India's Opportunity in Data Sharing Governance

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Context – India's digital strategies and data governance have advanced in recent years, but there are concerns regarding inclusivity, transparency, security, and sustainability.

India's G-20 presidency presents an opportunity to showcase advancements in data infrastructures and governance, while balancing the interests of stakeholders, promoting ethical and responsible practices, and navigating the complex issues of data sovereignty.
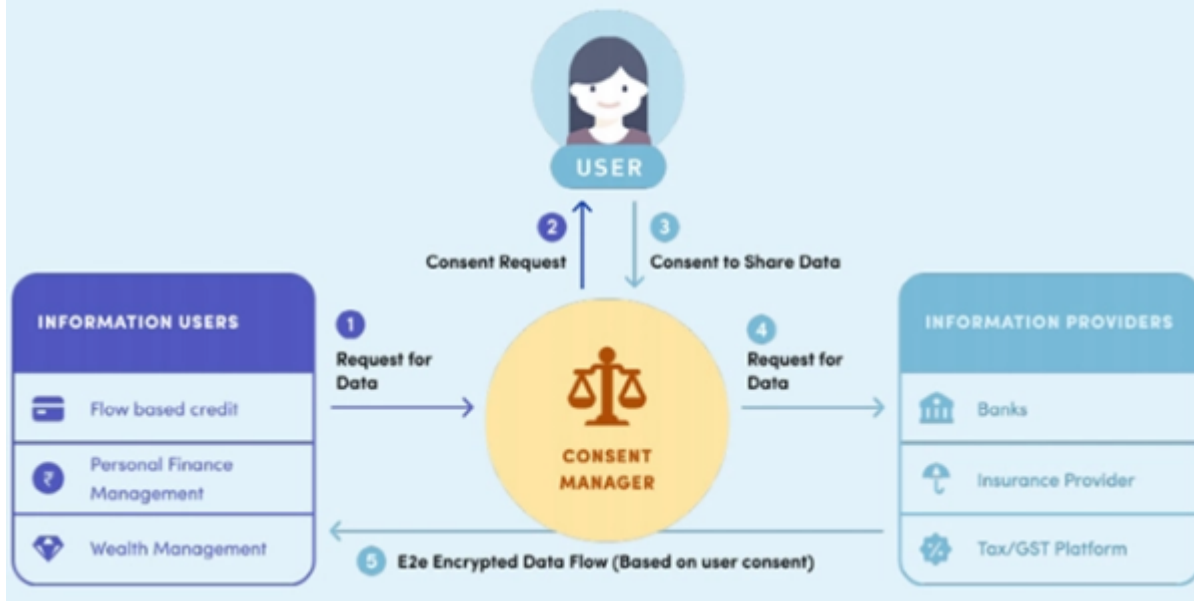
Data Governance

- Data governance refers to the overall management of the availability, usability, integrity, and security of data used in an organization. It is the management of data usage, data security, data availability, and data integrity. During the Union Budget 2023 presentation, the finance minister Smt Nirmala Sitaraman announced that GoI is to launch National Governance Policy.
- Data governance of a country is the policies, procedures, and practices established by the government to ensure that data is effectively managed and protected throughout its lifecycle.
- This includes defining standards for data collection, storage, usage, and sharing to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and reliability of data.

DEPA and Associated Issues

- The launch of India's Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), a consent management tool, has generated both excitement and concern among stakeholders.
- DEPA has the potential to improve data protection and privacy for citizens by giving them greater control over the use and sharing of their personal information. By allowing individuals to easily manage and control their data consents, DEPA could help to build trust in digital technologies and data governance.
- There are risks associated with DEPA, particularly in terms of security and privacy. If the consent management tool is not properly implemented or managed, there is a risk that personal information could be misused or misappropriated.
- The implementation of DEPA may be inconsistent across different sectors and jurisdictions, which could undermine its effectiveness and create confusion among citizens.
- In order to realize the potential benefits of DEPA and minimize the risks, it is important that the tool is implemented in a transparent, consistent, and secure manner. This will require close collaboration between the government, the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders and the development of clear and effective regulations and standards.

The Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture

Advancements in other Sectors

- **Digital Payments:** Significant progress in financial inclusion and promotion of digital transactions through Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and other options.
- **Digital tech in Healthcare:** Use of digital technologies can enhance access to health-care services and empower farmers
- **Security and privacy:** There are concerns that relate to security and privacy on the one hand and on infrastructure, connectivity and the availability of a skilled human workforce on the other hand.
- **Data Misuse:** There are also concerns around the potential misuse of data and information in these sectors. For example, in the health sector, there is a risk that sensitive medical information could be misused or exploited for commercial purposes, while in agriculture, there is a risk that market information could be manipulated for the benefit of certain actors.
- **Ownership and governance of data:** Another issue is that of ownership and governance of data generated and collected in health and agriculture. What are the rights of data providers? And what are the responsibilities towards them? The state has to play a key role in addressing and resolving such issues.

India's Opportunity

- India's establishment of an IDMO is a step forward in the country's journey towards data sharing and data governance.
- The IDMO is expected to oversee and coordinate the implementation of India's digital strategies and data governance framework, and to ensure that these efforts are aligned with the country's values and priorities.
- It will also work to promote the development and implementation of open-source solutions, which will help to ensure that underlying data architectures are a social public good, and to promote digital technologies to become accessible and affordable for all.

- Again, this is a great opportunity for India to develop solutions that can be adopted and adapted in other countries. Open source and open innovation models can be important alternatives to proprietary solutions that are governed by big tech companies.

Conclusion

India's digital strategies and data governance have made significant progress in recent years, but there are important concerns and issues to address. It is crucial to find a middle way between restrictive data sovereignty and limitless data flow, navigate complex issues of privacy, and invest in necessary infrastructure and skills to ensure responsible and accountable data governance.