

Digital revolution in rural India : An assessment

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ABSTRACT

India is an infrastructure poor country and it is unlikely that the development of infrastructure here will be able to keep pace with the ambitions, aspirations and needs of the people, especially in the rural areas. The benefits connectivity for the individual, community and the nation is well recorded in the literature. The power of “E” is clearly seen in areas such as governance, productivity, efficiency, employment, and entrepreneurship and information disintermediation. A well known World Bank study calculates that for developing countries broadband connectivity can add 1.3 percentage points to the GDP of the country. Therefore, this paper assesses digital revolution in rural india.

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In India the well-known e-governance programmes such as bhoomi on Karnataka or Gyandoot in Madhya Pradesh among many others have lead to effective and transparent governance. The creation of online electoral lists notably in Gurgaon and now in Mumbai likewise if an important step in strengthening our democracy. Setting up of 100000 common service centres to cover all the villages in India is a giant step towards information disintermediation for rural Indians and a first step towards their empowerment. There are also numerous examples in India where NGOs have empowered communities of artisans and craftsmen and other skilled trades people through the internet. Several innovative businesses based in internet and available through PCs and mobile phones are enabling users to access critical information at the click of the button, enabling safe and secure transfer of money at the in seconds, allowing a level playing field to small businesses and enabling consumers and sellers to buy and sell goods across the country nay the world (Turban *et al.*, 2002; Whiteman and Mattford, 2003). Therefore, this paper assesses digital revolution in rural india.

Keys to the digital economy:

Access:

By access is meant access through mobile as well as broadband. A well deployed broadband economy has numerous benefits not only in rural areas in terms of training, entertainment, job opportunities and critical market information, but also on the overall economy. For every percentage point penetration of broadband services, there is an economic growth of 1.3 percentage points. It is therefore critical that access to broadband network is available in both urban and rural areas.

Affordability:

India takes pride in being one of the lowest cost telecom markets in the world, but the premise holds true only for voice services. Internet access cost over PC as well as mobile remains high at more than 8 to 9 per cent of average monthly income as compared with 1 per cent in developed markets.

Applications:

Building applications, services and content is the key to the digital economy. In the last 15 or so years, there have been very few Indian companies who have come up with useful services for various demographic groups and made a successful business of providing content and services on the internet. Many of the government services are now available on internet as a part of the national e-governance programme, but these efforts remain piecemeal and slow to take off.

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