DIGITALIZATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Prof. Hamdani Rizwana M.J.[*]

ABSTRACT

Digital India campaign has its root from mid 1990 when central government of that time initiated the e-governance drive. India is huge country accommodate second largest population of this shrinking planet. Digitalization of such a huge nation is not an easy task. Several issues and factors like; literacy rate, Indian culture, awareness, basic infrastructure, willingness of stakeholders, adoption of new technology, economic conditions, governance, etc. get in the way of this journey. There are several advantages of digitalization like e-governance, transparency, reducing red tapism, availability of government services on finger tip at anytime from anywhere. Developed and most of the developing country citizens are enjoying these benefit for last many years. To make India global leader in the modern era, Indian citizen should benefited from digitalization. In this context, the importance of Digital India campaign has increased. So this is the time to review and analyze the Digital India campaign issues, challenges and its journey so far. This research paper attempt to explore the issues and challenges arises in transforming Digital India into a reality.

KEYWORDS: *Digital India, Digitalization, E-governance, Demonetization, Vibrant India.*

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Introduction

Digital India is an initiative taken by the new government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the 1 July 2015 with the inauguration of Digital Week in New Delhi. This journey not started from this very moment. It is an initiative taken by the government of India after the economic reforms of 1991. To make public services faster and making government department's working transparent, Government of India at that time kick off a drive named e-governance. But due to several reasons like worst economic conditions, inadequate infrastructure and fund, various other more important thrust areas of public expenditure left the previous governments empty handed. Furthermore, the last term of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government was in the state of policy and reform paralysis. E-governance project of previous government could not achieve the result as expected in all government departments. After the fall of UPA regime at the centre, the new government under the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi took guard and start transforming the India into new and vibrant India. The new government took initiative to overhaul the e-governance project and with addition of some other objectives launched Digital India programme. The Digital India (DI) campaign is nothing but the transform version of e-governance.

Objectives

- To study the overview of Digital India project
- To study the impact of Digital India in general
- To analyze challenges
- To suggest the way forward

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[*]   Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Arts, Commerce & Sciences College, Malegaon City, Tal-Malegaon, Nashik, Maharashtra, India.

Methodology

This paper uses various books on Indian economy, e-governance and Digital India initiatives published time to time by government agencies and renowned authors. For statistical data author referred various government websites. Articles, RBI reports, and news from leading news papers and notification and press release of various ministries are also used. Author also discussed the issue with general public, businessmen and industry experts to conclude this research paper.

Objectives of Digital India

Three major objectives of the Digital India are:

* To development of secure and stable Digital Infrastructure,
* To deliver services to people digitally on demand at anytime
* To develop digital literacy among Indian people.

The motto of Digital India is "Power to Empower".

Pillars of Digital India

The nine pillars of the Digital India campaign are:

* **Broadband Highways**

Connecting 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayat by December 2016 with the investment of 32,000 crore.

  ▪ Optic Fibre Network (NOFK) by 2016.
  ▪ Installation Optic Fibre Network by 2016.

* **Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity**

To connect rest of unconnected villages through telephone by the year 2018 with an investment of 16,000 crore.

* **National Rural Internet Mission**

To make all government services on the finger tip at Gram Panchayat level by 2017 by investing 4750 crore.

* **E- Governance**

To simplify all government functioning by implementing IT in every government department, Application, tracking system, payment, grievances and redressal.

* **E-Kranti**

To deliver services like agriculture, education, health, justice, finance, etc electronically to every one.

* **Information for All**

To provide transparency of data to all citizen through portal like; MyGov.in.

* **Electronic Manufacturing**

To encourage manufacturing and industries to make 0% import of electronics by 2020 and provide push to Skill India, Make in India and Smart Cities.

* **Training and Job Creation**

To make 1 crore rural population (students) of India skilled in IT sector jobs like BPOs, Telecom sectors.

* **Early Harvest Programme**

To connect all universities through Wi-Fi, make email primary mode of communication and biometric attendance in all government department. In most of cities government services like birth certificate, death certificate, property registry papers, finance, subsidies disbursement, pension to senior citizen, etc are available at one click. Due to digitalization ease of doing business index ranking of India is improved and hence new doors are opened to foreign investors in India. So far 107 training partner joined the skilling mission in 1500 cities through-out India. Under this program youth are provided quality training for better employability in electronic industries. World is changing and hence the India. Rise in disposable income causes change in lifestyle and food habits. Gathering, party and food from outside is common in India. Digital payment is usual practice on these expenses. Riding the bandwagon of Digital India and demonetization e-commerce sector has benefited and improved its market share.

Government initiated the biometric attendance in all its offices which cracked the whip on latecomers and non-performers in the offices. HRD union minister revealed on 4th January 2017 that after mandatory Aadhar disclosure survey in higher education institutes as many as 80,000 ghost teachers are identified. Similarly, 4.4 lakh ghost students were identified for midday meal scheme in April 2017. It is initially, estimated so far that government could save as much as 35 billion rupees annually. In a summit organized by Time Group Union Minister for Law & Justice and Electronics and Information Technology, stated that "With enrollment of 1.18 billion Aadhaar cards, we were able to save 49,000 crore of the exchequer which was previously looted by the middlemen in the public distribution system."

Challenges before Digital India Initiative

There is no doubt, the Digital India (DI) campaign is one of biggest reform in the modern India, this is the project which encompass entire nation, all government department and machinery, businesses, international community and public at large. If we could achieve the target set by the government, we can avail the benefits of government policies and services in real time. Furthermore, middleman, government officer ego will be wiped out. The grievances arise in due course can be redressed on fast track. In this we would make free and independence India from the red tape and attain the complete democracy. The target is big and so is the effort required. So let us evaluate ourselves – To what extent we are ready for this? Is our environment is ready for all these changes? Are we self-reliant to make Digital India? Is our economical condition allowing us to proceed with huge investment on this campaign? To make campaign of Digital India successful, there a lot of challenges like;

Infrastructure and Connectivity

A report compiled by World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked India 91st on the Networked Readiness Index 2016 out of 139 countries. The report further revealed that there are only 15 per cent households have access to internet and broadband access in India. Connecting 2.5 lack villages through national optical fiber network in huge work, it requires proper planning, investment, supervision, target and dedication from nodal agencies. Till December 28, 2017 only 1 lakh villages are given broadband facility and remaining 1.5lack by the end 2018. Previously it was estimated to achieve the target by December 2016. Moreover, connecting these villages to town and cities is complex task. Every state has different set of protocol for the execution of connectivity. Furthermore, it is challenging for IT engineers to keep such a large database safe and secure at the high speed of surfing. Indian economy is in the transformation phase and government needs huge money on public expenditures, infrastructure and all these projects. The fruit of all these investment will be received after successful implementation of Digital India campaign.

Dry ATMs

Cash base industries needs cash every day. Construction labours, labour in farms needs their wages daily basis. Similarly powerloom manufacturers, small wholesaler, traders are always in need of cash money to their businesses. ATMs can serve their very purpose. But it common complain and observation that most of ATMS in these are dry and out of service during the weekend, especially when banks are closed for more than one day due to holiday. During the festive seasons like Diwali, Dasehara, Eid, etc., ATMs are overcrowded get dried within few hours of operation.

IT Literacy

Sooner or later, government and nodal agencies may achieve infrastructure and connectivity target. There is another challenge arises about the IT literacy. India is the second largest country of the world amounting 1.2 billion inhabitants mostly from the rural areas with different regional languages. Even today many people in the town and cities are not comfortable while using of ATM. It is very necessary to literate masses to take advantage of such a huge infrastructure.

Digital Gender Gap

A recent Unicef report comment that women and men gap in digitalization is about 12 per cent globally, while the gap in India is much more wider. Only one third of Indian female are using internet and are marginalized. The report further stated the examples of a town in UP where use of mobile phone for unmarried girl is banned. Similarly, in Rajasthan a local governing body put restriction on girls to use mobile phone and social media.

Safety and Security

After the demonetization the online sales and purchase, money transfer, use of ATM had increased remarkably. We were in celebration mood with pride that India is moving ahead to cash-less

and less-cash economy like the developed countries. In comparison to cash transaction the boost in mode of digital payment is just a drop in the bucket. But after the ease in getting cash, online transaction dropped notably. According to data from RBI online transaction dropped to RS 94.21 trillion in May 2017 from 109.21 in April 2017. The main reason is cyber crime. Still it is common fear among the small traders, common people that online theft is very common. India is still unsafe and vulnerable to virus and cyber crime without any proper redressal system in place.

Lack of Coordination

India a very large country with many cultures, language, traditions even government ideology and visions. Digital India campaign needs high level of coordination among all the government departments from bottom to top, Gram Panchayat to Prime Minister Office. There are different internet protocols in use in different states and department. Hence compatibility with the each other is key factor while transferring and saving information.

Government Policy

Increasing mobile and data traffic make availability of spectrum a case of scare resource. India still lags behind with other economies in availability and pricing of spectrum. The issue of net neutrality is still under government consideration and the picture is not clear. It is very important and without neutrality it is not possible to achieve our goal of Digital India.

Attitude and Mindset

Finally, after deploying infrastructure with affordable and high speed connectivity, smart phone, simplified and transparent online government services and adequate IT literacy among the all citizen what is the guarantee they will utilize this huge government investment for their benefit in particular and nation at large. You can observe the group of youngster busy using their smart phones in the town and cities. But it is also the real fact that most of them are using for playing rummy, teen patti, Blue Whale games, and/or busy on the social media like 'Face book', 'Whats app', 'Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, We chat, Google+ etc. Recently, in India, many cases of 'Blue Whale' game victim came into light. All these activities are neither benefiting them nor the Indian economy who is investing heavily on this infrastructure and campaign of digital India.

People, rural or urban, buy smart phone with best available features and specifications and recharge their data services even if they cannot afford it at once. They are interested watching movies and listening music on go, calling family and friends 24x7. For this very purpose they earn and save extra money to buy highly priced hand-sets. On the other hand, Personal Computer (PC) or Laptops are available at much cheaper and subsidized price today, but we never observe any desire (uptake) in the people to buy Laptop and Personal Computers. PC and Laptop are not relevance to their interest.

Suggestions

Digital India campaign receives full support from all the corner of India. But still we need to do something more to make it successful:

- Infrastructure is not the only requirement to make Digital India successful but change the mindset of Indian of people especially rural population for relevance use of mobile.
- Computer centre must be established at village school to literate rural population.
- Industry related IT training centre/course should be designed with consultation of Industry expert to make rural youth marketable product in global job market.
- Build basic service providing government Apps such that can be access even when there is no connectivity.
- Tax holidays for the software developers of offline Apps.
- Implement strict cyber law to check the security and safety of people money and privacy.
- Make uniformity in all government department and businesses in using internet protocol, languages, etc.
- Government should make allocation of spectrum procedure simple and transparent to avoid any kind of confusion which lead to scandals.
- While putting transparent and good governance in place a care should be taken that data of sensitive natures like defense and other strategic documents must be well secured behind the heavily guarded firewalls.

- Government, technologist, teachers and parents should keep watch the young generations' online activities to avoid the miss use of internet. Parents should make frequent visits and talks to their wards while there are unaccompanied to avoid victimization of Blue Whale like games.
- Government and community leaders, social workers should drive an awareness campaign among the people to take advantages digitalization not to miss use the infrastructure.

The government has well plans like; Skill India, Make in India, Smart City, Digital India, Jan Dhan Yojana, UIDAI-Addhar Card, Demonetization, GST, etc. to transform India to New and Vibrant India which could be super-economic power of modern world. Execution of these plans is more important than bringing it on the paper. Overall this great initiative will require great efforts from the entire government machinery and other stake holder to make it successful.

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