

Brave new world

Covid-19 has changed the way we live, work and play

Welcome to the world of phygital, physical day-to-day life blended with digital – as a new world order grapples to emerge from an old one ravaged and humbled by the invisible Corona virus. While the human loss globally is a matter of grim tragedy, the venture capitalist and the start-up worlds will see big shifts in our daily existence à la phygital

Actually, the digital-physical mishmash has already been established in education – Calcutta schools holding online classes for instance – and in the delivery of entertainment to home by Netflix and Amazon Prime. But, in the future, its impact will be overwhelming in all aspects of our life, like banking, medicine, trade, shopping, dining and even sports.

The world will become more and more digital. The way businesses run and human beings interface will be 'light touch' and 'contact-free'. There will be less business travel, physical meetings and conferences. The impact of this will be felt very strongly in travel, tourism and the hospitality industry. For the foreseeable future, travel will be need-based. Working from home will become the new normal. Already, a lot of companies have said that they have seen increased productivity during the lockdown and will carry on the work-from-home practice for the majority of their staff. This will have far reaching consequences. In India, this will lead to an impact on house-holds and their livelihood, specially, for families with growing children. There will be a glut of empty office space impacting commercial real-estate.

As consumers, we are already used to digital payments be it through Paytm, RuPay and others. We will soon see a lot more of banking going digital. E-Signatures linked to Aadhar will become the norm and an accepted legal tender. Banks will not be required to visit homes for KYC but this will become digital with Aarogya Setu, the localisation app launched recently by the government. Even in trade, documentation will become more and more digital. Covid is the inflexion point for blockchain technology and this will become the basis for all trade especially cross-border trade. All of this will invariably lead to plugging off loopholes which will ensure financial transparency.

Telemedicine and telehealth will become the norm. The new white paper produced by Niti Aayog and the Medical Council of India aims to use these as enablers to ensure reach of services to remote corners of the country. This would also reduce the face to face interaction between doctor and



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patients. With e-prescriptions being legalised and with e-pharmacy picking up in the country, health-care solutions will become digital and this could, on the one hand, end the family doctor and on the other, enable one to deepen the reach of super-specialised medical services to remote areas.

Even after the abrogation of the lockdown, till a vaccine is found, people will avoid crowded spaces. People will avoid malls and restaurants. Fine dining will be rare and most outside eating will be limited to food delivery. This will have big impact on fine dining restaurant chains. Online delivery, which has become an integral part of our lives, will become the norm rather than the exception. Tech observers have been keen to spot these trends and sure enough, evidence was on hand in the form of the ₹40,000 crore deal signed between Facebook and Jio which is essentially about consumers connecting to local kirana shops and getting their wares delivered seamlessly.

The other area of substantial impact will be the way people entertain themselves. More and more content will be delivered at home through Netflix-like OTT services. The impact on the movie industry will be massive and newer films will be released directly to homes. Also, we will not see sporting events taking place for a long time and even if the events take place, they will do so in empty or near empty stadiums. Globally, young people will look at e-sports and e-gaming, through which they can recreate the stadium feel over the internet. Already, people are recreating pubs and bars online over Zoom during these lockdown days.

The world will become less tactile. People will avoid handshakes and back-slapping. The measurement of one's temperature will become an integral part of the check-in processes in restaurants, malls, hotels and airports just as security checks became ubiquitous post 9-11. We have all seen a reduction in our credit card bills as we get used to living a life on basic necessities. Given this experience and the fact that the economy is in turmoil globally, basic living will become the new normal – a far cry from the hedonistic days of the last two decades.

A lot of these things are not what the social animal in us is used to. This seems like another world from what we are used to. But this pandemic is an epoch-changing event in all our lives. Who would have thought an enemy we don't know about and can't see has locked down the entire world? All of us, throughout the length and breadth of the world, are living a life which we would have scoffed at even in a sci-fi movie. ♦

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