

Barriers of Digitalization in Indian Panorama: A Realistic Review

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Abstract

One of the core aims of digitalization in India initiated by the government is to minimize cash communication (inflow and outflow) in performing core financial transactions, which in turn leads to reduction in red-tapism, corruption and middleman culture. It also instigates more efficient and transparent work culture among the citizens. The current paper elaborates various impediments faced by the government in its pragmatic implementation and suggests some measures for effective overcoming of the challenges.

Keywords: Digitalization, Barriers, Infrastructure

Introduction:

India has stepped on its feet into becoming a digital powerhouse. The Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi launched the ambitious Digital India initiative in July 2015. The campaign has been targeted to ensure the upheaval of prevailing cash communication system in the society by variety of industrial organizations, costing massive losses to the Government financial system in terms of tax evasions. It is also catered for ensuring the outreach of Government services to citizens, especially common man by stressing upon the idea of promoting digital mode of communication, electronically improving existential online infrastructure and internet connectivity and thus making the country digitally empowered in the field of technology. The theme of Digital India proposed by the government comprises three core components. They are -

- The creation of digital infrastructure
- Digital delivery of services

- Digital literacy

Each of these pillars can further be elaborated as follows:

The importance of creating a cohesive digital infrastructure can't be undermined for sustained development of the country in terms of providing digital solutions for the overrated problems. This has become the need of the hour. The digital infrastructure imbibes into itself fast development of technology driven, cyber based digital scaffold and fabrication of the lateral communication systems surrounding it. This step requires massive efforts on the part of the Government and its associated stakeholders belonging from the private organizations to build, in the quickest possible duration, and start porting the existing dull platforms onto it. The recent times have witnessed tremendous growth in this segment due to the creative awareness initiatives taken by the government by inviting and authorizing private bodies for establishing and sustaining the digital framework across the country in this highly demanding arena.

The second pillar i.e. digital delivery of services have increased manifolds not only in conventional amenities and products like certificates of birth & death, lockers, visa, ration card, registry, Challan, railway and bus reservations etc, but also in terms of facilitating the financial transactions systems. The services have been convened to be digital in terms of offering their e-counterparts. There has been a supreme revolution in the financial transaction systems by offering private digital communication systems like that of paytm, freecharge, mobikwik, airtel e-wallet and along with these several other run the mil competing companies which keep mushrooming every now and then. There has been a significant up-thrust in the digital provisioning of other sectors as well, like women safety, police monitoring mechanism, the provision of electricity and facilities associated with it, reporting the malfunctioning of roads, garbage collections at various places, malfunction of railway and bus services etc. These have been digitally taken care of by interactive mobile applications like nirbhaya app for female safety concerns, citizen cop app for efficient policing, ojas for electricity related affairs, app provided by road development authority of India, tweeting to railway ministry officials way up to the rank of Central Railway minister and most importantly the Bhim app, recently launched by Honorable Prime Minister of India.

There have been a significant leap in the upliftment of Literacy mission of the country in the modern times. In the domain of higher education and learning, the enhancement of imparting quality in technical and management education has taken a tumultuous stride by the direct involvement of country's top notch institutions like IITs and IIMs through launching online courses like NPTEL. The school education is also evolved digitally by the launch of CBSE school app thus offering a valuable educational treat to the all the young learning enthusiasts. Moreover, the world web is also flooded with the free and easily accessible learning material.

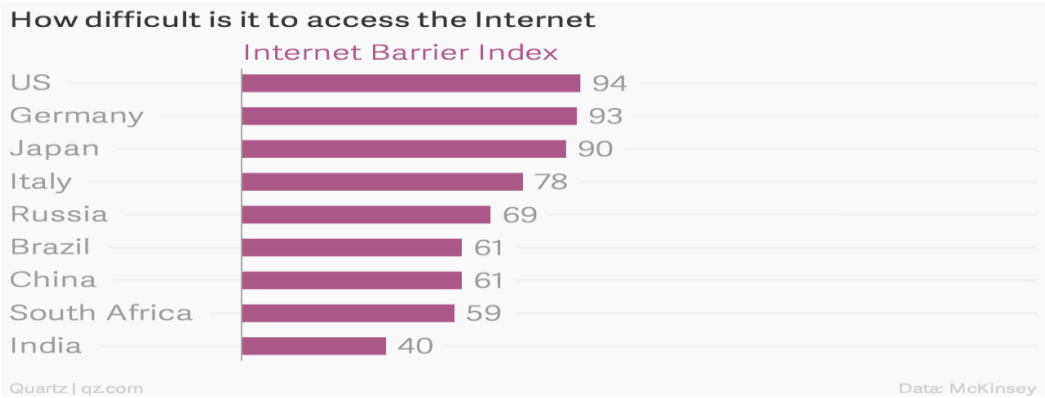
But as each coin has two sides, here also, there are certain barriers in the development of the aforementioned core components, which can play a momentous role in creating a niche for Digitalizing India. They are as follows-

1. Network infrastructure and policy- Developing network infrastructure is the most challenging task considering the gigantic size of the country. The Indian Government is circumventing this precarious issue by bringing in Public Private Partnership (PPP). The private organizations will work hand in hand with the Government in terms of investment of funds and will also share their expertise in terms of making the resources availability and timely completion of the network projects. This popular PPP model has also worked in leaps and bounds for framing a common policy for the network scaffold, so that the key stakeholders of this model, that is, the users are put as the major beneficiaries. There are several instances of its implementation, one of which has already been launched in Kerala, where online complaints can be lodged without even stepping into police station. Although the PPP provides the most fruitful solution for the network problem, however this is just a beginning and still there's a long way to go for its overall implementation.

2. Availability of Services and associated Devices - Out of nearly 4 billion worldwide population of unconnected people, 950 million individuals alone in India are yet to get access to Internet services today, as per Tele Talk by Sandeep Agrawal [1]. Almost all the businesses which intend to digitalize are facing the common problem of strategic handling of data. They focus on digitizing resources to support their existing business model, rather than rebuilding their business models from a digital standpoint.

3. Taxation- Digitalization is a pervasive process and as such the existing rules aren't sufficient to address the issues related to changing business trends. As there is a proverb in English "Look before you leap", this is the high time when government should reframe the existing taxation policies with giving due attention to the online business models, if it really wants to make digitalization program successful. There are taxes like e-transaction charges, delivery charges on online goods and many more, all these need to be curbed. Moreover, if some reward points are introduced on cashless transactions then it will double the rate of advancement of digital economy.

4. Literacy and Digital Skills – According to a survey the difficulty level in the usage of internet is very high not only in India but in the other countries as well. The following index shows the ratio of problems that Indians face while accessing internet-



The above table makes it clear that only 40% of Indians can use internet and this bitter truth makes the success of this initiative doubtful.

5. Affordability -

“Even the cheapest data plans are simply too expensive”[2]. A total of 4 billion people in the world don't have access to Internet—India accounts for 25% of them. The study found that most people who don't have Internet access live in the rural areas, in low income countries and are largely elderly and female[3]. The report suggests that the major obstacles in Internet access in India is the same as the most pressing issue facing the country today i.e. poverty. In the country where meeting both ends is a difficult task where people still are unsure to get both the meals, using internet appears to be a remote scene.

6. IT Literacy and Digital skills -

The entire 'Digital India' program 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 program are directly related to high-end consumers and not for 70% (almost, according to 2013 – 2014 survey)[4] of the rural population in India. So computer literacy needs to be enhanced at the root level without which any digital move is impossible to realize.

7. Guidance for Safety-

Safeguarding IT operations is also very important issue 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. Currently total cyber crime incidences occurred in the year 2013 were 41,319, in 2014 were 44,679 incidents, in 2015 were 49,455 cases, in 2016 (till March) were 14,363 incidents, according to a survey⁵. The figures show that with the increase in the use of technology, the safety issue is rising as the major concern.

8. Deploy Wi-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 are those populated by mostly tribal people, backward castes, minorities and geographically difficult areas, then it is a herculean tasks yet its impacts can bring a new era in our country.

To overcome all these barriers, we need to find some remedies for application of Digital India Program(DIP) -

1. A few new programs are needed-particularly in electronics, manufacturing and skill development.

2. Establishment of a dedicated training institute in each state under DIP, to aid in augmenting the digital literacy and awareness level.
3. To inspire the youth for making, creating and generating effective DIP's.
4. Government should conduct seminars to aware people about the digital services.
5. To advertise the policies of DIP on Books, pen, TV, newspapers etc. so that people could be made aware about the e services.
6. Mandate a lecture about Digital India in every educational institute to enhance the policies of DIP.
7. To launch a help line number of DIP so that people can tell the problems relating to e services.
8. Provide a help center in each state to solve public issues.
9. To print the booklets of e-services with picture and distribute to each home for awareness.
10. To turn the villages into smart economic centers that connects farmers directly to e-Markets to know the well price of crops.

Conclusion:

To conclude the digital India program is a flagship program of the government of India to shape by connectivity and technological opportunity. It is a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. It is a good effort to develop India. Although, digital India program is facing some barriers, yet it has a great impact on the country and also its future implications appears to be quite promising in shaping the best future of every citizen. We Indians and others should work together for generating a technology based insightful economy where more employment prospects can be promoted for the youth which may ultimately boost the nation's economy.

Digital India campaign is a welcoming step in shaping India of the 21st century powered by connectivity and the technological opportunity. In short, this paper focuses on the key barriers and performs an attempt in providing remedies for the prevalent challenges.

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