Internet Access in Hyderabad

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India is ranked 89th out of 142 countries for its poor infrastructure (Agarwal, 2013). Decades of underinvestment have left the country in dire deficits in telecommunications, electricity and other critical services (Agarwal, 2013).

Hyderabad, with a population of 21 million, is the fourth largest city in India. Although much of Hyderabad’s economic revenue is generated from the information technology industry, only 8% of the population, about 1 million residents, have regular internet access. Of those, only 3% have internet-capable phones (Schneider, 2013). Internet access in Hyderabad is constrained by current gaps and obstacles in the Internet ecosystem. Out of 57 countries, India ranks in the bottom quartile of internet strengths (Gnanasambandam, 2012).

Low internet access can have many implications. The most important is on health care. Health is the largest category of information hosted by the Internet, and over two thirds of the online public seeks information about it (Harris Interactive, 2002). Health care workers who have limited access to medical journals and the latest medical information cannot provide the most effective and best health care services. Having limited access to the internet prevents medical personnel from gaining life-saving knowledge from invaluable medical information found online (PsyPlexus). Access to life-saving medical information affects society as a whole. It impacts early detection and prevention of diseases, treatment of health conditions and negatively affects the life expectancy and quality of life of the residents of Hyderabad (Healthy People). Another impact is on e-governance services such as filing taxes, accessing educational services like school registration, register for government documents like driving licenses, etc. (Gnanasambandam, 2012). These simplified government services are only available to a small
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percentage of Hyderabad’s population who has access to the internet. Limited internet access also restricts e-commerce, entertainment, politics, and entrepreneurship (Gnanasambandam, 2012). As our jobs, entertainment, politics and even health care move online, millions are at risk of being left behind (Crawford, 2011).

India has seen a tremendous success in its mobile industry. The penetration of mobile devices in India is far greater than most people imagine (Bhinde, 2013). India has more than 160 million internet users, of which 86 million accesses the internet using a mobile device (Bhinde, 2013). There are over 36 million smartphone users in India (Bhinde, 2013). Nine percent of internet page views in India derive from mobile devices (Bhinde, 2013). Thirty percent of Facebook users are mobile-only (Bhinde, 2013). The paid app market in India is now higher than paid digital content (Bhinde, 2013). Mobile internet-based businesses are still in their infancy in India, but there is much potential to be unlocked (Bhinde, 2013). For example, within a year of Bookmyshow launching its mobile app, bookings through the app increased to 25% of its overall bookings (Bhinde, 2013). The penetration of mobile internet is driven by three factors:

- Cost-effective access to mobile devices without compromising technology and usability
- Availability of affordable data connectivity
- “Strong Use Cases,” which provide a compelling reason for users to adopt the technology (Bhinde, 2013)
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Improvements in technology would spur significant growth in mobile internet usage in India (Bhinde, 2013). The cost of connectivity is already low; however, the quality of connectivity is a concern. Only 96,000 of the 736,000 telecom towers in India are 3G enabled (Bhinde, 2013). With consumers constantly dropping 3G connectivity, they have poor service not to mention that it is a huge drain on battery life. In order to maintain consistent speeds, the towers should have a fiber optic backbone linking them (Bhinde, 2013). Reliance Industries has already put plans into motion to build the world’s most advanced telecommunications network, with 4G connectivity (Sharma, 2012). A study conducted by the Cologne Institute for Economic stated mobile growth will be average 4.9% from 2012-2015 and 2.1% between 2015-2020 (Priyanka, 2013).

In order for Hyderabad to increase online access rates for its citizens, there are several things the government should consider. I would recommend a partnership with internet and mobile telecommunications companies to further develop the telecommunications infrastructure. This would significantly increase speed and accessibility to a wide number of residents. While number of broadband subscribers has increased in India, the quality of connection remains poor. The Akakmi Report found that over 35% of internet connections had a speed of 256kbps or less (Anwer, 2011). Even though most high-speed internet plans have unlimited data transfers, the reduction in speed virtually renders the internet connection unusable (Anwer, 2011). Hyderabad’s government has already been receptive to working with internet providers. BEAM Fiber, India’s fastest and most affordable internet service provider,
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got approval from the Hyderabad government to dig up and install fiber optic lines to improve service. (TechVerse, 2013).

Since internet access on mobile devices has increased significantly and is expected to rise, a partnership in this arena would also be fruitful. Reliance Industries, one of the largest telecommunications providers in India, is investing $10 billion into improving India’s telecommunications network (Sharma, 2012). Hyderabad’s government should approach Reliance to expand their proposed 4G service into Hyderabad. In India and elsewhere, mobile phones have become an intrinsic part of people’s lives. According to a study by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research, mobile devices positively influence social development (Singh, 2013). The study indicated that mobile phones support democratic participation, increase gender equality and improve education opportunities, while also making a significant contribution to economic growth (Singh, 2013).
REFERENCES


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