



DIGITAL INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT:

The "Digital India" initiative, spearheaded by the Central Government of India, aims to revolutionize the country into a leading global digital hub through enhanced digital connectivity, skill development, and various incentives. This initiative embodies numerous innovations and technological advancements geared towards fostering a digital revolution. Its core objective is to establish a participative, transparent, and responsive system. Serving as the Indian Government's visionary project, it seeks to transform India into a knowledge-based economy and digitally empowered society by facilitating electronic access to government services and bolstering online infrastructure and Internet connectivity. However, several challenges such as digital illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, slow Internet speeds, lack of interdepartmental coordination, and taxation issues impede its smooth implementation. This paper endeavours to identify and address both global and domestic challenges hindering the initiative's success while proposing viable solutions. Furthermore, it explores opportunities that can propel India towards becoming the preferred destination for digital investments, illustrating how the "Digital India" model can attract both global and domestic investors to sectors yet to reach their full potential in the country.

KEYWORDS: Digital India, Digital Empowerment, Job Creation, Skill Enhancement.

INTRODUCTION:

In recent years, digital technologies, encompassing cloud computing and mobile applications, have emerged as potent drivers of rapid economic growth and citizen empowerment. A landmark moment in Indian history occurred on July 1st, 2015, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the flagship program, 'Digital India,' aimed at bridging the digital divide by providing high-speed internet to rural areas and enhancing digital literacy. This initiative signifies a pivotal step towards integrating the Indian economy into the global knowledge ecosystem, where information is readily accessible. With a focus on delivering government services electronically and promoting digital literacy, Digital India strives to create a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Through infrastructural reforms such as universal high-speed internet, digital identification, and mobile banking, the program seeks to foster transparency, responsiveness, and inclusivity in governance. With an ambitious budget of Rs 1,13,000 crore, Digital India is poised to revolutionize the country's technological landscape and attract global

investment. This paper endeavors to explore Digital India as a transformative campaign poised to revolutionize governance and enhance the lives of citizens through technological innovation and connectivity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on secondary data that have been retrieved from internet, magazines and journals. It is a conceptual paper. The focus is to know more about the concept, its application and the impact on economy. Therefore qualitative data have been used in this paper.

LITERATURE SURVEY

According to Laila Memdani Indian farmers are no longer traditional and illiterate. They are capable to grab the opportunities they get and make full use of the available technology. [2]

Rani (2016) concluded that the digital India project provides a huge opportunity to use the latest technology to redefine India the paradigms of service industry. She also highlighted many projects which require some transformational process, reengineering, refinements to achieve the desired service level objectives. [4]

Midha (2016) recognized digital India as a great plan to develop India for knowledge future but he also expressed his doubt regarding implementation due to inaccessibility and inflexibility to requisite which can lead to its failure. He admitted that though digital India programme is facing number of challenges yet if properly implemented it can make the best future of every citizen.[3]

Study of Gupta and Arora (2015) on the impact of digital India project on India's rural sector found that many schemes have been launched in digital India to boost agriculture sector and entrepreneurship development in rural areas. Digital India programme has also set the stage for empowerment of rural Indian women.[1]

According to Seema Dua the mission of digital India is facing serious challenges in implementation. She believed that Digital India campaign can't be successful until there is massive digital literacy among the citizen, development of infrastructure in rural and remote areas, improved skill in cyber security and effective participation of various departments and demanding commitment and efforts. [5]

OBJECTIVES OF DIGITAL INDIA:

1. To provide universal access to high-speed internet connectivity in all parts of the country.
2. To transform government services into digital platforms for efficient and transparent delivery.
3. To empower citizens through digital literacy programs and access to digital resources.
4. To ensure easy availability of government information and services to citizens electronically.
5. To promote domestic manufacturing of electronic goods and create job opportunities in the electronics industry.
6. To provide skill development programs and promote the growth of the IT and IT-enabled services sector.

BENEFITS OF DIGITAL INDIA:

The Digital India Initiative is a programme that offers suggestions for setting up quick internet connections in the country's rural areas. The Public Internet Access Programme is one of India's digital transformation's nine pillars. Indian digital economy to contribute 20% of GDP by 2025-26, IT Minister Chandrasekhar mentioned this target while participating in the global AI summit hosted by the United Kingdom November 2, 2023. Presently, India stands at 11% in this regard.

1. Electronic transactions related to e-governance are increasing.
2. A 2,74,246 km optical fibre network that is part of the Bharat Net programme has connected more than 1.15 lakh Gram Panchayats.
3. A Common Service Center (CSC), which provides access to information and communication technology, was built by the Indian government as part of the National e-Governance Initiative (ICT).
4. The CSCs provide multimedia content via computer and Internet access for e-governance, education, health, telemedicine, entertainment, and other public and private services.
5. Establishing online communities with cutting-edge features like Wi-Fi choupals, solar lighting, LED production lines, and sanitary product manufacturing facilities.
6. In metropolitan regions, the percentage of people using Internet data as their primary method of service delivery has risen to 64%.

VISION OF DIGITAL INDIA

The concept of Digital India has entered on 3 Key Areas

1. Digital Infrastructure as a Utility to Every Citizen

1. High speed internet as a core utility
2. Lifelong cradle to grave digital identity.
3. Unique, online, authenticable.
4. Mobile phone & Bank account enabling participation in digital & financial space.
5. Easy access to a Common Service Centre.
6. Shareable private space on a public cloud.
7. Safe and secure cyber space.

2. Governance & Services on Demand

- i. Seamlessly integrated across departments or jurisdictions
- ii. Services available in real time from online and mobile platforms.
- iii. All citizen entitlements to be available on the cloud.
- iv. Services digitally transformed for improving Ease of Doing Business.
- v. Making financial transactions electronic & cashless.

3. Digital Empowerment of Citizens

- i. Fulfilment of this vision is confronted with the requirement of the following needs
- ii. Universal Digital Literacy.
- iii. Universally accessible digital resources.
- iv. Availability of digital resources / services in Indian languages.
- v. Collaborative digital platforms for participative governance.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

It has been nearly nine years since the announcement of the Digital India mission. Several challenges have hindered the pace of its implementation.

1. In areas where there is still 25% illiteracy, combating high levels of digital illiteracy remains one of the most significant obstacles to the success of the Digital India program. Reliance Jio has made substantial contributions in this regard.
2. Generating awareness about the Digital India scheme among the general population is also a significant challenge.
3. Establishing connectivity with every village, town, and city is a monumental task. Connecting 250,000 Gram Panchayats through the National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) is a daunting endeavor. The primary challenge lies in ensuring that each broadband point in the panchayats is operational. It has been observed that 67% of NOFN points are non-functional even at the pilot stage.
4. India suffers from very low internet speeds. According to the third-quarter 2016 Akamai report on internet speed, India ranks 105th globally in average internet speed and has the lowest speed in the entire Asia-Pacific region. This sluggish internet speed hampers the delivery of various online services.
5. India's digital infrastructure is grossly inadequate to cope with the increasing volume of digital transactions. The foremost challenge faced by the Digital India program is the slow and delayed development of infrastructure.
6. Private sector participation in government projects in India is hindered by lengthy and complex regulatory processes.
7. An ASSOCHAM-Deloitte Report highlighted that over 50,000 villages still lack mobile connectivity because providing such connectivity in these areas is not commercially viable for service providers.
8. Although India's heart resides in its villages, the funding required for infrastructure development in rural areas exceeds that needed for urban areas. Allocating funds between rural and urban areas poses a significant challenge.
9. India boasts 1,600 languages and dialects. The absence of digital services in local languages poses a significant barrier to digital literacy.
10. Concerns about cybercrime and privacy breaches have deterred the adoption of digital technologies. Most technologies, including cybersecurity tools, are imported. There is a lack of sufficient expertise to detect hidden malware. India aims to train 1 million cyber security professionals by 2025.

CONCLUSION

The realization of the Digital India vision remains distant, as many of the nine pillars of the Digital India mission encounter significant implementation challenges. Continuous attention is imperative for each pillar to prevent the project from failing. The following measures could be considered to advance the vision of Digital India:

1. Digital literacy initiatives should prioritize educating individuals on safeguarding their online data.
2. Extensive awareness campaigns, particularly in rural areas, are essential.
3. Efforts must be made to bridge the digital divide.
4. Collaboration with telecom companies and other firms is necessary to develop the required infrastructure for this mission.
5. Achieving maximum connectivity with minimal cybersecurity risks is vital for the success of the Digital India project, necessitating the establishment of robust anti-cybercrime teams.
6. Introducing cyber-security courses within academic curricula can enhance skills in this field.
7. Effective participation from various departments, along with unwavering commitment and concerted efforts, is crucial. Policies across different sectors should align to support the overarching goal of Digital India.

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