What Caste is Your Metadata?

Source : http://rossmounce.co.uk/2013/01/06/pdf-metadata-using-exiftool/

In This Issue

Lead Essay

What caste is your metadata?

Metadata, very simply put is data about data, leading to formation of clusters of information. By being connected with the internet through our mobile phones and laptop we are constantly generating metadata. For every Facebook account made and used the individual's name, birth date, hometown, workplace, location, time-zone, any and every activity done through the account becomes a part of the metadata. And this is just a drop in the ocean. An active member of the virtual world will have a host of profiles-Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Amazon-which can be used to piece together what views a person holds, their professional history, their chronology of movement and personal interests inter alia.

Research supports the fact that it is not difficult to identify individuals by closely observing metadata. In an experiment[1] researchers put together an almost accurate picture of a person's only on the basis of one week worth of metadata tracked from a mobile application. They determined his work habits, personal interests, browsing history, subject, sender and recipient of every one of his emails.

Concerns regarding misuse of metadata have been voiced world over especially when governments come into picture. Whether this information is vital for national security or is it just means for surveillance, continues to be fierce debate.

But when we have the former head of the National Security Agency state that "we (U.S. government) kill people on the basis of metadata"[2], the Indian government directing States to link caste data to Aadhaar card holders could make a few of us uneasy.

Caste now a part of metadata

A 'first-of-a-kind initiative'[3] by the Central government directs State governments to link Aadhaar card number with caste and domicile certificates issued to school students. This was to protect students from the alleged harassment by the government officials preventing them from obtaining these certificates[4] which impeded them from applying for reservation benefits in higher education institutions.[5]

On receiving instructions[6] from the Centre the States put out a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)[7] on the issue of residence/domicile and caste/tribe certificates. The government clearly explains here that for establishing the veracity of caste/domicile certificates granted to students *sincere efforts* need to be taken to link it to their Aadhaar number.

"Q.9. How can the authenticity of data be verified?
Answer: The State Government may also try to get the information of students fed into the Meta Data to be made online and may link it to Aaadhar enabled data, if feasible. Sincere efforts be made to issue these certificates alongwith Aaadhar Number."

[1] http://www.statewatch.org/news/2014/jul/bits-of-freedom-on-the-metadata-of-your-phone.pdf
[2] http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2014/05/ex-nsa-chief-we-kill-people-based-on-metadata/
[3] http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/aadhaar-to-be-linked-with-caste-domicile-certificates/article8756875.ece
[4] http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/aadhaar-to-be-linked-with-caste-domicile-certificates/article8756875.ece
[5] http://www.telegraphindia.com/1160622/jsp/nation/story_92620.jsp#.V2oz-Pl97IU
[6] http://www.telegraphindia.com/1160622/jsp/nation/story_92620.jsp#.V2oz-Pl97IU
[7] http://ccis.nic.in/WriteReadData/CircularPortal/D2/D02adm/FAQ-21062016.pdf

Lead Essay

This move of the government becomes problematic on two counts- one, the idea of metadata is misrepresented; two, it is violative of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016; and three, it increases the possibility of caste based profiling, the consequences of which could be dangerous.

Can the government link metadata to specifics?

Those who defend collection of metadata by the State have always maintained metadata is not content. For instance the State may know the calls made by an individual from his phone but it will not know what the conversation was during these calls. This was also the line of argument taken by the U.S. government when it was revealed that they had been snooping into the phone record of Americans.[8] The challenge hence has been to prove that metadata is not as anonymous as the governments want us to believe. This is so that obvious concerns of privacy of an individual with regard to his/her information are not compromised.

Surprisingly, the Central government has outright declared that it will specifically link the unique identity Aadhaar card number to the otherwise unidentifiable metadata.

Did the government not use the word metadata right? This benefit of doubt cannot be afforded to the government since the issue at hand is so serious. Especially this is a government that realises the importance of technology and therefore oblivion to the technicalities of metadata is not anyone's first guess.

So then does the government have absolutely no concern for the confidentiality of personal information of individuals? By getting *information of students fed into the Meta Data* and linking this to Aadhaar card number the government is leaving stacks of personal information identifiable with a particular individual, at the mercy of whoever wants to exploit it.

While the other governments are trying to save face by stating that metadata is general information which cannot be linked to individuals and hence is neither intrusive of their right to privacy nor cannot be used for State surveillance (which of course is untrue)[9]; the BJP government at the Centre, in a very self contradictory manner is directly linking individual specific Aadhaar card number and sensitive caste information with metadata!

Is Aadhaar still a voluntarily obtained random number?

This government did not hide its insistence in wanting to pass the Aadhaar Act, 2016 in the last Parliamentary session. And yet even after passing of the legislation it is totally disregarding its tenets.

The proviso to section 7 of the Act[10] clearly states that it is not mandatory to possess an Aadhaar card number to avail subsidies, benefits or services. It allows for *alternate and viable means of identification* for delivery of subsidy, benefit or service. This accommodates those who are still to be included in the database due to logistical challenges as well as those who may not want be a part of the database for want of stricter privacy rules to protect their personal information.

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[8] http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/whats-the-matter-with-metadata
[9] http://www.wsj.com/articles/metadata-can-expose-persons-identity-even-when-name-isnt-1422558349
[10] http://www.indiacode.nic.in/acts-in-pdf/2016/201618.pdf

Lead Essay

Thus, non-Aadhaar card holders would have the option to fall back on other means of identification so that they can avail benefits under the Act.

But with this present announcement the Central government has shown that if the concerned students wish to obtain the caste/domicile certificate, they will have to have an Aadhaar card, efforts for providing which will be undertaken by the state government.

Logically speaking at least for a particular section of students the government has made it mandatory to possess Aadhaar card if they are to receive the benefit of scholarships set aside for them.

Section 4(2) Act, 2016[11] is states that – "an Aadhaar number shall be a random number and bear no relation to the attributes or identity of the Aadhaar number holder"

It can be no one's case that caste is not related to the *attributes or identity* of the Aadhaar card holder. What started out as being a random unique identification number for targeted delivery of benefits by the government is no longer so. By carving out an exception for caste to be associated with Aadhaar number is the government laying down a dangerous precedent? What could be the next exception that will be linked to the Aadhaar card number-religion?

Are we introducing caste system in the virtual world?

The Central government has been particular in stating that the information about caste will not only
be linked to the Aadhar card number but also be a part of *metadata*. It is this linking of the two that can have unpleasant consequences. Aadhaar card is envisaged to be a sine qua non in the near future as a proof of identity. And now caste will also be a part of an individual's identity whether or not s/he wants it.

It has often been argued that metadata in only content that is anyway available online. But by introducing caste as a part of metadata the government is setting a new trend. The entire argument that Aadhaar card number is an unbiased, random number is now broken down. Has our society become fully accepting of those who belong to a caste below them? Caste based attacks and discrimination are not unheard of. Is it prudent to connect the welfare based measure of generating unique identity numbers with caste in a country where caste is considered to be a sensitive piece of information?

Judicial recognition for the right to privacy is still pending and the lack of stringent rules regarding privacy is glaringly obvious. Amidst this uncertainty of legal protections where an individual may have no recourse if their personal data is compromised with, ushering in caste to be a part of metadata seems to be an unsettling prospect. Will caste based data after being made available online be afforded extra protection so that there is no discrimination on its basis? Will this information be available to all thereby allowing for a possibility of increased caste based profiling and possibly attacks?

It is this grey area that is often exploited by governments for their own means. For now it is only the caste of some students that will be linked to their Aadhaar card numbers and made a part of metadata. Tomorrow it could be a much larger section of the population or some other personal information will be included on the pretext of delivering a benefit on behalf of the government. Anyway all these decisions are being taken surprisingly very arbitrarily. This move

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[11] http://www.indiacode.nic.in/acts-in-pdf/2016/201618.pdf

Lead Essay

is being passed off as a simple executive order without any sense of parliamentary accountability. Since this move does not adhere to the Aadhaar Act, 2016 how the Central government can give such a direction without a debate?

Can this be seen as an attempt by the Central government for permanent stratification of the Indian society, on the basis of caste and perhaps religion too in the future, which would be a part of the difficult-to-erase metadata? Will this information be then used to influence government decisions and policies?

If it is agreed that we let caste information be a part of metadata so that concerned students can avail their scholarships and reserved seats in higher education institutions, we are setting precedent for 'conditional' transfers. Who knows next what personal information we will have to give up to be a part of online data warehouse to get benefits from this government? Allowing caste to be a part of such data warehouses is only a starting point which could have disastrous consequences for a plural society like India.

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Headlines

India to Get Access to 99 percent of US Defence Technologies
(*The Deccan Herald*, **June 27, 2016**)

India will be the only country outside the US' formal treaty allies that will gain access to almost 99% of the latest defence technologies in America. Earlier this month, after a meeting between US President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the White House, the US, in a joint statement, recognised India as a "Major Defence Partner".

Read more: http://www.deccanherald.com/content/554592/india-get-access-99-us.html
Date Accessed: 27.6.2016

Governance & Development

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

How Well-funded is Modi's Yoga Mission?
(Roshan Kishore, *The Livemint***, June 22, 2016)**

The government might be spending more on yoga than is revealed by the ministry of AYUSH figures. For example, the human resource ministry announced last week that yoga courses would be started in at least six central universities and the number would be increased to 20 within a year. Running full-fledged departments in 20 central universities would probably entail a greater annual cost than the Rs.20 crore increase for yoga under the ministry of AYUSH in this year's budget. If even NDA governments in states were to follow similar policies in state universities, government funding other than through non-AYUSH ministry could see a further jump.

Read more: http://www.livemint.com/Politics/gINXrcHf1rRrMCuJ9nWM7I/Four-charts-that-show-how-the-Centre-is-pushing-for-yoga.html
Date Accessed: 27.6.2016

EDUCATION

New Law for Higher Education Sector Must
(Seema Kaul, *The Tribune***, June 26, 2016)**

Recommending Higher Education Management Act (HEMA), the TSR Subramanian-chaired panel for evolving a new education policy has said this was a must for "comprehensive promotion and stimulation" of the higher education sector. Pointing out that state governments and the Centre have established universities and institutes of higher education through legislation and executive orders, the panel says new developments in the higher education sector have made it necessary to update and review the mandate of these institutions.

Read more: http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/new-law-for-higher-education-sector-must-panel/257577.html
Date Accessed: 27.6.2016

HEALTH

India Among Worst Performers in Mitigating Malnutrition
(Jyotsna Singh, *The Livemint***, June 15, 2016)**

India ranks 114th out of 132 countries in stunting among children aged less than five years. Anemia among women is also a cause of concern as India ranks 170th among 185 countries. India is off the track on all targets related to malnutrition, except overweight among under-5 children. However, overweight and obesity among adults has been increasing and is a matter of grave concern. In India, 22% of adults are either overweight or obese and 9.5% suffer from diabetes. Under-5 stunting (low height for age) is 38.7%, putting India in the 34th position among 39 Asian countries. Even for under-5 wasting (low weight for height), India ranks 35 out of 38 countries in Asia.

Read more: http://www.livemint.com/Politics/UjCBNhqlOgJN4UJsjprXRN/India-among-worst-performers-in-mitigating-malnutrition-say.html
Date Accessed: 27.6.2016

US, Brazilian Researchers launch Massive Zika Virus Study
(*Daily News & Analysis***, June 27, 2016)**

Sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Washington and its Brazilian counterpart Fiocruz, "The Zika in Infants and Pregnancy Study" (ZIP) aims to enroll upwards of 10,000 pregnant women ages 15 and older. The study will open first in Puerto Rico and expand to Brazil, Colombia and other areas affected by the virus, up to 15 sites.

Governance & Development

Scientists will follow study participants from the first trimester through at least the first year after birth. "The full scope of the effect of Zika virus in pregnancy has not yet been fully determined," said Anthony S. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Read more: http://www.dnaindia.com/health/report-us-brazilian-researchers-launch-massive-zika-study-2228499
Date accessed: 27.06.16

TECHNOLOGY

TRAI floats consultation paper on digital terrestrial broadcasting
 (Firstpost, June 27, 2016)

Trai wants to replace analog terrestrial television broadcasts with more frequency efficient digital terrestrial transmission. Trai has released a consultation paper requesting feedback from stakeholders on how the conversion can take place in the smoothest possible manner. Trai intends to use the consultation paper to create a road map for the conversion from an analog system to a digital system.

Read more: **http://tech.firstpost.com/news-analysis/trai-floats-consultation-paper-on-digital-terrestrial-broadcasting-322462.html**
Date accessed: 27.06.16

ENVIRONMENT

Environment Ministry withdraws draft forest policy
(*The Hindu*, June 26, 2016)

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has repudiated a 'Draft National Forest Policy' that it uploaded on its website earlier this month calling it an "inadvertent" error.

The 'Draft National Forest Policy, 2016', was uploaded on the Ministry's website on June 16 along with an office memorandum calling for comments. "The Ministry is in the process of revising the present National Forest Policy, 1988. A draft National Forest Policy in this regard has been prepared and enclosed. All stakeholders are requested to send their comments, if any, by email…by June 30, 2016," said the official memorandum signed by A.K. Mohanty, Deputy Inspector General of Forests.

Read more: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/environment-ministry-withdraws-draft-forest-policy/article8773434.ece
Date accessed: 27.06.16

India and World

EUROPE

Barriers and Lies Fawned Brexit
(Anil Dharker, *The Asian Age*, June 26, 2016)

The narrow margin of the Brexit vote (52 per cent "Leave" versus 48 per cent "Remain") has meant that Britain has been divided into two diametrically opposed groups of almost equal numbers. What will be the effect of this division? Will we have millions of sullen people, who will feel resentful and angry with their neighbours? The vote, of course, hasn't divided the country equally. Even a cursory analysis shows that most of the big cities voted for "Remain". This was particularly so of London, which is not just the capital of the country but its financial centre, the seat of government and the cultural and intellectual capital of Britain. The analysis also shows that a majority of young people voted to stay in EU. It was the perpetually depressed north east of England and its industrial centres which voted for "Leave", as did a majority of older people.

Read more: http://www.asianage.com/columnists/barriers-and-lies-fawned-brexit-778
Date Accessed: 27.6.2016

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