The New Age Testament - Roti, Kapra, Makaan and Internet

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TODAY, internet has become a basic necessity of life; even the United Nations has recommended that every country should make access to internet a Fundamental human right. In accordance with their 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the apex international body has recognized the spread of internet having a 'great potential to accelerate human progress'.

The Government of India is also pushing to make the country digitally empowered by focusing on digital literacy, digital resources, and collaborative digital platforms through Digital India Mission. Believing in the potential of Internet, Kerala, India's most literate state, has declared Internet as a basic human right, putting it at par with food, water, education and electricity.

With the increased focus and access to internet, Smartphones and Mobile Apps are drastically shaping the reality around us. They are bringing in new experiences to us, defining convenience in another way and ushering a new era of 'Big Data' and 'Internet of Things' that not only has the potential to impact how we live but also how we work.

Today, Smartphones have literally become the remote control of our lives and are the main device connecting us to the world. Over the past few years, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the smartphone penetration in the country. As per market research firm International Data Corporation (IDC), India accounts for 10% of the global smartphone sales while another research firm App Annie's 2016 Retrospective Report states how in the recent years India has surpassed US as the second largest smartphone market while also sharply outpacing US in mobile app market. India has been ranked number one in terms of Google Play downloads, highlighting the vibrancy of the country's mobile ecosystem. Indians downloaded over 6 billion apps in 2016 alone. However, this is only the beginning, as India's smartphone penetration is still below 30% and much more advancements are to be seen as the use of mobiles for entertainment and information is increasing each passing day.

In the emerging digital ecosystem, the smart phones and tablets, mobile applications, platforms like social media, and data technologies have given a new meaning to the concept of business-customer communication and customer engagement. Industries such as banking, retail which were quick adopters of these new communication channels are already reaping the benefits. Utilities being conservative in their functioning, took some time to come around. However, post demonetisation Mobile's influence enveloped the utility services, also paving the way for immersive cus-

tomer experience.

For example, our own Mobile App, 'Tata Power-DDL Connect' has seen a tremendous surge in the last one-and-a-half year with over half a million hits. It has emerged as a preferred choice of consumers to get information pertaining to billing, consumption patterns, updates on account, new schemes and offerings, scheduled outages etc. Besides this, the app has also been used by consumers to make bill payments. In our case, the effective use of App and e-platforms by customers has led to better and timely cash flows leading to an in-

crease of more than 131% in total online payment transactions and 370% in online revenue collection in the past few years.

In near future, our app will also be offering consumers features such as home automation and time-of-the-day tariffs. This will enable the consumers to automate their appliances as well as have full control over their power consumption, even remotely. Presently, we are ready to roll out these advanced interactive services and are working on the convergence of Information Technology (IT) with Operational Technology (OT) by rolling out deployment of 18 lakh smart meters (with 2.5 lakh in the first phase beginning March 2018) as part of our Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) project.These Smart Meters will give consumers greater control over their energy usage and result in real time two way communication and flow of

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data between the consumer and the Utility.

I firmly believe, user friendly mobile apps will not only go a long way in delighting customers and supporting real time information to customers on usage of electricity but will also assist in laying the foundation of a Smart City.Dynamic Apps will support the core infrastructure elements in a Smart City like adequate water supply, assured optimum electricity supply, sanitation, including solid waste management, efficient and clean urban mobility and public transport and sustainable development.

Affordable housing- especially for the poor, robust IT connectivity and digitalization, e-Governance and citizen participation, sustainable environment, safety and security of citizens - particularly women, children and the elderly, and health and education.

According to Wipro Council for Industry Research, in 2017 624 million customers are already using social media for accessing information related to utility services. Considering this, the next logical step is to link mobile apps with social networking sites. This will result in better customer insights for Utilities leading to deeper relationships.

With substantial subscribers of its mobile app and social media platforms aggregating to over 4 lakhs, Tata Power-DDL is leading by example within the Utility space and is more than willing to support other utilities to gain from its experience and contribute towards the Government of India's Mission to build 100 Smart Cities, the success of which is contingent on adaptive use of smart devices, sensors, connectivity, cloud and Big Data technologies. ∎