



Unlocking the Potential *Digital Economy in India & South East Asia*



Dignitaries at the launch of the three country studies – India, the Philippines and Vietnam

Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) in collaboration with Thammasat University organised a Conference entitled, ‘*Unlocking the Potential: Digital Economy in South Asia & South East Asia*’ at Bangkok, Thailand on August 23, 2018.

This august meeting of researchers, regulators, consumer activists, academicians, businesses and the media from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Vietnam, Australia, China and the Philippines, etc. was organised on the occasion of the release of research findings of a multi-country project examining the potential of the digital economy for ‘Regional Inclusive Growth’ spanning three countries, viz. India, the Philippines and Vietnam.

The project draws its conclusions from a series of case studies about the uptake of digital technologies and internet connectivity across various industries and sectors in three project countries, including education and vocational training, health services delivery, urban transportation, and financial services.

The application of digital technologies and Internet

connectivity could bring about significant efficiency gains for companies and organisations, and broadly contribute to improving consumer welfare.

Digitalisation of economic activities and transactions can help to overcome certain barriers to more inclusive development, and accelerate the efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Toward that end, there is a need to maintain a rights-based approach towards the Digital Economy (DE), adopt an optimal regulatory framework, and capacitate citizens to avail of the DE’s many benefits and avoid the inherent risks to the extent possible.

Delivering his keynote speech, Pansak Siriruchatapong, Vice Minister for Digital Economy and Society of Thailand shared rich information about how Thailand is going digital on all fronts, from human resources, infrastructure to government services and entrepreneurship development. Similarly, several ‘Digital India’ initiatives are also being deployed with remarkable success, as shared by Sanjay Kumar, Commercial

Representative of the Embassy of India in Thailand.

“ICT-enabled solutions are being deployed for the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases, ensuring quality and accessible education, promoting financial inclusion, building smart sustainable cities, and encouraging the participation of women and people with disabilities in general economic and social activities,” said Sameer Sharma, Senior Adviser of the International Telecommunications Union, Thailand.

“Technologies are fundamentally changing the nature of international trade, what we trade, how we trade and at what costs”, echoed Mia Mikic, Director of the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

Other important topics, such as optimal regulation for digital businesses, data privacy, data sovereignty, automation plus artificial intelligence and their impact on the future of work were also deliberated at the conference.

<http://www.cuts-ccier.org/diginomics/>

Enhancing Broadband Quality & Enabling Consumer Choices

As part of its key initiative on Consumer Broadband Labels that advocates for creating a standard information disclosure mechanism to empower consumer choice for broadband Internet services, CUTS organised a seminar entitled, ‘Empowering India Digitally – Enhancing Broadband Quality & Enabling Consumer Choice’ at New Delhi on July 18, 2018.

The session also witnessed the official release of an animation film that highlights common Quality of Service (QoS) challenges faced by consumers on broadband services and advocates for the need for adoption of consumer broadband labels in India. A research report, “Consumer Broadband Labels – Strengthening Disclosure and Transparency of Broadband Services in India” on the subject was also released during this session.

Emphasis was laid on the need for having broadband labels, on the lines of energy efficiency and quality assurance labels, with similar objectives of providing adequate



Dignitaries at the launch of ‘Consumer Broadband Labels’

information on broadband Internet plan and service provider performance to consumers. Different forms of consumer broadband labels were also discussed, i.e. simplistic ones – which may be placed on data packs and other common areas of consumer access. Besides, more complex labels were suggested to be placed in mobile retail outlets, service provider websites, etc.

During the session, the fact emerged that regulation and management of QoS are increasingly important and complex in today’s highly competitive, challenging and globalised digital environment. In this regard, a common approach for regulating QoS could enable greater quality prospects irrespective of the locations of the consumer and service provider.

<http://cuts-ccier.org/broadbandlabel/>

Consumer Sovereignty in Times of Data Localisation

CUTS conducted a roundtable discussion on ‘Consumer Sovereignty in Times of Data Localisation’ in New Delhi on September 06, 2018. The event unfolded with a round of introductions followed by a presentation by CUTS, which set the stage for deliberations on the contemporary challenges and benefits hinged to the issue of data localisation and safeguarding consumer welfare in the backdrop of recent developments in the realm of Data Privacy & Protection such as Data Protection Committee recommendations.

The discussion was moderated by Amol Kulkarni, Fellow, CUTS. The roundtable witnessed rich participation from different stakeholders including government, industry, consumer groups, academia, and data protection experts. Some of the key speakers included Usha Ramanathan, Independent Researcher and Legal Expert; GV Srinivas, Joint Secretary, Cyber Diplomacy, Ministry of External Affairs; Nikhil Pahwa, Founder, Medianama; Smriti Parsheera, Legal Consultant, National Institute for Public Finance and Policy; Venkatesh Krishnamoorthy, Country Manager, The Software Alliance; Prasanna, Supreme Court advocate.



The key takeaway from the discussions was to undertake Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) or Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) of the proposed data mirroring mandate in order to map its impact on various stakeholders before its enactment. Regulations can have varied and divergent impacts on different stakeholders, and it is thus necessary to ensure that in the process of achieving its objectives, costs imposed by regulation on stakeholders do not outweigh its benefits.

CUTS Memorandum on Information Technology, Pertaining to Citizens 'Data Security and Privacy'

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology (2017-2018) invited comments and suggestions on the pertinent issue of 'Citizens Data Security and Privacy'. Being a consumer centric policy think tank, a memorandum was submitted by CUTS from the lens of consumer welfare.

A few pertinent recommendations made in the submission have been listed below:

- Ensuring greater freedom for Indian users against compulsory signing up of 'Terms of Consent' agreement.
- The Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In's) advisory to be coupled with undertaking awareness and capacity building initiatives in order to implement the advisory in spirit.
- Adequate steps to be taken for securing citizen's data privacy in light of the Puttaswamy judgement, which may be preceded by adequate evidence-backed research to clearly identify the areas requiring attention, keeping in mind the interests of all stakeholders.
- Making India prepared to deal with EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), by: preparing Indian stakeholders to comply with the relevant provisions of the GDPR for continued digital interaction with European countries; and ensure that the draft Indian data protection legislation does not hamper the growth of Indian business, such as Information Technology-Enabled Services (ITES) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries, Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), start-ups, etc.
- Taking a bottom-up approach while undertaking capacity building programmes for police officers and other government department personnel to handle various cyber-crimes, in order to better capacitate consumers in being beware of threats, and know about appropriate redress mechanisms in case of being a victim to any of these cyber-crimes.

[http://www.cuts-ccier.org/pdf/Advocacy-](http://www.cuts-ccier.org/pdf/Advocacy-CUTS_Memorandum_to_the_Parliamentary_Standing_Committee_on_Information_Technology_Pertaining_to_Citizens_Data_Security_and_Privacy.pdf)

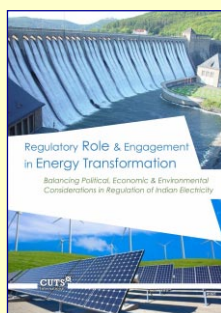
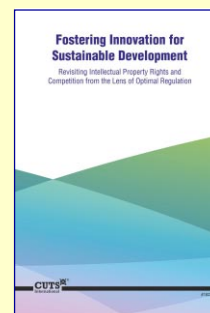
[CUTS_Memorandum_to_the_Parliamentary_Standing_Committee_on_Information_Technology_Pertaining_to_Citizens_Data_Security_and_Privacy.pdf](http://www.cuts-ccier.org/pdf/Advocacy-CUTS_Memorandum_to_the_Parliamentary_Standing_Committee_on_Information_Technology_Pertaining_to_Citizens_Data_Security_and_Privacy.pdf)

Publications

Fostering Innovation for Sustainable Development *Revisiting Intellectual Property Rights and Competition from the Lens of Optimal Regulation*

This publication is a compendium of select papers from the conference that sheds light on some of the very technical and contentious policy issues that governments face as they try to craft a regulatory framework that fosters innovation and competition while improving consumer and environmental protection. Deliberations at the biennial conference rightly called for governments to intervene in new markets, but only after fully understanding the technology used and its effects on the economy.

www.cuts-ccier.org/5th_Biennial_Conference/pdf/Fostering_Innovation_for_Sustainable_Development.pdf



Regulatory Role and Engagement in Energy Transformation

The report analyses the mandate of select State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs) to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency as defined in the central and state legislation and policies, SERCs' performance on those mandates, variation across the states and gaps constraining regulators' engagement. The objective is to identify the potential areas of policy and practice reforms so that regulatory role and engagement can be consolidated in India's clean energy transformation.

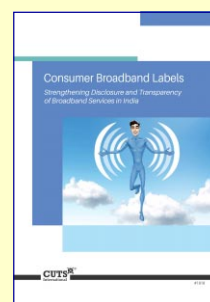
www.cuts-ccier.org/CET/pdf/

[Research_Report_on_Regulatory_Role_and_Engagement_in_Energy_Transformation.pdf](http://www.cuts-ccier.org/CET/pdf/Research_Report_on_Regulatory_Role_and_Engagement_in_Energy_Transformation.pdf)

Consumer Broadband Labels *Strengthening Disclosure and Transparency of Broadband Services in India*

The contemporary world is showing its ever-increasing dependency on internet services. Despite such importance, often consumers do not get the optimal Quality of Service (QoS) and the Quality of Experience (QoE) with respect to wireless and wired broadband services in India. This report summarises global experiences and key recommendations to achieve effective disclosure mechanisms for Indian Broadband users as well as proposes two prototype labels for measuring QoS and QoE.

http://cuts-ccier.org/broadbandlabel/pdf/Report_Consumer_Broadband_Label.pdf



Publications

Impact of CBET on Livelihoods and Gender in Nepal and Bhutan

The study recommended that to facilitate Cross-Border Electricity Trade (CBET) in the region, governments should promote bilateral/ regional agreements and treaties which promote equitable benefits. Moreover, such treaties must safeguard political interest not just at the national or regional level but also at the local level. Such policies backed by political interest will foster private investment which is essential for trade and development.

<http://cuts-ccier.org/CBET/pdf/Report->

[Impact_of_CBET_on_livelihoods_and_Gender_in_Nepal_and_Bhutan.pdf](http://cuts-ccier.org/CBET/pdf/Report-Impact_of_CBET_on_livelihoods_and_Gender_in_Nepal_and_Bhutan.pdf)



Future of Coal in India: Will coal be the secret of our energy?

Coal, being an important source of energy generation, remains preferable to India for fueling its economic growth. Approximately, 70 percent of India's electricity generation is dependent on coal. The paper focusses on the 'Future of Coal' and delves deep to understand the structural issues, regulatory challenges, and technology disruptions in the sector.

www.cuts-ccier.org/pdf/Discussion_paper-Future_of_Coal_in_India.pdf

Status of Implementation of Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 in Select States of India

Real Estate (Development and Regulation) Act, 2016 (RERA), a pro-consumer legislation aims to protect the interest of consumers by ensuring accountability, transparency and establishing an adjudicating mechanism for 'speedy' redressal of disputes. The paper highlights the progress made by select four states and a Union Territory with respect to adoption of the Act.

www.cuts-ccier.org/pdf/Status_of_Implementation_of_Real_Estate_Act_2016_in_Select_States_of_India.pdf

Representations

Ujjwal Kumar and Arpit Tiwari participated in a 'Workshop to Strategise Capacity Augmentation in Public Transport, Ride Sharing and Last Mile Connectivity' organised by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) at New Delhi on August 31, 2018. Tiwari delivered a presentation in the workshop.

Ujjwal Kumar participated in 'Technical Workshop on Competition Issues in Healthcare and Pharmaceutical Sector in India,' organised by Competition Commission of India (CCI) at New Delhi on August 28-29, 2018.

Ujjwal Kumar participated in an International Conference entitled, 'Innovation for Shared Prosperity: GRIP on Balanced Policymaking' organised by the OP Jindal Global University, JIRICO and Jindal Global Law School, at New Delhi on August 20-21, 2018.

Udai S Mehta and Ujjwal Kumar attended the Sensitisation Workshop for Empanelled Institutions (EI) for conducting micro-economic analysis (market studies, market inquiry etc.) organised by CCI at New Delhi on August 03, 2018. CUTS International is one of the EIs for this purpose.

Advocacy through Media

Implications of data mirroring

Mint, September 20, 2018

By Pradeep S Mehta

It remains to be seen whether such a policy will backfire when it comes to the potential threat of data colonialism.

www.cuts-ccier.org/Article-Implications-of-data-mirroring.htm

Postcard from a Spicejet flight on youth job creators

The Asian Age, September 20, 2018

By Pradeep S Mehta

This was the young man's first ever air journey, but he maintained calm and fastened his seat belt without any clumsiness.

www.cuts-ccier.org/Article-postcard-from-a-spicejet-flight-on-youth-job-creators.htm

Deregulation under the Modi government

Mint, July 17, 2018

By Pradeep S Mehta

The Narendra Modi government is nearing the completion of its term. Unsurprisingly, it is keen to list its achievements in the past four years and has deployed its entire machinery to spread its message across the country.

www.cuts-ccier.org/Article-Deregulation_under_the_Modi_government.htm

Pharma quality is the key for competition

Mint, July 16, 2018

By Ujjwal Kumar

The pharmaceutical market is an 'imperfect market' where prescribers, and not end-consumers, are the decision makers. Therefore, despite the presence of many drug manufacturers in India, real competition may not happen as it does in other products.

www.cuts-ccier.org/Article-Pharma_quality_is_the_key_for_competition-UJK.htm