Cashless Transactions: a Distant Dream for Rural India

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Abstract:

With a dream to make India a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy, Government of India introduced 'The digital India' programme. As part of promoting cashless transactions and converting India into less-cash society, various modes of digital payments are made available. Government of India initiated many schemes in order to achieve maximum digital literacy especially in rural areas. This paper highlights hurdles in generating digital literacy amongst rural people thus making it a dream to introduce cashless transactions as a trend in rural areas. This research paper mainly details issues identified in generating digital literacy. The Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA) scheme was initiated by Government of India in February 2017.The primary target of the scheme was to make 6 crore people digitally literate in a course of 2 years since inception, i.e to reach to around 40% of the rural household. The sanctioned budget for this project is Rs. 2,351.38 crore which it to be used for digital literacy in rural India. The emphasis of the scheme is to make at least one person of every household digitally literate in rural India. The training is imparted through identified training centers with an objective to empower citizens with access to knowledge, information, and skills for operating digital device. Learning outcomes include understanding basics of digital device, use of digital device for creating, accessing, managing and sharing information, using internet to browse in effective and responsible manner. This public policy has many shortcomings which might come through during the implementation of the same. In this study the authors has tried to identify some issues and have recommended some suggestions thereon. The paper also explores some of the problem areas which the government needs to reconsider for the success of the scheme.

Keywords: *Household, Digitally literate*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Government of India has launched the Digital India Programme with an ambitious vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The Programme is focused on linking citizens from rural India to various e-governance initiatives also involving them in decision making for strengthening public participation and hence enhancing governance accountability. The full potential of Digital India Programme can only be realized if every citizen, regardless of location and social background, is provided with opportunities as well as capabilities to access and leverage digital services/technologies. An essential element for success of these initiatives is the universal digital literacy across the country including rural India. Government had approved two similar schemes for providing digital literacy to the citizens viz. National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) and Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (DISHA) which were implemented concurrently by CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, a Special

Purpose Vehicle (CSC-SPV) (a public limited company set up under the Companies Act, 1956). The cumulative target of providing digital literacy to 52.5 lakh duly certified beneficiaries under these two schemes was achieved in the month of December 2016, which was much ahead of the proposed timeline of December 2018.Also, as the thrust of the government is on promoting cashless transactions through mobile phones and technology, the course content would also have emphasis on use of Digital Financial Tools for Electronic Payment System.

Defining Digital Literacy

"Digital Literacy is the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within life situations"(https://www.pmgdisha.in)

Household: A household is defined as a unit comprising of Head of family, spouse, children and parents. All such households where none of the family member is digitally literate will be considered as eligible household under the Scheme(http://icsmindia.in/NDLM.php).

Target Beneficiaries

One person from every eligible rural household would be trained in Digital Literacy relevant to their needs across all States/ UTs. The target group would be in the age group of 14-60 years. In order to provide better representation to socially and economically marginalized communities, due preference would be given to SC, ST, BPL, Minorities, women and differently-abled persons. Priority would also be given to Antyodaya households, non-smartphone users, college drop-outs, participants of the adult literacy mission etc.

Course contents

	Module Name	Learning hours

1	Introduction to Digital Devices	2
2	Operating Digital Devices	4
3	Introduction to the Internet	2
4	Communications using the Internet	6
5	Application of the Internet (includes Citizen centric services and use of mobiles for undertaking cashless transactions) Applications of Internet	6
	Total	20

Table 1 – Module wise course content

Learning Outcomes / Competency Standards(https//pmgdisha.gov.in):

- Understand the basics (terminology, navigation and functionality) of digital devices
- Use digital devices for accessing, creating, managing and sharing information
- Use the Internet to browse in an effective and responsible manner
- Use technology to communicate effectively
- Carry out cashless transactions using digital financial tools (USSD/ UPI/ eWallet/AEPS/ Card/ PoS)
- Use Digital Locker
- Use online citizen centric services
- Appreciate the role of digital technology in everyday life, in social life and at work

Training fees: A training fee of Rs. 300/- per candidate is payable directly to respective Training Partners/Centers through CSC-SPV on successful certification of candidates trained by them.

Target Given to each individual state is given below

Sr.	State	Target	Student	Training	Certified	Certified

No.			Registered	Completed	Students	Stud. % wrt target
1	Uttar Pradesh	11171000	2717675	2717675	1302111	11.66%
2	Bihar	6630000	859658	859658	442203	6.67%
3	West Bengal	4481000	352980	352980	158515	3.54%
4	Maharashtra	4433000	600459	600459	309862	6.99%
5	Madhya Pradesh	3784000	811066	811066	385845	10.20%
6	Rajasthan	3712000	751094	751094	369013	9.94%
7	Karnataka	2705000	319823	319823	175684	6.49%
8	TamilNadu	2679000	369623	369623	212578	7.93%
9	Orissa	2517000	889403	889403	454237	18.05%
10	Gujrat	2497000	800102	800102	443504	17.76%
11	AndhraPradesh	2028000	243902	243902	130713	6.45%
12	Telangana	2028000	245798	245798	127466	6.29%
13	Assam	1929000	127960	123212	3298	0.17%
14	Jharkhand	1803000	996537	996537	502136	27.85%
15	Chhattisgarh	1412000	758567	758567	392788	27.82%
16	Kerala	1257000	14086	14086	4751	0.38%
17	Punjab	1247000	304712	304712	178576	14.32%
18	Haryana	1191000	706970	706970	400459	33.62%
19	Jammu & Kashmir	658000	160569	160569	85985	13.07%
20	Uttarakhand	506000	172453	172453	98275	19.42%
21	Himachal Pradesh	444000	86810	86810	34319	7.73%
22	Tripura	195000	34676	34676	18802	9.64%
23	Meghalaya	171000	679	659	3	0.00%
24	Manipur	137000	6489	6489	1886	1.38%
25	Nagaland	101000	1178	1178	774	0.77%
26	Arunachal Pradesh	77000	639	639	106	0.14%
27	Goa	40000	5	5	0	0.00%
28	Mizoram	38000	4479	4479	2270	5.97%
29	Sikkim	33000	2	2	0	0.00%
30	NCT Of Delhi	30000	0	0	0	0.00%
31	Puducherry	28000	6848	6848	2814	10.05%
32	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	18000	0	0	0	0.00%
33	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	13000	1	1	0	0.00%
34	Daman & Diu	4000	3	3	0	0.00%
35	Chandigarh	2000	0	0	0	0.00%
36	Lakshadweep	1000	0	0	0	0.00%
	Total	60000000	12345246	12340478	6238973	10.40%

Table 2 – State wise target and achieved target percentage(https://www.pmgdisha.in/students-count-list/)Only 3 states i.e Haryana, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have achieved target of more than 20%. 12 states have not even reached 5% of the target achievement. From the above table we can easily see that till the date cumulatively only 10.40% target is achieved and the Government has kept the deadline for successful completion as March 2019, With hardly 6-8 months left the Government would need some miracle to achieve the remaining target of getting nearly 6 crores individuals digitally literate.

Challenges in achieving digital literacy

Computer literacy in India is just 6.5 per cent. While radio and television reach is less than 150 million households, the mobile phone outreach is more than 330 million households. However, only 31.2 per cent of the population currently subscribes to the internet via mobile phones. This gap represents an opportunity to educate millions of Indian citizens on how they can use their mobile phones to improve education, employment opportunities and access to financial services and healthcare information. The digital skills gap needs to be tackled, urgently, for a number of important socio-economic reasons. Digital devices enhance lives and enable Indian citizens to feel more autonomous and connected.

Only when every citizen is empowered to use digital devices and resources in ways that directly benefit their own lives, and the lives of their communities, can the whole of India participate equitably in the thriving global knowledge economy(September 2017 Report by National Institute of Rural development And Panchayat Raj).

Some Major determinants

There are some major determinants to consider, this part of world faces multiple problems simultaneously, economist intelligence unit has identified some of them and are listed below

Ability	The capacity to use available access varies between groups, particularly among people with disabilities
Access	Lack of access to ICT and/or lack of access to the Internet has increased but continues to be a concern
Age	The elderly are often less comfortable using ICT although they could benefit more
Broadband	Higher speeds are increasingly necessary to reap the full benefits of the digital society; the gap between basic access and broadband access is also an increasingly cited divide
Content	Local content creation and consumption is important, as local usage can depend on local solutions; it is also an area linked to both geographical and linguistic divides
Culture	Culture can make a difference in access rates; for example, urban area has higher access rates than the rural areas
Education	Low education and literacy rates are perhaps the most commonly cited digital divides; it affects the poor, immigrant and disabled populations, among others
Gender	There are sometimes differences in access and usage by gender
Income	The division between rich and poor is very instrumental and affects affordability and use of digital technology
Language	Often, there is not enough content in local languages; rural users required their native language

Location	Rural and remote areas are often at a disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts with respect to connectivity, affordability and maintenance
Measurement	This is a major concern how we measure and keep track of progress in the said movement of making people digitally literate; what gets measured tends to get done
Mobile	Many countries rely on mobile devices to bridge the access gap but this can also introduce new forms of divides both in terms of technology and speed—second generation (2G) compared with 3G and 4G—as well as usage patterns
Skills	There are differences in the skills levels of people when using various ICT; overlaps with education and usage

Table 3: Major determinants for success of PMGDISHA

In India, in 2012, the ICT@School scheme was introduced to ensure ICT education in all government and government-aided secondary and higher secondary schools in the country, with the emphasis on educationally backward blocks and areas with a concentration of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and weaker sections. The scheme was a big failure for some very basic reasons like lack of electricity and Infrastructure.Data shows that

only 12% of elementary schools in the country have computers, and only 24% of schools have both computers and electricity. Secondary schools do not present a very encouraging picture either, with only 31.52% of all schools having an ICT laboratory and 40% of schools having both computers and electricity(U-DISE Analytical Data 2015–2016 http://digitalequality.in). Thirteen states Arunachal Pradesh(24.52%), Assam(13.93%), Bihar(4.80%), Jammu & Kashmir(20.37%), Jharkhand(11.10%), Madhya Pradesh(23.14%), Manipur(24.25%), Meghalaya(16.61%), Nagaland(34.21%), Odisha(23.88%), Tripura(19.81%), Uttar Pradesh(38.48%), West Bengal(35.48%)(https://visualize.data.gov.in) have electricity in less than 40% of schools

Problem Area

The success of the present scheme can only be achieved by the acquisition of the adequate level of digital literacy and the required competencies are to satisfy the need and expectations of stakeholders. Among many problems affecting the proper implementation of Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan, at least for present discussion authors have shortlisted some of the areas which raises the bar of difficulty for implementation to next level. This determines it difficult to achieve Cashless Transactions dream.

Selection of household: Selection of household is the basic problem at entry level, a person shall be selected only if he or any one among his family members are possessing operative bank account or at least have Jandhan account. This will help the learners to practically implement the things. The participant shall possess and be able to operate the smartphone, only then the mission of making every household digitally literate will be successful.

PMGDISHA training Module: The training module is of 20 hours only which needs to be completed within 30 days, but the policy has not fixed the responsibility for confirming the continued participation which in turn means possibility of partial knowledge transfer and hence it is affecting the overall trained to certified participants ratio which is portraying a poor picture. Moreover at many places the trainings are done through running videos of the process only. Participants are lacking hands on experience for the said module. Success of this module may also depend on the content to be presented in their native language, this may also be a

major concern why participants are reluctant for training.

Electrification in Rural India: As per the government's rural electrification website, Grameen Vidyutikaran, only 1,301 villages have 100 percent household connectivity. This means that just 0.21 percent of India's 600,000 villages are completely electrified. Worse, if we look at the quality of that power — its availability over the day and voltage supplied — a more realistic picture would come forward. The government has now set a new deadline as March 2019 for electrification of all households.(https://www.firstpost.com/) If this is a status of electrification how we can imagine the conduction of training module and continued participation? Here we can definitely question the availability of internet connection in the rural area.

Outcome Attainment: If we talk about the outcome attainment, which as per the policy is labeled under Social Evaluation and Outcome Evaluation is again questionable. It is not done through any established agency and no particular format is proposed to collect the details regarding the training. Feedback parameters that authors emphasis on are training, Infrastructure, Quality of training/Trainer, Quality of services/Implementation, Challenges/Opportunities, Usefulness of Course.

The road ahead

Author wants to suggest a six stage improvement process for sustainable expansion
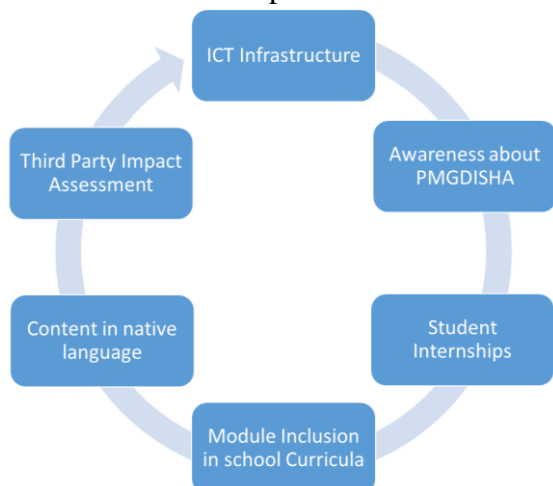
ICT Infrastructure: The major hindrance for the successful implementation of this policy is the non-availability of ICT infrastructure. The development of the required ICT infrastructure in the rural areas can only be done by NGOs, Public and private organizations, Financial Institutions like NABARD and many PSU's working in rural areas, as a part of their CSR activity.

Awareness about PMGDISHA: The awareness about this scheme among the rural area is also a big challenge, though grampanchayat will do their job of shortlisting and selecting households, but the participants shall be aware of the scheme and its benefits, Self-help Group (SHG) for respective rural areas can act as an awareness partner. The more they are aware more participation is guaranteed.

Student Internship: If ample infrastructure is developed and proper awareness programs are conducted then we need skilled manpower for training. Government can ask state and central universities to have student internship for imparting training for digital literacy carrying some incentive grade point; this will make content delivery task very easy. As per government report only 21 universities are participated till the date.Government with willingness of state/Central and Private universities may increase this number.

Inclusion of module in school curricula: As per the eligibility norms in terms of age to participate in this scheme; a participant of age 14 can also be the beneficiary of this scheme. A 14 years aged student can be in 8th or 9th standard, if this module is included as a part of their curriculum in secondary or senior secondary school then by the time of completing secondary or senior secondary schooling students will become a learned as well as certified beneficiary of the scheme. It can be practically possible at least for students belonging to SC, ST and OBC category students as they get may benefits of government scholarships

Content in Native Language: India's Internet user population is growing by leaps and bounds – the total number of Internet users in this country will

reach 450-465 million by the end of this month. Of India's 1.27 billion people, more than 30% is illiterate and only 10-30% understand English, which is predominantly the language of the Internet. A recent Google-KPMG report states that more than 70% of the India's Internet users trust content in their native language over English. The lack of native language content and the lack of electronic accessibility tools therefore plays an important factor in stopping a large number of people from accessing information and contributing to the knowledge commons.(Subhashish Panigrahi-From https://thewire.in/society/india-endangered-languages-need-to-be-digitally-documented)

Looking to the magnitude of the problem and lingual diversity in the different states of India, the content so created for training and for further use should be in region specific native language for successful implementation of the scheme.

Third Party Impact Assessment: A third party impact assessment needs to be done to ensure the transparency and authenticity of the scheme. It will be independent, impartial and qualified. The areas need to be undertaken for purview must include training Infrastructure, Quality of training/Trainer, Quality of services/Implementation, Challenges/Opportunities, Usefulness of Course.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan is to inclusively provide every member of a society with an equal opportunity to benefit from digital development and enabling them to use the digital technology for cashless transactions. As looked upon there might not be quick or easy solutions for attainment of its objective. The physical access to the internet being the most essential requirement, other factors are equally important to foster the up-take of digital technologies and ensure meaningful investment in infrastructure. The Government, on top priority, shall focus on the three primary challenges; access, skills and content. The Government should elaborate

general policy guidelines and take action to reduce socio-economic inequalities across national populations. These guidelines should also clearly indicate specific measures and strategies to design innovation friendly policies that every state governments and Municipal Corporations should follow to make every individual digitally literate. Lack of proper training and lack of skills to use available technologies are commonly cited problems, this is a prime opportunity for the private sector and NGOs to help bridge divides.Getting electricity, computers, Internet, smart phones and basic ICT infrastructure at Grampanchayat level shall be a priority for the government, still there is a huge gap between policy framing and execution. Now the question is why government is not holding National Digital Literacy Mission to make the computer labs functional and enable them with broadband on an emergency basis?

With the willful government policies, facilities to make every individual digitally literate, can very easily penetrate in the underprivileged if handled carefully with an honest approach. If the journey continues with the same reluctant passion and unwillingness then making every individual digitally literate will remain a distant dream in the decades to come.

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