



Globalization as a catalyst to digitization in rural India: A case study

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Abstract

The paper delves into the impact of globalization on the rural society of the country of India by exploring the scenario in the island named G-Plot in the Sundarbans region of West Bengal, India. Having addressed the issues related to digitization and digital divide with respect to Indian society, the field work in the mentioned island is elucidated. The data that has been found through the survey is presented and then analyzed. It is found that smartphones have come up as a popular device for the exponential growth in the use of technology and internet. The paper also discusses how the internet is important for knowledge dissemination and spreading of information. The factor of digital literacy is also discussed. The case of G-Plot can be taken as a microcosmic example of the picture of digitization in rural India in the present times.

Keywords: globalization, digitization in India, rural population, digital literacy, smartphones, internet

1. Introduction

Globalization has made way for a sea of change in the entire world, and the regions that were isolated for a long span of time owing to geographical barriers have come to get connected with the rest of the globe. Globalization with all its impetus not only has a constructive effect on the economy of the world, but it has also paved the way for sharing knowledge, information, and developmental amenities all across the world. The developing nations of the world have been highly benefited by the effects of globalization as they have come to imbibe technology and way of life from the developed regions, apart from getting economic boost due to the intertwined relationships among the nations in the process of economic development. While the global powers are committed toward accelerating their growth and development, one can take the example of India that has grown at an exponential rate as a developing country since the past few decades owing to the new avenues opened by globalization and its paramount positives. The economic growth of India has been complemented by the technological advancement that has influenced the lives of common people of the Indian society in the past few years.

2. Digitization and Digital Divide in the Era of Globalization

Now, one needs to comprehend that the process of digitization in the country of India has had a paramount impact on the lives and perspectives of common people. The union government and the respective state governments are treading toward the path of digitizing various essential services that are provided by the governments. Surely, the revolutionary imbibition of computers and other technological devices has proved to be a pivotal step toward the advancement in work and use of technology. Nonetheless, one of the major concerns that have bothered academicians is the fact that the massive distinction among the people of the country that is based on

economic capability has the potential to occlude the path of holistic development. As such, the economic disparity also poses a substantial hindrance to the process of digitization as the chance of creation of a digital divide can be gauged. The country's population can be categorized as urban, suburban, and rural. The rural population can generally be described as the economically weakest section of the society and has access to less amenities or services, while the same things are quite commonplace in availability for the urban and suburban masses. One can reckon the difference in lifestyle and perspective that can have a detrimental effect on the process of holistic advancement of the Indian society.

For the proper comprehension of the effects of globalization on a developing country like India, one should delve deep into the condition of the rural mass. It needs to be scrutinized if the sea of change that has been brought about by globalization could leave an impact on the lives of these people who have not been included in the process of development in the seventy years after the end of the colonial era in India. Indeed, inclusive development is the need of the hour, and the question of advancement of the lives of common people in the rural regions of the society has to be addressed with utmost immediacy. It should be noted that the rural people of India are underprivileged as they have lesser advantages and privileges in comparison to the rest of the country's population. As such, these people need to be connected to the more advanced section of the society, so as to facilitate the process of inclusive and sustainable development. Communication can play a key role in engaging the rural people through disseminating information, providing education, entertainment, and leading to persuasion. For the proper comprehension of the process in which the rural mass of the country is getting included in the digital revolution, one can very well delve into a microcosmic study and analysis that would work as a representation of the larger rural community of India.

3. Field Work and Survey in Sundarbans, West Bengal

For the purpose of comprehending the scenario of digitization in rural India, the isolated island named G-Plot that is situated in the Sundarbans delta of the state of West Bengal in India was chosen. It needs to be reckoned in this context that G-Plot is one of the remotest islands in the delta, and is a place of sustenance for unprivileged people whose main occupation is farming or fishing.

Being at the extreme end of the delta, electricity has reached the island only in the month of October, 2017, after a span of seventy long years of independence of the country. The roads are being built by the initiative of the union and state government. One needs to cross a number of water-bodies to reach this remote place. Although the island is about 99.7 km away from Kolkata, the connectivity being not good, it takes around five hours' time to reach the island from the metropolitan city. Eight villages of the island were chosen for the contextual survey, and 20 respondents were interviewed from each village. The 20 respondents from each village were stratified into males and females in equal proportion and were further chosen on the basis of the two categories of age group: one from 15-30 years, and another from 31-45 years. Thus, a sample size of 160 respondents was selected for the survey. The villages of Uttar Surendra Ganj, Dakshin Surendra Ganj, Daspur, Satya Daspur, Krishna Daspur, Indrapur, Sitampur, and Gobordhanpur were surveyed for the collection of data.

The respondents were asked certain questions that would provide a view of their exposure to digital technology and their idea about the same. One should know that there is no access to 4G or 3G connectivity in this area. The people have to rely on 2G internet speed. The data collected was then analyzed for further understanding of the various intricacies of the matter. The respondents were asked if they have access to the internet. At this, 79 percent of the people said that they have access to the internet, while the remaining 21 percent said that they do not have the access. Then, they were asked about the device that they use for accessing the internet. While none of the respondents owned a computer, 93 percent of the ones who had access to the internet were found to use their smartphones for the purpose, while the remaining 7 percent spoke of using the tablet PCs for the purpose. The respondents were asked about their main purpose of using the internet. Among the ones who had access to the technology, 43 percent said that they used the internet for social media usage. 39 percent said that they used the internet for accessing news from around the world, 9 percent said that they accessed the government provided services through the internet, and the remaining 9 percent said that they used the internet for entertainment purposes.

4. Use of Smartphones as Technological Device to Access the Internet

It becomes evident that the use of smartphones as the cheapest technological device that can provide access to the digital world has been greatly welcomed by the rural population. Respondents from both the age groups showed keen interest in their use of the device. Globalization has opened the markets to many companies that have come up to produce smartphones at cheap prices. In a developing nation like India, the demand for such smartphones is on its way to the zenith owing to the

rapid digitization. These people from the island have availed the use of smartphones as they come handy and at a low cost as well. The effect of globalization can be found in the fact that these underprivileged and less educated people too are finding it possible to use a technological device to access greater facilities than just being restricted to making phone calls and texting. Accessing the internet has been one of the greatest boons of globalization as it has opened up new avenues for these rural people. Surely, the scenario of G-Plot can be seen as a microcosmic one that stands for the entire country's rural population, as more and more people are getting engaged in the use of the internet accessed via their smartphones. In fact, the massive competition among the global players in the telecommunication market has led to huge drop in the expenditure of telephonic and data service. This is also a positive impact of globalization as the rural people who belong to the economically weaker section of the society can access the internet at cheaper rates.

5. Knowledge and Information Dissemination via the Internet

Since a number of questions were asked to the respondents regarding the education as well, it became evident that literacy is not a precondition for using the internet on smartphones. Even the ones who could just read and write Bengali language, the native tongue of West Bengal, could use social media sites as they are available for use in the language as well. Again, the phenomenon of media convergence has made way for the rural people to access news on their cellphones using the internet. The rural people of the island access news via the websites or the official pages of the media houses on the social media platforms. Apart from this, the people also use the internet for entertainment purposes. The various services that have been digitized by the union government and the state government have also become accessible via the use of the smartphones in this remote region of the state of West Bengal. The people went on to opine that they get to know a lot about the rest of the state, the country, and the world through the use of the internet.

Newspaper reaches this island in the evening, and almost none of the houses in the entire region have television. Since electricity has just been provided to this area by the government, they are not used to other technological devices as such. Previously, some of the houses would have electricity via solar power. As such, one can very well imagine the need for development in this region at an exponential rate for facilitating the process of holistic growth of the country. The case of G-Plot is akin to the scenario in many other rural regions of the nation that require massive advancement in facilities and ways of life of the common people. It is noticeable in the villages of G-Plot that people are gaining more knowledge due to the regular use of the smartphones. The internet has become the omnipotent source of knowledge for these rural people of Bengal. They have surely joined the bandwagon of betterment through digitization, in spite of the various roadblocks that still impede the development of this area. The internet has to be credited for being omniscient in the era of technological advancement as it has added value to the experiences of the rural people of India who live in remotest areas that impede connectivity with the rest of the

land or society. Globalization has paved the way for exchange of information, knowledge dissemination and digital inclusiveness.

6. Digital Literacy

Beyond any doubt, the scenario explored in G-Plot is simply a telltale sign of the rapidly growing digital literacy of the Indian population. While the economic barriers, religious distinctions, and communalism challenge the holistic development of the nation's population, globalization has brought about uniformity in the condition of digital literacy. It can be comprehended that the people of G-Plot would only become more capacious with time in using the internet to extract the most benefits from the platform. In a country that is known for its diversities, globalization and technology work as the uniting factors that can surely pave the path of a better future for the younger generations who can transcend the barriers of geography and community through their knowledge and education that would only be facilitated by the access to the internet. The digital revolution has truly reached the country of India where using the internet or the smartphone is equated with betterment of life and perspective. People's lives have become easier and more comfortable owing to the availability of information and knowledge on the internet that can be accessed in the wink of an eye. Smartphone is the best tool in the arsenal of globalization to bring a positive change in the lives of the people who have just started using electrical appliances in a proper manner. Surely, the phenomenon of digital literacy is a marker of advancement of the rural mass of the Indian society.

7. Conclusion

It would be correct to conclude by saying that globalization has brought about enormous change in the socio-economic dynamics of India. While the companies gained access to the global market, the section of the society that had remained shunned from the process of advancement for many years has been brought within the purview. Digitization also makes it easier for the government to reach out to the common people and provide required services to them. The people of G-Plot in the Sundarbans delta region of West Bengal, India, have embraced the boon of globalization. They have started to tread the path of betterment using the technology that they have got access to in the present. Their case is simply a microcosm of the rural section of the Indian society. As such, it can be said that the rural population would be immensely benefitted due to globalization and its boons. The developmental process of India as a nation would only get accelerated due to the positive impact of globalization. So, globalization is the perfect catalyst that can help the holistic development of the developing nation and its population in the coming years.

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