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Green Digitalization: A Study of India's Efforts to Reduce Carbon Footprint through Digital Technologies

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Abstract

Green Digitalization refers to the concurrent application of digital technologies and sustainable practices to attain environmental objectives. It entails employing digital technologies to enhance resource efficiency in systems, such as controlling smart grids and optimizing buildings, while concurrently diminishing the environmental impact of the digital sector through initiatives like e-waste reduction. The purpose of this study is to analyze India's plan to reduce its carbon footprint by utilizing digital technology, which is in line with the aims of sustainable development. In this report, we investigate the ways in which efforts such as Digital India are promoting environmental sustainability in important industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, and energy management. In this study, an analysis is conducted to determine the influence that digital transformation has on the enhancement of energy efficiency, the promotion of green innovation, and the overall adoption of renewable energy. The findings indicate that despite the fact that digitalization presents a large potential for lowering carbon emissions by means of enhanced resource management and process optimization, major hurdles continue to exist. The need for increased digital literacy, stronger cybersecurity, and improved internet connection, particularly in rural regions, are some of the hurdles that need to be overcome. The research investigates the dual nature of digitalization, which allows for the achievement of environmental goals while also being a source of its own digital carbon footprint. The study highlights the need of adopting a balanced and strategic approach to the formulation and execution of policies. After conducting this research, the researchers came to the conclusion that it is essential to combine digital solutions with strong environmental laws in order to fully exploit the potential of green digitalization for India's transition to a low-carbon economy and to accomplish its climate goals.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development; Digital Technologies; India; Carbon Footprint; Green Digitalization; Climate Change*

1. Introduction

The term "digital carbon footprint" refers to the total amount of emissions that are produced over the whole lifespan of a device or program, which includes its production, use, and further maintenance. During the first step, which is the production of hardware devices like laptops, phones, and microprocessors, considerable amounts of carbon dioxide are produced by the machinery that are used to make these different types of electronics.

It is also necessary to have energy for the equipment that are needed to generate, operate, and maintain software. There is a correlation between the source of the power used for charging and the carbon footprint. If the electricity comes from sources that are not renewable, then the emissions that are produced each time a phone is charged contribute to the digital carbon footprint of the phone. A study that was carried out in 2021 revealed that the charging

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of smartphones throughout the world results in the emission of more than 8 million tons of carbon dioxide in a single year.

To keep the devices' software up-to-date, massive data centers need a constant and intense power supply. The "total electricity consumption of Germany and Japan combined" is equal to 1-1.5 percent of the world's electricity consumption, which data centres are responsible for, according to a report by the International Energy Agency in 2022. Electricity is also needed by data storage facilities to power their enormous cooling systems, which are essential for the efficient operation of the servers and storage devices.

There is an environmental impact associated with every phase of a digital object's life cycle since energy is consumed at each stage. A single Google search, for instance, results in the release of 0.2 grams of carbon dioxide. As a result of the energy required to run the technologies that make Google searches possible, daily carbon emissions amount to 18,00,000 kilos. In 2020, the total emissions of Google's offices, Cloud services, and gadgets exceeded 10 million tons of carbon dioxide. By 2030, Google plans to have "operated on 24/7 carbon-free energy" as part of their environmental initiative. It is also the goal of businesses such as Apple to decarbonize their worldwide supply chain by the year 2030. This is being accomplished through the enhancement of energy efficiency, the development of low-carbon designs, and the attainment of carbon neutrality for corporate operations. Carbon emissions from the corporation have decreased by forty percent between the years 2015 and 2022, which is a reflection of the efforts that have been made. In addition, Apple's efforts lend credence to the company's assertion that it will achieve its goal of reducing 75 percent of its emissions by the year 2030 and having a supply chain and products that are carbon neutral by the year 2030. However, the efforts of individual organizations are not adequate to reach the target of the Paris Agreement, which is to reduce emissions by forty-five percent by the year 2030.

2. Green Computing

The adoption of environmentally friendly information technology methods in India, such as virtualization, energy-efficient hardware, and cloud computing, with the goal of reducing energy consumption and electronic waste is referred to as green computing. For the purpose of reducing their negative influence on the environment, Indian enterprises are pushing digital documentation and investing in environmentally friendly data centers. The use of energy-efficient equipment, the optimization of data centers for cooling and power distribution, and the facilitation of remote work choices are all important techniques that may be used to minimize emissions caused by traveling.

3. Reduce Carbon Footprint through Digital Technologies

To reduce your digital carbon footprint, optimize your device's energy settings, use less data by reducing video streaming or downloading content, and manage your digital storage by deleting unnecessary files and emails. Additionally, use energy-efficient devices, unplug them when not in use, and dispose of old electronics responsibly.

4. Optimize your devices and settings

- Adjust power settings: Set your devices to sleep or hibernate after a period of inactivity. Turn them off completely when not in use.
- Reduce brightness: Lowering your screen's brightness can significantly decrease energy consumption, with a 70% brightness level saving up to 20% of energy, according to Terrapass.
- Unplug devices: Unplug chargers and devices like monitors, TVs, and computers when not in use to prevent "phantom power" consumption.
- Use dark mode: On devices with OLED or AMOLED screens, using dark mode can reduce energy consumption.
- Turn off Wi-Fi and Bluetooth: Disable Wi-Fi and Bluetooth when you don't need them to save power.

5. **Reduce data consumption**

- Download instead of stream: For content you'll watch or listen to repeatedly, download it for offline use to reduce the energy needed for streaming.
- Lower streaming quality: When you must stream, lower the video quality to decrease data usage.
- Block video autoplay: Prevent videos from playing automatically on websites to save data and energy.

6. **Manage digital storage and content**

- Clean up your inbox: Delete old emails and unsubscribe from unnecessary newsletters. Each email stored has a carbon footprint, so decluttering your inbox is beneficial.
- Delete old files: Regularly delete old and unused files from your devices and cloud storage.
- Use local storage: Opt for storing large files on local devices or external hard drives to reduce cloud storage usage.

7. **Extend device life and dispose of e-waste properly**

- Keep devices longer: Instead of frequently upgrading, extend the life of your current electronic devices.
- Recycle electronics: Dispose of old electronics responsibly through certified e-waste recycling programs or take-back programs offered by manufacturers.
- Support green companies: Choose companies that use renewable energy for their data centers and prioritize energy-efficient manufacturing when purchasing new equipment.

8. **India's Efforts to Reduce Carbon Footprint through Digital Technologies**

By enhancing the efficiency of energy and high-emission industries, utilizing data analytics, artificial intelligence, and blockchain to monitor and reduce emissions, and encouraging smart technologies in areas such as manufacturing and transportation, India is lowering its carbon footprint through the utilization of digital technology. Additionally, efforts are being made to digitalize government services in order to increase efficiency, as well as to integrate digital solutions in order to enable a better use of renewable energy and infrastructure that is more efficient.

9. **Some Important practices in India**

- Virtualization and Cloud Computing: Businesses are cutting back on hardware by running several virtual machines on a single physical server using virtualization. They are also saving a ton of energy by leveraging cloud services to share resources.
- Energy-efficient hardware: In an effort to reduce the amount of electricity that is consumed, investments are being made in energy-efficient servers, workstations, and laptops, which frequently come with certifications such as Energy Star.
- Green data centers: To lessen their impact on the environment, businesses are enhancing their data centers with cutting-edge technology including streamlined power distribution, efficient cooling systems, and LED lighting.
- Remote work and digital documentation: Encouraging telecommuting and remote work helps reduce the carbon footprint from daily commutes. Digital documentation and reduced paper usage also contribute to greener operations.
- E-waste management: Proper disposal and recycling of electronic waste are crucial components of green computing, ensuring that harmful materials are not released into the environment.
- Improving industrial and energy efficiency: Digital technologies like AI, machine learning, and big data analytics are used to optimize production processes, predict and monitor emissions, and improve energy efficiency in industries.
- Enhancing mobility: Digital solutions are being used to reduce emissions in the transportation sector through optimized routing, the use of real-time data from IoT sensors, and promoting alternatives like public transit and e-bikes through services like Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) platforms.

- Promoting green ICT: The development of "green ICT" (Information and Communication Technology) focuses on energy-efficient hardware, efficient data center operations, and the use of renewable energy sources to power IT operations.
- Leveraging digital government: Digitalizing government services can lead to improved efficiency, better regulation, and a more favorable business environment, which helps inhibit carbon emissions.
- Using blockchain for carbon tracking: Blockchain technology is being used to create transparent records for carbon credits, which helps companies participate in carbon trading markets and achieve climate goals.
- Applying digital twins and IoT: Companies like RMZ Corp are using digital twins integrated with IoT sensors to monitor and simulate construction processes, which reduces waste, equipment idle time, and energy consumption.
- Supporting a shift to renewables: India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) emphasizes the transition to renewable energy sources, and digital infrastructure is crucial for managing and integrating these new sources into the grid.

10. Positive outcomes

- **Reduced carbon emissions:** Digital technologies can substantially lower the carbon footprint by improving energy efficiency and productivity across various sectors.
- **Structural economic shifts:** Digitalization encourages the shift from energy-intensive traditional industries to more advanced, technology-driven sectors, leading to a reduction in overall carbon emissions.
- **Enhanced governance and efficiency:** Programs like the government's "Digital India" initiative use digital technologies to improve the efficiency of services and governance, including e-governance, which in turn supports sustainability goals.
- **Promoted green innovation:** Digitalization fosters innovation in areas like precision agriculture, waste management, and renewable energy by improving access to information and enabling better resource management.
- **Increased accessibility and connectivity:** Digital platforms can enhance the accessibility of services like education and healthcare, while also boosting economic engagement and potential for sustainable growth.

11. Challenges

- **Digital divide:** Barriers such as digital illiteracy and limited internet access in rural areas hinder the widespread adoption and benefits of digital transformation, particularly for sustainable development.
- **Cybersecurity threats:** The increasing reliance on digital systems introduces cybersecurity risks that must be managed to ensure the stability and effectiveness of these systems.
- **Infrastructure requirements:** A robust and accessible digital infrastructure is necessary for digital transformation to have its full positive impact on reducing carbon emissions, but this requires significant investment.

12. Recommendations for moving forward

- **Strengthen policy integration:** Policies should focus on the synergistic effects of combining digitalization with green initiatives, such as investing in digital infrastructure and implementing regulations for both digital technologies and carbon emissions.
- **Invest in digital literacy and inclusion:** Efforts must be made to bridge the digital divide through education and improved internet access to ensure that the benefits of green digitalization are shared across all sections of society.
- **Foster innovation and strategic partnerships:** Continued investment in digital green innovation and building strategic partnerships is crucial for creating sustainable digital financial services and a more efficient digital ecosystem.

- **Embrace "digital decarbonization":** Organizations should proactively manage and reduce the carbon footprint of their digital practices by optimizing technology and data usage to build a more efficient digital approach.

13. Conclusion

Despite the fact that issues such as digital illiteracy and cybersecurity continue to exist, India's green digitalization initiatives are successful in lowering the country's carbon footprint. This is accomplished by enhancing energy efficiency and fostering innovation. Optimising resource consumption, stimulating a move towards cleaner sectors, and enabling better governance and a more circular economy through programs such as "Digital India" are all ways in which digital technology make this decrease possible. A solid framework and regulations are required to integrate digital and green activities, with special focus paid to areas such as digital infrastructure and rural access. This is necessary in order to fully exploit the benefits of the integration.

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