DIGITAL INDIA INITIATIVES-BUILDING THE NEW, NOT JUST FIGHTING THE OLD (WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON CHALLENGES)

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Abstract: The vision of Digital India aims to transform the country into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The programme will be implemented in phases from the current year till 2018. The Digital India is transformational in nature and would ensure that Government services are available to citizens electronically. It would also bring in public accountability through mandated delivery of government's services electronically, that provides the intensified impetus for further momentum and progress for this initiative and this would promote inclusive growth to cover electronic services, products, devices, manufacturing and job opportunities. India in the 21st Century must strive to meet the aspirations of its citizens where government and its services reach the doorsteps of citizens and contribute towards a long-lasting positive impact.NarendraModi launched his 1.13 lakh crore Digital India initiative on July 3 with a vision to digitally empower each and every citizen of the country. Though the plan is ready and we are good to go, but is it that easy to transform words written on a 'white paper' into a reality? In contrary we must not forget that it comes with lot of challenges too. Despite its growing interest and increasing popularity, there seems to be limited research on this subject. Although several papers have been published in this area, they are predominantly from a practitioner's point of view. From an academic perspective research publications seem to be limited to some general definitions and brief explanations. So there is need to analyze and study DII along with its challenges.

Key words: Digital India Initiatives, DI, programme, government

I. INTRODUCTION

The digital world which we live today is the outcome of several innovations and technological advances. It is transformed from knowledge savvy to techno knowledge savvy[1]. To inspire and connect Indian economy on a parallel pace, the Government of India has embarked upon an ambitious journey which has a vision to transform India into a digital state where the government will interface with its stakeholders digitally. To connect the citizens, businesses and various departments of the government, the fundamental principle is digital enablement of services, which has led to the inception of the 'Digital India' (DI) programme[2]. The DI is a large umbrella

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programme which will restructure and reform several existing schemes to bring in a transformative impact. With this grand, ambitious and inspirational project, government is ready for the big programme by connecting every service through e-power. But this would not be an easy for the developing country like India which has many hurdles from grassroots to top level. So for the successful implementation of the programme, government has to overcome various challenges which come across its way. Only then, Digital India project can use the latest technology to redefine India the paradigm of service industry.

II. MEANING

According to Wikipedia, Digital India is a campaign launched by the Government of India through which it aims to make Government services available to citizens electronically by increasing Internet connectivity andby improving online infrastructureor by making the country digitally empowered in the field of technology.According to Chandigarh Institute of Internet Marketing, the Digital India Programme is the flagship programme of the government of India with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.

It is centered on three vision areas which is as follows-

➢ Infrastructure: The government is aiming to provide high-speed internet connectivity to 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats[3] bank accounts will be given preference at individual level. People will be provided with safe and secure cyber space in the country.
➢ Government and Services:Government services will be available online where citizens will get easy access to it.The government departments will be integated with optical fibre which will improve the operability of these organizations[4].
➢ Digital Empowerment ofCitizens: To provide universal digital literacy and universal access to digital resources by availing the services in Indian languages.

III. NINE PILLARS

1. *Broadband Highways:*Digital India aims to have broadband networks that will span India's cities, towns and 250,000 villages by end-2016[5], along with a system of networks and data centers called the National Information Infrastructure.
2. *Universal Access to Mobile Network Connectivity:*This pillar focuses on network penetration and filling the gaps in connectivity in the country. Around 56,000 villages do not have the mobile coverage and also in North East.
3. *Public Internet Access Programme:*There are two components: Common Service Centres(CSCs) and Post Offices as multi-service centres. At present 1, 37,000 are operational out of 2,50,000centres. Atotal of 1,50,000 post offices are proposed to be converted into multi service centres.
4. *E- Governance:* Reforming The processes and services include digitising manual databases, introducing online applications and tracking, using online repositories for citizen documents, introducing publicly-visible government workflow automation, and public grievance redress.
5. *E-Kranti:*Electronic Delivery of Services: There are now a total of 44 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) under different stages of implementation, including 13 new ones added. Technology can be used in the field of education, health, planning, agriculture, security, financial inclusion, justice etc.

6. **Information for all:**Online hosting of information and documents would facilitate open and easy access to information for citizens. Government can engage through social media and web to inform and interact with citizens

7. ***Electronics Manufacturing Target Net Zero Import by 2020:***To achieve this target coordinated action on many fronts is necessary, such as Taxation, Incentives, Skill development, Government procurement, Safety standards, National Award , Marketing , Brand building, R&D IN Electronics etc.

8. ***IT for Jobs:***This pillar focuses on providing training to the youth in the skill required for the employment opportunities in the IT sector. The target is to train 1 crore students from smaller towns and villages for IT sector jobs, setting up of Services of BPOs in every state and train delivery agents as a part of skill development to run viable businesses delivering IT services.

9. ***Early Harvest Programmes:***This pillar includes IT platform for messages covering all the elected representatives and government employees, crowdsourcing e- greetings through MyGov platform, Biometric attendance, Wi-Fi in all universities, Secure email within government, Public Wi-Fi and converting school books to eBooks.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

DiponGhosh (Jan 2016)gave an overview of DI focusing on the vision and pillars in the edited book that readsDI projectas huge potential to accelerate the pace of economic development. But the project also involves a number of challenges like digital illiteracy, huge costand lack of coordination among departments and overall backwardness of rural India. ***Sree, K. Bharadwaj(Jan 2016)*** in the same book stated that the vision to transform India into a DI is not simple and easily achievable. A lot of issues and problems both technical and legal in nature are to be addressed by the Government which are very important to gain and the confidence and trust of the people in the programme. ***NipanHaloi*** through his paper entitled 'Digital India project: A Critical Analysis' argued that India should be digitized at the same time the poverty of the poor people also should be eliminated. Then only every citizen of India will be able to take the benefit of the DI Project and the India will be digitized in a true sense.***Saptarshi Paul*** positively stressed that DII is going to be a boon for the information starved citizens of India if implemented successfully.

V. NEED FOR DIGITALIZATION

DI comprises of various initiatives under the single programme each targeted to prepare India for becoming a knowledge economy and for bringing good governance to citizens through synchronized and co-ordinated engagement of the entire Government[6]. It hopes to have Broadband internet in 2.5 lakh villages, universal phone connectivity, wi-fi in 2.5 lakh schools and all universities, public wi-fi hot spots for citizens, to create millions of jobs in the digital sectors, digital locker for citizens,immense benefits from healthcare to education, panchayats with high speed broadband to improve connectivity across the country. IT can play a key role in GDP growth, employment generation, laborproductivity, education, healthcare and banking[7].The technological revolution provides India with unique opportunities to reinvent it and overcome the "developing country" status. The sooner government embark on a digital transformation, the more capable individuals, business and countries will be in making the most of this

opportunity.But we must not forget that it comes with lot of challenges too. Despite its growing interest and increasing popularity there seems to be limited research on this subject. Although several papers have been published in this area, they are predominantly from a practitioner's point of view. From an academic perspective research publications seem to be limited to some general definitions and brief explanations. So there is need to analyze and study DII along with its challenges.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is based on published data and information. No primary data is being collected.Time constraint remained the major limitation in the study.But it consumes the same time as the primary data.The objectives, nature and methods used tocollect secondary data may not be appropriateto the present situation.

VII. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To know about the conceptof DI, its visionary areas and pillars briefly.
2. To focus mainly on few challenges faced in the implementation of DI and offer suggestions on the basis of the findings.

VII. CHALLENGES (FEW FINDINGS OF THE STUDY)

1. *NOFN Infrastructure Setup:*(National Optic FibreNetwork) The effort to connect about 250,000 villages through this network is a challenging task. Just about 1% of those villages are connected. Providing last-mile connectivity would be a challenge in the future since it is unaffordable for most Indians. The NOFN project which is the back bone of the Digital India project has been delayed several times and this may lead to delay in other dependent projects and meeting the budget limit will be difficult.
2. *Adoption of Internet:* Internet penetration has remained close to 15% in India. Low literacy level, lack of content with regional relevance, lack of appropriate access devices, affordability and availability of mobile devices and data tariffs, lack of local language content, lack of regionally relevant apps, high data tariffs etc would also hinder the adoption.
3. *Data Speed andSecurity:*With cybercrime on the rise, the idea of putting information of about a billion citizens online seems like a risky move. Hence highest levels of security measures and protocols would need to be taken to ensure a safe environment for the citizens. Nation Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report shows the rapid increase in cybercrime in India by 50% from 2012 to 2013.
4. *Lack of coordination among departments:* It is an umbrella project involving participation of several departments and demanding commitment & effort. Hence, strong leadership and timely support of all the involved entities will play a critical role. Within the government there are various departments which should be integrated. Self ego of the officers and staff of our government services are hurdle in the change.
5. *Private Sector Participation:* In order to meet the expected timelines, participation of private sector players becomes quite crucial. Whereas, private sector players have shown limited involvement, this needs to be boosted quite rapidly.
6. *Manpower and high cost of implementation:* Skilled and qualified manpower is, perhaps, the biggest challenge of all. Creating a system to train and provide gainful

employment to so many people is an immense challenge. The technology sector increasingly finds that the dwindling manpower resources available for its jobs are under-trained and mismatched to its needs.

7. *Effective execution:*The fact that a project of this type has never been completed in India before is, in itself, a major challenge. The reasons behind these are numerous, but corruption, bureaucracy and apathy are some major reasons.

8. *Broadband Highways:* Digital India aims to have broadband networks that will span India's cities, towns and 250,000 villages by end-2016, along with a system of networks and data centres called the National Information Infrastructure. This project needs content and service partnerships with telecom companies and other firms, with new entrepreneurs.

9. *Electronics Manufacturing:*This plan aims for "net zero imports" in electronics, or imports that match exports by value, by 2020. As of now, India stands to import three quarters of worth of electronics products it will consume in the next five years.

10. *High level of digital illiteracy:*It is a great task ahead because for the project to become successful, it is necessary that mass of people must know how to utilize the digital services. Digital illiteracy is prevalent in most of the towns and villages in India. It is a mammoth task to have connectivity with each and every village, town and city.

11. *Changing the mindset:*Indians are accustomed with years of same of practice that they are not ready to change or to prepare ourselves for the upcoming challenge.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

1) India is a diversified country, in terms of language, culture, laws which vary from states to states. Complete integration of technology and language, is one of the main solution for the successful implementation of DI

2) There are different internet protocols in different states depending on what kind of hardware and software they implement and chances are that this might lead to connectivity glitches. Hence, there must be some sort of a directive to standardize all the software protocols. New protocols may be developed in this regard.

3) We live in a world where Internet and cyber crime are inseparable enemies. The entire architecture should be designed in such a way that there is proper authentication done of all the documents put online by citizens and it is available to the right users at any time they want with the right authentication.

4) Digital literacy should be coupled with country wise drive on cyber security awareness, so that users have a safe experience on the internet.

5) Although the Department of Electronics and IT is leading it forward, there should be an active involvement of telecommunication, justice, finance and planning, health department etc. with a smooth teamwork

6) There is need for 'privacy law' and 'data protection measures' to increase trust of people in such programs[8]. There is cyber threat all over the globe and DI will not be any exception. Hence there must strong anti cyber crime team which maintains the database and protects it round the clock.

7) Government should gain trust among its citizens by increasing the internal security on cyber attacks and should show history of zero cyber attacks. This trust can only be built over a period of time. Government's main motive of digitalizing must be to eliminate the

middlemen in government service processes so that efficiency would be increased and corruption would be reduced.

8) Government should also ensure that the services are given in maximum possible languages to reach the masses directly. Steps to expose the unexposed to the digital world are essential by campaigning and advertising the advantages of using such services.

9) Government also should further try to plan and expand the range of services delivered online with services like digital locker and e-hospitals in addition to missions under National E-governance plans. Program also aims at levering technology to impart skills and make people digitally literate with focus on digital classroom and e-education.

10) Government should conduct the seminars to aware people about the digital services. To launch a help line number of DIP so that people can tell the problems relating to e-services. Provision of a help center in each state to solve public issues is also needed.

11) Mandate a lecture about Digital India in every educational institute to enhance the policies of DIP

IX.CONCLUSION

These challenges indicate that Digital India has a long way to go on its road to reality in its truest sense. The government cannot overstep them, no matter how trivial they might seem to be. It is an initiative to build Digital infrastructure and provide Internet access, service to every citizen along with Digital literacy to empower them to utilize it effectively. Although, digital India programmeis facing some barriers, yet it has a great impact on India to make the best future of every citizen. We Indians and others should work together to shape the knowledge economy. More employment prospects will open for the youth that will boost the nation's economy. Digital India campaign is a welcome step in shaping India of the 21st century powered by connectivity and the technological opportunity. In short, this paper focuses on certain barriers and providing some suggestions to face such challenges.Focusing on these obstacles, if the government of India tries to get over them by using effective methods then there is no doubt in India being a digitally empowered country.

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