

Manthan Series to Foster Digital Economy in India

Introduction

The growth of the data-driven digital economy in India has brought many benefits. However, its disruptive nature and proliferation have opened the doors to many challenges, risks and misuse. These pertain to ensuring adequate data protection, curbing fake news, preventing unethical use of technologies, fair taxation, enabling cybersecurity, ensuring consumer sovereignty & (re)defining consumer welfare standards.

Problematique

India, like many other countries, is grappling with such challenges and risks. Notably, in its endeavour of framing regulations to overcome these risks and challenges, the government has often been accused of devising sub-optimal knee-jerk responses over regulation. These threaten to halt innovation, curb free speech, violate privacy, etc., and result in undesirable unintended consequences and disproportionate costs on stakeholders.¹

CUTS Project

Considering the concerns highlighted above, there is a need to curate informed discussions on the digital economy issues. To this end, Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), being actively involved in issues on the digital economy, proposes to organise **Manthan Sessions** (brainstorming sessions) to spearhead an evidence-based discourse on pressing issues in the digital economy, with the objectives mentioned below.

Proposed Objective

The primary objective of conducting these sessions will be to enable:

- dispassionately consider different stakeholder perspectives on issues about the digital economy;
- cross-learning and sensitising policymakers, influencers, and senior bureaucrats on the way forward for optimal regulation of the digital economy.

Approach and Methodology

Brainstorming Sessions: The sessions would be organised quarterly with relevant stakeholders, such as consumer groups, service providers and industry bodies, government representatives, experts, etc., to have informed discussions on the way forward to foster India's digital economy. The sessions will primarily be conducted as webinars. The priority areas for the discussion would be finalised in consultation with our partners. These may pertain to issues such as the future of data governance, leveraging the potential of e-commerce, proportionate intermediary liability, taxation of digital firms and promoting digital payments.

Research Output: To instigate an informed discussion during these sessions, CUTS will undertake research on the selected issue(s) and prepare appropriate outputs before each discussion session, such as background papers, briefing papers, discussion papers, policy briefs, etc. The outputs will be finalised based on discussions with stakeholders.

¹ Key regulations include: Information Technology [Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules] 2018; Personal Data Protection Bill 2019; Competition Law Review Committee (CLRC) report; draft Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules 2019; draft National E-commerce policy 2019; draft National Cyber Security Strategy 2020; Report on Non-Personal Data Governance Framework; draft Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture; draft National Health Data Management Policy.

Networking and Dissemination: The research output will be submitted for engagement with a wide range of policymakers, regulators, senior bureaucrats and key influencers, including Parliamentary Committees, Ministries of Electronics and Information Technology, Consumer Affairs, Reserve Bank of India, parliamentarians, among others. CUTS will also leverage its social media presence to create a narrative on optimal regulation in the digital economy

Envisaged Outputs

- Four quarterly discussions will be organised on emerging issues in the digital economy.
- Research output after every webinar in the form of background papers, briefing papers, discussion papers or policy briefs will be produced.

Envisaged Outcomes

These discussions will inform the way forward for policymakers and relevant stakeholders to design optimal regulations and policies on emerging digital economy issues.

Timeline

The estimated period of the project is one year, i.e., January-December 2021.

