

Digital Reconnections

Reuniting Homeless People with their Families in India

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Introduction

The Digital Reconnections is a collaborative project of VU Amsterdam and Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) in India, which aims to address the complex challenge of reuniting homeless individuals with their families. Through the use of AI, open-source census data, citizen science, and memory-triggering interviews, the project seeks to overcome the difficulties faced by homeless individuals in recalling their native place and families in contacting their lost relatives.

Methodology

The project employs two key components: a memory-triggering protocol developed through interviews and discussions with stakeholders, and feature engineering techniques utilizing census data and citizen science contributions by involving 1000 Community Information Resource Centres run by DEF. The protocol helps elicit location-specific answers and trigger memories, while feature engineering narrows down potential home locations. By combining these methods, the project addresses the challenge of location identification and facilitates the reunification process.

Results

The project has formulated a design and is currently in the proof-of-concept stage of implementing the technology. Preliminary findings indicate that the impact of the project can be extended to the NGOs and social workers involved in rejoining efforts, providing direct support to their challenging work of reuniting homeless individuals with their estranged families.

Conclusion

The project aims to reunite homeless individuals with their families in India using AI-based location markers, open-source data, citizen science, and memory triggering protocols. By merging approaches from Social AI and STS, it impacts the lives of the homeless, supports NGOs and social workers, influences policies, and assists other vulnerable groups. It addresses homelessness and improves well-being in India.