



# **E-Commerce and Indian Legislation Relating to Data Protection: A Critical Study**

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## **Abstract**

E-commerce denotes electronic commerce. E-commerce (Electronic commerce) involves buying and selling of goods and services, or the transmission of funds or data, over through network, . It is leading a complete change in the traditional way of doing business. E-commerce concerns carrying on a business with the help of the internet and by using information technology like Electronic Data Interchange. No doubt e-commerce has made our life's convenient, but it has raised some issues also like breach of data protection. Data Protection and right to privacy are correlated to each other. Data Protection refers to the set of privacy laws, policies and procedures that aim to minimize infringement of the right to privacy caused by the collection, storage and dissemination of personal data. Personal data generally refers to the information or data which relate to a person who can be identified from that information or data whether collected by any Government or any private organisation or an agency. Change is necessary for any society to progress but the change brought by the internet in the lives of people has invited greater risks. Such risks have appeared in the forms of infringement of privacy, data theft, issue of choice of law and jurisdiction. Right to privacy under Article 21 is a fundamental right under the Constitution of India. Sections 43A and 72A of the Information Technology Act, the Indian Contract Act, the Indian Penal Code, the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2006 provide the provisions for the personal information of the person. Even data which is outsourced to India gets protection under these Sections. The researchers discuss the different types of security challenges and their impacts on the e-commerce systems. This study foresees some challenges in an imminent economy and

highlights the legal framework relevant to e-commerce in India. The researchers suppose to suggest the measures to fill the gaps relating to it.

**Keywords:** e-commerce, e-consumer, data protection, privacy, data privacy, Information Technology Act, 2000

## **Introduction**

E-commerce has caused a paradigm shift in international markets. Despite the fact that the Indian e-commerce sector has grown at a rapid pace in recent years, it still faces significant challenges. The etymological meaning of E-commerce is the business transaction of buying and selling products and services solely through electronic medium, without the use of paper documents. E-commerce is defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as a new way of doing business that occurs over networks that use non-proprietary protocols established through an open standard setting process, such as the Internet. The increased customer choice and improved convenience in online business transactions, where the vendor or merchant can sell his products or services directly to the customer and the payment can be made via an electronic fund transfer system using a debit card, credit card, or net banking, among other methods, are examples of pushing the rapid popularity and acceptance of e-commerce around the world.<sup>1</sup> Because of the comfort and simplicity of conducting business, the e-commerce industry and its influence on all trade and commercial transactions are growing rapidly in popularity and replacing non-e-commerce operations in a wide range of industries. All facets of company and customer service are already incorporating e-commerce.<sup>2</sup> Due to a vast variety of low-cost products, a wide variety of suppliers, and an online audience, the e-commerce industry is expanding in India. Considering India's growing percentage of internet users, every company unit wants to participate in online business nowadays. Even if Indian e-commerce is still in its early stages, there are many opportunities. To deal with the situations arising from time to time, laws are also required to be made or modified accordingly. India has also taken steps in this regard. The Information Technology Act, authenticity of electronic signatures, introduction of the Data Protection Bill, 2018<sup>3</sup> are some examples of it. Though law understands the seriousness of the

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<sup>1</sup> Raj Aijaj Ahmed and Wazida Rahman, E-commerce Laws and Regulations in India: Issues and Challenges. Published at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330845555> (as accessed on Nov. 12, 2022)

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Rajendra Madhukar Sarode, "Future of E-Commerce in India Challenges & Opportunities" 1(12) *IJAR* 646 (2015).

<sup>3</sup> This Bill has been withdrawn due to some technical issues. But, its introduction shows the concern of the state.

consequences, all issues could not be resolved yet.<sup>4</sup> Through this study, the researchers suppose to summarise the current legislative framework that governs e-commerce in India and to analyse the potential and problems that it faces. In order to ensure a just, equitable, and consumer-friendly e-commerce environment in India, the paper also aims to determine the effectiveness of the current laws and regulations in addressing the legal issues of e-commerce within the current legal system. It also tries to suggest any necessary improvements for a better legal and regulatory framework.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To understand the present status and trends of e-Commerce in India.
2. To study the opportunities and challenges of e-commerce in India.
3. To analyse the laws relating to e-commerce in India.
4. To identify the deficiencies in the current framework of e-Commerce Regulations in India.
5. To make suggestions to effectively regulate e-commerce in India.

### **Research Methodology**

For the study, the researchers have adopted the doctrinal method. For data collection, the help has been taken from books, articles available in newspapers and journals, judicial pronouncements, websites, laws and legal provisions etc. The reports of various commissions and committees have also been tried to be explored. All of the content is from a secondary source and proper references have been provided wherever they are felt necessary to be given.

### **Literature Review**

Gupta (2014) discusses the meaning and concept of e-commerce in detail. He also describes the far-reaching effects of e-commerce. The article includes various online business models, such as B2B, B2C, B2G, and C2C, and narratively deconstructs the most minute details of each.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sakshi Sherwal, Legal & regulatory framework governing e-commerce in India. Available at <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=6c3e377f-e607-4fa2-869b-54f9731ecdb6> (as accessed on Nov. 10, 2022)

<sup>5</sup> Anjali Gupta, E-commerce : Role of E-Commerce in Today's Business, International Journal of Computing and Corporate Research ISSN (Online) : 2249-054X Vol. 4 Issue 1, January 2014.

V S Beniwal and Kapil Sikka (2013) discuss the application of e-governance in improving current system of governance and giving quality services to the public. E- Governance is regarded as a crucial tool for introducing IT to the "Common Public." The paper finishes by discussing e-Governance developments, prospects, issues, and acceptance in India.<sup>6</sup>

Gunasekaran, Marri, McGaughey, & Nebhwani (2002) describes the hierarchical framework of the electronic form of business. He also described it in terms of e-exchanging and explained how it has put impact every industry. The paper differentiates the progressive changes brought about by web advancements in manufacturing, promoting, buying, planning, creation, selling and appropriation, warehousing, and human resource management from the progressive changes simulated by earlier web applications like email and electronic information exchange. Web-based innovations have given businesses the ability to shorten development, purchasing, and acquisition cycles, stay current on product and market information, fundamentally speed up communications, and improve the quality of client relationships by maintaining close contact and regular communication. In order to improve their proficiency through engaging B2B online business, the report focuses on the inside and outside significance of online advancements in distinct business activities.<sup>7</sup>

Awais and Samin (2012) have done the SWOT<sup>8</sup> analysis of e-commerce. They have explained both the positive and negative points of e-commerce in detail. It highlights efficiency, low operating costs, increased client participation, and comprehensiveness as the exceptional qualities of e-commerce, but at the same time emphasizes the need for associations to adapt to the changing environment and improve continuously to create better commitments for customers.<sup>9</sup>

Susheel Chandra Bhatt and Durgesh Pant (2011) addresses how security is crucial when using technology, especially in the financial industry. The paper discusses the need for cyber security at the basic banking level given that money is merely one click away. The writers of

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<sup>6</sup> V S Beniwal and Kapil Sikka, E-Governance in India: Prospects and Challenges, *International Journal of Computer & Communication Technology*, ISSN (PRINT): 0975 - 7449, Volume-4, Issue-3, 2013

<sup>7</sup> Gunasekaran, A. & Marri, H. B. & McGaughey, R. E. & Nebhwani, M. D., 2002. "E-commerce and its impact on operations management," *International Journal of Production Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 75(1-2), pages 185-197, January.

<sup>8</sup> The full form of SWOT is strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Awais and Tanzila Samin, *Advanced SWOT Analysis of E-Commerce*, *IJCSI International Journal of Computer Science Issues*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, No 2, March 2012.

this study have attempted to highlight many problems that the Indian banking system faces as well as the significance of cyber security measures.<sup>10</sup>

### **International scenario relating to e-commerce and data protection**

E-commerce has no boundaries. Online shopping is just one click away from any part of the world. Thus, obviously, the issues relating to e-commerce also have an international concern. Considering it, various initiatives have been taken. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is the major one. Till 2016, over 60 countries in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean have so far received various types of technical help. According to their study, there are presently data privacy laws in 110 nations. Still, around 50% of developing nations are without such rules. Several nations are updating their rules, including China and Indonesia, which have laws governing e-commerce and consumer privacy (eg. Japan, Singapore). It is getting harder to enforce the law in emerging nations.<sup>11</sup>

Even the World Trade Organization has its policy towards data protection. In their policy, they declare that though they collect the data of the users, but the users have been given the right to access, rectify or even erase the data.<sup>12</sup> Further, a booklet is issued by the World Trade Organization, in which it has been laid down that More and more businesses are participating in this new data gold rush as a result of the growing significance of data in commerce and business. Cross-border data flow restrictions have historically been the most prevalent form of digital protectionism. However, data localization standards have also gained popularity more recently, with some key variants.<sup>13</sup>

General Data Protection Regulation is the data protection law concerning international policy. It has concerned with the organisations that handled personal information (including biometrics) from any EU citizen. It established the standard and influenced the tendencies that now rule this industry. The ultimate goal of data protection is to safeguard data and information from both internal and external dangers. It safeguards the individual while reducing the dangers of fraud, compromise, and corruption. Increased data protection has

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<sup>10</sup> Susheel Chandra Bhatt and Durgesh Pant, Study of Indian Banks Websites for Cyber Crime Safety Mechanism, *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications*, Vol. 2, No.10, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Data Protection Regulations and International Data Flows: Implications for Trade and Development, Economic Affairs Officer, ICT Analysis Section Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD at July 6, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.wto.org/english/info\\_e/privacy\\_policy\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/info_e/privacy_policy_e.htm) (as accessed on Nov. 11, 2022)

<sup>13</sup> Data regulation in trade agreements: different models and options ahead, Chapter-15. Available at [https://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/19\\_adtera\\_chapter\\_15\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/19_adtera_chapter_15_e.pdf) (as accessed on Nov. 5, 2022)

become essential and unavoidable as the amount of data being created and kept grows exponentially.<sup>14</sup>

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has also shown its concerns about the protection of consumer rights in e-commerce. The OECD is a group that mostly focuses on economic issues. Since 1999, when the OECD Council established the first international instrument for consumer protection in the context of electronic commerce on March 24, 2016, e-commerce has seen a significant evolution. The OECD 401 was created as a torch to illuminate the significance of data privacy. The user's personally identifying information is requested by the service provider on the understanding that it would be kept private and used only for the purposes specified by the users. The OECD guarantees that a service provider's website privacy policy guarantees privacy policy and that there are remedies available in the case of a confidentiality breach. The OECD also addresses the need to inform users of the dangers of online transactions, their right to privacy, and the legal and technological tools available to safeguard those rights.<sup>15</sup>

### **Indian Law Relating to Data Protection**

Privacy is a very big concern. Its importance is realized by the law-makers and interpreters also. That's why, even the law recognizes the right to privacy to be part of the fundamental right. The Supreme Court held in *R. Rajagopal v. State of Tamil Nadu*<sup>16</sup> that the right to privacy, or the "right to be left alone," is protected by Article 21. Further, in *Justice K.S.Puttaswamy v. Union of India*<sup>17</sup>, the Supreme Court has further recognized it. Thus, first of all, there may be mention of the Constitution of India when the issue relating to privacy and data protection comes into consideration.

Legislators have made an effort to address privacy concerns related to computers under the provisions of the IT Act of 2000. The major and most significant Acts in India that were created based on UNCITRAL Model Laws to legalise e-contracts and digital signatures in order to facilitate e-Commerce are the Information Technology Act, 2000 and the Information Technology (Amended) Act, 2008. These laws relate to the whole of India. Data

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<sup>14</sup> Schrems II and beyond GDPR: International privacy laws for data protection in 2021

<sup>15</sup> Guidelines for Consumer Protection in the Context of Electronic Commerce, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development

<sup>16</sup> 1994 SCC (6) 632

<sup>17</sup> (2017) 10 SCC 1

protection safeguards are provided under this Act. Section 66-E of the Information Technology Act, 2000 provides for the punishment for violation of privacy.<sup>18</sup>

By imposing severe penalties up to one crore, Section 43 of the IT Act of 2000 protects against illegal access to the computer system. The same punishment applies to data extraction, copying, and downloading that is done without permission. The penalty for the unlawful introduction of pollutants or computer viruses is described in Section 43 (c). Source code for computers is covered by Section 65. If anyone consciously or intentionally conceals, destroys, eradicate or causes another to do as such shall have to suffer a penalty of imprisonment or fine up to 2 lakh rupees. Thus, protection has been provided against tampering of computer source documents. Section 66 provide protection against hacking. According to this section hacking is defined as any act with an intention to cause wrongful loss or damage to any person or with the knowledge that wrongful loss of damage will be caused to any person and information residing in a computer resource must be either destroyed, altered or its value and utility get diminished. Section 66 imposes the penalty of imprisonment of three years or fine up to two lakh rupees or both on the hacker. Protection from data privacy and confidentiality violations is provided under Section 72. Anyone who discloses information to another person after having been granted authority under the IT Act and related rules to secure access to any electronic record, book, register, correspondence, information document, or other material will be punished with up to two years in prison, a fine up to one lakh rupees, or both. Indirectly and unintentionally, the Reserve Bank of India's recommendations affect India's two most important legal issues—privacy and data protection. Contract law is used by businesses today as a very practical way to safeguard individuals' personal information. the Information Technology Act of 2000 introduced the "Digital Signature" as a way<sup>19</sup>. The Indian Penal Code prescribes penalties for wrongdoing. However, it fell short in one area—the punishment for grave data-related offences, which are already commonplace.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992, but it did not include any provisions for protecting personal information or privacy. However, the reporters for "Business Standard

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<sup>18</sup> The section has been added by the Information technology (Amendment) Act 2008.

<sup>19</sup> See Sec.-3, Chapter-2 of the Information Technology Act, 2000.



Budget, 2020" claim that privacy and data issues have been treated carefully and that investors' rights to their data's privacy have been upheld.<sup>20</sup>

In order to secure a person's personal information, after a year-long consultation process, the Srikrishna Committee drafted the Bill in 2017, and the government introduced the initial draft in Parliament three years ago. The Joint Committee of Parliament took a further two years, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to research the specifics of the hotly contested regulation. Recently, on Aug. 3, 2022, the Bill has been withdrawn. There have been reports that a more comprehensive version of the Data Protection Bill may have been introduced before it was withdrawn. Separately, the government may be considering replacing the Information Technology Act, 2000 with a Digital India Act instead of a Data Protection Bill.<sup>21</sup>

### **Issues and Challenges relating to e-commerce and data protection in India**

1. One of the crucial challenges that must be addressed is sensitive personal data. Individuals who possess private information about their personal lives, or information that is deemed to be personal, are the owners of this type of data. Infringement of privacy amounts to the infringement of the fundamental rights of individuals.
2. Click stream data are information that data gathering agents maintain about cookies that send requests to their servers. Cookies are used to capture a significant amount of click stream data that can identify specific machines. Concomitantly, the State has a duty to define and safeguard personal information. Data protection will help to safeguard people's autonomy while also protecting their privacy.
3. The shocking reality is that many people today encounter identity theft without even realising it and suffer financial losses as a result. Identity theft is the fraudulent use of another person's identity, typically for financial benefit, to put it simply.
4. Phishing is a tricky method of obtaining sensitive data. With the development of technology, a number of cybercrimes have emerged, harming e-users' economic and personal interests. These crimes include cybersquatting, cyberbullying, hacking, and others. One of the most well-known of these is "Internet phishing," which is a criminally incorrect practise in which bogus websites ask visitors to divulge their

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<sup>20</sup> This Act has been revised and updated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Amendment) Act, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Various local and international groups have consistently criticised the proposed regulation. They have raised concerns about aspects in the Data Protection Bill include the inclusion of non-personal data, treating social media like publishers, and its organisational structure.



personal information under the pretence of security or authenticity via electronic communication with a webpage that seems like a legitimate one.

5. Along with privacy concerns, security concerns have always been integral to e-commerce. One of the most pressing issues for consumers of e-commerce is the effort to prevent unauthorised third parties from accessing another party's data. Data mining's techno-legal problems also involve ethical and privacy concerns.
6. Using a logic bomb is another method of tracking information or behaviours. When a logic bomb is used, a malicious function is automatically activated when certain criteria are met due to the purposeful attachment of a piece of code into a software system.

### **Suggestions**

1. The Information Technology Act, 2000 must be amended and clear definitions of the terms like privacy, data privacy, e-commerce and e-consumers must be given, so that security to personal data may be provided in a more effective manner.
2. There is diversity in Indian laws, which has led to privacy and data difficulties. Because the internet is dynamic and these Acts are static, traditional laws cannot effectively address these two problems in the e-commerce platform. So, a particular codified law must be made to tackle the issues.
3. A standard cyber law is urgently needed to meet the concerns of privacy and data protection of all parties involved in e-commerce transactions since e-commerce is entirely dependent on internet services and because internet is borderless and involves parties throughout the world.
4. For kids who use websites and messaging apps like Facebook messenger, whats app etc., the Indian government needs to take the initiative to draught a special Online Privacy Law. Like the U.S. COPPA Act of 1998, the Act must seek to regulate the transfer of their personal information.
5. The principle 'the law of the place where the tort was committed' must be applied in internet-related issues also. The Country where the wrong have been committed should be the country to act upon the matter before its court. It will resolve the jurisdiction questions.
6. The awareness about privacy rights among both the adult and kids is the need of the hour. They must be made aware of the complaint filing etc., on the commission of wrongful acts and infringement of their rights.

## **Conclusion**

Every person has various values when it comes to their privacy. Technology is playing a big part in the growth of the economy in the age of globalisation and e-commerce. E-commerce has given this new revolution more wings by altering the way that business is done. Personal data transfer both domestically and internationally has skyrocketed. Only the internet has been able to support this expansion. The art of modern technology has been influenced by the internet. E-commerce may develop into a forum for corporate anti-competitive agreements. The use of computerised processes in business is expanding quickly. People were involved in business even in the ancient civilization, but today, e-Commerce is the form of commerce in which our culture is most actively involved. The manner that commerce is conducted today has changed as a result of technological advancements, with people now participating virtually through e-Commerce instead of physically. Online frauds, hacking, phishing, and other illicit actions resembling cyberwarfare are becoming more prevalent as e-commerce trends increase. In order to secure the sensitive information, it is urgently necessary to develop the legislative and institutional capability of an administrative organisation at the digital level. Consumers are victims of internet transactions that can happen anytime, anywhere, and technical innovation. The absence of Internet rules has prompted calls for India to adopt better data privacy and protection laws. It becomes exceedingly challenging to protect one's data and privacy. The issue becomes more serious when data is transmitted between jurisdictions without the consent of, or knowledge of, the data subjects, according to the online world's defence of privacy and data protection.

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