government projects in India is poor because of long and complex regulatory processes.
8. Many request proposals issued by government are not picked up by competent private sector organizations since they are not commercially viable. Currently Over 55000 villages remain deprived of mobile connectivity because providing mobile connectivity in such locations is not commercially viable for service providers, ASSOCHAM Deloitte report pointed out.
9. There is a wide digital divide between urban and rural India. Till now funds have not been deployed effectively to meet the cost of infrastructure creation in rural areas.
10. India has 1600 languages and dialects. Non availability of digital services in local languages is a great barrier in digital literacy.
11. Fear of cybercrime and breach of privacy has been deterrent in adoption of digital technologies. Most of the technology including cyber security tools are imported. We do not have requisite skills to inspect these for hidden malwares . We have no top level experts for

these high end jobs at present. According to NASSCOM, India needs 1 million trained cyber security professionals by 2025. The current estimated number is 62000.

SUGGESTIONS

Digital India campaign can't be successful on its own. Policy changes are needed to make digital India a reality. Few of the suggestions are –

1. Digital literacy is first step in empowering citizens. People should know how to secure their online data.
2. To make this programme successful, a massive awareness programme has to be conducted. There is pressing need to educate and inform the citizens, especially in rural and remote areas, about the benefits of internet services to increase the growth of internet usage.
3. Digital divide needs to be addressed.
4. Manufacturing content is not government's strength. This mission needs content and service partnerships with telecom companies and other firms.
5. PPP models must be explored for sustainable development of digital infrastructure.
6. Private sector should be encouraged for development of last mile infrastructure in rural and remote areas. To encourage private sector, there must be favorable taxation policies ,quicker clearance of projects.
7. The success of digital India project depends upon maximum connectivity with minimum cyber security risks. For this we need a strong anti cyber crime team which maintains the database and protects it round the clock.
8. To improve skill in cyber security , we need to introduce cyber security course at graduate level and encourage international certification bodies to introduce various skill based cyber security courses.
9. There is need for effective participation of various departments and demanding commitment and efforts. Various policies in different areas should support this goal.
10. For successful implementation, there must be amendments in various legislations that have for long hindered the growth of technology in India.

CONCLUSION

The vision of digital India is grand. It is a huge step towards building a truly empowered nation. If successful, it will transform citizen access to multimedia information, content and services. However the goal is still far away since most of the nine pillars of digital India mission are facing serious challenges in implementation. It is imperative that focused persistent attention must be given to each and every pillar so that this programme does not end up in failure. In fact we all should be mentally prepared for the change and be ready to face the challenges in implementing this policy, only then it would be possible to make this vision a reality.

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