

Studying Internet in India Internet Researchers' Conference (IRC) 2016

Call for Sessions, October 2015

Internet Researchers' Conference

The last decades have seen a growing entanglement of our daily lives with the internet, not only as modes of communication but also as shared socio-politico-cultural spaces, and as objects of study. The emergence of new artifacts, conditions, and sites of power/knowledge with the prevalence of digital modes of communication, consumptions, production, distribution, and appropriation have expectedly attracted academic and non-academic explorers across disciplines, professions, and interests. Researchers across the domains of arts, humanities, and social sciences have attempted to understand life on the internet, or life after the internet, and the way digital technologies mediate various aspects of our being today. These attempts have in turn raised new questions around understanding of digital objects, online lives, and virtual networks, and have contributed to complicating disciplinary assumptions, methods, and boundaries.

The Researchers at Work (RAW) programme at the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS) is very excited to invite you to take part in the first of a series of annual conferences for researchers (academic or otherwise) studying internet in India. These conferences will be called the Internet Researchers' Conference (IRC), with the abbreviation reminding us of an early protocol for text-based communication over internet. The first edition will be organised around the theme of 'studying internet in India.' The word *study* here is a shorthand for a range of tasks, from documentation and theory-building, to measurement and representation.

This conference series is founded on the following interests:

- Creating discussion spaces for researchers studying internet in India and in other comparable regions
- Foregrounding the multiplicity, hierarchies, tensions, and urgencies of the digital sites and users in India

- Accounting for the various layers, conceptual and material, of experiences and usages of internet and networked digital media in India
- Exploring and practicing new modes of research and documentation necessitated by new (digital) forms of objects of power/knowledge

Studying Internet in India

The inaugural conference will be held in Delhi **(to be confirmed)** on February 25-27, 2015. It will comprise of discussion and workshop sessions taking place during the first two days, and a writing sprint and a final round table taking place during the third day.

The conference will specifically focus on the following questions:

- How do we conceptualise, as an intellectual and political task, the mediation and transformation of social, cultural, political, and economic processes, forces, and sites through internet and digital media technologies in contemporary India?
- How do we frame and explore the experiences and usages of internet and digital media technologies in India within its specific historical-material contexts shaped by traditional hierarchies of knowledge, colonial systems of communication, post-independence initiatives in nation-wide technologies of governance, a rapidly growing telecommunication market, and informal circuits of media production and consumption, among others?
- What tools and methods are made available by arts, humanities, social science, and technical disciplines to study internet in India; how and where do they fail to meet the purpose; what revisions and fresh tool building are becoming necessary; and how should the usage of such tools and methods be taught?
- Given the global techno-economic contours of the internet, and the starkly hierarchical and segmented experiences and usages of the same in India, how do we begin to use the internet as a space for academic and creative practice and intervention?

Sessions

The conference will not be organised around papers but sessions. Each session will be one and half hour long. Potential participants may propose sessions that largely engage with one of the questions listed above.

Each proposed session must have at least two, and preferably three, co-leaders, who will drive the session, and prepare a session document after the conference. The proposed session can either involve a discussion, or a workshop.

In a discussion session, the co-leaders may present their works (not necessarily of the academic kind), or invite others to present their works, on a specific theme, which will be followed by a discussion, as structured by the co-leaders.

In a workshop session, the co-leaders will engage the participants to undertake individual or collaborative *work* in response to a series of questions, challenges, or provocations offered by the co-leaders at the beginning of the session. The proposed work may involve writing, searching, copying, building, etc., but **not** speaking.

Both the kinds of sessions are open to presentations and collaborations in the textual format or in other formats, including but not limited to code-based works and multimedia installations.

Writing Sprint

At the writing sprint, on the third day morning, all the participants will collaboratively put together the first draft of a handbook on tools and methods of studying Internet in India. It will be created as an online, open access, multilingual, and editable (wiki-like) book, and will be meant for extensive usage and augmentation by students, researchers, and others.

Final Round Table

This will take place after the lunch on the third day to wrap-up the conversations (and propose new initiatives, hopefully) emerging during the previous days of the conference, to make plans for follow-up works (including the first IRC Reader), and to speculate about the shape of the next year's conference.

IRC Reader

The IRC Reader will be produced as documentation of the conversations and activities at the conference. The Reader, obviously, will have the same theme as the conference, and will largely comprise of the session documentation (not necessarily textual) prepared by the co-leaders of the session concerned. Once all the session documentation is shared by the co-leaders and is temporarily published online, all the participants will be invited to share their comments, which will all be part of the final Reader of the conference.

Proposing a Session

To propose a session, each team of two/three co-leaders will have to submit the following documents:

- The name of the session: It should be created as a **hashtag**, as in #BlackLivesMatter, or #RefugeesWelcome.

- A plan of the proposed session that should clarify its context, the key questions/challenges/provocations for the session, and how they connect to any one of the four questions listed above. Write no more than one page.
- If it is a discussion session: Mention what will be presented at the session, and who will present it. Share the abstracts of the papers to be presented (if any). Each abstract should not be longer than 300 words.
- If it is a workshop session: Mention what you expect the participants to do during the session, and how the co-leaders will support them through the work. Write no more than one page.
- Three readings, or objects, or software that you expect the participants to know about before taking part in the session.
- CVs of all the co-leaders of the session.

We understand that finding co-leaders for a session you have in mind might be difficult in certain cases. One possible way for you to find co-leaders is by sharing your session idea on the researchers@cis-india.org¹ mailing list. Alternatively, you may keep an eye on the list to see what potential topics are being discussed. If you are facing any difficulty subscribing to the mailing list, please write to raw@cis-india.org.

All session proposals must be submitted by **November 15, 2015**, via email sent to raw@cis-india.org.

Selection of Sessions

All proposed sessions, along with related documents, will be published online by **November 30**. All co-leaders of proposed sessions will be invited to vote for 8 sessions before **December 15**. The sessions with maximum votes will be selected for the conference, and the list of such sessions will be published on **December 31, 2015**.

Venue, Accommodation, and Travel

The conference is most likely to take place in Delhi on February 25-27, 2015. The place, dates, and venue will be confirmed by **December 31, 2015**.

The conference organiser(s) will cover all costs related to accommodation and hospitality during the conference.

Unfortunately, we are not sure if we will be able to pay for travel expenses of the participants. We will confirm this by **December 31, 2015**.

¹ See: <https://lists.ghserv.net/mailman/listinfo/researchers>.