

## Decentralised Digital Platforms For Better Accountability

Dr. Zubair Ahmed<sup>1</sup>, Rahul Shaw<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Aliah University, Kolkata  
[zubairahmed8285@gmail.com](mailto:zubairahmed8285@gmail.com), ORCID: 0009-0001-8734-7351

<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Law, Aliah University, Kolkata  
397/A, Rabindra Sarani, Kolkata- 700005, [shawrahul@hotmail.com](mailto:shawrahul@hotmail.com)  
ORCID: 0000-0003-0615-7327

**How to cite this article:** Zubair Ahmed, Rahul Shaw (2024) Decentralised Digital Platforms For Better Accountability. *Library Progress International*, 44(3), 11029-11034.

### Abstract

The contemporary era is frequently referred to as the Information Age or the Digital Age. Because of the digital revolution, we live in an age where knowledge is instantly available at our fingertips. However, the drive to convey news instantaneously has blurred the line between information and disinformation. In today's world, the utility of information is determined by its speed rather than its accuracy. Digital platform governance frameworks have worsened this sad trend. Digital platforms exist solely on the idea of increasing user engagement, which they accomplish through various dubious and sometimes even illegal means.

The digital revolution has enrobed our lives and proved to be a transformative force of unprecedented proportions. Unfortunately, digital platforms, particularly social media platforms, are not a safe space to freely exchange ideas and engage in meaningful discourses as advertised. They are highly regulated and closely monitored with the help of artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms. These algorithms enable the circulation of radicalising and discriminating content simply for the sake of user engagement. Apart from these passive algorithmic exploitations, digital platforms also actively manipulate their content and policies for the sake of maximising their profits.

The increase in power and influence of these digital platforms is proportional and arguably related to the rise of conservative political ideologies and the erosion of basic human rights. Mere policymaking and regulation have proven to be insufficient in keeping these digital platforms in check. We need to take advantage of another technological breakthrough to find the ideal solution which would keep fuelling the digital revolution without curtailing human rights. This research paper discusses how law and policymakers can leverage blockchain technology to provide better digital platforms which are decentralised, resilient, and accountable to all its users and move towards sustainable social welfare.

**Keywords:** digital platforms, social media, blockchain, decentralisation, governance.

### Introduction

Since the dawn of civilisation, humans have formed communities to live together. Even though humans are social creatures by nature, forming communities and living together affords us a plethora of benefits and forms the bedrock of society. It is said that no two people are the same and rightly so. Each human is a distinct individual and has the right to lead his life with utmost liberty over his personhood. Living in a society though comes at the cost of having some social norms which every person must abide by for the sake of a peaceful social life for all.

Balancing the rights of an individual with that of society is a paradoxical puzzle, the solution to which is well beyond the reach of any single person. Thus, with the growth of society, arose the body politic which casually and frustratingly seized the responsibility of governing the rights, duties, and actions of humans in society. These rights of governing the actions of fellow men naturally put the people exercising these rights a step above those who were being governed. Understandably, in primitive societies, these rights were obtained either by people who artfully conquered their fellow men, usually by violent conquest or by people who claimed to be agents or messengers of divine origins.

Ages have passed since those primitive days and now almost the entirety of the human species is governed by governments having sovereignty over a territory and its inhabiting citizens. The modern nation-states and social order can be argued to have reached the pinnacle of balancing individual and social liberty or at least give the appearance of it. On a close inspection, it is revealed that throughout the ages, people who have had the power and trust of the masses had repeatedly exploited and abused it for their motives. This occurrence can be observed since the time man started exercising sovereignty over his fellow man and persists, even though we have wisdom and progress of millennia at our literal fingertips.

### **The Rise of Digital Platforms and Ubiquitous Social Media**

Every major communication innovation, from telephones to fax machines to e-mail, has provided law and lawmakers with both new obstacles and new opportunities (Radhakant & Diskin, 2013). The current times have been riding the wave of digitization and digitalization. The amount of sensitive data saved electronically grows and will continue to rise tremendously in the digital era. Medical and biometric records, bank account information, private chats, and location information are just a few examples of the types of data that are now more easily available than ever before. The simultaneous repercussions of this trajectory include major privacy and online security concerns (Nojeim & Maheshwari, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated and increased our reliance on digital platforms, which has also highlighted the malpractices and questionable methods employed by them. Commentators have advocated for a re-examination of policy and regulation in the data economy, considering information as the world's most valuable resource and its manipulation and exploitation as a primary source of economic power. The digital platform economy's distinct characteristics point to several scenarios in which established legal procedures must be reworked. Such conceptual revisions should be made in light of the different sorts of power that can be obtained through new organisational models, the use of data and analytics on which platform companies rely, and the long-term economic strength that can result (Bamberger & Lobel, 2017).

The Internet of today is not the same as the Internet of the 1990s. It is significantly less 'open' and decentralised. One cause for this is the increased availability of Internet connection via closed mobile and tablet devices that do not operate on a peer-to-peer basis, the proliferation of app stores and programmes, and the rise and popularity of an Internet of 'walled gardens' (Bietti, 2021). These dominant digital platforms commonly referred to as the Big Tech enterprises are the cradle of social activity, and employ policies solely favouring their revenue and user engagement, usually at the cost of their user's privacy, and sometimes even at the cost of disturbing the social order.

In Sri Lanka and the Philippines, disinformation on Facebook has had a devastating effect. A post on Facebook falsely accused a pharmacy owned by a Muslim of plotting to use 23,000 sterilisation pills to sterilise the Buddhist (Sinhalese) population, which led to a mob beating up a twenty-eight-year-old employee of the pharmacy and destroying the shop. In the Philippines, Facebook is used as an outlet for threats and deceits (Takhshid, 2021).

In India, the effects of social media are quite similar. Although the rise of digital platforms has boosted India's economy significantly through e-commerce (Shaw, 2021), there has also been a rise in its adverse effects. Although the internet is recognised as the most powerful instrument of the current era, and people utilise it for a variety of purposes, the user must be aware of how it begins to take over life and interfere with other daily activities. Addiction to social media appears to be a significant developing mental health condition among students at all levels of education in India (Rajak et al., 2022). While it is believed that social media provides an outlet for the underprivileged and marginalised sections of Indian society to express themselves (Kureel, 2021), it is also a fact that the digital platforms are increasingly relying on algorithms, artificial intelligence software, and user-data collected by them to distribute controversial content to their users.

The digital platforms do not monitor or moderate the content uploaded by their users. At least not in such a manner that would be acceptable. And they have little reason to do so. Content uploaded by users which are usually

aggravating, offending, controversial, and false generally garners immense user engagement. Unfortunately, the authenticity of the claims or assertions made in the uploaded content is not evaluated and its damaging after-effects are usually borne by the users. The platforms owe no responsibility for the content uploaded by their users, even if the law explicitly tells them to. The platforms use unfair means which are downright illegal with the help of their artificial intelligence algorithms to actively circulate these controversial content and fake news simply to increase user engagement which in turn translates to increased revenue for them (Bergh, 2020). The fact that these activities usually cause social distress and have long-lasting repercussions are conveniently ignored by digital platforms.

### **The Quest for Decentralisation**

Decentralisation is the process of transferring resources and powers from a higher, more centralised authority to a lower, more decentralised one. Administrative decentralisation, political decentralisation, and economic decentralisation have all been widely discussed and argued, about but have yet to be effectively implemented. The arguments against decentralisation often suggest that the redistribution of power and autonomy does not promote efficiency because the persons or institutions gaining the redistributed power may not be capable of exercising and efficiently using it (Bevir, 2009). The digital platforms are here to stay. There have been several cries for breaking down these behemoth platforms into smaller enterprises to reduce their power and influence (Santesteban & Longpre, 2020). There have also been deliberations on making these platforms operate in such a way that commercial transactions stay away from media platforms, thereby giving them less incentive and opportunity to incentivise these disruptive policies (Khan, 2019). Among all these suggestions, one other suggestion which has been explored for a long time but hasn't been practicable due to a lack of infrastructural technologies that might enable its application is that of decentralisation.

The concept of decentralisation is not new. Several philosophical debates on the structure of social, political, and economic institutions have asserted that decentralisation is the crucial factor that would revitalise society (Yawar & Shaw, 2023). A few technology corporations dominate the digital platforms, acting as market intermediates and providing services that effectively manage the digital ecosystem. However, these businesses are no longer simply dominating market actors; they instead act as gatekeepers, controlling the digital ecosystem to suit their purposes. They monopolise the digital realm, excluding competition from the market, while demanding exorbitant prices and engaging in open anti-competitive behaviour. Current competition laws impose punishments, restrictions, and enforced neutrality requirements, yet these efforts are ineffective (Orbach, 2022).

Decentralisation is already being implemented across the world and on many levels. Many European countries have witnessed an increase in the process of decentralisation and subsequent economic prosperity and efficiency because of it (Carniti et al., 2019). While the process of decentralisation has also been explored in Ghana for the sake of their national development, the results have been unimpressive, largely because of the political influence over the process which frustrates the entire goal (Adams & Agomor, 2020). Similarly, decentralisation for electoral governance in Nigeria has also faced several challenges (Adekeye et al., 2022). Spain has had a better experience with decentralisation. The regions where decentralisation has been implemented, show increased financial autonomy and a greater share of regional investment in public infrastructure which has positively impacted the total productivity (Aray, 2018).

The evolution of decentralisation principles and their adaption over time and space have had long-term consequences for global urban and regional planning. Decentralisation, as a complex strategy, leads to a better knowledge of national and international dynamics, power conflicts, economic causes, social changes, and their immediate effects on the built environment. There have been observations that decentralisation principles forcefully connect political, economic, social, and ecological components to a location at various local, regional, and national scales (Jafari & De Togni, 2020). Although decentralisation increases the range of policy initiatives, the impact on wellbeing is equivocal. Learning about politicians, in particular, is always greater with centralisation, whereas learning about policies is greater with decentralisation if and only if districts are sufficiently homogeneous. This result runs counter to the widely held belief that decentralisation works best when districts are diverse. The disparity in normative expectations reflects a fundamental trade-off associated with decentralisation, particularly the trade-off between information spill-over and preference matching (Cheng & Li, 2019).

The concentration of power is the very definition of tyranny and decentralising powers given to the central government authorities should be seriously considered (Fontana, 2018). The freedom obtained by people through

decentralisation to participate in basic societal decision-making activities has a positive effect on social life and solves several social problems (Frug, 1993). Administrative democracy is under a lot of backlashes in current times (Frug, 1990). Democracy is the primary form of governance model in current times but still leads to the erosion of basic human rights of lots of people, specifically on social media platforms.

The shortcomings of decentralisation in policy and governance models have long been implored and pondered upon. There was no remedy to it. But technological breakthroughs have once again come to the rescue. Blockchain technology enables us to utilise a technologically sound and fully functional database for exchanging information and storing data in a completely decentralised manner.

### **The Blockchain Effect**

Blockchain is a digital database that operates on a peer-to-peer network of computers and enables a wide range of online transactions. One feature distinguishes blockchain from other disruptive innovations: it is a global, international technology by nature and design. It was designed to work around national borders and existing institutions. The blockchain network enables the transmission of data and economic value regardless of the geographical location of the participants (Dimitropoulos, 2020). A blockchain is simply a tool that allows us to accomplish what we already do in a decentralised manner, eliminating the need for intermediaries in routine transactions.

Blockchain is so-called because it is essentially a digital network where data is stored in *blocks* connected in a peer-to-peer manner by cryptographically encrypted *chains*. Advancements in the field of blockchain technology have given rise to a few other variants of the technology that do not connect or communicate with each other using blocks or chains. As a result, the better term for such technologies, including blockchain, is Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT). If distributed ledgers did not answer real-world problems, they would only be of interest to cryptographers and philosophers. Some people wish to adopt blockchain to dodge government supervision and minimise external influence. Entrepreneurs, established organisations, large financial institutions, and governments investigating blockchain today are mostly looking for measurable benefits. The blockchain's two key value propositions are the avoidance of dependency on central actors and the creation of universal truth among distrusting parties (Werbach, 2018).

Blockchain is already being used in several fields. Blockchain applications include finance, insurance, healthcare, travel, education, telecom, agriculture and many government initiatives (Mohanty, 2019). Blockchain has also applications in arts (Whitaker, 2019). Although experts believe that the transformative potential of blockchain will take almost another decade to be evident (Pomelnikov, 2021). The possibilities offered by blockchain to digital platform intermediaries are mainly based on the decentralised governance model. Government and governance are critical components for participation, ownership, rights, and responsibilities. In blockchain networks, each participant's role must be well defined and contribute something to the network, because their contributions, whether as a leader, executive or central group, participant or member of the project, end-user and/or provider as a third party, make the network a sustainable ecosystem. While the consortium group is interested in network legal and budgetary issues, end users are only interested in information security or consensus rules; however, this does not excuse a lack of participation (Covarrubias & Covarrubias, 2021).

### **Global Regulatory Attempts**

In response to challenges posed by digital platforms, both global and national entities have introduced diverse regulatory measures seeking a delicate equilibrium between innovation and regulation. The European Union stands as a pioneer, exemplified by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Suripeddi & Purandare, 2021), emphasizing digital rights protection, with the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act (Graef, 2023) poised to address competition, content moderation, and platform responsibility. Conversely, the United States, a hub for major digital corporations, historically supported self-regulation, yet recent congressional discussions suggest a potential shift towards stricter oversight, reflecting growing concerns regarding platform responsibility (Heikkilä, 2023). India's digital trajectory, marked by dynamism, witnesses strides in robust data governance through efforts like the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 necessitating tailored digital governance methods owing to the nation's distinct sociocultural fabric. Globally, a spectrum of digital governance approaches is evident, ranging from Brazil's Marco Civil da Internet to Singapore's Protection against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, portraying a complex regulatory landscape (Rotulo et al., 2020). Collaborative platforms engaging multiple stakeholders underscore the significance of amalgamating diverse expertise for effective

governance. The evolving nature of digital platforms necessitates continuous construction of new legal frameworks; conventional regulations are acknowledged as potentially inadequate for the unique challenges of the digital sphere (Schrepel, 2023). Explorations of new conceptual frameworks like self-regulation and co-regulation emphasize collaborative stakeholder involvement, illustrating a shift towards innovative regulatory approaches.

## Conclusion

In Indian politics, social media has not resulted in an immediate crisis or change. Social media platforms, which are subject to public service requirements and rules, have risen to prominence as the primary source of political news. Online expression merely adds a new channel to society. However, this has led to technological advancements and audience habits that put regulations in peril. These changes may have an impact on how media freedom is justified, business accountability is defined, and user mental and physical well-being is protected. Individual participation, as well as the role of regulation, are being emphasised. However, rather than breaking with tradition, this shifts the paradigm. There will continue to be media elites with greater control over the spread of information and political discourse on the internet (Rowbottom, 2006). Blockchain applications are being explored in India (NITI Aayog, 2020). But these frontiers need to be evaluated for the sake of decentralising the existing social media platforms, specifically, the concept of migrating social media and other digital platforms on a blockchain infrastructure to increase transparency and accountability amongst all stakeholders.

The existing digital platforms do not show much concern for the social impact of their unfair business practices and there is sufficient reason to anticipate that this will continue; the situation may deteriorate as online expression becomes more common. The current cyberspace already resembles a dystopian totalitarian structure (Yawar & Shaw, 2022). This research paper lays the groundwork for regulating specific social media organisations through blockchain-based platforms in a way that is consistent with expressive rights and free speech and would ensure that democratic and public service values continue and develop into the digital era.

## References

- Adams, S., & Agomor, K. (2020). Decentralization, Partisan Politics, and National Development in Ghana. *Public Organization Review*, 20(2), 351–366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-019-00442-8>
- Adekeye, J. A., Adeiza, S. U., & Otu, A. J. (2022). Empirical Analysis of Electoral Governance and Decentralization. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*, 23, 7–26. <https://doi.org/10.47743/jopafl-2022-23-01>
- Aray, H. (2018). More on decentralization and economic growth. *Papers in Regional Science*, 97(4), 971–993. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pirs.12305>
- Bamberger, K. A., & Lobel, O. (2017). Platform Market Power. *Berkeley Technology Law Journal*, 32(3), 1051–1092. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26488977?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26488977?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)
- Bergh, A. (2020). Understanding Influence Operations in Social Media. *Journal of Information Warfare*, 19(4), 110–131. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27033648?seq=1&cid=pdf->
- Bevir, M. (2009). *Key Concepts in Governance* (1st ed.). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Bietti, E. (2021). A GENEALOGY OF DIGITAL PLATFORM REGULATION. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1–82. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3859487](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3859487)
- Carniti, E., Cerniglia, F., Longaretti, R., & Michelangeli, A. (2019). Decentralization and economic growth in Europe: for whom the bell tolls. *Regional Studies*, 53(6), 775–789. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2018.1494382>
- Cheng, C., & Li, C. (2019). Laboratories of Democracy: Policy Experimentation under Decentralization. *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics*, 11(3), 125–154. <https://doi.org/10.1257/mic.20160257>
- Covarrubias, J. Z. L., & Covarrubias, I. N. L. (2021). Different types of government and governance in the blockchain. *Journal of Governance and Regulation*, 10(1), 8–21. <https://doi.org/10.22495/jgrv10i1art1>
- Dimitropoulos, G. (2020). The Law of Blockchain. *Washington Law Review*, 95(3), 1117–1192. <https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wlr/vol95/iss3/3>
- Fontana, D. (2018). FEDERAL DECENTRALIZATION. *Virginia Law Review*, 104(4), 727–795. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44863415>
- Frug, J. (1990). Administrative Democracy. *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 40(3), 559–586. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/825824>
- Frug, J. (1993). Decentering Decentralization. *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 60(2), 253–338. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/1600075>
- Graef, I. (2023). *The EU regulatory patchwork for dark patterns: an illustration of an inframarginal revolution in European law?* (DP 2023-07). [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4411537](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4411537)

- Heikkilä, M. (2023). AI language models are rife with different political biases. *MIT Technology Review*. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/08/07/1077324/ai-language-models-are-rife-with-political-biases/>
- Jafari, E., & De Togni, N. (2020). Perspectives on decentralization past, present, and future: a review of conferences in Grenoble, Milan, and Delft (2017–2019). *Planning Perspectives*, 35(1), 211–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2019.1668290>
- Khan, L. M. (2019). THE SEPARATION OF PLATFORMS AND COMMERCE. *Columbia Law Review*, 119(4), 973–1098. <https://doi.org/10.2307/26632275>
- Kureel, P. (2021). Indian Media and Caste: Of Politics, Portrayals and Beyond. *CASTE / A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, 2(1), 97–108. <https://doi.org/10.26812/caste.v2i1.261>
- Mohanty, D. (2019). THE WORLD OF BLOCKCHAIN. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 45(3/4), 196–203. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45129865>
- NITI Aayog. (2020, January). *Blockchain: The India Strategy*. [https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2020-01/Blockchain\\_The\\_India\\_Strategy\\_Part\\_I.pdf](https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2020-01/Blockchain_The_India_Strategy_Part_I.pdf)
- Nojeim, G., & Maheshwari, N. (2021). Encryption in India: Preserving the Online Engine of Privacy, Free Expression, Security, and Economic Growth. *Indian Journal of Law and Technology*, 17(1), 1–44. [https://www.ijlt.in/\\_files/ugd/066049\\_e2c585f7148e4a0c8b0734d3addd2842.pdf](https://www.ijlt.in/_files/ugd/066049_e2c585f7148e4a0c8b0734d3addd2842.pdf)
- Orbach, B. (2022). Mandated Neutrality, Platforms, and Ecosystems. In P. Akman & et al. (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Abuse of Dominance and Monopolization*. Edward Elgar. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3984398>
- Pomelnikov, A. G. (2021). The Impact of Blockchain on Emerging Economies. *Journal of Applied Business and Economics*, 23(1), 277–284.
- Radhakant, A., & Diskin, M. (2013). How Social Media Are Transforming Litigation. *GPSolo*, 30(5), 74–75. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23630754>
- Rajak, B. K., Singh, S., & Paliwal, M. (2022). The Dark Side of Overuse of Internet: a Study of Indian College Students. *Asia Pacific Journal of Health Management*, 17(1), 18–27. <https://doi.org/10.24083/apjhm.v17i1.757>
- Rotulo, A., Epstein, M., & Kondilis, E. (2020). Fiscal federalism vs fiscal decentralization in healthcare: A conceptual framework. *Hippokratia*, 24(3), 107–113.
- Rowbottom, J. (2006). Media Freedom and Political Debate in the Digital Era. *Modern Law Review*, 69(4), 489–513. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2230.2006.00597.x>
- Santesteban, C., & Longpre, S. (2020). How Big Data Confers Market Power to Big Tech: Leveraging the Perspective of Data Science. *Antitrust Bulletin*, 65(3), 459–485. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3556232>
- Schrepel, T. (2023). *Being an Arthurian: Complexity Economics, Law, and Science* ((DCI) Working Paper 2-2023, Issue September).
- Shaw, R. (2021). The Progress of E-commerce and Competition Law in India. *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 4(2), 212–220. <https://doi.org/10.1732/IJLMH.26045>
- Suripeddi, M. K. S., & Purandare, P. (2021). Blockchain and GDPR - A Study on Compatibility Issues of the Distributed Ledger Technology with GDPR Data Processing. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1964(4). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1964/4/042005>
- Takhshid, Z. (2021). *Regulating Social Media in the Global South*. 1–55. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3836986>
- Werbach, K. (2018). Trust, but Verify. *Berkeley Technology Law Journal*, 33(2), 487–550. <https://doi.org/10.2307/26533144>
- Whitaker, A. (2019). Art and Blockchain: A Primer, History, and Taxonomy of Blockchain Use Cases in the Arts. *Artivate: A Journal of Enterprise in the Arts*, 8(2), 21–47. <https://doi.org/10.34053/artivate.8.2.2>
- Yawar, S. M., & Shaw, R. (2022). Augmenting Blockchain With Competition Law for a Sustainable Economic Evolution. *Frontiers in Blockchain*, 5. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fbloc.2022.931246>
- Yawar, S. M., & Shaw, R. (2023). Decentralising the Digital Economy: The Blockchain and Competition Remedy. In B. Alareeni & A. Hamdan (Eds.), *Explore Business, Technology Opportunities and Challenges After the Covid-19 Pandemic* (pp. 1265–1274). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08954-1\\_109](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08954-1_109)