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Digital India – A step towards empowerment

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ABSTRACT

The 'Digital India' programme was launched by Honourable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi on 1st July, 2015. This programme was launched with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The success of this programme to a great extent depends on the availability, affordability, and efficiency of digital infrastructure, readiness of the people to become digital, and on digital literacy rate. The three key vision areas of this programme are – digital infrastructure as utility to every citizen, governance and services on demand, and digital empowerment of citizens. It includes providing high speed internet, digital identity, easy access to Common Service Centres, making financial transactions electronic and cashless, availability of digital resources/services in Indian languages, etc. Digital India programme will be beneficial to the Indian economy if it is properly implemented. It will act as a catalyst for rapid economic development of India. It will increase transparency and accountability. The businessmen can make use of online tools to expand their business and increase its effectiveness. The education and research, health, IT, banking and financial sectors, etc. will all be benefited by this programme. Though various initiatives have been undertaken by the Government of India for the success of this programme, yet there are certain peculiar features of India which may act as hurdle in the path of digital India programme. Low literacy rate, very low digital literacy rate, low level of income, lack of proper infrastructure, cyber crimes, lack of awareness — all act as hurdles in the success of the programme. For overcoming the hurdles, it is necessary to improve the literacy rate in India and also increase digital literacy rate. More measures need to be taken to increase employment opportunities and the income of the poor, only then they will be in a position to take advantage of digital India programme. The curriculum of educational institutions should be modified to include required skills needed to become digital. Awareness camps should be organized about digital India programme and cyber security. These will help in increasing the readiness of the public to become digital and will contribute towards the success of Digital India programme.

Key Words : Digital India, Literacy rate, Digital infrastructure

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the fastest growing in the economy and to take India to greater heights, the Government of India launched the Digital India programme. The success of this programme, to a great extent, depends on the availability, affordability and efficiency of digital infrastructure, readiness of the people to become digital, and universal digital literacy.

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The Digital India programme is an ambitious programme of the government launched by honourable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi on 1st July, 2015, with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. This attempts to transform the entire ecosystem of public services through the use of information technology.

Though government has undertaken various steps to implement the digital India programme efficiently and successfully, but there are certain peculiar features of India which may act as hurdles in the path of digital India programme.

Objectives :

- To know about Digital India Programme
- To understand the challenges of Digital India Programme

METHODOLOGY

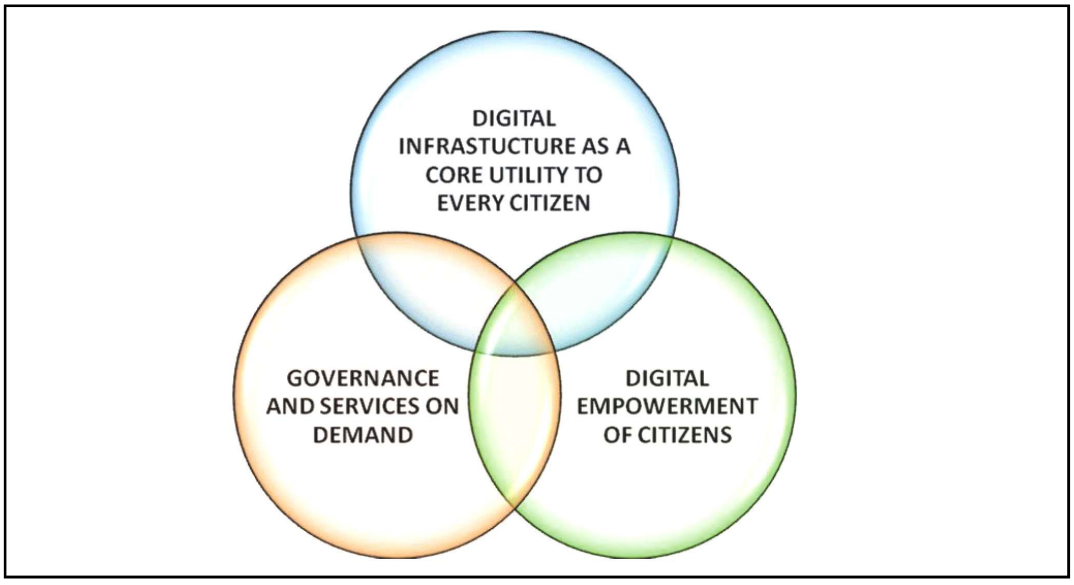
This study is based on secondary data and books, journals, websites, magazines etc. have been referred to in attempt to achieve the objectives of this study. Graphs and tables have used to make the matter clear and understandable.

Digital India Programme :

'We want to have one mission and target : Take the nation forward – Digitally and Economically' – Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi

The Digital India programme of Government of India aims to prepare India for knowledge based transformation, delivering good governance to the citizens by synchronization and coordination with both central government and state government, and make India a digitally empowered nation.

*The Digital India programme is centred on three key vision areas:



Digital infrastructure as a utility to every citizen :

It includes providing high speed internet as a core utility for delivery of services to citizens and digital identity that is unique, lifelong, online and authenticable to every citizen. It provides for

mobile phone and bank account to enable citizen participation in digital and financial space. It includes easy access to Common Service Centre, shareable private space on a public cloud, and safe – secure cyber-space.

Governance and services on demand :

It includes providing seamlessly integerated services across departments along with availability of services in real time from online and mobile platforms. It ensures all citizens entitlements to be portable and available on the cloud. It also includes providing digitally transformed services for improving ease of doing business, and making financial transactions electronic and cashless. It provides for leveraging Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) for decision support systems and development.

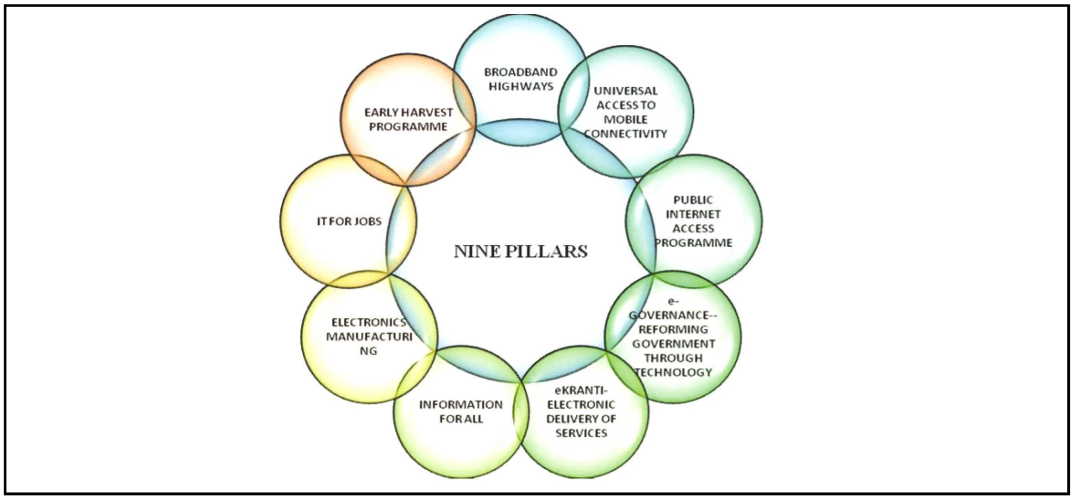
Digital empowerment of citizens :

It includes attainment of universal digital literacy. It includes providing universally accessible digital resources along with availability of digital resources / services in Indian languages. It also includes providing collaborative digital platforms for participative governance. Citizens will not be required to physically submit Government documents/certificates, *i.e.*, these can be submitted online.

It is necessary to have a strong management structure for effective management and the success of the Digital India programme. The programme management structure would consists of a Monitoring Committee on Digital India headed by the Prime Minister, a Digital India Advisory Group chaired by the Minister of Communications and IT and an Apex Committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary. The structure has the needed secretarial/ monitoring/ technical support and appropriate decentralization of power and responsibility to ensure effective execution of the various projects/ components by the implementing departments/ teams.

The Apex Committee has been formulated and its meetings have been held, and action plans are being prepared on its decisions, but only time will tell about the success of this programme.

Digital India is to be implemented by the entire Government with overall coordination being done by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY). Digital India aims to provide the much needed thrust to the nine pillars of growth areas, the names of which are given below. Each of these areas is a complex programme in itself and cuts across multiple Ministries and Departments.



Advantages of Digital India :

Digital India programme would be beneficial to Indian economy and its people, if it is properly implemented and outcomes are properly analysed, and problems are immediatelty tackled. Some of the benefits of the digital India programme are given below :

– The digital India programme will ensure the availability of government services through common service centres.
– It will improve online infrastructure and increase internet connectivity.
– It will help in getting things done easily and will reduce paper documentation
– It will help in increasing accountability and transparency
– It will be beneficial to various sectors like education, research, health, IT, banking and financial sectors, etc.
– It will contribute towards creation of new employment opportunities
– It will step up digital literacy
– People can use online tools to expand their business and increase its effectiveness
– It will act as catalyst for rapid economic development of India

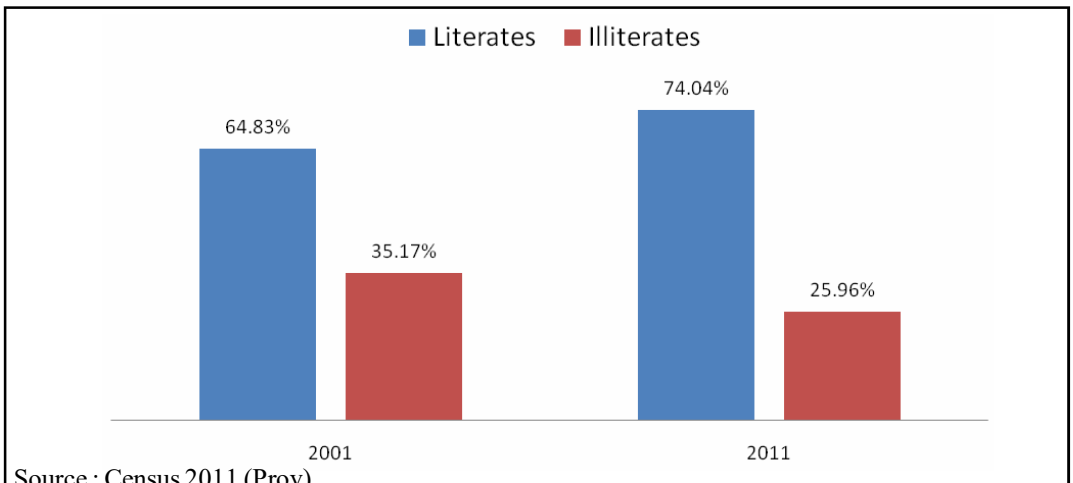
Challenges of Digital India :

India, where there is low literacy rate, low level of income, large population, and insufficient and poor infrastructure, transforming India into a digital nation is quite a challenging task. Poverty along with economic inequality are certainly major hurdles in the path of digitalization.

Literacy rate:

Higher levels of education and literacy will certainly act as catalyst in making India, a digital nation. But the literacy rate is low in India and there also exists disparity in rural – urban literacy rate and male – female literacy rate. This disparity acts as barrier in achieving the goal of digital India. Moreover in India, generally good quality education and training is quite costly. So it becomes difficult for the poor to obtain proper education and professional training.

Moreover, digital literacy is also low in India. According to ASSOCHAM-Deloitte joint study on Digital India, November 2016, around 950 million Indians are still not on internet. As of mid-



Source : Census 2011 (Prov)

Fig. 1 : Effective literacy rate

2016, digital literacy in India is less than 10%*. The curriculum in educational institutions are also mostly lacking in providing required skills needed to step up digital literacy in India. Increasing the effective literacy rate will certainly help in stepping up digital literacy in India.

Effective literacy rate as per Census 2011 (prov.) in India is 74.04 per cent**. NSSO's 71st round of survey on Social Consumption: Education (January to June 2014) indicates that adult literacy (age 15 years and above) rate in rural areas was 64 per cent and in urban areas it was 84 percent. Illiterates will face difficulty in becoming digital as digitalization requires understanding and use of smartphones and computers.

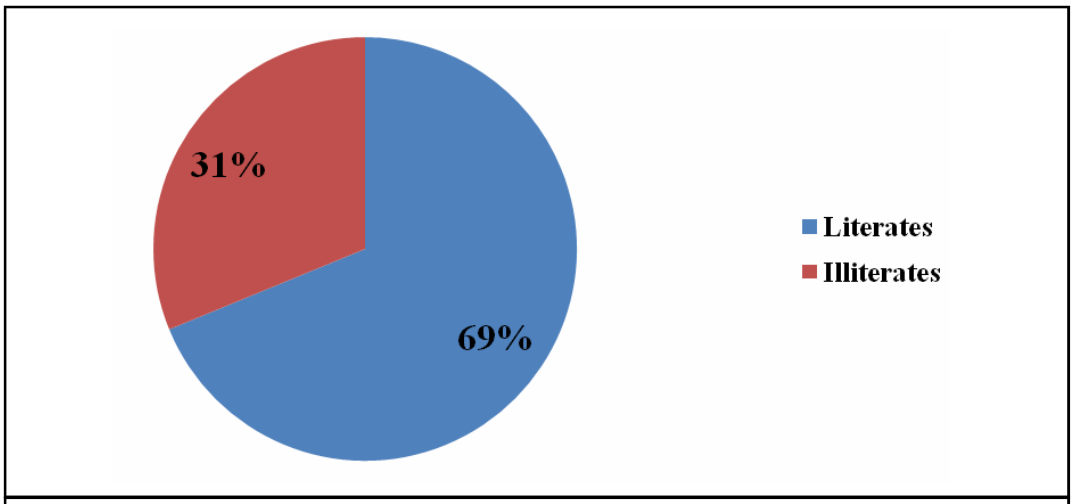


Fig. 2 : Rural areas - India, 2011

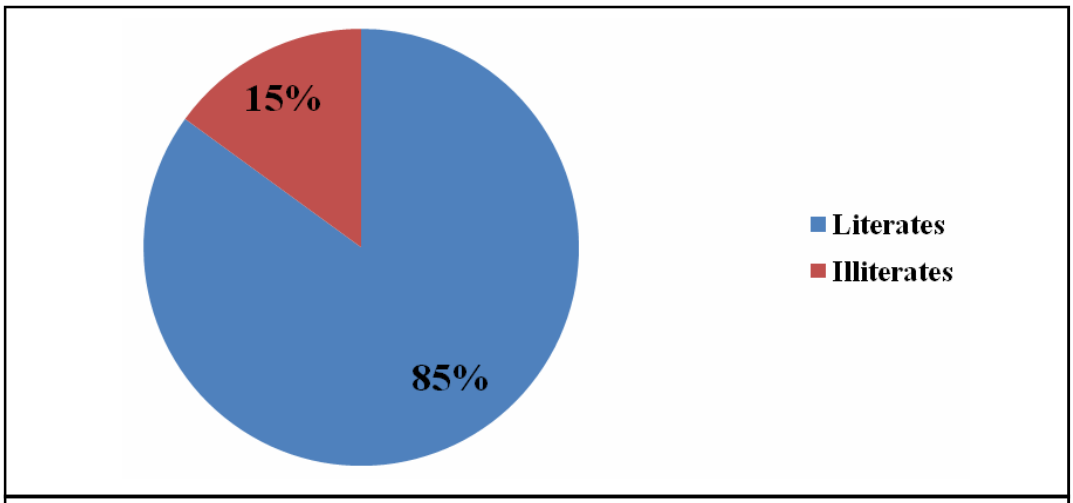


Fig. 3 : Rural areas - India, 2011

Literacy Rate	2011
Male literacy rate	82.14%
Female literacy rate	65.46%

Low level of Income :

Though India is among the fastest growing economies in the world, the employment opportunities are not expanding at a fast rate to meet the needs of the vast population of India. Large population accompanied with low employment opportunities, economic disequality and low literacy rate are some of the reasons responsible for low per capita income in India. Low income acts as a barrier in purchase of smartphones, computers and such other devices as well as services necessary to become digital.

The Expert Group (Rangarajan) constituted by the Planning Commission, estimates that the 30.9% of the rural population and 26.4% of the urban population was below the poverty line in 2011-12. The all-India ratio was 29.5%. In rural India, 260.5 million individuals were below poverty and in urban India 102.5 million were under poverty.

Totally, 363 million were below poverty in 2011-12.

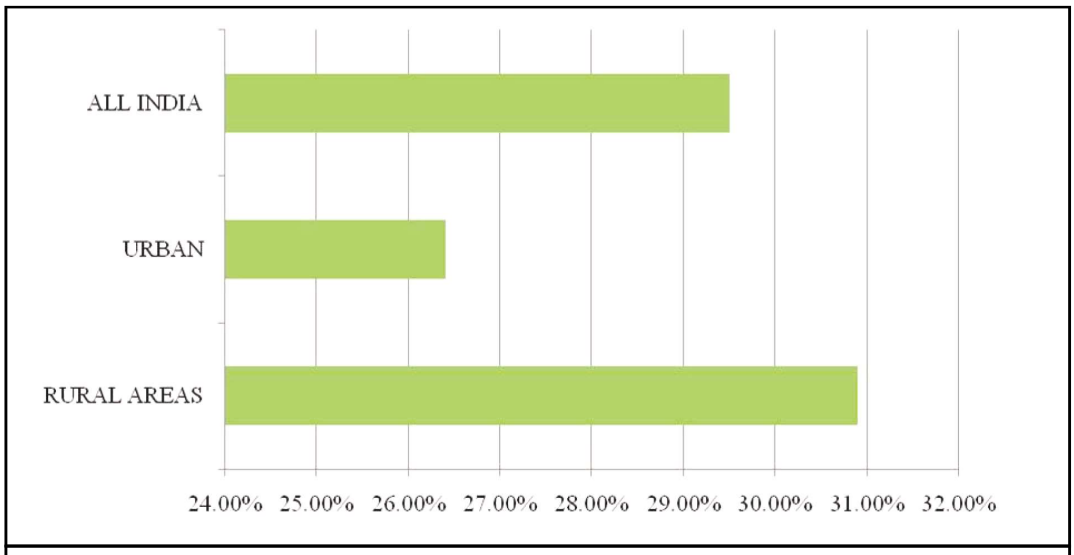


Fig. 4 : Population below poverty line

Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 indicates that about 92 per cent of rural household have income (monthly income of highest earning household member) less than Rs.10,000/- per month and about 75 per cent of rural households have monthly income (monthly income of highest earning household member) less than Rs.5000/- per month***.

Low infrastructure development:

One of the biggest challenge faced by Digital India programme is slow and delayed infrastructure development. For Digital India programme to have impact on citizens across the nation, the rural-urban digital divide needs to be addressed through last mile connectivity in rural areas, as currently many villages remain deprived of mobile connectivity.

While the overall Internet penetration in India is 33 per cent, it is only 16 per cent in the rural areas, as per a report released at the 'India Mobile Congress 2017****

India currently has ~31,000 Wi-Fi hotspots and to match the global average of a hotspot for every 150 people, 8 million hotspots need to be deployed in India as per study titled 'Digital India:

Unlocking the Trillion Dollar opportunity,' jointly conducted by ASSOCHAM and Deloitte[1].

There are many places in India, especially in rural areas where there is no internet connectivity or very poor internet connectivity. Urban areas in comparison to rural areas have mostly high speed internet connectivity. Moreover, for digital technology to be accessible significant efforts are needed to customize apps and services to cater to local needs, but finding vendors who can provide it has become a challenging task, especially in rural India.

Other factors :

Increase in the rate cyber crimes and frauds create lack of trust in digital programmes and this acts as hurdle in becoming digital. Lack of awareness about digital India programme, lack of required skills and inflation, all may directly or indirectly hamper the programme.

Recommendations :

– More resources and efforts should be put in for the development of primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of India.

– Awareness campaigns should be organized both in rural and urban areas about digital India programme.

– Awareness programmes should be organized on cyber security, risks and safeguarding information on the internet.

– There should be proper vigilance and security measures along with sufficient legal support for digital transactions.

– More efforts and resources should be put in to step up the literacy rate and quality of education.

– More steps should be taken to push up the income level of the poor, so as to increase access to affordable broadband, smart devices and monthly data packages

– More short term training workshops should be organized for development of required skills

– More efforts and resources should be put in to push up the availability, affordability and efficiency of digital infrastructure.

Conclusion :

Digital India programme will certainly contribute in the development of the Indian economy. Though many initiatives have been undertaken by the government for the success of digital India programme, yet there is much more task to be done. There are many hurdles which the government has to take care of for realizing the dream of Digital India. For digital India programme to be inclusive, it is necessary that the rural-urban digital divide is addressed through last mile connectivity, that is even the remotest place in rural India should have mobile and internet connectivity. The private sector should also be given incentives to contribute in overcoming the challenges of making India a Digital India.

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