The potential of E-Commerce is no more a matter of debate. From the world of hype and fantasy, it has moved to that of digital reality and it has unleashed yet another revolution. Electronic Commerce has an impact on a significant portion of the world, on business, professions, and of course, on people. Vice President Albert Gore JR. put it in this way:

"We are on the verge of a revolution that is just as profound as the change in the economy that came with the industrial revolution. Soon electronic networks will allow people to transcend the barriers of time and distance and take advantage of global markets and business opportunities not even imaginable today, opening up a new world of economic possibility and progress."

Truly speaking, this new digital economy is having a major impact on the global economy. E-Commerce has a tremendous growth potential and also generates economic growth in the country. It is important to recognize that E-Commerce is going to be the driving force of economic development in countries, especially India.

About the present study:

In view of the fact that E-Commerce helps in fostering a favourable business and regulatory environment, the study analyses the mechanics and modus operandi of E-Commerce. Also, it indicates how various factors related to E-Commerce contribute to the growth of a vibrant and active electronic community in India, resulting in economic growth. It covers a broad overview of issues under the umbrella of E-Commerce and the knowledge-based economy. In doing so, it goes deep into the relevant issues and encompasses all technologies involved in it. The study further examines the current and potential level of E-Commerce activities and identifies the challenges and opportunities for Indian business and the government in the emerging new economy.

Objectives of the Study:

As we have seen above, E-Commerce is one of the most important factors that will revolutionize economic growth in India: This study is undertaken with the following objectives in mind.

a. The rise and development of E-Commerce in the world.
b. The development of E-Commerce in India in the global context.
c. A critical analysis of the institutional factors and policies affecting E-Commerce in India.
d. The institutional mechanisms and regulatory framework for E-Commerce in India.
e. E-Commerce for people at the bottom of the pyramid.
f. The future of E-Commerce in India.
g. The recommendations to stimulate the growth and widen the base for E-Commerce in India.
Scheme of Presentation:

With the above objectives in view, the scheme of presentation of the study is as follows:

**Chapter 1 “Introduction”** – Chapter 1 attempts to explain the meaning of E-Commerce and present its significance in the overall economic scenario. It covers a wide gamut of areas related to E-Commerce - its definition from various angles by different authors, the driving forces of electronic commerce that differentiate its growth in different countries, the various business models of E-Commerce, its applications, the benefits and the limitations of this new business medium.

**Chapter 2 “E-Commerce Worldwide”** - With a view to get insight into the present context of E-Commerce in the world, this chapter highlights the E-Commerce growth in various countries. In doing so, it throws light on forecasts made for E-Commerce development, its brief status around the world, the regional perspective on electronic commerce and the present statistics on the growth of E-Commerce in its various aspects.

**Chapter 3 “E-Commerce in case of small and medium sized Enterprises (SMEs)”** – Keeping in view that e-business practices are increasingly becoming the subject of studies evaluating the impact of E-Commerce on economic growth and business performance, this section focuses on adoption of E-Commerce in SMEs in three developing countries - Asia, Africa and Latin America. It investigates which companies use E-Commerce according to sector, size, location or target markets, the costs and benefits of using E-Commerce from the viewpoint of SMEs and what kind of assistance they may need to enhance their e-business activities.

**Chapter 4 “Research design and methodology for the study”** – Extensive study of existing literature was made and the major trends in E-Commerce in India are identified. Numerous research reports and articles in the research journals were studied and analysed to arrive at the broad trends in E-Commerce in India and the world.

With a view to attain the above objectives, a comprehensive semi-structured questionnaire was prepared and was sent to 118 selected companies from key vertical segments in 4 cities in India. The questionnaire was filled by CEOs / CIOs as per availability of these top senior executives. During the study, efforts were made to draw samples from almost all types of industries i.e. both ICT and non-ICT companies. Besides questionnaire, this study also presents a Case Study of eChoupal, to emphasize the fact that E-Commerce has revolutionized various aspects of business processes and it leads to operational efficiency of a business.

**Chapter 5 “Survey Results”** – This chapter attempts to analyse peoples’ perception of E-Commerce in India, the business functions most affected by E-Commerce, their degree of acceptance, the status of E-Commerce in Indian businesses in terms of awareness, its usefulness, its actual usage, its future potential and what people feel facilitates or inhibits the adoption of E-Commerce.

**Chapter 6 “Current trends in E-Commerce in India”** – This Chapter attempts to analyse the readiness of India in this phase of E-transformation. It describes E-Commerce in Indian context, a brief glance at India’s Internet scenario, the growth pattern of Indian E-Commerce and various opportunities available for Indian opportunities. While doing so, it throws light on some of leading Indian players in E-Commerce industry, their success factors and the barriers in growth of E-Commerce in India.

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Chapter 7 “Infrastructure of E-Commerce in India” – With the IT revolution, there is a constant and continuous convergence of technology and India is witnessing a change never seen before. The change and pace of growth is dynamic from basic telephony to voice video and data services, and bandwidth on demand to virtual private networks. The fast track revolution in IT, particularly the spread of Internet, makes it imperative that the telecommunications sector keep pace for its survival and growth. Keeping this in view, this chapter attempts to highlight the growth of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) as a basic infrastructure for E-Commerce.

Chapter 8 “Present status of E-Commerce” – This Chapter outlines the present status of E-Commerce in India. It provides information on the users, their profile, internet usage, products/service purchased online along with future propensity to buy, their online shopping aversions and preferences and the factors that would increase their frequency of shopping online. While doing so, it also throws light on the fact that E-Commerce is also fuelling rural growth in India.

Chapter 9 “Driving and Inhibiting factors of E-Commerce in India” – In order to understand E-Commerce and its implications for developing countries, it is important to see it from the perspective of the legal framework of E-Commerce, i.e. the basic regulatory framework requirements that are needed in developing countries for it to develop. While doing so, this Chapter identifies the factors that drive and inhibit the growth of E-Commerce in India. It identifies the aspects due to which India can gain recognition in the digital world. It also throws light on the issues which need to be addressed for its fullest utilization.

Chapter 10 “Prospects of E-Commerce in India” – Having investigated the present status of E-Commerce growth in relation to the world, this chapter attempts to highlight the future of E-Commerce in India. It investigates various forecasts made for E-Commerce development and presents views of different experts on what will happen in E-Commerce in years to come.

Chapter 11 “E-Commerce strategy for India” – Whether as a tool for development and governance domestically, or to promote and increase export growth and international trade, India needs to adopt a proactive role. It needs to ensure that the benefits of E-Commerce accrue to those trying to overcome economic marginalisation due to geographic, financial, technological, or educational handicaps. Indeed, the need to close the gap between those with abundant information at hand and the ‘information poor’ provides a strong rationale for the development of E-Commerce as a national objective. With this in view, this section points towards the possible future strategy and policy agenda for India.

Thus, this study attempts to throw light on the status of E-Commerce development in India, its existing problems and issues in furtherance of this digital medium, the initiatives that have been taken by the Government. It suggests recommendations on policy as well as strategic change which can promote the e-transformation in India.

Concluding Observations

India faces a special challenge and responsibility to design an E-Commerce strategy that, on the one hand, allows for the development of E-Commerce and, on the other hand, ensures the social objective of providing access and benefits to those who cannot afford it. Electronic governance, public Internet terminals, rural access at subsidized cost and awareness are some of the initiatives that must be considered as a part of this strategy which should ensure that the regulatory approaches are transparent, harmonised, and independent of specific technologies. Along with open and competitive telecommunications regime this will attract the investment in telecom and E-Commerce promotion required for its diffusion to the people living at the bottom of the pyramid.