A Talk on 'Working towards an inclusive,multi-lingual Internet for every Indian'

Venue: Title Waves, Bandra, Mumbai

Date: 14th July 2018.

India has a population of 1.3 billion that includes an estimated 500 million users as per an IAMAI (Internet and Mobile Association of India) report. Thus, more than 60% of Indian citizens have never used the Internet. Apart from limited physical infrastructure and lack of digital literacy, linguistic barriers have been identified as a critical reason for limited adoption of Internet-qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Indeed, there is a need for more multi-lingual Internet content on the Indian Internet.

Poets and storytellers across India use the Internet to create multi-lingual content for their audience in their respective languages. They are actively affiliated with organizations that promote their vernacular language. These individuals and organizations acknowledge the role of Internet as a medium to propagate their ideas and share their life experiences with their audience. In today's social media world, most of these individuals are 'influencers' in their respective online and offline communities. Unfortunately, most of these individuals are not aware of broader technological principles or initiatives from Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and related organizations that support a multi-lingual Internet. Increasing their awareness levels and soliciting their support will eventually play a critical role in raising awareness within their respective communities about multi-lingual Internet and foster better Internet adoption and usage.

With an overarching mission to make *Internet relevant for everyone*, ISOC India Mumbai was able to sponsor a slot for a guest speaker at an Open Mic Event for storytellers and poets. Dr Ajay Data, Co-Chair of ICANN NBGP (Neo-Brahmi Generation Panel), kindly accepted our invite to deliver a remote talk as a guest speaker to a diverse audience of literary enthusiasts from different languages comprising of poets, storytellers, media personnel, event managers and software engineers. His talk provided an introduction to ICANN supported technological principles and initiatives that promote a multi-lingual Internet.

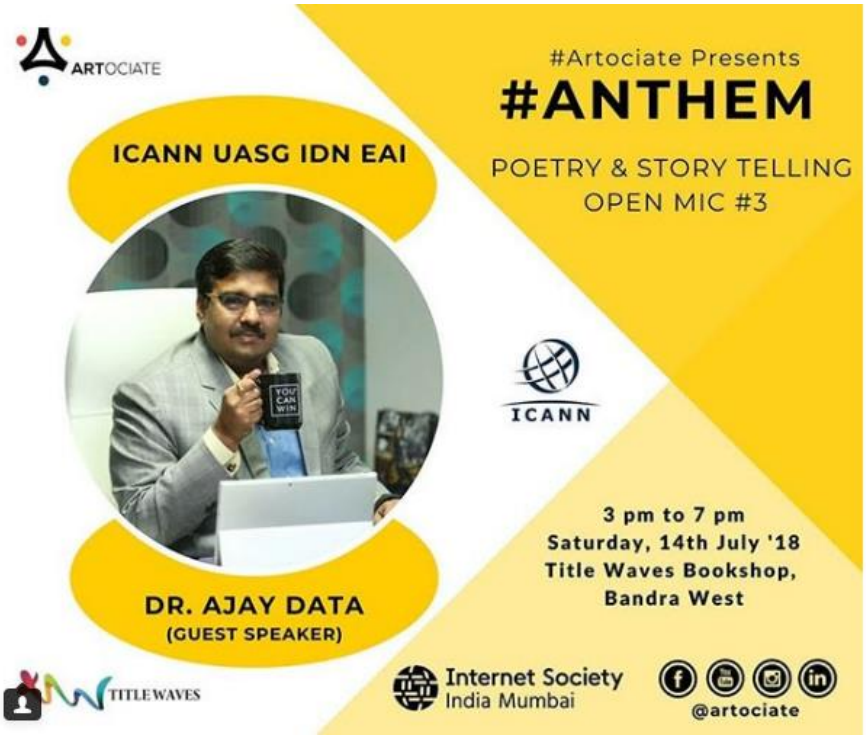
According to Dr. Data, UASG (Universal Acceptance Steering Group) espouses the principle that all domain names and email ids should be accepted equally. Apart from content, email address and domain names should also be available in multilingual formats to realize a multi-lingual Internet .E-mail address Internationalization (EAI) and Internationationalised Domain Names (IDNs) are critical initiatives in this regard. These initiatives hold the promise of bringing next million people online .Since 2014, companies like Google and Microsoft have supported EAI and allowed emails to be sent and received from EAI. Further, non ASCII scripts are being supported in domain names as per IDN initiative. In India, the Neo Brahmi Generation Panel is an ICANN supported community that covers 9 linguistic scripts to generate valid labels for IDNs.

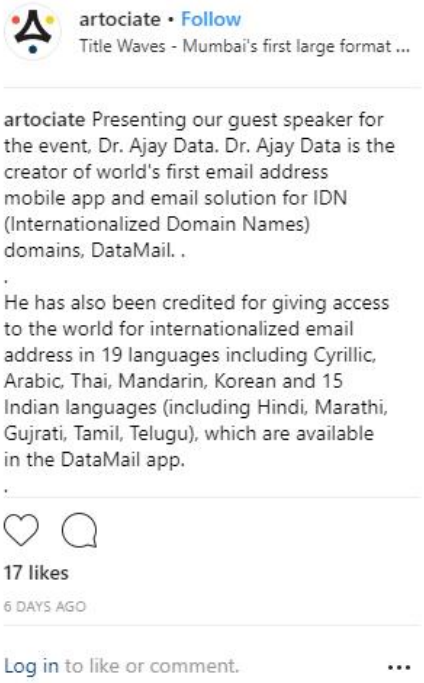
Without getting into more technical details, he urged the non- English users to register their domain and get a free email id via websites like https://godil.in//.It will enable them to communicate over the Internet and break the linguistic barrier. This will also provide them with an opportunity to access knowledge over the Internet and eventually contribute to socio-economic development of our country.

It was the first time that members of the audience were introduced to terms like UASG, EAI, IDN etc. More than 60 poets and story tellers performed at the four hour event which was attended by an audience compromising of more than 120 individuals. They represented a diversity of languages- English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Bangla, Kashmiri, Urdu, Punjabi, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. Some of these poets have won laurels and recognition at national and international levels .ISOC India Mumbai team was happy that it was able to raise awareness about these technological initiatives to stakeholders that are critical producers and consumers of multi-lingual Internet content.

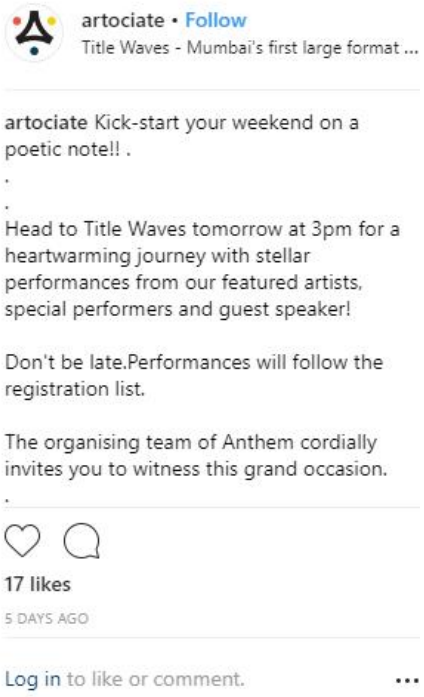
Some moments from the event:-

1. *Dr. Data's banner on Instagram*





2. *A banner of artists performing at the event.*



3. *Dr. Data's guest talk at the event*

4. *The crowd listening to Dr. Data's talk*

Some responses from the audience:-

"It was an insightful talk from Dr. Data. I wasn't aware that email addresses and domain names are now available in non - English languages."

- Pooja Gupta, a Hindi Poet

"*I am an avid user of Internet but I had never heard of ICANN. Will like to know more about it now***"**

- Md. Irfan, an Urdu Poet.

"*The session was informative. I learned something after a long time*"
- Srijan Das, a Bangali percussionist and poet.