Industry captains place big bets on new-age tech as digitization drives business

Mint asked top company bosses how they see disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain and 5G impacting Indian firms. Edited excerpts:

CP GURNANI

MD AND CEO ,TECH MAHINDRA

Thoughts on AI (Machine Learning, Deep Learning), Blockchain, IoT, AR-VR, 3D Printing, Automation and Robotics.

The IT and digital transformation industry is witnessing exponential growth in the use of cutting-edge digital technologies like Blockchain, 5G, AI, automation, robotics, cybersecurity and IoT. One can expect all these new age technologies to make greater inroads both in the Indian and global markets, in the years ahead.

As part of our TechMNxt charter, we are collaborating and co-innovating with our partner ecosystem to derive business value for our customers by leveraging these digital technologies. 2019 can very well turn out to be an inflection point for many of these technologies converting into real connected experiences.

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GDPR impact on companies in India.

I believe if companies are pre-emptive in the data protection space, there will be a huge business opportunity for Indian IT players like Tech Mahindra, not just in the European markets but globally too.

Thoughts on 5G.

At Tech Mahindra, we are bullish on 5G and as part of our preparedness for 5G, we are investing in 5G training labs in partnership with global players as well as setting up a training academy.

Progress of Digital India.

The government of India has been focusing heavily on developing India into a $1 trillion digital economy by 2025. The government's focus on developing digital governance services and Smart Cities by adapting new age technologies like automation, AI, cybersecurity, blockchain and IoT has contributed to the growth of the Indian IT industry in recent times and promises to open additional avenues in the future.

Cybersecurity challenges.

While Indian enterprises are certainly susceptible to cyber threats, the scenario is gradually changing with organizations understanding the need of having a robust cyber security system. With increased focus on cybersecurity, major IT players like Tech Mahindra are also investing heavily in developing new age cyber security solutions.

SAMEER GARDE

PRESIDENT, INDIA AND SAARC, CISCO

Thoughts on AI (Machine Learning, Deep Learning), Blockchain, IoT, AR-VR, 3D Printing, Automation and Robotics.

The trends that are shaping IT are a combination of all of these technologies. To experience the full value of these modern tools, integration is the only way forward. The common factor between all these technologies is data; IoT and blockchain provide a network between devices that pull out vast scores of data. Rich analytics and insights are inferred and then intelligently used to fuel solutions such as AI, robotics, and AR-VR. While each of these solutions have vast implications, it may be said that IoT will have the largest impact due to its ability to integrate.

GDPR's impact on companies in India.

The GDPR regulations pushed Indian businesses to upgrade their privacy policies for global customers and not only their clients in the EU.

Do you think there will be a visible shift to 5G next year?

5G is expected to drive emerging technologies such as IoT, AR and VR. It is going to have a big impact on segments beyond mobile broadband such as smart cities, robotics, self-driving cars, healthcare, agriculture, and education. Cisco is working with BSNL to demonstrate use cases of 5G to address challenges in areas like education, healthcare and agriculture.

Thoughts on the progress of Digital India

The Digital India initiative is a significant initiative that has helped India leapfrog in many aspects. It has transformed the way communities, citizens, states, and industries operate today. The penetration of mobile devices and services alone has created a new channel for the delivery of public services. For example, the UPI-based digital payments platform has democratized financial transactions on an unprecedented scale. Intelligent networks have become a foundation of Digital India, making most of the government's initiatives such as Make in India, Smart Cities, financial inclusion, startup India more relevant than ever.

Do you think AI will impact jobs?

There is no doubt that AI will have a profound impact on jobs, but it will be a positive one.

According to a new Cisco-IDC report, digital disruption is likely to add over 1.4 million new IT jobs by 2027 in India, primarily in areas like cybersecurity, automation, AI, networking and data analytics. AI will create new roles which never existed before like 'empathy trainer' for AI devices, or an AI 'ethics auditor.'

Security challenges.

India faces the highest number of cybersecurity threats in the Asia-Pacific region with over 500,000 alerts daily. Considering the growing threat landscape, companies and governments should consider adopting advanced security technologies like machine learning and artificial intelligence capabilities to investigate and identify alerts.

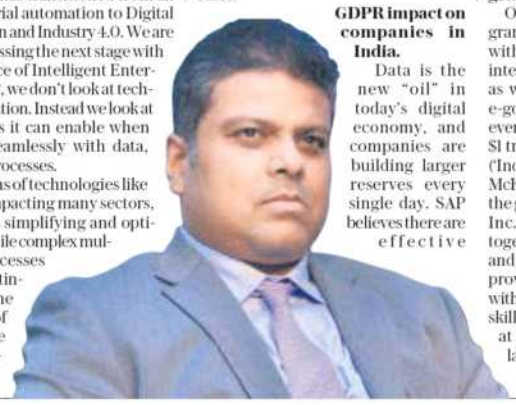
DEB DEEP SENGUPTA

PRESIDENT AND MD, SAP INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Thoughts on AI (Machine Learning, Deep Learning), Blockchain, IoT, AR-VR, 3D Printing, Automation and Robotics.

The world has transitioned from an era of Industrial automation to Digital transformation and Industry 4.0. We are already witnessing the next stage with the emergence of Intelligent Enterprises. At SAP, we don't look at technology in isolation. Instead we look at the outcomes it can enable when integrated seamlessly with data, people and processes.

Applications of technologies like AI are now impacting many sectors, blockchain is simplifying and optimizing erstwhile complex multi-party processes while IoT continues to push the boundaries of data exchange and consequent actions by machines and humans. As the application of these technologies mature, businesses across industries will adopt them to re-imagine their business processes.



GDPR impact on companies in India.

Data is the new "oil" in today's digital economy, and companies are building larger reserves every single day. SAP believes there are effective alternatives to data localization, such as encryption technologies to ensure data security. We believe GDPR has paved the future of data privacy and provides a view of what compliance will look like moving forward.

> Data is the new oil in today's digital economy, and companies are building larger reserves every single day

Progress of the Digital India programme.

Over the last three years, the programme has seen its share of success with a steady increase in internet and mobile users, as well as an increase in e-gov transactions. However, to achieve the goal of $1 trillion in GDP by 2025 ('India's tech opportunity': McKinsey Global Institute), the government and India Inc., will need to come together to build a robust and nurturing ecosystem that not only provides citizens with technology, but with end-to-end solutions. This requires skill building of our large human capital at scale. With this in mind, SAP has launched initiatives like Code Unnati and Bharat ERP to build skills of young India along with an increase in industry capability to leverage them.

AI impact on jobs.

Digital transformation has impacted workplaces globally. The speed of innovation will continue to increase exponentially, and application of new-age technologies is making it possible to automate routine tasks. Not only are jobs changing, the job market itself is transforming.

AI can effectively disaggregate value chains and generate the capacity to serve people at scale.

We believe this technology has the potential to augment human potential and uplift the workforce into higher value adding jobs. To help elevate the country's human capital to take on these roles, while promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, SAP has signed a pact with NITI Aayog's innovation unit to adopt 100 Atal Tinkering Labs. SAP believes people are the force behind innovation and growth.

MANU SAALE

MD & CEO, MERCEDES-BENZ RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INDIA

Thoughts on AI (Machine Learning, Deep Learning), Blockchain, IoT, AR-VR, 3D Printing, Automation and Robotics.

AI is a key technology enabler for all megatrends that are set to redefine the automotive industry. Autonomous driving, for example, relies on AI, because it is the only technology that enables reliable, real-time recognition of objects around the vehicle. AI creates numerous opportunities to reduce costs, improve operations, and generate new revenue streams. For shared-mobility services, for example, AI can help optimize pricing by predicting and matching demand and supply. Improvements realized through AI will play an important role for automotive companies in the future.

> 'For shared-mobility services, AI can help optimize pricing by predicting and matching demand and supply.'

Blockchain is seen to provide new applications with connected cars, vehicle safety and data security, supply chain transparency and in the world of automotive financing. 3D printing is seen to support better parts prototyping and in several weight reduction initiatives in the automotive industry.

Automobile technology in 2019.

The automotive industry is always evolving and has, in the last few years, been going through constant disruption. At Mercedes-Benz too, a strategy termed C.A.S.E —Connected, Autonomous, Shared and Services and Electric—is being applied as a guiding principle for defining the future.

Will 5G affect auto tech?

The cars of the future are designed and intended to be highly connected. With their 'Always On' feature, there is a huge amount of data expected to be transferred from the car to the cloud and back. Compared to 4G, 5G is set to significantly increase the sustainable bandwidth of both data uplink as well as downlink.

Progress of the Digital India programme.

The amount of pure-play digital startups in the country that are catering to making lives easier are increasing by the day.

AI impact on jobs.

There is going to be a lot of disruption over the next 5-10 years.

While it is shown that many jobs done by humans today AI can potentially do better, there are still thousands of areas where human intervention and deployment would be necessary. It calls for better coordination between AI and humans.

JAY CHEN

CEO, HUAWEI INDIA

Thoughts on AI (Machine Learning, Deep Learning), Blockchain, IoT, AR-VR, 3D Printing, Automation and Robotics.

While 2018 has been a good year for demonstrating use cases of 5G, next year is poised to be the year of 5G field trials in India. Enhanced Mobile Broadband (eMBB) will drive the first wave of 5G, while Massive IoT and digitalization of vertical industries will drive the next wave of 5G. The rollout of 5G will be at the heart of the proliferation of other technologies such as AI, IoT and AR-VR globally and in India. At Huawei we believe the future will be intelligent, AI-driven. The key to staying competitive in such an environment lies in data and analytics including AI, so businesses will have to become an intelligent enterprise in an intelligent world. We are exploring how existing technologies can be upgraded to 5G.

GDPR impact on companies in India.

EU's GDPR does not impact Indian companies if they are not processing data of citizens residing within EU.

Progress of the Digital India programme.

When the government rechristens its flagship National Telecom Policy as the National Digital Communications Policy 2018 (NDCP 2018), it's a clear indication of its continued commitment to the realization of its Digital India vision and enabling its citizens with a Digital way of life.

Cybersecurity challenges.

Indian enterprises are taking appropriate measures to safeguard themselves and their users, which include appointing a chief information security officer, conducting annual cybersecurity audits and improving the overall product security capability by frequent testing.

Impact of AI on jobs.

Only a decade ago, enterprises needed engineers.

However, with the widespread adoption of technologies such as AI, they need scientists. While there will be much less demand for jobs that handle repetitive tasks in future, the focus will shift to more meaningful tasks. Technologically-advanced economies are already creating full-fledged jobs that require AI skill sets. That said, talent availability remains a concern. Huawei will be investing more than $140 million (including Huawei Cloud AI resources and AI suites) in AI talent education.

PRAKASH MALLYA

MD, SALES AND MARKETING GROUP AT INTEL INDIA

Thoughts on AI (Machine Learning, Deep Learning), Blockchain, IoT, AR-VR, 3D Printing, Automation and Robotics.

We believe data analytics and AI will have the maximum impact in India and globally. About 90% of global data was created in the last couple of years but only 1-3% of this data has been analyzed. Intel is inventing technologies and software tools that will advance the AI ecosystem, making it possible to gain insight, anticipate needs and continuously learn from data at enterprise scale.

> 'India has an opportunity to tap into its existing pool of mathematicians, statisticians, and programmers.'

GDPR impact on companies in India.

Regulations such as GDPR offer an opportunity for India to leverage its vast technology expertise and talent pool to address the need for privacy compliant solutions globally.

Thoughts on 5G.

In the last 18 months or so, India went from being 155th to being #1 globally in mobile data consumption, which underlines the scale of the opportunity in this market. That's set the stage for data-led transformation of our country. India is on the cusp of 5G adoption with the auction of spectrum for 5G services likely to happen in the latter half of 2019.

Progress of the Digital India programme.

India today presents a fascinating data driven transformation story. There is no other country that has digitized similar volumes of citizen data. Our future is going to be data driven and India provides a significant data science opportunity. Through our 20 years in the Indian market, we have been committed to working closely with the government, the developer community, and industry collaborators to accelerate new technology adoption and strengthen our local ecosystem to help enable a digitally empowered society.

AI impact on jobs.

Industry reports indicate that AI will actually create more jobs than it is expected to eliminate globally. India has an opportunity to tap into its existing pool of mathematicians, statisticians, and programmers and nurture this talent to leverage their skills for analytics and AI. Intel is committed to democratizing AI through deep industry, academic, and government collaborations. Last year, we committed to training 15,000 developers, students, and professors in AI. We have long surpassed our goal and have today engaged with more than 112,000 people across more than 130 corporate organizations and academia.

Cybersecurity challenges.

Today there is a need to understand that when it comes to securing data, software alone is no longer enough. Hardware-enabled security capabilities improve an organization's security posture and mitigate risk, offering safer data exchanges and secure storage and processing.

While India Inc is spending more on cybersecurity each year, there is still a lot of work to be done to increase awareness of risks and drive home the need for continuous focus and investment in end to end security.