NR36 / Bridging Innovation and Inclusion: Governance Challenges in the Digital Age

Topic : Research

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Emerging technologies are transforming agriculture, healthcare, infrastructure, and governance. They offer efficiency and sustainability but also introduce socio-political and ethical dilemmas. Embedding social, ethical, and environmental values into design and governance is essential. These challenges are urgent in India and the broader Global South, where technologies diffuse rapidly while regulatory capacity, institutional safeguards, and infrastructure lag behind. Unlike Western contexts with more mature regulatory ecosystems, the Global South faces fragmented regulations, infrastructural constraints, and deeper digital divides, making governance questions distinct.

In India, AI and digital policies remain largely principle-driven but lack operational clarity about what “responsibility” means in practice. Existing legal frameworks and policy initiatives, such as the ITRules and NITI Aayog’s National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (#AIForAll, 2018) and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act(2023) provide partial, fragmented coverage. Technologies frequently roll out before safeguards are in place, producing ex-post governance where protections follow harms. Facial recognition’s broad adoption in consumer devices and public surveillance before robust biometric protections illustrates this misalignment. Civil society, end-users, and marginalized communities are often excluded from policy discourse, reinforcing inequity. Scholarly reviews similarly note that while India’s strategy highlights sectoral applications, it remains vague on privacy, security, and long-term institutional responsibilities.

The panel seeks to examine how public policy, law, and governance institutions respond to these transformations, and how frameworks such as Responsible Innovation (RI) and community-centered data governance can be adapted to India’s socio-political and developmental infrastructure. In doing so, the panel aligns closely with the Research Track’s focus on technological governance, digital inequality, human rights in digital spaces, and comparative governance in developing economies.

The panel will contribute to the core thematic concerns with technological governance, digital inequality, and human rights in digital spaces, but not limited to the following questions:

1. How are emerging technologies such as AI, data-driven systems, and digital infrastructures reshaping public policy praxis, regulatory capacity, and institutional responsibility in India and the Global South?

2. What legal and policy challenges arise when harm is caused by automated and algorithm-based systems, and how can responsibility and liability be addressed within India’s fragmented regulatory system?

3. How do current data governance systems redistribute power between the state, corporate platforms, and citizens, and what does this mean for privacy, autonomy, and human rights in digital spaces?

4. In what ways are emerging technologies increasing or reshaping digital inequality, social exclusion, and access gaps in developing economies?

5. How do interactions between technology design, government regulation, private companies, and political interests influence how AI and digital systems are governed?

CALL FOR PAPERS

We welcome theoretical, empirical, and comparative policy papers on accountability, data governance, and responsible innovation. The panel invites scholars and practitioners to engage with the political, legal, and institutional challenges of governing emerging technologies in the context of diffusion, fragmented regulation, infrastructure gaps, and social inequalities. It seeks to explore how responsibility, rights, and safeguards can be meaningfully operationalized in practice in India and Global South contexts. The panel will focus on, but not be limited to, the following three broad thematic areas and research questions:

1) Accountability & Liability: As AI and automation expand, responsibility is distributed among manufacturers, regulators, service providers, and end-users. India’s fragmented regulatory landscape

complicates identifying responsible actors and providing remedies when technologies cause harm. The panel invites papers that explore:

a) How can governance frameworks allocate responsibility when technological failures or societal harms occur?

b) Which liability frameworks (strict liability, negligence, and no-fault)suit emerging technologies in India?

c) What comparative regulatory models for AI liability and accountability can inform India’s emerging governance framework?

2) Data Governance & Ethical Concerns: Data-intensive systems raise issues of ownership, privacy, and power asymmetries, particularly where corporate platforms control infrastructure. The panel invites contributions that examine:

a) Who owns and controls the data generated by emerging technologies, and what are the implications for autonomy and fairness?

b) What safeguards can prevent monopolization and ensure ethical data use?

c) How can inclusive, community-centered data governance be cultivated in the Global South?

3) Responsible Innovation

RI frameworks integrate ethical, social, and governance considerations into design and policy. The panel invites papers that explore:

a) How can RI dimensions, anticipation, deliberation, participation, reflexivity, and responsiveness shape governance for emerging technologies?

b) How do different national policies regulate emerging technologies, and what comparative insights can be drawn for India?