

"Universal Acceptance - Empowering the common citizens at the last mile in India"

India is a huge country - not only in terms of land but also in terms of cultural diversity. The country is unique in its own ways, and its vast cultural diversity makes, India the land of languages. To begin with, India has over 1600 dialects, with 22 official languages. An incredibly diverse country in many ways. The complexity only grows from here, as in the India Language ecosystem, there is a single language with multiple scripts, and multiple languages with a single script, giving the foundation of an old saying “कोस कोस पर बदले पानी, चार कोस पर वाणी”, which translates to “In India, water changes every mile, and the language changes every 4 miles”.

Further, in the past decade, India has witnessed exponential growth digitally. The number of Smartphone users in rural areas surpassed that of urban India. The public sector has been a strong catalyst for India's rapid digitization. Additionally, with the advent of the government's Digital India program, there has been a considerable demand for digital services. At the same time, private-sector innovation has helped bring internet-enabled services to millions of citizens and made online usage more accessible. This has led to an expanding market for digital products and services, going well beyond expectations. However, due to the unavailability of larger content in local languages on the internet, Smartphone users are starved for content in languages they speak and understand. To support and cater to such a massive user base, it is required to have a robust content ecosystem, technological support for Indian languages, access to open-source data, translation tools, and most importantly, a coalition of like-minded people.

Along the same lines, and to address this pressing need for making online information and content available to an increasing number of Indians, FICCI launched the 'FICCI-Indian Language Internet Alliance (FICCI-ILIA), back in 2017. The objective of the alliance is to boost internet penetration in the country by enabling greater access to regional language content on the internet and to bridge the knowledge divide by propelling the next phase of growth for content generators, content enablers, advertisers and other stakeholders of the Indic ecosystem. The alliance is working continuously towards bridging the linguistic digital divide in India through our innovative platforms and collaborative models.

FICCI-ILIA is also the official secretariat of UA local India Chapter, which works towards the development of multilingual internet and UA readiness in India with ICANN, NIXI, and other stakeholders like industry and academia. The local UA India Chapter, led by FICCI-ILIA has undertaken several successful initiatives for the digital development of the Indian Languages

industry sector focusing on areas like UA Implementation and IDNs. The local India Chapter has also developed a community of professionals, and policy and technology experts who are keen to learn and contribute more to UASG's mission.

FICCI-ILIA believes that Universal Acceptance is a fundamental requirement of a truly multilingual internet in India. Over the years, the internet landscape has changed dramatically with the expansion and evolution of available Top-Level Domains (TLDs), generic Top-Level Domains (gTLDs), Internationalized Domain Names and Email Address Internationalization (EAI). A new horizon has opened up with the possibility to have Internationalized Domain Names in one's mother tongues and scripts. People are still not aware that, there are globally 1488 active TLDs covering 22 Indian languages represented using 11 scripts. The challenge is clear, the next billion Internet users are not online because systems that enable their access do not support their local language. Providing access to the internet for these users will require technological solutions apart from merely Internationalized or multilingual content. Localized Domain names and email addresses need to be part of these technological solutions, making Universal Acceptance the priority ONE.

Universal Acceptance is a big deal across rapidly growing markets worldwide, particularly in Asia, where multilingualism is widespread and new users on smartphones are key drivers of digital and economic growth. The need for UA readiness is clear, now if we talk about the benefits, the Top-Level and Internationalized Domains have evolved and matured enough as far as the technology is concerned. For increasing business reach and greater opportunities, the UA for applications, and services are crucial. People are generally comfortable trusting and communicating in their local language. Having a local language identity (i.e., email address) is easier to use for the non-English speaking user for participating in any government, social, banking and other online applications. UA allows customers to expand their customer base by offering products/technologies/services to various countries in their languages. Businesses can now communicate, share information, and provide products, technologies and services in the customer's language, creating trust and building a huge business potential while bringing the next billion-plus users online. In fact, Government services can also communicate with the user in their local language creating inclusiveness and better adoption. UA readiness not only generates trust among stakeholders but will also help in reducing the challenge of the digital divide, further supporting social inclusion. As we all know economic growth depends on a degree of economic freedom, and under some circumstances, more freedom will promote additional growth.

Understanding the importance of UA, the Government of India is also making several strides towards the development and awareness of UA in India. The Ministry of Electronics and IT has created a Task Force which will oversee the growth of language technology and multilingual internet in India, and the FICCI-ILIA and the local India UA chapter are a part of the same. In the end, we have to recognize that Universal Acceptance enables internet users the opportunity to create a unique online identity of their choice thus boosting the value of digital freedom. However, to have an effective UA-enabled system, various stakeholders like Government, Industry like - Technology Enablers, Technology Developers, Email Software and Service Providers, Email Service Providers, Email (and System) Administrators, Top-Level Domain Registries and Registrars, Academia, and Policy Makers must come together. This is the prime objective of the local India UA chapter, and our initiatives like Technical Workshops, Awareness Campaigns, Social Media Promotions, and Government Engagement Campaigns, aimed in the same fashion to bring everyone together and work towards the main cause.



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For more Details please visit:

UASG, ICANN - <https://uasg.tech/>

Local India Chapter - <https://www.ficci-ilia.in/universal-acceptance.html>