Partnering India's progress

India continues to be one of the fastest growing economies in the world and is working towards providing greater connectivity and ease of life to its people by augmenting digital infrastructure. The telecommunications industry is a key pillar of this effort on digital transformation, and connectivity. Notably, the telecom industry in India has witnessed one of the fastest paces of expansion in the recent years.

Enabling a digital economy

Cognisant of the support the industry needed, the Government of India introduced seminal reforms that paved the way for growth, both for businesses and the country. The structural and process reform packages announced are expected to boost telecom proliferation, infuse liquidity and create an enabling environment for investment in 5G networks. This will fast track the growth opportunities of the country towards digital economy. These initiatives are expected to fuel the next-generation telecom technologies such as 5G, which will provide a strong push in achieving the country's US$ 5 Tn GDP goal. Equally, it should foster innovation and investments in allied industries such as network equipment, smartphones, and data centres.

Airtel's take on it

We have been working tirelessly to boost indoor coverage of high-speed data services to enable people to work, learn, or play from the comfort of their homes, even in the remote and difficult terrains. At the same time, we are also joining hands with other best-in-class players like Google, Tech Mahindra, and Axis Bank to strengthen the growth of India's digital economy and the related ecosystem. In keeping with the growing awareness and acceptance of blockchain technology, we have also opted the path of acquiring strategic stakes in promising businesses in the field.

Noting the high-level disruption faced by the small businesses during the pandemic due to lack of digital infrastructure in place, we made a dedicated effort to accelerate their digital transformation. To that end, we partnered with Google Cloud and Cisco to launch 'Airtel Office Internet' - a unified enterprise grade solution for the emerging digital connectivity needs of small businesses, SOHOs and early stage tech start-ups.

During the year, we rolled out #5GforBusiness initiative to demonstrate use cases and showcase transformational high speed and low latency network solutions for a range of industries in partnership with top companies.

In order to accelerate digital transformation through a collaborative approach, we, in partnership with Invest India, invited early stage Indian startups to demonstrate solutions for 5G, IoT, Cloud Communications, Digital Advertising and Digital Entertainment. The startups got an opportunity to leverage Airtel's Digital Innovation Lab and Global Partner Ecosystem.

With upcoming 5G, an accelerated digital economy, enterprises transitioning to cloud and local data storage regulations, India continues to see robust demand for secure data centres. Building on that, Nxtra by Airtel announced an investment of ₹50 Bn crores to triple its data centre capacity to over 400 MW by 2025.
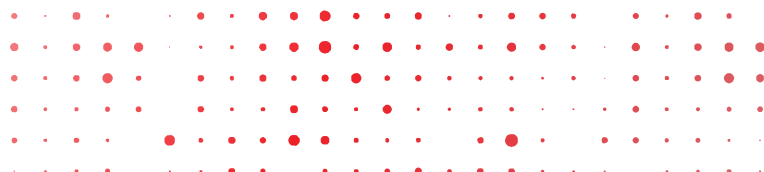
Homing in on normalcy

The telecom operators have emerged as a lifeline in keeping people and local communities connected during the lockdown and social distancing period. While the pandemic brought the economy to a sudden halt, it also opened opportunities in form of demand on account of professionals working-from-home, schools going online, home entertainment and isolated consumers reaching out to friends and families.

Airtel's take on it

We have relentlessly served our customers with a commitment to deliver great experience and keep the wheels of the economy turning throughout a challenging pandemic. Be it our network teams, home delivery teams, sales team or digital teams, every single one of our people lived the spirit of service. Being one of the world's leading global communications solutions providers, we ensured that lives of our customers get pandemic disruption to the minimum. Equally, we proudly assisted the customers in their quick transition to remote working and the new normal of heightened digital communications, contributing to an early economic recovery.

Increasing demand for cyber security

As India saw an exponential growth in digital adoption, it has also seen a whopping 300% increase in cybercrimes. Cybercrime continues to rise in scale and complexity, affecting essential services, businesses and private individuals alike. Cyber criminals seek to exploit human or security vulnerabilities in order to steal passwords, data or money directly. The most common cyber threats are in the form of hacking, phishing and malicious software, including ransomware. We have seen a significant growth in cyber criminality in the form of high-profile ransomware campaigns over the past few years. Data breaches with leaked personal data on a massive scale have left victims vulnerable to fraud as business with inadequate protection are vulnerable to cyber-attacks.

Airtel's take on it

As a responsible service provider, coming up with a solution was imperative. To safeguard our customers from cyber-attacks and data breach during work from home, online classes, e-commerce purchase and being entertained, we launched a 'secure internet' service through Xstream Fiber that blocks malware, viruses, high-risk websites and apps in real time. Similarly, we partnered with Kaspersky to allow Airtel customers to purchase Kaspersky Total Security solution directly from the Airtel Thanks app in a matter of few clicks. this aimed at increasing the cybersecurity awareness amongst Indian internet users and encourage them to practice cyber safety in the wake of growing cyberthreats. Over the past years, we have pioneered multiple cyber security solutions including Airtel Secure - a comprehensive suite of advanced cyber security solutions for business customers. Additionally, in order to protect Airtel customers from the growing incidents of online payment frauds, Airtel Payments Bank offers an innovative solution 'Airtel Safe Pay' – India's safest mode for making digital payments.

Megatrends in the industry

The dynamic regulatory, technological, and competitive environment has presented the telecommunication industry with new opportunities and challenges. While the sector has made considerable progress by augmenting network capacity with additional fiber and wireless deployments, there are emerging set of potential opportunities and trends which can fundamentally influence the players to transform themselves into more efficient and profitable businesses.

Rise of metaverse

In the recent past, metaverse environments and the convergence of physical and digital worlds have taken centre stage while setting a backdrop for a cultural and business model evolution. Though the concept is still in nascent stage, businesses have been rushing to formulate new strategies for a transition to the unchartered territories of the metaverse. Airtel has recently showcased its capabilities to transform the future of video entertainment by recreating the in-stadia experience of Kapil Dev's famous 175-not-out vs Zimbabwe, during the 1983 Cricket World Cup. It also demonstrated India's first 5G powered hologram in form of a virtual avatar of Kapil Dev appearing on the stage, to interact with fans in real-time and walk them through the key moments of his innings.

Through the future metaverse development activities, telecommunication industry can explore new avenues for monetisation via subscription models, virtual stores and in-world services. Leveraging 5G technology and embracing its mobility, superior speed, and throughput benefits, the opportunity for the sector is immense - accelerating growth of the metaverse can enhance engagement with stakeholders in new ways through immersive experiences.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) revolutionising Telecom industry

AI, data science and machine learning are transforming the face of businesses in this sector. Optimising mobile tower operations, fraud detection, and enhancing customer experience are some of the most promising uses. A recent survey concluded that 95% of all customer interactions would be AI-powered by 2025. Deploying AI-based solutions multiple has reaped benefits in being better equipped to deal with consumer demands and optimising their service operations journeys, such as in-store customer experience, and deployment of employees in stores and call centres.

Airtel is fervently gathering pace to access this cutting-edge technology to provide best-in-class service. Partnering with leading technology companies of the country, Airtel has successfully demonstrated 5G-based Remote Robotic Operations and AI-driven Quality Inspection for Factories of the Future. Airtel has also deployed AI-based predictive maintenance solutions across its operation.

IoT: A world of possibilities

Emerging technologies are reshaping businesses and have become a key disruptor in recent times. Notably, McKinsey research indicates that adoption of IoT technologies has increased exponentially the past five years, and global IoT market size is predicted to exceed $1 Tn by 2024 (GlobalData). Telecom sector players can explore new opportunities and put IoT use cases to develop an extensive array of services, based on their unique assets. The use of IoT in this industry can be extended to intelligent networks, data analytics, IoT platforms, billing, CRM, and cloud services for a vast range of industries, from manufacturing to healthcare.

Airtel, being a leader in Enterprise connectivity segment, offers an IoT platform with proven capability to connect billions of devices in a seamless fashion. With accelerated adoption of IoT ecosystem in daily business operations, Airtel Business has successfully developed industry-specific use cases to address customer concerns and drive business value.