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RURAL INDIA IN THE DIGITALIZIED PHASE

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Abstract
The article discusses the strides towards digitalization of rural India and its implication for the economy. Legion of initiatives were taken like Lifelines India, e-choupal, Choupal Sagar, Gyandoot, n-louge etc. Its impact is also far reaching in Employment Opportunities, Improvement in standard of Living, Reduction in Risk and Uncertainty etc.

Keywords: Digitalization, Rural India, Gyandoot, E-Choupal.

Introduction

India, which is considered primarily as an agricultural economy, is developing at a very great peace. It has now become a knowledge based economy. It has got the world's largest pool of scientists, doctors, engineers and experts in every field. India's metros are fully developed and have all the latest technologies. The revolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) revolution in India has created a technological divide between the urban and rural areas. Many of India's companies and well-informed enjoy the benefits of ICTs; however these technologies are not accessible or affordable for the majority of the population. The divide is exacerbated by the deeply ingrained disparities of gender and social class, which determine who can or cannot access technology. Despite recent Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (since the 1990), accessibility is also impaired by language barriers, such as lack of suitable content and applications in local languages. Today, the trend is otherwise India is also developing at faster rate. According to a marketing research firm report by Francis Kanoi "Contrary to the perception that Direct- to-Home (DTH) television technology is an urban or a metro phenomenon, 70 per cent of its DTH subscribers reside in rural areas and towns with a population under a million. And metros like Delhi or Mumbai contribute only 2-3 per cent to the overall DTH subscriber base of 13.2 million" In rural India the market leaders are Dish TV and DD's direct plus DTH while in metros Tata Sky, Dish TV and Sun Direct DTH services are the sought after brands. The states of Maharashtra, Goa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan are the leaders in DTH subscription, contributing more than 6.4 million DTH connections or 48 per cent to the overall DTH subscriber base. DTH has become popular in rural areas for it always responds to the verity of consumers choices. In rural areas, almost 10 to 12 hours of power cuts. None the less it is easier for the people to access their favorite programmes through DTH. What all the need is a small generator to switch on their alights TV which the cable fails to do so.

Digitalization of Rural India and the Steps in the Context

Cisco and BT have established Life lines India. It is a telephone-based help line that offers advice and guidance to rural farming communities. Majority of the rural population is unlettered and therefore a voice based programe is highly useful to the farmers. Large number of farmers call on helpline for varies problem concerning cattle and pest infestation etc. There is one case of a farmer whose cow was milking very less. He called on help lines and followed their instructions meticulously and within few days found improvement the quantity of milk.

The program, which was launched in November 2006, can point to many glaring achievements:

- Participating farmers have increased profits from 25 to 150 percent due to a consistent improvement in crop quality and productivity.
- The FAQ database now contains more than 125,000 entries.
- The program has expanded to include over 100,000 farmers in nearly 5,000 villages.
- Call volume has risen from 1,100 per month at launch to more than 200 calls daily.
- The program has expanded beyond agriculture and now supports teachers with advice on curriculum, pedagogy, policy and administration.

Madhya Pradesh government has launched Gyandoot Project. Under the project a reliable intranet connects villages across the district in a State. Access is through numerous cyber-kiosks run by local entrepreneurs. A wide range of services is offered: mandi [market] information, landholder records, Hindi email, forms and news on employment, matrimonial, education and health. This project won the prestigious Stockholm Challenge Award for the year 2000.

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation of Chennai and International Development Research Centre [IDRC] of Canada have embarked upon corresponding to Gyandoot project named, The Information Village Research Project (IVRP). In Chennai about 8 villages around Pondicherry form the test bed for the project. The villages covered under the project, Villianur, Pillayarkuppam, Kizhur, Embalam, Veerampattinam, Thirukanchipet, Pooranamkuppam and Kalitheerthalkuppam, information technology is no longer a dream of the 21st century It has redefined their lives. It provides information on fisheries, agriculture, buses, healthcare, jobs etc. online. The advantages of the project is that the project exploits' 60% of solar energy devoid of wireless. Under this project the village information centre (VIC) receives information through voice

mail and dispenses it through a public-address system. Farmers get advice on rotation of crops, fertilizers and pesticides. They no longer need to travel up to 20 km away to know the market price of their crop. Unreliable power supply does not bother these villages as 60 per cent of the project work is carried by solar power. Motorola has donated two-way radio dispatch equipment to connect the villages so that they are not handicapped by the lack of telephones in the villages.

The recent elections were completes computerized and that too for the first time in India and carried out on India made machines. People everywhere, even in rural areas handled it at ease. There was no need for ballot boxes to be manually carried and hence no poll rigging. Results were announced within three hours of beginning the software driven 'counting' ITC has launched its new innovative rural mall "Choupal Sagar". It stocks wide range of products from consumer durables to the grocery items. It also provides training facilities to farmers for new techniques of farming, E-kiosk for market intelligence and requisition of farm inputs, warehouse for the storage of farm products, information center for online information on weather condition and community prices.

An organization called n-louge focused on providing commercial telephone and internet connection to every village. It decided to provide an Internet Kiosk with a computer, an Internet connection, a printer and some accessories like web cam in each village. It is a hub of rural connectivity, as well as education and training, health care, agricultural consultancy and e governance.

Impact of Digitalization of Rural India

- **Employment Opportunities:** First and foremost benefit of digitalization is increase in employment opportunities in rural areas. Large number of small entrepreneurs have got employment in provision of Internet kiosks in rural areas
- **Standard of Living:** The improvement in standard of living of the people by improving their income. Large numbers of people are getting benefitted by these facilities. They are using internet services and other facilities provided by various schemes like lifelines India and are getting awareness regarding various plant diseases, new methods of farming etc. They are also getting information on various diseases of farm animals and methods with this they can remain healthy and their output also increases.
- **Risk and Uncertainty:** Being reduced rural community is taking advantage of available techniques and is protecting risk and uncertainty by getting market information online. Fishermen observe weather conditions before venturing into the sea. They are also carrying mobile phones with them so that in case of emergencies they can contact their relatives or authorities for help.
- **Saved Life During Tsunami:** "Residents of the village of Nallavadu, Pondicherry on the east coast of India escaped December's deadly tsunami after some quick- thinking, and forewarned, citizens managed to broadcast an alert of the oncoming waves. After receiving a phone call from a relative in Singapore who had heard of the earthquake and resulting tsunami headed for India, villagers broke into the community centre set up by the IDRC-supported MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) where a public address system used routinely to announce sea conditions to the fishermen was housed. The warning was successful and the entire village's population of more than 3,500 evacuated the area in time" (Digital Review of Asia Pacific) this is only one instance in which ICT could save lives of large number of people.
- **E-literacy in Rural India:** Large number of rural youth desires training in using computers, MS Office and Internet. Internet Kiosks are conducting educational and training programs for rural youth. Under various programs large number of rural youth is being trained through village knowledge centers.
- **Improvement in Spoken English:** Rural people have become aware of importance of spoken English, since English is the must to be conversant with Internet.

Conclusion

Digitalization of rural India gives a very rosy picture. But it is not so. There are large number of problems and challenges ahead. Discussion of all these is beyond the scope of this paper. But it can be said that Indian farmer is no longer traditional and illiterate. It is found that whenever he has got the opportunity he has made full use of available technology and has benefitted with it. However, India to draw the maximum solution to its problems it should educate people on all the areas of necessity, since the environment cover is precipatatiregly dwindling the awareness of its protection is for more important than all other scientific achievements. All the achievements in the digitalized world become fruitful only when the environmental degradation is hasted. To make it more effective conscientious concerted effort should more to be strengthened. Creation of consejousness should exell the mere awareness among the people to extract the genuine benefits. It is for the India and world at large to make digitalization even more effective and result oriented. The digitalization process should move invinciblng towards protecting the nature as it is the only life blood of all existing phenomenon. Digitalization

rather than being mere anthrop centric, it should take into its stride the lost glory of nature and make it more responsive to human existence. For there is no nature, no existence. Finally, this paper makes no attempt to focus on regeneration of natural components with on open eye to the existing natural scenario through digitalization. ICT should move towards nature for consummation of its set-goal. ICT relation should more here after as men-nature, ICT triangular relationship to sustain and sign to the future generation.

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