

SOCIAL CHANGE AND CHALLENGES IN THE EPOCH OF DIGITALIZATION: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Indian masses are strongly influenced by the culture prevailing in the society and re – socializing values already indoctrinated is not easy to alter. Culture have a profound influence on one's attitude, perception, values, beliefs, personality and so on. The newly introduced 'Digital India' programme is based on technology with a vision to transform India to a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy. Citizens can now avail many of the Government services electronically. The implementation of digitalization will help in impelling power of Information Technology for the overall development of the country. Implementing it is a great challenge and there are many hurdles to successfully implement it especially in the social sector due to poor internet connectivity in the remote areas and rectification of the concerned issue lacking by certain departments. The process of 'Digitalisation' is creating a constant deliberation among economist, bureaucrats, Industrialist as well as educationists. This paper attempts to understand the concept, its impact and effect of digitalization in Indian Society and how it has been able provide various services to the people in society.

Keywords

Digitalization, Culture, Cultural Lag, Socio – cultural Change, Organisational change.

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Introduction

Digital India is a dream project of the present Indian Government to reconstruct a digitally skilled masses and empowering them with better knowledge and preparing them to sustain to the future changes. Digital India was an initiative launched on 1st July 2015 by the honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure that Government services are made available to citizens electronically by improving online infrastructure as well as Internet connectivity with high speed networks especially in rural areas. This recent initiative introduced by the Indian Government will produce a positive improvement in the field of networking. This process of 'Digitalization' which is in its infant stage will gradually create a remarkable transformation that the country has ever witnessed as is the known fact that digital India is the consequence of many experiments as well as scientific inventions. This will surely have an impact on the economy and quality of life of the people in India because today 'Digital technologies' are being increasingly used by us in everyday lives from retail stores to government offices.

Digital India Programme includes various schemes worth over Rs. 1 lakh crore.¹ The programme includes projects that aim to ensure that government services are available to citizens electronically and people get benefit of the latest information and communication on e-education, e-health and so on. The Ministry of Communications and IT is the nodal agency to implement the programme².

Objective:

The paper provides an overview of:

Overview of Digitalization in India.

To identify how Digitalization process affected the culture of Indian population in India.

The challenges faced in the implementation of the Programme.

Suggestion to improve the process.

Research Methodology

The available secondary data has been widely used for the study and the data has been collected from various magazines, journals, newspapers, government reports and certain academic literature on Digital India. Secondary data from government sources and the available research

papers are referred. It is a conceptual paper and focus is more on the concepts, its application and the impact on economy. Therefore qualitative data have been used

Meaning - Concept

Social Changes are the alterations of behaviour patterns, social relationships, institutions, and social structure over time³

Digitalization is the integration of digital technologies into everyday life by the digitization of everything that can be digitized. The literal meaning of digitalization gives an apparent idea of development and technology dependent world. In this chapter, digitalization means computerization of systems and jobs for better ease and accessibility. - ICT: A Magic Wand for Social Change in Rural India.⁴

DIGITALISATION AND SOCIO – CULTURAL CHANGE IN INDIA

The present century is witnessing a dramatic shift in the field of Information Technology. It not only changed the life style of the people but also improved the technical know-how of the people.

Digitalisation as a process of social change has been a debating topic among policy-makers, economists and industry leaders about its societal impact. This process of social change has affected issues such as employment, salary, discrimination, and so on.

Government has been promoting the process of Digitalization, by providing the citizens all services either on their web portals or electronically. This makes business communication easy and smooth.

Unique Identity number or Aadhaar number is the base for Digital program and this also helps in curbing duplicate or fake identities.

Digitalisation will lead to rapid and better service to customers. It increases customer satisfaction by timely and widespread reach of the services delivered to the masses.

This new digital revolution which has been influential in executing new methods and techniques has in turn altered the culture, mass media, politics and education. This revolution has not only brought about material changes but also non – material. It has created more awareness and changed the interrelationships and interaction of the people in society.

History also proved on how the new learnings and cultural changes and amalgamation of new culture have changed society. There have been diverse changes in person's identity, the relationships, the customs and the ethos of the civilisation from time to time. The introduction of Digitalisation is gradually indicating a new culture and the everyday practice is also effecting Indian culture. Adoption of other culture which is mostly individualistic in nature has changed Indian values and beliefs.

These cultural changes perceived, occur within the society as well are borrowed from another society. This give and take relationship has brought in new ideas, changed values, practices and beliefs. This has brought about changes in society. These changes have aided in progress of civilization and introduction of new culture. Without change in human element, change cannot occur and this brings in lasting changes in society.

Now efforts are on for Digital empowerment of citizens & will pay emphasis on universal digital literacy and availability of digital resources/services in Indian languages.

Concern is on about how the issues such as jobs, wages, inequality, health, resource efficiency and security will be impacted.

Some ways in which digitalisation process affected the culture of Indian population:

Change in Organizational Culture: Constant change is the key to any organisation. Organisations should be quick in adopting the new culture as well able to reach it to the people. Culture plays a key role for any transformation. The ability to transform depends on the impulse of the organizational culture.

Induce technical skills among the masses:The use of digital technologies requires reasoning ability, socio-emotional, and technical skills that help respond to fast-changing technologies and their adoption. Constant practice of the same leads to technically skilled population.

Introduction of various program has benefited and changed Indian culture to certain extent: The introduction of 'Aadhaar' the biometric identification was the first step towards digitalisation process which was followed by other programs such as Jan-Dhan Yojana (providing a bank account for every Indian household), PAHAL (LPG subsidies for Aadhaar Card holders) and Digi - Locker (storage of personal documents on a secured government server) followed. The notion of "Smart Cities" is also supposed to change the urban landscape, to create new investment opportunities and to promote employment. The Indian government continues to strongly encourage cashless economic system by introducing and promoting digital payment transactions since the demonetization process in 2016. These changes have brought in wide-ranging cultural changes in the lifestyle and habit of the Indian population.

Transmission of Cultural values are affected by the process of digitalisation: No product is independent of the process of digitalisation and the values are also modified on the basis of the digitalisation culture. Cultural value is transferred in the design of a product which in turn has changed the way of life of the people.

Interaction among members have changed: The way societies operate and interact with each other has drastically changed with the advent of the digital revolution. The impact of technology has impacted the interaction process, approach to life and dealing with problems. Digital India seeks to transform into an empowered society which makes people more competitive in their approach.

Challenges of Digitalization Process

Presence of Cultural Lag: The use of digital technologies requires reasoning ability, socio-emotional, and technical skills that help respond to fast-changing technologies and their adoption. With the present literacy rate at 74.04% and the question arises on how many literates possess technical knowledge. Lag or gap exist in technical knowledge.

Lack of proper knowledge of various mobile applications: An article published in 'The Hindu' on 29th March 2018 on 'Mobile internet users in India seen at 478 million by June' states - The report estimates 291 million urban mobile internet users, with 187 million rural users by June. "Urban India witnessed an estimated 18.64 per cent year-on-year rise, while rural India witnessed an estimated growth of 15.03 per cent during the same period."⁵ Though the percentage of internet users are gradually increasing, the question is how many have installed or are familiar with the knowledge of various Mobile Application and are they convenient in using the same.

Lack of proper infrastructure facility: The news published in NDTV news titled - Rural India: Living Under Digital Exclusion on 6th January 2017 States that 'India's 70% population that lives in rural areas and after government's demonetisation move, it is asking the people to use e-Wallets and make e-Payments, but an e-wallet means nothing unless one has an internet-enabled mobile phone, a functional bank account and a credit or debit card. Paytm, Freecharge, the newly launched Bhim app by the government are inaccessible if there is no working internet connection for the consumer. So the problem is not of digital literacy alone but of infrastructure to support a digital economy and 'Digital India'.⁶

The first risk is the degradation of human relationships resulting from intense digital consumption. – An article published Digital media powered growth in India's M&E industry in 2018: Report – Published on 13th March 2019 - States that 'India's media and entertainment (M&E) sector grew 13.4% year-on-year to touch ₹1.67 trillion in 2018, powered by digital platforms that grew 42% to ₹16,900 crore during the period, a new report said. At 570 million, India has the second-highest number of Internet users after China, growing 13% annually and estimated to reach five million by 2021. The report estimates that approximately 2.5 million consumers in India are digital only and would not normally use traditional media'.⁷

Further the article published on - Indians Spend More Time Watching Digital Content Than Global Average: Survey

States that - Indians spent an average of 8 hours 28 minutes each week watching online videos, while the global average was six hours and 45 minutes in 2018, a 58 percent increase from the 2016 figures, the “State of Online Video 2018” survey from Limelight Networks, a global digital content delivery platform, said.⁸

The network lag can be bridged only by installing efficient infrastructure for accessing internet facility. Well-equipped infrastructure is mandatory for including data and the other requirements and for this the bandwidth should support and to reach it to rural areas too is a requirement.

Lag existing between technology adoption and its social and economic impact: An article published in ‘The Economic Times’ on ‘**Internet users in India expected to reach 500 million by June: IAMAI’ on 20th February 2018 states** 62% access internet daily in urban area as compared to 53%, in rural India⁹. With nearly half of the population not using internet facility, it is difficult for the digitalisation process to spread wide. Moreover the persisting lack of basic education among majority of the Indian population is another hurdle for the digitalization process to survive. Remote rural areas lack internet facility and for digitalisation process to endure becomes tough.

Cost of maintaining the infrastructure: An article submitted in website – **GoCertify INDIA** states that Cost is another significant hurdle — Digital India is estimated to cost approximately Rs. 113,000 crore (equivalent to 1,130 billion rupees). On top of these challenges is the ticking of the clock — Digital India has just four years left to prove its worth.¹⁰ To bear this huge cost and move forward with this mission remains a challenge.

Lack of proper Guidance: The support service provided by the Government is also not up to the mark because navigating to the portal is sometimes not feasible even for the tech – savvy’s. The question of majority of illiterate population navigating through the portal is not practical without proper guidance.

SUGGESTION

Demonetization process has indeed encouraged the formation of a less cash and a digital economy to survive and the popularity of online application such as paytm, debit/credit cards, internet banking, mobile wallets and digital payment apps but educating the population on these applications is time consuming and for the habituated culture to change will need time and resources.

The need of the hour is to introduce and implement beneficial policies on digitalisation which will provide favourable benefits to the masses in the society so that the fervour to adopt the digitalisation process continues and the impact provides better result.

Educating the poor on the Mobile phone payment system will encourage the drive of cashless society. People accessing smartphones should be educated and encouraged to receive and make payments using mobile phones. Small time vendors such as Street food sellers and vegetable vendors need to be made aware of the facility and be educated to use the system.

It is important for building a structured system & organizational culture for a successful adoption of digital technologies.

CONCLUSION

Culture is a key determinant of successful digital transformation. Radical change can be bought out in technologies, the required infrastructure, and our processes, but without addressing the human element, enduring change will not happen. Culture is the core of any organization. Knowledge, better interaction among people and access to information are the main impacting forces for any process to persist. Drifting from a cash economy to a digital economy will demand altering of the entire mind-set for consumers. It involves shifting to new social and cultural traits and practices and this social changes will consume plenty of efforts and time.

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