CODR Bits & Bytes

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

Communication in the time of COVID-19

If there is one lesson to learn from the challenges arising in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it must be the importance of data science in both rapid response, resource allocation, and community outreach. Underlying the insights that government, the market, and the community might draw from evidence-based work is the importance of identifying the target audience and the need for effective communication with them via diverse mediums, but especially digital communication.

COVID –19 has compelled government and non-government alike to expand communication channels to provide for virtual meetings and consultations. Greater emphasis was laid on communications with employees. The well-being of frontline health workers and other employees has become a priority, and it is to government's credit that care has been taken to ensure that all employees are safe from the pandemic.

Use of simple but effective communication to reach a wider audience has gained importance. Conveying important messages to a wide spectrum of audiences on real-time basis has become imperative. Government has done this to great effect. The public too has responded positively in substantial measure. This is testimony to government's effective outreach campaigns.

The Public Affairs Centre, in its turn on the one hand, developed easy to understand videos in Kannada and disseminated them to grass root level partner organisations; and on the other hand, leveraged its action research and data analytics experience, to articulate issues of public interest through articles in the main stream media, besides providing pandemic-related reports to help government decision-making.

Adaptability has become the norm of the day. In short, digital transformation across all verticals and activities in an organisation has become imperative.

INTERVIEW

G. Gurucharan

Director

Public Affairs Centre

Q. How is PAC integrating data science in its research programmes/projects?

A: *In 2017, the Public Affairs Centre (PAC) adopted a five-year strategic action research framework focussing on human development - school education, primary health, women and child development, and livelihoods. An important element in the strategy was to develop data science use case applications - data analytics, machine learning, and artificial intelligence - to drive evidence-based development praxis and help improve public governance outcomes. The data science vertical of PAC called - Centre for Open Data Research (CODR) - was therefore established in January 2018.*

CODR has since worked on two important aspects: first, to gradually expand the types of data and statistical methods that can be applied to draw insights to inform policy formulation and programme design; and provide predictive analytics, cluster analysis, and big data methods. Second, to develop a set of tools; and establish standards in the data analysis process. Two important data tools at the prototype stage include 'Siddhi' that helps spatial, temporal and contextual integration of data; and 'Drishti' that helps draw knowledge graphs for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of specific knowledge domains in development governance. Data science is now an essential component of all PAC action research.

Q: How can PAC help government leverage the power of data science in the policy making process?

A: *Using data to fine tune policy is not new to governments in India. In differing degrees, the more progressive departments at the Centre and in the states have been using statistical analysis for several decades now. More recently, some government departments have gone beyond descriptive statistics, and have begun to experiment with simulation models and predictive analysis.*

The most important asset of governments is the humungous and diverse data that they generate. There are questions about the validity, reliability and the provenance of this data. But we don't live in a perfect world. While CODR is helping departments make the transition to more scientifically managed data systems, over the medium to long term; in the short-term, it is important that we use the data available to meaningfully interpret the results to improve the quality and the adequacy of service delivery, and help make decision-making objective and transparent.

PAC's primary aim is to help governments find and implement resource optimisation solutions and help improve human development outcomes.

Q: Can you provide some examples of how PAC has used data to help the Government decision-making?

A: There are several, but a good example is the first and a pioneering project implemented successfully by the CODR at the request of the Principal Accountant General, Karnataka titled 'Project DIA - Data Integration and Analytics'. The project developed a framework to accomplish a data enabled audit process. The system DIA developed provides an integrated and comprehensive view of digitized audit resources and will help the AG in planning future audits. This removes subjectivity and the choice of audit is generated by the system based on objective criteria. The insights – temporal, spatial, and contextual- drawn from past audit data ploughs back into the audit planning process, thus improving the quality of the audit.

Since then we are partnering the government in other projects, and in recent months, especially in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

PUBLICATION REVIEW

An article titled Fraternity in the time of COVID was published in Deccan Herald on Tuesday, August 11, 2020. This Opinion piece was written by **Gurucharan G,** Director Public Affairs Centre

"The heart of the matter as a society is the challenge of fostering a sense of fraternity. India has long been a country in search of an Indian. If nothing, COVID 19 has shown that the consciousness that we are Indians first, sublimating intersectionality must permeate our core values. Dr Ambedkar emphasised that 'Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of Indians being one people.' This pandemic has demonstrated first-hand the virtue of his sage advice. This alone can protect our collective well-being in the future. After all, our real strength is to stand together as one people regardless of caste, creed, language, religion and region - the true manifestation of India".

For more details read ***here.***

NEWS

The knowledge partnership between the Government of Karnataka and the Public Affairs Centre has made good progress in the last six months. The following is noteworthy:

- Domain knowledge is important to leverage the full power of data science, therefore CODR is empanelling domain experts whose subject matter expertise will be drawn on, when necessary for reviewing and critiquing DA results/reports
- A data processing specifications document has been developed by the Data Engineering Team of the CODR. This has enabled PAC to establish a Standards and Process Protocol, in dealing with government data. This will make the process of using data more scientific.
- A conceptual and analytical framework for DA on human development, focussing on school education, primary health and women and child development has been developed. This will help define the research questions germane to the development challenges the state is facing.
- The DA methods classification has also been finalised to include exploratory DA, causal relationship analysis, predictive analysis and micro simulation modelling. Normative time and process standards have been defined for all of the data science methods to be used, so that timely delivery and quality of outputs is assured.

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