

The Online Video Environment in India : A Survey Report

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iCOMMONS, the OPEN VIDEO ALLIANCE, and the CENTRE FOR INTERNET AND SOCIETY have initiated a research project which seeks to survey the online video environment in India and the opportunities this new medium presents for creative expression and civic engagement. This report seeks to define key issues in the Indian context and begins to develop a short-term policy framework to address them.

The basic assumption of this paper is that the online video medium should support creative and technical innovation, competition, and public participation, and that open source technology can help develop these traits. These assumptions are not elaborated upon here. Instead, this report looks at questions of “openness” that are not strictly technological; that are specific to video in India; and that provide points of entry to a simple policy framework.

The paper is organized in the following parts:

- „„The first chapter, **THE NATIONAL CHARACTER OF INDIAN VIDEO**, provides a brief historical timeline of events from the first screening of the Lumiere Brothers films in India in 1896, through the beginning of the twenty-first century. This chapter traces the traditional channels of dissemination of video content in India, and establishes the close and unique bond that the visual medium has formed with Indian society.
- „„The second chapter, **DIGITAL MEDIA AND NETWORK TRANSFORMATIONS**, looks at recent media transformations like the rise of the Internet and peer-to-peer networking, the proliferation of telecommunications, and other developments which form the backbone of the emerging online video medium. Peer-to-peer and associative networking provides a new means of content circulation throughout the country.
- „„The third chapter, **MAPPING CONTENT ON THE INTERNET**, traces the various types of visual content visible over these new networks, exploring case studies of videos circulating on the Internet which have raised new questions of censorship, freedom of speech, and the openness of the medium.
- „„The fourth chapter, **THE ‘OPEN VIDEO’ QUESTION**, creates a judgment-based framework to assess the openness of the medium. This chapter lays out a series of questions around the broad spectrum of openness,

viewed from various perspectives of access, participation, open source technology, and availability, with the intent of mapping the circumstances under which online video operates in India. Moreover, the chapter focuses on the structural limitations to video which can be addressed by policy, or even an absence of policy.

Whereas the report consciously makes an effort to explore not only transitory web videos but also films, the terms ‘video’ and ‘film’, in many parts are treated interchangeably. Although films and videos represent different traditional mediums of recording, the interest of this report in examining the ‘online video’ content in India, consists of both types of material—accessed perhaps with little distinction.

The scope of this paper is extremely broad and touches upon a wide variety of issues in India, where each area has a peculiar specificity of its situation—urban or rural, geographic, and so on. Links and references have been provided in the footnotes for background readings of these issues.

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