



Citizen-Centric Digital Revolution

This article is based on [“G20 offers India a chance to be the architect of a new digital economy”](#) which was published in Livemint on 03/11/2022. It talks about the need for citizen centricity in the Indian digital economy.

For Prelims: Digital Revolution, Digital Economy of India, MyGov, Unified Payments Interface, Digital Locker, MeghRaj, Internet literacy, Cloud Computing, Quantum Technology, Common Services Centres (CSCs).

For Mains: Current State of Citizen Centricity in India’s Digital Revolution, Major Hurdles in Citizen-Centric Digitalisation in India, Cooperative and Competitive Digital Federalism.

Digital infrastructure has emerged as an equally or arguably a more significant infrastructure **necessity of citizens**, as compared to the traditional infrastructure necessities such as power, water, and roads. The **Covid-19 pandemic** has not only shuffled the global order, but it has also provided an impetus to the ever-expanding digital infrastructure.

The digital infrastructure has become indispensable to the functioning of a society and the quality of life of its citizens. With nearly **half a billion internet users in India** and a host of indigenous digital services that are expected **to transform the digital economy of India**.

For a digital economy to succeed, it must provide **all citizens equal opportunity and access to critical services**. India needs to reflect on its strength i.e., an opportunity to lead the **creation of a framework for a citizen-centric digital economy**.

What is the Current State of Citizen Centricity in India’s Digital Revolution?

- The **Government's Digital India programme** aims to provide high-speed internet connectivity across the length and breadth of the country. Furthermore, it aims to establish a variety of **digital services to facilitate citizens and improve governance**.
- Some of the transformative digital platforms under Digital India include
 - **MyGov:** It has laid the robust foundation for **citizen engagement and participatory governance in the country** by providing a common digital platform, where **citizens can share their views on government programmes and schemes**.
 - **Unified Payments Interface:** It is an **instant real-time payment system** developed by **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile phones.
 - In 2021, UPI processed around 39 billion transactions totalling USD 940 billion, **equivalent to 31% of India's GDP**.
 - **Digital Locker (DigiLocker):** It is enabling **paperless governance by providing digital space** for users for their document verification and storage.
 - **MeghRaj:** In order to utilise and harness the benefits of **Cloud Computing**, the Government has embarked upon an ambitious initiative – **GI Cloud, which has been named MeghRaj**.

- The focus of this initiative is to **accelerate delivery of e-services in the country**, while optimising ICT spending of the Government.
- **SWAYAM Portal:** The education system is poised to be transformed by use of [SWAYAM](#), providing more than **2,000 open courses**, and [SWAYAMPRAKASH](#), a group of **32 DTH TV channels** devoted to telecasting of high-quality educational programmes.

What are the Major Hurdles in Citizen-Centric Digitalisation in India?

- **Digitalisation Induced Centralisation:** As digital technology integrates governance and the central government holds most data, **centralisation can cause discord between the central and the state.**
 - It becomes more relevant when specific standards are prescribed by the Central government for data sharing as a **precondition to financial assistance.**
- **Digital Divide:** High level of **digital illiteracy is the biggest challenge and hindrance in the success of digital India programme** in adaptation of technologies. Also, India had a rank of **73 out of 120 countries for internet literacy.** (2021)
 - Also, **digital services are not available in local languages**, which is a major barrier to digital literacy.
- **Deceptive Service Strategies:** “Free” services are a myth in the digital world. Personalization is based on data. Despite its benefits for users, **Firms earn money by using the personal data** collected to ensure **targeted advertising, cross-selling other products/services.**
 - Unless these services are regulated, fair digitalization would not be possible.
- **Disproportionate Digitalisation:** Between urban and rural India, there is a wide digital infrastructure divide, the **problem of funding is still not able to meet the cost of infrastructure creation in rural areas.**
 - Due to the **booming private telecom industry**, the competent private sector organisations **avoid building towers in rural areas as they are not commercially viable.**
 - Currently **over 25,000 villages remain deprived of mobile connectivity** because providing mobile connectivity in such locations is not commercially viable.
- **Dominance of Big Tech:** Big tech companies acquire competitors to buy consumer loyalty instead of earning it. They leverage their market power in one line of business to gain monopolies in others, **locking consumers into their ecosystem of products and services.**

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Exploring Emerging Technologies:** There is a need to **integrate governance with block chain technologies** that will consolidate the digital revolution in India and **increase transparency and decentralisation of information.**
 - Also, the **expansion of Quantum Technology and internet of things in a regulated manner** will open new opportunities for India to have a **real-time based economy.**
- **Integrated Digital Environment:** **Our regulatory systems** need to be able to understand the **evolving risks of data privacy** and guide firms in placing appropriate safeguards.
 - Regulations should create a **competitive environment for the digital market** and a good cushion should be provided so that **incumbents should not be apprehensive of failing** (as more startups fail in this industry than succeed).
- **Bottom-Up Digitalisation:** [Common Services Centres \(CSCs\)](#) can be revitalised at panchayat level as digital access points for delivering **e-services to citizens**, that will **improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency** in the delivery of services by acting as an intermediary between rural citizens and the government.
- **Cooperative and Competitive Digital Federalism:** **States in India vary in their levels of e-readiness**, this aspect must be considered when implementing eGovernance reforms across the country.
 - At the same time, there are several successful projects running in the country currently, but very few are on a national scale. **Successful models need to be replicated and upscaled throughout the country.**
- **Innovation-Security Coexistence:** **Co-creation and co-ownership of a digital world** in which innovation and security coexist is imperative. In order to achieve this, **the tech industry and regulators/government bodies would need to meaningfully cooperate**, as well as harmonise their regulatory approaches to see the "big picture" together.

- And through the country's [G20 presidency](#), **India could become the architect of this redesigned digital economy**, so that **when the world thinks digital, it thinks India**.

Drishti Mains Question

“Digitalisation is inducing Centralisation in India”. Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following is/are the aim/aims of “Digital India” Plan of the Government of India? (2018)

1. Formation of India's own Internet companies like China did.
2. Establish a policy framework to encourage overseas multinational corporations that collect Big Data to build their large data centres within our national geographical boundaries.
3. Connect many of our villages to the Internet and bring Wi-Fi to many of our schools, public places and major tourist centres.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q. “The emergence of Fourth Industrial Revolution (Digital Revolution) has initiated e-Governance as an integral part of government”. Discuss. **(2020)**