

“Big Data and Governance in India”

A discussion on the role of Big Data in Governance in India with a focus on Digital India, UID Scheme and Smart Cities Mission.

The roundtable discussion intends to delve deeper into various issues around the role of Big Data in Government schemes and projects like the Digital India, the UID Scheme and the 100 Smart Cities Mission. We look forward to making this a forum for knowledge exchange and a learning opportunity for our friends and colleagues attending the discussion.

Context:

The Centre for Internet and Society, Bangalore is conducting a case-study on the role of Big Data in governance in India for their project “Big Data in the Global South: Mitigating Harms”, focussing on schemes such as Digital India, UID and the 100 Smart Cities Mission. These schemes as intended, will collect large quantities of data in digitally readable forms based on common standards which will allow them to be interoperable. This presents significant opportunities for Big Data techniques to be employed in governance, tied with several challenges and concerns. Big Data has been defined in a number of ways in terms of characteristics such as volume, velocity, variety, exhaustiveness, granularity, scalability and interoperability of data. Other definitions look at the kind of technology in use, and whether transaction generated data is involved. The advocates of Big Data point towards its benefits in terms of real time insights, and simultaneously it is critiqued by those who point to the various potential harms of using Big Data. Some of these issues in the context of schemes that are the subject of our case-study shall be discussed.

Digital India

On July 1, 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Digital India Programme to ensure availability of government services to citizens electronically by improving online infrastructure and increasing Internet connectivity. The programme is divided into nine pillars. Our research is currently focussed on the two pillars – e-Governance and e-Kranti, which intend to reform governance through technology and enable electronic delivery of services. The programme will involve large scale digitisation, electronic collection of data from residents and processing, common standards for interoperability between schemes and potential sharing of data. The Government intended to use the Aadhaar number as identification technology for most of the schemes, however the Supreme Court order in the Aadhaar case on August 11, 2015 prevents it from being made compulsory, apart from a handful of initiatives. Our research aims to focus on what the various schemes in Digital India intend to quantify and the kind of policies that are in place to govern such quantification. Most of these initiatives do not have clearly laid down privacy policies. There is also a lack of properly articulated access control mechanisms and doubts over important issues such as data ownership owing to most projects involving public private

partnership which involves private organisations collecting, processing and retaining large amounts of data. In the roundtable, we will look to throw light on and discuss some of these issues.

100 Smart Cities Mission

In the year 2014, the Indian Government had announced building 100 smart cities across the country in light of the shift towards urban transformation due to massive influx of migrants from villages. The vision is to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local area development and harnessing technology that leads to smart outcomes and smart solutions in order that the cities capitalize on information and data to transform operations and the mechanism of service delivery. Due to lack of an absolute definition of a smart city, the mutual consensus has evolved around a future city that uses technology to make life better for its residents. Big Data and analytics will play a predominant role in such transformation by way of cloud, mobile technology and other social technologies that gather data for the purpose of ascertaining and accordingly addressing concerns of people, and increase the level of their engagement to culminate these plans successfully. However, the Mission lacks clarity and has faced several challenges regarding use, storage and ownership of such data in the cities, the actors involved and their accountability, concerns around data security, privacy, and need for a suitable regulatory framework, to name a few.

These Government initiatives and projects call attention due to the use of Big Data, which raises questions about the public dialogue in the context of big data, rights, and governance, status and role of India's data protection standards impacted by Big Data and the legal hurdles posed by it.