Digital Empowerment: Need and Challenges In 2023

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ABSTRACT

The term digital empowerment describes the process of utilizing digital technologies to give people and communities access to knowledge, tools, and resources that help them accomplish their objectives and enhance their standard of life. In the framework of Digital India, digital empowerment is a major goal of the government's flagship program to make India into a society and knowledge economy that is empowered by technology. By giving all societal segments, particularly the underprivileged or marginalized, access to digital infrastructure, services, and resources, digital empowerment aims to close the digital divide and encourage inclusive growth. It includes a multifaceted strategy that takes into account different facets of digital literacy, skill development, digital entrepreneurship, and access to digital services and resources. The vision and mission of making citizens digitally included and empowered has many challenges to overcome.

Key Words
Digital Empowerment, Digital Literacy, Need, Challenges, Role, Digital Indi

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I.   INTRODUCTION

India, a union of nations, is Asia's second most populous country after China. The nation has made impressive advances in science and technology and is emerging as one of the most powerful economies in the developing world. Through information dissemination, information and communication technologies have brought about significant changes in the growth of Indian society (Dar and Nagrath, 2022). Through the Digital India Programme, Government of India envisioned to transform the Indian society. Launched by Prime minister Shri Narendra Modi on 1st July 2015, Digital India intended to transmute India to a knowledge economy. Many initiatives are taken by the Indian Government to make this dream a reality. The Digital India initiative is the result of changes brought about by information and communication technology. It is a government of India effort to integrate government departments and the people of India. Its goal is to ensure that government services are accessible to citizens electronically by reducing red tape (Paramasivan et al., 2018). According to Arvind (2015), the Digital India, will play a major role in the successful delivery of services, performance monitoring, project management, and governance improvement.

Digital empowerment can be done in many different ways, such as:

1.   Providing access to technology: This means making sure that everyone has the hardware and software they need to use digital tools.

2.   Digital literacy means knowing how to use digital tools and get around online, including protecting your privacy and safety.

3.   Imparting Digital skills: This means being able to make things like websites, videos, or posts on social media.

4.   Online communication: This means being able to talk to people in a good way through things like email, messaging, and social media.

Digital empowerment can make a big difference in people's lives by giving them access to education, jobs, health care, and other services they need. It can also help communities connect and work together better, which is good for both social and economic growth (Sharma, 2016).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The paper has the following objectives:

i.   To Study the concept of Digital Empowerment.

ii.   To study how Digital Empowerment helps to make Digital India Programme Successful.

iii.   To study the various challenges faced in making the citizens Digitally Empowered.

BUILDING CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION
1. **Meaning of digital empowerment**

Digital empowerment is the process of equipping people with the skills, knowledge, and resources to access, understand, and use digital technology to improve their lives. It is a comprehensive strategy for assisting individuals in developing their digital literacy while expanding their access to resources, employment prospects, and social interactions (Agarwal et al., 2022). The larger goal of ensuring that all people and communities have access to digital technology is known as digital inclusion, and digital empowerment is a key part of that effort (Kirti et al., 2017).

2. **Digital India: Vision, Programmes and Initiatives**

Digital India is the Government of India's flagship programme, with the objective of transforming India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.

- **Vision of Digital India**

Digital India Programme envisions inclusive growth in electronic services, products, manufacturing, and job opportunities. Digital India Vision is basically classified in 3 major areas, which are as follows:

1. Digital infrastructure as a service that wants to give every citizen high-speed internet, an online identity from birth to death, a cell phone and a bank account, access to a common service centre, private space that can be shared on a public cloud, and a safe and secure cyberspace (Ray, 2021).

2. Integrated across departments and jurisdictions, real-time web and mobile platforms will offer governance and services on demand. Citizens won't need to bring any paperwork with them while seeking services because all citizen documents will be stored on the cloud platform (Rathore and Panwar, 2020). Cashless electronic transactions will also aid in increasing revenue. Geospatial Information Systems will be incorporated into the development strategies (GIS).

3. Empower people, especially people who live in rural areas, by teaching them how to use technology. This will be done through digital platforms for collaboration and by making digital resources available in their native language, so that their participation can happen (Suljan and Kiran, 2018). It will help people use the data that will be freely available on the cloud computing platform without the need for an intervention.

- **Nine Pillars of Digital India Program Projects**
1. Broadband Highways
2. Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity
3. Public Internet Access Programme
4. e-Governance: Reforming Government through Technology
5. e-Kranti - Electronic Delivery of Services
6. Information for All
7. Electronics Manufacturing
8. IT for Jobs
9. Early Harvest Programmes

DIGITAL INDIA INITIATIVES
AADHAR

One of the most important parts of "Digital India" is the Aadhaar identity platform, which gives every person who lives in the country a unique number called an Aadhaar number. The largest biometrics-based system in the world for identifying people is called Aadhaar. It is a strategic policy tool for encouraging people-centered governance with less hassles, reforming public sector delivery, improving lives, and managing fiscal budgets. It is distinct and powerful enough to oust false or duplicate identities. More than 132.96 crore Aadhaar numbers have been generated and assigned to Indian residents till March 31, 2022 (UIDAI Annual Report 2021-22). It can also be used as a basis or primary identifier for a number of government welfare programmes and schemes to improve service delivery and promote transparency and good governance.

COMMON SERVICE CENTERS (CSCS): One of the mission mode projects in the Digital India Program is the CSC scheme. People in rural and isolated areas of the nation can access a wide range of B2C services as well as public utility services, social welfare programmes, health care, finance, education, and agricultural services at CSCs. It is a pan-Indian network that caters to all of the nation's numerous regional, linguistic, and cultural diversity. This aids the government in achieving its objective of making India a socially, economically, and technologically inclusive nation.

ACCESSIBLE INDIA CAMPAIGN AND MOBILE APP

Sugamya Bharat Abhiyaan, also called the Accessible India Campaign, is a national campaign that aims to make all parts of India accessible to everyone. This means that people with disabilities will have equal access to opportunities, be able to live on their own, and be able to take part in all parts of life. The goal of the campaign

is to make the built environment, transportation system, and information and communication ecosystem more accessible. The mobile app is a way for people all over the country to share information about places that are hard to get to. The mobile app is available for IOS, Android, and Windows and can be downloaded from the App Stores for each platform.

AGRIMARKET APP

The purpose of this smartphone app was to inform farmers of the current market value of their crops and to prevent them from having to resort to distress sales. Once a farmer downloads the AgriMarket Mobile App, he or she can find out what their commodities are selling for in markets within a radius of 50 kilometres of their device. This app uses the farmer's mobile Geolocation to automatically retrieve the market prices of crops grown within a 50-kilometer radius. Agriculture product prices are collected from the Agrimarket website. The app is currently translated into English and Hindi.

BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO

The campaign's stated goal is to ensure that all girls are given an equal opportunity to be born, raised, and educated so that they may become contributing members of society. The campaign connects efforts at the national, state, and district levels with local initiatives in 100 jurisdictions, pooling the resources of various groups for greater efficacy. Videos on the campaign are available on the initiative's YouTube channel.

BHIM (BHARAT INTERFACE FOR MONEY)

Using the Unified Payments Interface, the Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) app streamlines the payment process (UPI). It paves the way for instantaneous Mobile number or Payment address-based collections and direct bank-to-bank payments. The Bharat Interface for Money app may be downloaded from the Google Playstore on Android devices.

CRIME AND CRIMINAL TRACKING NETWORK & SYSTEMS (CCTNS)

Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) was developed as a planned initiative after the success of another initiative, the Common Integrated Police Application (CIPA), which was not planned (CIPA). Through the implementation of e-Governance and the development of a national networking infrastructure for the evolution of an IT-enabled state-of-the-art tracking system centred on "Investigation of crime and detection of criminals," CCTNS aims to create a comprehensive and integrated system to improve policing efficiency and effectiveness.

DIGITAL AIIMS

In January 2015, AIIMS, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology made a good connection. The Digital AIIMS project started with this (MeiTY). Every patient who went to AIIMS was given a unique health identification number on an Aadhar platform. A Digital Identity was given to everyone who went to AIIMS and got a Unique Health Identification Number.

E-GRANTHALAYA

The National Informatics Centre (NIC), Department of Electronics and Information Technology, made e-Granthalaya, which is an integrated library management software. The app can help libraries automate their internal tasks and give their members access to a number of online services. The software has a Web OPAC interface built in so that the library catalog can be published on the Internet. Since the software works with UNICODE, users can enter data in their own languages.

E-PANCHAYAT

E-Panchayat is an e-Government project for the rural sector that offers a complete software solution to try to automate the tasks of the Gram Panchayat. It is a way for representatives of panchayats to connect with the rest of the world. The goal is to make sure that local voices are heard by giving local communities the tools they need to show and share local social, cultural, and economic practices, stories, and problems.

AADHAAR ENABLED PAYMENT SYSTEM (AEPS)

AEPS is a bank-led model that lets people use their Aadhaar numbers to do online financial transactions at PoS (MicroATM) through the business correspondent of any bank. It is a payment service that lets a bank customer use his or her Aadhaar number as an ID to access his or her Aadhaar-enabled bank account and do basic banking transactions like checking the balance, depositing cash, withdrawing cash, and sending money to someone else through a business correspondent.

BPO SCHEME

The India BPO Promotion Scheme (IBPS) wants to make it easier for 48,300 BPO and ITES seats to be set up all over the country. It is given to each state based on how many people live there. The total cost is Rs. 493 crore. This would help build up infrastructure and people in smaller cities and become the foundation for the next wave of IT- and ITES-led growth. Taking into account three shifts of work, this plan has the potential to create around 1.5 lakh direct jobs. It could also lead to a good number of jobs in other ways.

DIGIDHAN ABHIYAAN

Through the DIGIDHAN Bazaar, the plan is for people and businesses to be able to do digital transactions in real time. It plans to help people make digital transactions by helping them download, install, and use different digital payment systems at DigiDhan Melas that will be held all over the country.

MYGOV

MyGov platform is a unique, ground-breaking project that was started by Shri Narendra Modi, the Honourable Prime Minister of India. It is a first-of-its-kind, one-of-a-kind participatory governance project that involves the general public. The idea behind MyGov is to bring the government closer to the average person by using an online platform. This creates a way for the average person and experts to share ideas and opinions in a healthy way. The end goal is to help India become more socially and economically stable.

NORTH EAST BPO PROMOTION SCHEME (NEBPS)

Under the Digital India Program, the North East BPO Promotion Scheme (NEBPS) has been approved to encourage BPO and ITES operations in the North East Region (NER) so that more jobs can be made for young people and the IT-ITES industry grows.

NEED FOR DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT:

With over 1.4 billion people, India has the became the world-largest populated country. However, only 40% of the population is digitally literate. In India, the digital divide is visible, with only a small proportion of the population having access to digital technologies and the internet. To bridge this gap and ensure that every individual in the country has access to digital technologies and the internet, digital empowerment is required (Mishra et al., 2016). On the other hand, Digital empowerment is important to make sure that people and groups can fully participate in the digital world and take advantage of the opportunities it offers.

Reasons to use digital tools:

1. Bridging the digital divide: To bridge the digital divide between people who have access to digital technologies and those who don't, digital empowerment is essential. This gap can lead to differences in education, health care, jobs, and social involvement.

2. Making it easier to get information: Digital empowerment can make it easier to get information and knowledge that wasn't available or was hard to get before. This can help people learn about and understand important issues and give them the power to make decisions based on what they know.

3. Making digital transactions easier: Digital empowerment is essential for making online banking, e-commerce, and digital payments easier. This can help more people get access to the financial system and use less cash.

4. Improving communication and teamwork: Digital empowerment can make it easier for people and groups to talk to each other and work together, so they can share ideas, knowledge, and resources more easily.

5. **Encourage innovation and entrepreneurship:** Digital empowerment can help by giving people access to the tools and resources they need to create and develop digital products and services.

Overall, digital empowerment is important for making society more open, connected, and prosperous, and for making sure that everyone has a chance to take part in the digital world (De and Singh, 2017). The ultimate vision of Government of India is to make DIGITAL INDIA and for making this programme successful, the first thing required is to digitally empower every citizen of India. Otherwise, various projects under Digital India Programme will not be successfully implemented.

CHALLENGES FOR DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT

One of the major challenges in digital empowerment is the lack of infrastructure in rural areas. With over 65% of the population living in rural areas, India's population is predominantly rural. Because these areas have limited access to the internet and digital technologies, providing digital education and resources is difficult. Another issue is the population's lack of digital literacy. Many Indians are unaware of the benefits of digital technologies and are unsure how to use them effectively. This lack of awareness and knowledge impedes digital technology adoption and limits the potential for growth and development (Doshi, 2020). Some of the major challenges faced in the path of digital empowerment are given below:

1.   Infrastructure: Lack of digital infrastructure in many places is one of the biggest problems with digital empowerment. This includes having access to computers, computers with fast internet, and other digital devices (Midha, 2016). Without the right infrastructure, it's hard to get digital empowerment programmes up and running.

2.   Digital divide: The digital divide is the difference between people who can use digital technologies and people who can't. This gap can lead to differences in education, health care, jobs, and social involvement. Bridging this gap is an important step towards digital empowerment.

3. **Digital literacy**: Being digitally empowered requires digital literacy, but many people don't have the skills they need to use digital technologies well. Digital literacy programmes need to be made so that everyone has the skills they need to take full advantage of the digital world.

4. **Privacy and security:** Digital empowerment also raises concerns about the privacy and security risks that come with digital technologies. It's important to address these worries if people are to trust digital technologies and feel safe and secure when using them.

5. **Cost:** Many digital empowerment projects need a lot of money, which can be hard for governments and organisations to come up with. For digital empowerment to happen, it is important to come up with solutions that will last and won't cost too much.

Some of other challenges or Barriers of Digital Empowerment are:

• Lack of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies)
• Weak monitoring and evaluation system
• Lack of last-mile internet connectivity
• Digital Training
• Data Security
• Economic Problems
• User Interface

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTION OF DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

The promotion of digital empowerment in India can be done through a number of different techniques. The first strategy is to offer the public digital education and training. All sociocultural groups should be able to access and understand this education, so it should be provided in that way.

The development of digital infrastructure in rural areas constitutes the second strategy. Computers, high-speed internet and other digital gadgets etc all are the part of this infrastructure (Hans, 2018). These resources can be made available in rural areas due to government and private sector cooperation.

The third strategy is to encourage the creation of digital content in regional tongues. As we all know learning Digital content is not so easy as it has many things to do and sometimes people don't want to learn it because of their traditional thoughts like there is no use of learning it or it can harm our financial resources and this is made for youth or young generation (Kaur et. al., 2022). So, the easiest way to learn Digital Content is to provide it in their local language.

II. DISCUSSION

India's development and growth can be significantly impacted through digital empowerment (Goswami, 2016) . It can increase access to vital services like healthcare, education, and other necessities. Also, it can provide doors to employment and business, especially for women and underprivileged groups. The government's programme for "Digital India" can benefit from digital empowerment as well. India is to be transformed into a knowledge economy and society that is enabled by technology. By encouraging the use of digital technology and promoting general awareness of digital literacy, digital empowerment can help in the achievement of this objective**.**

With the massive growth of Digital Empowerment in recent years, India is considered as digitally included and empowered nation (Kedar, 2015). The regulated Indian government has justified electronic government services. Citizen work has been made easier by improved online infrastructure and connectivity. India leads the digital revolution after 25 years of advanced advancements. India's poverty rate dropped from 22% in 2012 to 16% in 2019 despite population growth. Since, smartphones and 4G streaming have become widespread in urban and rural India, the digital revolution has been gaining momentum. India has 200 million smartphone users and 550 million internet subscribers in 2019. As poor villages seek chances in India's advanced cities, rural-to-urban migration is accelerating this trend. The Indian government has promoted digitization since 2014. The growth of Digital Empowerment is directly related to the efforts made in this field, Government has taken all the necessary efforts to make people digitally strong and even now Value Added Course: Digital Empowerment is added by many universities in the syllabus of Under Graduate Students in NEP.

III. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

• Even government is planning to issue Digital Currency- E Rupee (it is a digital token that will be the equivalent of a bank note, and can be transferred electronically) as soon as possible. It would be crucial for the government to build a trust in e-currency for which various awareness programs should be conducted.

• Since many universities are adding papers related to digital education, the prior knowledge of digital India programs and tools provided by the government would be of added advantage.

- Government should launch a scheme for students in which limited free data should be provided as most of the time during online classes students always deny to take large duration lectures because of unavailability of data. So government should launch such scheme as soon as possible.
- Various campaigns should be launched in local language of the state and should be highlighted on places like buses, metro, taxi, auto etc. and government should also provide some financial benefits when the entire family is digitally empowered.

Digital empowerment requires governments, organisations, and individuals to work together. Some solutions in order to boost the digital empowerment mission are:

1. **Infrastructure**: Governments and businesses can invest in high-speed internet, computers, and other digital technologies to address infrastructure issues. Public-private partnerships, government funding, and other initiatives can do this.

2. **Digital divide**: Governments and organisations can provide digital access and literacy training to underserved communities to bridge the digital divide. Digital access points, free or low-cost gadgets, and digital literacy training are examples.

3. **Digital literacy:** Governments and groups can create digital literacy programmes for all ages and backgrounds to solve the digital literacy issue. These programmes can teach digital skills, internet safety, and privacy.

4. **Privacy and security:** Governments and corporations may protect internet privacy and security through policies and legislation. Data protection, cybersecurity, and internet safety education are examples.

5. **Cost:** Governments and organisations can find sustainable and affordable digital empowerment solutions. Use open-source software, leverage existing infrastructure, and collaborate with other organisations.

In conclusion, governments, organisations, and individuals must collaborate to solve issues of digital empowerment. Together, we can build a more inclusive, connected, and successful society and give everyone a chance to participate online.

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