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# Digital literacy in India: An overview

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**Abstract**
India is witnessing a rapid invasion of digital media in the society and a need for digital literacy for the people emerges. The fact that India is the second largest online market ranking just below China with over 460 million internet users and with strong penetration of internet backed by technological advancement, digital literacy becomes an integral part of the learning and training objectives of almost everyone. Digital literacy is an empowering tool for adolescents and youth. It has the potential to raise the literacy levels in rural areas and give young people the functional knowledge to be aware and responsible citizens. To prepare for the wave of digital transformation, building digital skills is as essential as creating digital infrastructure, starting with a progressive focus on digital literacy and general literacy. Those who lack either will find themselves side-lined. This has been recognized as UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), where one of the monitoring indicators calls on countries to track digital literacy skills. The inevitable and rapidly evolving human-machine relationship will mean that either we are driven by technology, or that we drive the change. The present paper focuses on importance and status of digital literacy in India, steps taken by government to spread digital literacy at different levels, and what more can be done in this regard**.**

**Keywords:** digital economy, digital literacy, economical, GDP, information

## Introduction

During the last two decades, there has been lot of interest and experimentation in the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) worldwide for achieving socio-economic development. Information and communication technologies have brought a revolution in the way information is produced, processed, stored and distributed. Information and Communication Technologies include devices, networks, services, and applications. These can range from internet-based technologies and sensing tools to other technologies that have been around for much longer, such as radio, telephones, mobile phones, television and satellites. The various types of information and communication technologies which comprise of some older technologies (radio and television) as well as new technologies (mobile phones, computers and internet enabled technologies. ICTs have a tremendous scope of alleviating problems of developing countries. Studies conducted across different countries have shown that use of ICTs can work as catalysts to enhance the rate of change in different areas including women empowerment. The increased use and penetration of ICTs across the globe presents several new opportunities for development.

ICT plays a vital role in almost all aspects of government, business, and the lives of individuals. Networked computers, for example, are widely adopted as an e-governance medium to improve communication with the public and improve delivery of services. ICT-skilled people are able to serve as empowered citizens in their communities and understand how society operates. ICTs provide a great platform and tools with the potential to deal with challenges and barriers. Application of ICT is a paradigm shift in comparison to the long-held traditional government approaches of the 1.2 billion people in India, about 69 percent live in rural India in about 650,000 villages, and approximately 72 percent of the rural workforce is engaged in agriculture (Census, 2011). As per the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC, 2011), a staggering three-fourths of rural households earn less than Rs. 5,000 per month, while more than half are landless and only 10 percent have salaried jobs. Rural India lags behind urban areas in the development process. With a substantial majority of the population in rural areas, it is imperative to engage them in the development process. One way to do this is to provide them with access to information.

ICTs can play an instrumental role in bridging the information gap in rural India. Integration of ICT in rural development interventions will speed up the development process and fill the gaps between the educationally and technologically deprived and the prosperous in society. As most of the population in villages are engaged in agriculture, ICT is a helpful tool for them to get information about their village, blocks and districts, natural resources around them, agricultural practices to be employed, seasons and monsoons, market rates of different commodities, and about government schemes.

ICT can inform them about money allocated for rural development in their area and track the expenditures. All this information impacts their lives and livelihoods. Computers are an effective tool to do all this and much more. ICT plays a major role in rural education, health, hygiene, agriculture, and social awareness. Simple training and implementation of ICT programs in easy-to-understand language has the potential to bring about a revolution in rural development.

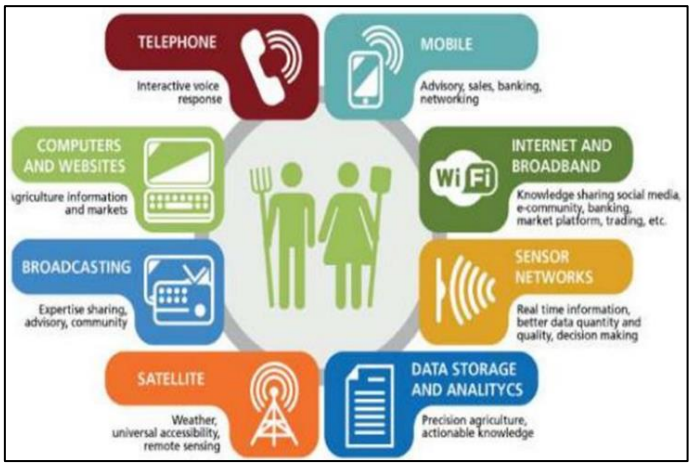


**Fig 1**

## Digital Revolution

Evolution of technology has been the foundation stone of progress and has over the centuries changed the way societies function. Technological inventions have revolutionized each sector of the society by reducing human labour, brining efficiency and increasing productivity. Be it introduction of information communication technologies in education, digitization in the media and services sector, automated devices for health care ; each sphere of society gets a boost with the touch of technology. For a country like India that has a perfect blend of rich traditional heritage and one of the fastest growing economies with the largest 'young 'population; there is an immense opportunity to change the face of the society with technological revolution. While the country has seen implementation of technological inventions in various fields in several decades after independence, the present Government has acted as a catalyst in not only speeding up the process of digital revolution in the country but also taking an initiative in bridging the digital divide in the country. The past three years have not only witnessed a swift rise in exploration, implementation and utilization of digital technologies but also focused on taking digitization and its benefits to the grass root level and especially to the less privileged sections of the society. Digital revolution in India is significant as it promises to bring a multi-dimensional metamorphosis in almost all sectors of the society. From digitization in governance to better health care and educational services, cashless economy and digital transactions, transparency in bureaucracy, fair and quick distribution of welfare schemes all seem achievable with the digital India initiative of the present Government. A look at Government initiatives in various sectors in past three years show how digital revolution in India is not only changing the way society functions but also bridging the gap between the haves and the have-nots of the country.

## Digital Literacy

Digital literacy refers to the wide range of skills, which are necessary to emerge successful and adapt to the digital world. Since the print mediums are facing stagnation, the ability to grasp information found online becomes important. People and students who lack digital literacy skills may soon find themselves tough to gain access to information which is available online.

## The need for digital literacy

With over 460 million internet users, India is the second largest online market ranked only behind China. By 2021, there will be about 700 million internet users in the country. With such a huge internet penetration, Digital literacy has become the core part of almost everyone. Since most of the people search for information, watch entertainment, buy products, claim benefits and also access a number of public services. Indian population is a mixed population where people from various age groups fall within various categories of education. We cannot say that a particular set of people in a particular set of category belong to a particular level of education. Many people who are working in offices have got a certain level of education but they are not well equipped with digital literacy and many who might not have got so much education formally have much knowledge of digital world. And then there were many who had got education in none of these. Now it was a challenge to bring all of them together in same level of digital literacy. There were too many things required, but most important of them was the infrastructure for multiple level of learners. Then there was requirement of few major things:

1. Good internet for all.
2. Mobile phones and other gadgets.
3. Secured space in the cyber world.

Next came governance:

1. All services available all time
2. All citizens given space in cyber world
3. Freedom in Financial transaction electronically.

And finally what we required in India was:

1. Digital Literacy in all level.
2. Digital resources should be made available everywhere.
3. Digital resources being made available in all Indian languages.

These were essential for giving digital India and to include participation of every Indian in electronic services and governance. It was required to provide each one with internet, mobiles, broadband services, create job opportunities in IT sector, run small training programs and deliver electronic services.

## Challenges

Despite facing a fourth industrial revolution and strong penetration of internet backed by technology advancement, several countries including India have currently failing to prepare people for a new breed of workplace or environment. The reason for such a low percentage of digital literacy despite the presence of computers in school was a lack of a availability of computer teachers. Only 10% of the students had computer teachers in the school.

The use of digital devices was mostly limited to mobiles, which 78% of the student has access to, while only 17% of the students had access to laptops/desktops. The data indicated that 15% of the students did not have access to any of the devices. The data reflected that overall, only 10% of the students had ever used a computer.

## Conclusion

Strengthening the digital India vision of the nation ICT Academy has been focusing on digital literacy as a key pillar benefit the citizens, teachers, students in enabling them to lead an effective

life in the digital world. Development in digital technology has brought rapid changes in different aspects of our life, be it our work, social, or personal space. As this new development flows through the old channels of societal structures, urban elites get access to the majority of resources, consequently coping with the changes quickly. In the ICT of the digital economy, India appears to have comparative advantage to grow to global stature. No doubt, the digital economy has the risks and problems of Security and Privacy which are more in the case of India subject to internal and external risk. The roll out of e-Government services in India is currently lightly well, but policies of digital inclusion should play an advanced role in this development, in order to encourage the bridging of the 'digital divide'. Many strengths and opportunities fuel the development of India, while at the same time new threats and challenges arise. The impact of the Internet in India is constrained by current gaps and obstacles in the Internet ecosystem due to the following obstacles : Limited availability of Internet infrastructure, High cost of access and usage, Lack of awareness and low digital literacy, Narrow range of applications and services and un unfavorable business environment.

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