PUBLIC POLICY AND SERVICE DESIGN AT THE JUNCTURE OF A DIGITAL DIVIDE

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ABSTRACT

The complexity of certain social problems affecting communities is such that they cannot be solved by individuals trapped in the local structures. One such systemic problem is the digital divide in India. With the government's push towards digitisation, multiple public services have been linked to a digital unique identity system— Aadhaar. Access to many welfare state programs such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) are now possible only through biometric authentication to the Aadhaar database. The minimum requirements to access the welfare programs are an uninterrupted internet connection and electricity at the point of sales, which has resulted in the socio-political exclusion of many citizens. Participative design led approaches for policy making are being considered by governments to solve today's complex socio-technical problems and enable citizen-centred service delivery. This thesis explores the specific question of how design can be applied to make the process of public policy formulation more inclusive, and in turn also improve the service delivery of the PDS linked to Aadhaar. Taking the digital divide in India as a focal point, the working of the PDS within this e-Government framework has been examined. The DesignX formulation by Dan Norman has been utilised to categorise the Aadhaar linked PDS in India as a complex sociotechnical DesignX problem, which can be resolved through the DesignX framework and participative design intervention. To understand how design can be applied to the PDS, the service has been mapped to the **Citizen Engagement in Design** Process model developed by Christian Bason, and based upon the presented theoretical framework of Design in Public Policy. The thesis proposes a bottom-up + top-down design approach to service delivery and suggests that this manner of working brings about not only innovative, effective, and more effcient policies; but enhances democracy. In so far as it includes more stakeholders in the process of creating policies which affect them. This thesis is not about theory-building, but about theory-testing.