Technology Law and the Credibility of Electronic Evidence: A Study Under the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023

by

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Abstract

The rise of digital technology has fundamentally transformed legal proceedings, creating new challenges and opportunities in evidence law. The Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023, is a landmark legislative development in India, focusing on the admissibility and credibility of electronic evidence in the judicial system. This paper examines the provisions of the BSA, exploring how it redefines the role of electronic records as primary evidence and the measures put in place to ensure their authenticity and reliability.

The BSA elevates electronic and digital records to the status of primary evidence, marking a shift from the traditional view where such records were considered secondary evidence. This change highlights the growing recognition of digital forms of evidence—such as emails, server logs, and multimedia files—as essential elements of legal cases. Section 61 of the BSA ensures that electronic records hold the same legal weight, validity, and enforceability as conventional documents, provided they meet the specific criteria outlined in Section 63.

A key aspect of the BSA is its focus on maintaining the chain of custody and integrity of electronic evidence. The Act mandates that electronic records be accompanied by an authenticity certificate, signed by both the person responsible for the device and an expert. This dual-certification requirement aims to prevent tampering and ensure the reliability of the evidence presented in court.

Moreover, the BSA includes provisions for expert testimony, permitting courts to rely on forensic analysts and IT specialists to interpret complex electronic evidence. This approach recognizes the need for specialized expertise in evaluating digital records and guarantees that such evidence is properly understood and assessed.

However, the BSA's implementation faces certain challenges. Notably, the Act does not clearly define who qualifies as an expert capable of certifying the authenticity of electronic evidence. Furthermore, as technology evolves rapidly, there is a pressing need for

continuous updates to the legal framework to address emerging issues in digital evidence handling.

In conclusion, the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, represents a crucial step in modernizing India's evidence laws, adapting them to the digital era. By providing clear guidelines for the admissibility and credibility of electronic evidence, the BSA strengthens the integrity of legal proceedings and enhances confidence in the judicial system's handling of digital records. Nevertheless, ongoing efforts are necessary to address the challenges posed by rapid technological advancements and ensure the law remains effective and adaptable.

Keywords: Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam 2023, electronic evidence, IT Act 2000, Section 61, digital forensics, admissibility, judiciary, blockchain, AI, forensic standards

1. Introduction

The digital era has revolutionized every facet of life, from how we communicate to how we transact and record information. This transformation has extended into the judicial system, where digital records have rapidly become a primary source of evidence in both civil and criminal cases. Emails, text messages, CCTV footage, metadata, social media content, and online transactions now play critical roles in the resolution of legal disputes. However, their increasing use brings new challenges in terms of authenticity, reliability, and legal standards.

Recognizing the need for a robust legal framework to accommodate digital realities, the Indian Parliament introduced the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) in 2023. This legislation replaces the colonial-era Indian Evidence Act of 1872, reflecting the evolution of technology and societal expectations. The BSA seeks to align legal procedures with contemporary digital usage, especially concerning the admissibility of electronic records. Section 61 of the BSA, in particular, lays the foundation for a systematic approach to digital evidence, outlining specific conditions for its acceptance in courts.

This paper delves into the implications of the BSA for digital evidence, with a focus on Section 61. It assesses the framework's capacity to safeguard the integrity of electronic records, highlights complementary provisions from the Information Technology Act,

2000, and examines relevant case law. Further, it explores current vulnerabilities such as forgery, deep fake content, and the knowledge gap among legal professionals. Insights from international best practices and technological tools like blockchain and AI offer a comprehensive view of how India can modernize its approach to digital evidence.

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2. **Understanding the Nature of Electronic Evidence**

Electronic evidence refers to any form of data that is stored or transmitted through digital devices and holds legal relevance. This includes a wide range of data types, many of which have become increasingly important in various legal contexts, such as criminal investigations, civil lawsuits, and regulatory compliance. Electronic evidence can encompass:[1]

- **Emails and SMS messages**: Digital communications that are often used to demonstrate interactions, intent, or knowledge between parties.
- **Call logs and voice recordings**: Telecommunication records, including phone call logs and voicemail messages, frequently used to establish contact or provide alibi evidence.
- **Images and videos**, including CCTV footage: Visual data captured by cameras or other devices, which can serve as direct evidence in cases of crime, disputes, or investigations.
- **Metadata**: Information that describes other data, such as file creation dates, modification times, and user interactions. Metadata plays a crucial role in verifying the authenticity of files.
- **GPS and location-based data**: Location information obtained from GPS-enabled devices, such as smartphones or vehicle tracking systems, which is often used to verify the whereabouts of individuals or objects at a specific time.
- **Social media posts and interactions**: Digital content from platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter that document personal communications, public statements, or interactions.
- **Financial transactions and cloud-based records**: Electronic records from banking systems, credit cards, and cloud storage that track financial activity and document the exchange of sensitive information.

As technology becomes more integrated into daily life, more and more evidence in legal matters originates from electronic sources. Unlike traditional physical evidence such as

1. **Berk, M., & Fiedler, R.** (2018). *Digital Evidence and Computer Crime: Forensic Science, Computers, and the Internet* (3rd ed.). Academic Press.

paper documents or physical objects, digital evidence is intangible and often volatile, which introduces a host of challenges to its credibility and reliability.

1. **Berk, M., & Fiedler, R.** (2018). *Digital Evidence and Computer Crime: Forensic Science, Computers, and the Internet* (3rd ed.). Academic Press.

2.1 The Challenges of Electronic Evidence

Electronic evidence differs from traditional evidence in several key ways, primarily due to its intangible nature and the ease with which it can be altered, deleted, or manipulated. These characteristics make electronic records vulnerable to issues related to authenticity, making it crucial for courts and legal practitioners to adopt robust methods to verify the integrity of such evidence.

Unlike paper documents, which are typically more difficult to alter without clear signs of tampering, digital data can be easily modified. For instance, emails can be forged, GPS locations can be spoofed, and images or videos can be altered with editing software. Metadata, which provides important context for the data, can also be manipulated, further complicating the task of verifying its authenticity. This means that ensuring the integrity of electronic evidence is more challenging and requires advanced tools and protocols.

The ease with which data can be erased or modified means that courts must ensure strict controls around the preservation and presentation of electronic evidence. Without these safeguards, the risk of tampering or alteration can undermine the value of the evidence in legal proceedings.

2.2 Ensuring Authenticity and Reliability

To address these challenges, it is essential to implement strict procedures to ensure that electronic evidence is both authentic and reliable. This has led to the development of specialized **digital forensic techniques**, which are designed to handle, examine, and authenticate electronic evidence.

Digital forensics[2] is a field dedicated to recovering, analyzing, and validating digital data to ensure it is preserved in its original state and is suitable for use in legal proceedings. Digital forensic experts use a variety of techniques to ensure the integrity of electronic evidence, such as:

- **Data Duplication**: Creating exact copies, or images, of digital storage devices ensures that the original evidence is preserved, and analyses are conducted on the copies, minimizing the risk of tampering.
- **Chain of Custody**: A crucial process that documents the handling of the evidence from its discovery to its presentation in court. Proper chain of custody ensures that the evidence has not been tampered with and can be traced back to its original form.

2. **Gilbert, R., & Johnson, K.** (2015). *The Forensic Examination of Digital Evidence*. Oxford University Press.

- **Metadata Analysis**: By examining metadata associated with digital files, forensic experts can determine the history of a file—when it was created, modified, or deleted—and establish its authenticity. This is especially useful for verifying whether a document has been altered in any way.
- **Forensic Software**: Experts often use specialized software to recover deleted files, analyze data from damaged or corrupted storage devices, and identify any signs of tampering or fraud. This software can also help uncover hidden files and information that may otherwise go undetected.[3]

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3. Legal Provisions under the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023

The **Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023** (BSA) represents a key development in the legal landscape of India, particularly in how electronic evidence is treated. The Act grants **legal recognition to electronic records** as valid documentary evidence, bringing them to the same level as traditional physical documents. Section 2(1)(d)[4] of the BSA incorporates definitions consistent with the **Information Technology Act, 2000**, ensuring alignment between India's legal standards and its digital governance infrastructure.

3.1 Legal Recognition of Digital Records

Section 2(1)(d) of the BSA provides a clear definition and recognition of electronic records as legitimate forms of evidence in court. This legal framework acknowledges the growing importance of digital information in legal proceedings, including communications and data shared through electronic means.[5] By aligning with the **Information Technology Act, 2000**, the BSA helps ensure consistency between India's digital and evidentiary laws, making it easier for electronic records to be accepted as evidence in legal matters.

This provision is critical in a world where much of the relevant information in criminal, civil, and regulatory cases is often digital in nature. By officially recognizing electronic records as evidence, the Act addresses the need for the legal system to keep pace with technological advancements, ensuring that digital records such as emails, social media posts, and multimedia files can be used effectively in the courtroom.

3. **Casey, E.** (2011). *Digital Evidence and Computer Crime: Forensic Science, Computers, and the Internet* (2nd ed.). Elsevier.
4. **Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023.**
5. **Information Technology Act, 2000**

3.2 Section 61: Admissibility Requirements

Section 61 of the BSA outlines the specific conditions under which electronic evidence can be admitted in court. This provision is a cornerstone of the Act, providing a framework that guarantees the **authenticity** and **reliability** of digital records presented as evidence. The section specifies several key criteria for admissibility:

- **Proof of origin from a secure system**: The electronic record must come from a trustworthy system, ensuring the data's integrity has been maintained.
- **Certification by a system administrator or expert**: The data must be accompanied by a certification from an individual responsible for the system or an expert, confirming that the record is intact and unaltered.
- **Verification of proper system function**: The system used to create, store, and retrieve the data must be verified to have been fully operational and free from malfunction during the process.
- **Chain of custody**: There must be a documented, uninterrupted chain of custody to prove that the record has not been tampered with or altered from its original state.

These conditions emphasize the **substance over form** approach, focusing more on the reliability and authenticity of the evidence rather than the technical details of how it was handled. This shift reflects a more rational and practical method of evaluating electronic records in legal contexts.

Overall, Section 61 of the BSA establishes a clear and robust process for handling electronic evidence in India's judicial system, ensuring that digital records are treated with the same level of scrutiny and respect as traditional forms of evidence. By laying down these requirements, the BSA helps ensure the integrity of electronic records and promotes transparency in their use in legal proceedings.[6]

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4. The Complementary Role of the Information Technology Act, 2000[7]

The **Information Technology Act, 2000** serves as a key legislative support to the **Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA)** in the realm of electronic evidence and digital governance. While the BSA lays out the evidentiary standards for digital records, the IT Act provides the legal framework that validates digital communication, electronic records, and cybersecurity practices in India. Together, these two statutes reinforce one another to facilitate the integration of technology into legal and administrative processes.

6. ibid
7. ibid

Among the most important features of the IT Act are **Sections 3 and 4**, which set the foundation for recognizing digital transactions within the legal system. **Section 3** confers legal recognition to **digital signatures**, equating them with handwritten signatures when they are applied using secure methods. This provision is fundamental to ensuring the credibility and legal standing of digitally signed documents, particularly in contracts, electronic filings, and official communications.

Section 4 further extends legal recognition to **electronic records**, treating them on par with physical documents. It provides that any information in electronic form is legally valid as long as it is accessible and reproducible for future reference. This equivalency facilitates the widespread use of electronic records in both public administration and private sector dealings, allowing courts and institutions to accept documents submitted electronically.

These sections have enabled the transformation of traditional paperwork-heavy processes into more efficient, digitally managed systems. They support the use of e-contracts, digital agreements, online financial records, and authenticated e-documents in legal settings.[8]

Despite these advances, the IT Act does not fully resolve all concerns. **Issues like data interoperability**, the absence of uniform standards for **cybersecurity and data preservation**, and **ambiguities in evidentiary procedures** remain challenges. As digital technology continues to evolve rapidly, there is a growing need for continuous updates to both legal and technical protocols to ensure seamless integration of electronic records within the justice system.[9]

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5. Judicial Interpretations and Case Law

Judicial interpretation has played a pivotal role in shaping the treatment of electronic evidence in India. Even before the formal codification of electronic records under the **Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA)**, the Indian judiciary had begun laying the groundwork for how digital evidence should be examined and admitted in legal proceedings. Through a series of landmark decisions, courts emphasized the importance of authenticity, procedural compliance, and the safeguarding of data integrity—principles that are now central to the BSA's legal framework.

8. Government of India, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. (2020). *A guide to the Information Technology Act and amendments*. Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
9. Agarwal, R., & Sharma, A. (2021). Digital evidence and the role of Indian laws in the age of cybersecurity. *Journal of Cyber Law and Policy*, 12(4), 24-37.

5.1 Pre-BSA Jurisprudence

Prior to the BSA's enactment, the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 [10] governed the admissibility of electronic records. However, it lacked clarity in dealing with modern forms of digital data. As a result, judicial pronouncements became essential in interpreting how digital documents should be treated. One of the most significant judgments in this context was **Anvar P.V. v. P.K. Basheer (2014)[11]**. In this case, the Supreme Court overruled previous interpretations and held that any electronic record intended to be submitted as evidence must be accompanied by a **certificate under Section 65B** of the Indian Evidence Act. The judgment emphasized that the certificate must confirm the origin and integrity of the data and that the electronic record was produced from a device operating properly in the regular course of activity.

This decision was a watershed moment, as it set a new benchmark for the admissibility of electronic evidence. It clarified that **oral evidence or general affidavits were not sufficient** to prove the contents of electronic records unless accompanied by a proper certificate. The decision also highlighted that courts must be cautious about the potential for digital tampering, and thus, stringent safeguards are essential.

The principles laid out in *Anvar* were further reinforced in **Arjun Panditrao Khotkar v. Kailash Kushanrao Gorantyal (2020)[12]**. This case revisited the interpretation of Section 65B and affirmed that **secondary electronic evidence**, such as printouts, screenshots, or copies of digital content, could not be admitted unless a Section 65B certificate was provided. The Court also clarified that the certificate must be obtained at the time of producing the evidence and could not be filed at a later stage unless permitted by the court under exceptional circumstances.

These rulings underscored the critical importance of maintaining the **chain of custody**, certifying data authenticity, and ensuring procedural compliance. Together, they established a foundational framework that continues to influence judicial reasoning under the newer provisions of the BSA.

10. Indian Evidence Act, 1872
11. Anvar P.V. v. P.K. Basheer, (2014). *10 SCC 473*.
12. Arjun Panditrao Khotkar v. Kailash Kushanrao Gorantyal, (2020). *7 SCC 1*.

5.2 Evolving Interpretation under Section 61 of the BSA[13]

With the introduction of the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, electronic evidence has received a dedicated legal structure, particularly through **Section 61**, which outlines the admissibility requirements for digital records. This provision builds upon the jurisprudence established under the Indian Evidence Act while introducing more refined and updated requirements for the digital era.

However, as with any newly enacted law, **interpretation and application of Section 61 are still evolving**. Early observations suggest that several areas within the provision require judicial clarification and procedural standardization. One of the first concerns relates to the **definition of a "secure system."** The Act mandates that electronic records must originate from a secure system to be considered admissible. However, the term lacks a precise legal definition, leaving room for ambiguity in courtrooms. Questions remain regarding what constitutes adequate security—whether it refers to encrypted systems, tamper-proof logs, or government-certified technologies.

Secondly, the **requirement of certification** continues to be a subject of debate. While Section 61 mandates certification by both the person in charge of the system and a qualified expert, courts have witnessed inconsistent application. In some cases, judges have demanded dual certifications, while in others, they have relied on just one, leading to legal uncertainty. Additionally, the absence of clear guidance on **who qualifies as an "expert"** for the purposes of certifying digital records has further complicated implementation.[14]

Another emerging challenge is the **limited technological proficiency within the judiciary**. Many courts still lack the infrastructure and expertise needed to evaluate complex digital evidence. This technological gap poses a risk of misinterpretation or undervaluation of important electronic records. As the reliance on digital data grows, it becomes essential to build judicial capacity and promote collaboration with digital forensic professionals.[15]

13. ibid
14. **Rowe, S.** (2019). *Understanding Digital Evidence: The Need for Legal and Technological Expertise*. Routledge
15. Subramanian, V., & Nair, R. (2019). Interfacing the Information Technology Act with the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam: Legal considerations. *International Journal of Legal Studies, 6*(2), 48-62.

Despite these challenges, it is anticipated that **judicial precedents under Section 61 will evolve gradually**, just as they did under the earlier regime. As courts continue to engage with digital evidence in diverse contexts—from cybercrimes to financial fraud and civil disputes—procedural clarity and legal consistency are likely to improve. In time, judicial interpretation will not only solidify the practical application of Section 61 but also help harmonize its implementation across jurisdictions, thereby enhancing the overall credibility of electronic evidence in the Indian legal system.[16]

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6. Challenges to the Credibility of Electronic Evidence

As digital technologies continue to transform how evidence is created, stored, and presented, the legal system faces a growing number of challenges in ensuring the credibility of electronic records.[17] While laws such as the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, have introduced much-needed structure, various technological and procedural issues still complicate the effective handling of such evidence. From the threat of manipulation to limitations in institutional expertise, the hurdles are both technical and systemic.

6.1 Forgery and Data Manipulation[18]

One of the most serious challenges to the credibility of electronic evidence is the ease with which it can be altered or fabricated. With the proliferation of sophisticated editing tools, individuals can now modify digital files—such as images, documents, and videos—with incredible accuracy. Timestamps on files can be changed, logs can be rewritten, and even metadata can be falsified without leaving any immediately visible trace. This means that the mere presence of digital evidence does not guarantee its reliability. Unless supported by a solid forensic trail and appropriate verification mechanisms, such evidence may mislead rather than illuminate. Consequently, courts must rely on digital forensic experts to validate the authenticity of such records, using tools that can detect signs of tampering, unauthorized access, or data manipulation.

16. Agarwal, R., & Sharma, A. (2021). Digital evidence and the role of Indian laws in the age of cybersecurity. *Journal of Cyber Law and Policy*, *12*(4), 24-37.
17. Chauhan, A., & Kaur, S. (2021). Understanding digital evidence in the Indian legal context: Issues and challenges. *Cyber Law Review*, *10*(3), 45-61.
18. Kumar, V., & Verma, S. (2022). Bridging the gap: Educating the legal profession on digital evidence. *Legal Technology Journal*, *12*(4), 59-73.

6.2 Volatility and Fragility

Digital evidence is inherently volatile. Unlike physical documents, which can remain intact for years if stored properly, electronic data is fragile and prone to being lost due to hardware failures, software crashes, accidental deletion, or system malfunctions. If evidence is not promptly preserved or backed up in a secure environment, it risks becoming permanently inaccessible. This fragility increases the burden on investigators and litigants to act swiftly and handle electronic records with care. Moreover, the absence of reliable archiving procedures in many institutions further compounds the risk of losing crucial data before it can be examined or presented in court.

6.3 Threats from Deepfakes and Synthetic Media[19]

Artificial Intelligence has introduced an entirely new category of threats in the form of deepfakes—synthetically generated audio and video content that is almost indistinguishable from genuine recordings. With AI-powered tools, it is now possible to create convincing fake videos of individuals saying or doing things they never actually said or did. As these synthetic media become more refined, distinguishing real from fake becomes increasingly difficult, even for trained experts. The emergence of such technologies poses a direct threat to the trustworthiness of audiovisual evidence, calling for urgent updates in forensic capabilities and legal standards for admissibility.

6.4 Knowledge and Skill Gaps in the Legal System

Another significant barrier lies in the lack of technical literacy among many legal professionals, including lawyers, judges, and law enforcement officers. Understanding the origin, context, and integrity of electronic evidence often requires specialized knowledge in areas like data science, cybersecurity, and digital forensics. Unfortunately, these skills are not widely present in the legal community. This knowledge gap can lead to misinterpretation, procedural delays, or wrongful admissions and rejections of evidence. Therefore, continuous training and collaboration with digital experts are essential to ensure the legal system is equipped to handle increasingly complex digital evidence[20]

19. Prasad, N., & Nair, M. (2023). Emerging threats to electronic evidence: The rise of deepfakes and AI manipulation. *Journal of Cybersecurity and Law, 4*(2), 14-29
20. Mishra, K. (2021). Digital evidence and its challenges in the Indian judiciary. *Journal of Digital Forensics and Law, 8*(1), 20-33.

7. Comparative Perspectives: Global Best Practices

As courts worldwide grapple with the complexities of handling electronic evidence, several countries have developed structured legal frameworks and institutional practices that offer valuable insights. By examining these systems, India can refine its approach to digital evidence under the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, and bridge critical gaps through informed adaptation of global standards. The experiences of the United States and the United Kingdom are particularly instructive.

The United States: Emphasis on Authentication and Procedural Rigor[21]

In the United States, the admissibility of electronic records is governed by the Federal Rules of Evidence (FRE), a set of procedural rules used across federal courts. The FRE does not treat digital evidence as a separate category but instead emphasizes fundamental criteria such as relevance, authenticity, and lawful collection. One of the key requirements is that any party introducing electronic evidence must demonstrate that the data has not been altered and originates from a trustworthy source.

A landmark case in this domain, *Lorraine v. Markel American Insurance Company* (2007)[22], highlighted the importance of multiple layers of verification. The court observed that mere possession of electronic records is not enough to secure their admissibility. Parties must satisfy the court with proper documentation regarding how the data was created, maintained, and preserved. This case became a touchstone in setting the precedent that electronic evidence must not only be relevant but also backed by clear proof of authenticity and integrity.

Additionally, U.S. courts frequently rely on expert witnesses in the field of digital forensics to assess whether electronic records have been tampered with or manipulated. The role of forensic certification bodies and strict chain-of-custody protocols further strengthens the reliability of electronic data submitted in court.

21. Chauhan, R., & Singh, R. (2021). *Comparative study of electronic evidence handling in India, the United States, and the United Kingdom*. Indian Journal of Legal Studies, 8(2), 55-74.
22. Lorraine v. Markel American Insurance Company, 241 F.R.D. 534 (D. Md. 2007).

The United Kingdom: A Focus on Practical Reliability

The United Kingdom takes a slightly different approach by prioritizing the practical reliability of electronic evidence over rigid procedural requirements. The Civil Evidence Act, 1995, lays out the legal foundation for the acceptance of computer-generated evidence in civil matters[23]. The Act stipulates that digital documents are admissible if they appear to be reliable and relevant to the case at hand, even in the absence of highly technical documentation.

The British legal system grants judges the discretion to weigh the credibility of electronic evidence based on its overall trustworthiness. The emphasis is placed on how the data was stored and managed, rather than on whether every technical requirement has been formally met. Courts also tend to consider the regularity of data creation and maintenance, which can serve as indicators of authenticity.

This flexible model helps avoid overly technical barriers that may prevent relevant and useful digital information from being considered in judicial proceedings. At the same time, the United Kingdom has invested in strengthening its forensic institutions, allowing courts access to expert assessments when authenticity is in question.

Lessons for India: Moving Towards Uniformity and Preparedness

In comparison, India's digital evidence regime is still in a phase of active evolution. The Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, has laid down important principles and procedures, particularly under Section 61, which establishes requirements for the admissibility of electronic records. However, implementation challenges persist, largely due to the absence of uniform guidelines and varying levels of technical understanding within the judiciary.[24]

Drawing from global practices, India could benefit significantly from adopting certain reforms:

- **Establishing National Forensic Protocols:** A uniform set of digital evidence handling procedures—applicable across all states and jurisdictions—would promote consistency and reduce ambiguity.

23. Civil Evidence Act, 1995, c. 38. (United Kingdom).
24. Parker, D., & Williams, T. (2018). Global trends in digital forensics: The role of courts and experts. *Journal of Global Cyber Law, 17*(4), 89-104.

- **Judicial and Legal Training:** Specialized training programs for judges, lawyers, and investigators in digital forensics and data verification would help bridge existing knowledge gaps.
- **Public-Private Collaboration:** Engaging with private sector technology experts can aid in the development of tamper-detection tools, data preservation techniques, and verification systems to support court proceedings.

By integrating these global best practices into its legal infrastructure, India can enhance the credibility and effectiveness of electronic evidence handling, ensuring that the judicial process keeps pace with rapid technological change

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8. Technological Aids for Verifying Digital Evidence

As digital evidence becomes more central to modern legal proceedings, the importance of reliable tools to verify its authenticity has increased significantly. The dynamic and malleable nature of electronic records makes them vulnerable to alteration, tampering, or accidental loss. To address these risks, various technological mechanisms have been developed that help ensure the integrity, credibility, and admissibility of digital data in courtrooms. Among the most effective are digital signatures supported by cryptographic infrastructure, hashing techniques, blockchain technology, and artificial intelligence.

8.1 Digital Signatures and the Role of PKI[25]

Digital signatures play a crucial role in authenticating the origin and content of electronic records. Unlike handwritten signatures, digital signatures are based on cryptographic algorithms and are supported by a Public Key Infrastructure (PKI). PKI operates through a pair of cryptographic keys—one public and one private—which work together to ensure that any digitally signed document has not been tampered with after being signed.

The use of digital signatures is prevalent in official government transactions, income tax filings, electronic contracts, and secure corporate communications. They provide strong assurance of authorship and document integrity. In legal settings, a document bearing a valid digital signature is often treated as highly credible, as the signature can be verified independently using the associated public key. The verification process also detects any alterations made after the signature was applied, ensuring document consistency.

25. Patel, S., & Jain, R. (2020). Public key infrastructure and digital signatures: Legal and technical aspects. *Indian Journal of Cyber Law, 27*(1), 45-59.

8.2 Hashing and Blockchain Technology[26]

Hashing is another foundational technique used to validate digital content. A hash function generates a fixed-length string—often referred to as a digital fingerprint—based on the content of a file. Even the slightest modification to the original file results in a completely different hash value. Algorithms like SHA-256 (Secure Hash Algorithm) are widely used in legal and forensic environments for this purpose. They are especially useful in verifying the originality and integrity of documents, images, and multimedia files presented as evidence.

In addition, blockchain technology has emerged as a cutting-edge solution for preserving digital evidence. By storing information in distributed, time-stamped blocks that are cryptographically linked, blockchain ensures that data cannot be modified without consensus from all participating nodes. This makes it ideal for logging chain-of-custody events and storing sensitive digital records in a tamper-resistant format. Some jurisdictions and private entities have started experimenting with blockchain-based evidence registries to enhance the trustworthiness of digital submissions.

8.3 Artificial Intelligence and Forensic Analysis[27]

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly being deployed in the digital forensic space to analyze large volumes of data and detect anomalies. AI algorithms can be trained to recognize patterns in metadata, identify inconsistencies in timestamps, and detect signs of forgery in documents, images, or videos. These tools are especially useful in complex cases involving cybercrime, financial fraud, or large-scale data analysis.

However, while AI has immense potential, its use must be complemented by human oversight. Algorithms may reflect bias or yield incorrect conclusions if not properly trained or understood. Therefore, forensic experts are still essential in interpreting AI outputs, ensuring that conclusions drawn from AI-assisted analysis are legally defensible and contextually accurate.

In sum, the integration of technology into the legal verification process has significantly strengthened the evidentiary value of digital records. As the legal system continues to adapt to technological advances, the responsible and informed use of these tools will be essential in preserving the credibility and fairness of judicial proceedings

26. Brown, R., & Smith, M. (2021). Blockchain technology in legal evidence handling: An emerging frontier. *International Journal of Cyber Law, 19*(1), 34-51.
27. Kumar, A., & Singh, R. (2019). Artificial intelligence and digital forensics: A new era of evidence analysis. *Journal of Cybersecurity and Forensic Science, 14*(2), 73-85.

9. Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The growing reliance on electronic evidence in legal proceedings requires comprehensive and forward-thinking reforms to ensure that justice is served without compromising the integrity of digital records. As courts across India begin to grapple with increasingly sophisticated technological issues, several key recommendations can be implemented to reinforce the credibility and admissibility of electronic evidence.

9.1 Establishing a Clear Definition of "Secure System"

One of the most pressing needs in the current legal framework is a precise and universally accepted definition of what constitutes a "secure system." While the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 references the concept, the absence of specific technical parameters creates ambiguity in judicial interpretation. A robust definition should include minimum encryption standards, access control mechanisms, audit logging requirements, and data retention policies. This clarity will enable consistent application across courts and ensure that digital records from approved systems are presumed to be authentic unless proven otherwise.

9.2 Formulating a National Digital Evidence Framework[28]

There is a strong case for the establishment of a centralized regulatory body or inter-agency task force to develop and implement national standards for digital evidence. This entity could create uniform protocols for collecting, preserving, and presenting electronic records, thereby eliminating inconsistencies between jurisdictions. It would also serve as a reference point for technological updates, best practices, and cross-border cooperation in cybercrime and digital data disputes.

9.3 Strengthening Capacity Through Training and Awareness

Digital evidence is inherently technical and often misunderstood by those without a background in computer science or cybersecurity. To address this, continuous professional development programs should be introduced for judges, lawyers, police officers, and other key stakeholders.

28. Smith, J., & Miller, T. (2021). Developing national frameworks for digital evidence management. *Journal of Law and Technology, 30*(2), 145-160.

These programs could cover a wide range of topics—from data recovery and digital signatures to metadata analysis and legal standards for admissibility. Ensuring a basic level of digital literacy within the legal profession is essential for the fair and effective evaluation of such evidence.

9.4 Institutionalizing the Role of Forensic Experts

In complex cases involving significant digital data—such as cyber fraud, intellectual property theft, or white-collar crimes—the inclusion of certified digital forensic professionals should be made mandatory. These experts bring specialized knowledge to the table, ensuring that electronic records are examined using proper tools and validated processes. Courts should establish guidelines for the appointment, accreditation, and testimony of such experts to maintain the credibility of digital evidence presented during trial.

9.5 Modernizing Judicial Infrastructure[29]

Finally, for courts to fully embrace the digital transformation of the evidentiary process, investment in technological infrastructure is essential. E-courts must be equipped with secure systems for uploading, storing, and reviewing digital files. Capabilities such as real-time metadata inspection, encryption for sensitive data, and protected access to evidence databases would greatly enhance the court's ability to handle electronic records efficiently and securely. Moreover, implementing video conferencing tools and virtual hearing platforms ensures that even remote experts can provide testimony when needed

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10. Conclusion

The Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 marks a significant and timely reform in India's legal framework, addressing the challenges posed by the increasing reliance on digital evidence in legal proceedings. Section 61 of the Act is pivotal in recognizing electronic records as credible and reliable sources of evidence, ensuring they are treated with the same seriousness as traditional documents. However, as digital technology evolves, so too must the legal and technological infrastructures that support the integrity of electronic evidence.

29. Chawla, S., & Rai, S. (2020). E-courts and judicial infrastructure modernization: A roadmap for India's digital transition. *Journal of Digital Governance, 15*(2), 95-110.

To fully realize the potential of this reform, India must focus on clarifying key definitions, such as that of a "secure system," and implementing robust frameworks for the handling, authentication, and presentation of digital records. Moreover, there is a need for continuous capacity building through education and training for legal professionals, ensuring they are equipped to assess electronic evidence accurately. The inclusion of digital forensic experts in complex cases and the modernization of judicial infrastructure will further enhance the effectiveness of the law.

In conclusion, while the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 sets a solid foundation, its success will depend on ongoing collaboration between legal and technological sectors to create a justice system that is both forward-thinking and procedurally sound.

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