

## Digital Content Enters Governance Challenge

Governance of Digital Content in the era of Mass Participation is key to effective use of Internet and ICT tools in general. **By Syed S kazi**



The realm of Internet Governance is undergoing fundamental changes as it moves from a restrictive participation to an era of mass participation world wide. This emergence of Internet as the 'Vehicle of Transformative Change', is driven by the digital content, created by the multi-producers and consumed by citizen masses in the larger ICT framework. Today, there is unprecedented flow of content for usage with customised content for diverse and multitude user groups. There is flow of free content and protected content that co-exist. Countries have embarked on strategies and policies that recognise the criticality of digital content development.

Some are focusing on the power of digital content to transform social, economic indicators, while others are investing strategies and resource in digital content industry segment. There are others focused on digitization of culture and heritage and make it available for larger user audience. At national policy level the emphasis appears to be on the twin issues of- how government produces, procures and disseminates public sector digital content (including addressing demand in sparsely populated areas); and how government policies and regulations affect digital content markets i.e. encouraging infrastructure, content and service provision. At interna-

tional level such as OECD and WIPO, the focus is on thinking and policy around digital content and content standards, and is exploring issues related to social equity and the digital divide. For World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) the stress is on Intellectual and cultural property as central

issues in a digital content environment.

However, in most of the cases in countries like India, the thrust in any Digital Strategy that provides for a framework and focus for the government and other stakeholders is missing in the digital content realm. Despite the greater emphasis on issues like telecommunications reform, copyright law, e-learning, e-infrastructure is taking a central attention, the key concern remains in the absence of a digital strategy that con-

### Understanding Digital Content

Digital content is any content created, accessed, shared, used, or preserved in a digital format. It is changing the way we interact with one another, and demanding new delivery models for communities, business, and government. Digital content provides us with new abilities to discover and cherish our languages, cultures, histories and national identity. Digital content provides new opportunities to do business, work collaboratively and create innovative new products and services.

Digital content is 'intangible' rather than 'tangible', in that it takes up no physical space; it is not subject to wear and tear, retaining its original form regardless of how many times it is used; and it can be perfectly duplicated or reproduced a virtually limitless number of times for little cost. As a result, digital content requires a wholly different approach to its creation, organisation, distribution and preservation.

Source: <http://www.digitalstrategy.govt.nz/upload/Main%20Sections/Content/NATLIBDigitalContentStrategy.pdf>

verges on key aspects of digital technology and content. Achieving a right balance between technology and content is potentially more vital to achieving good digital outcomes for a country like India.

#### Why digital content governance has assumed importance?

Governing digital content in this Internet age is important for key reasons. Digital content has emerged as a key strategic enabler of the overall Digital Strategy for growth and development. creation of and access to content, including the applications that are vital for creating, using and sharing content, has become a compelling factor to digital connectivity, skills and security. The availability of unique digital content is driving demand for broadband and other key digital tools and platforms, improving the return on investment, and creating opportunities for social and commercial advantage.

#### Digital Content Challenges

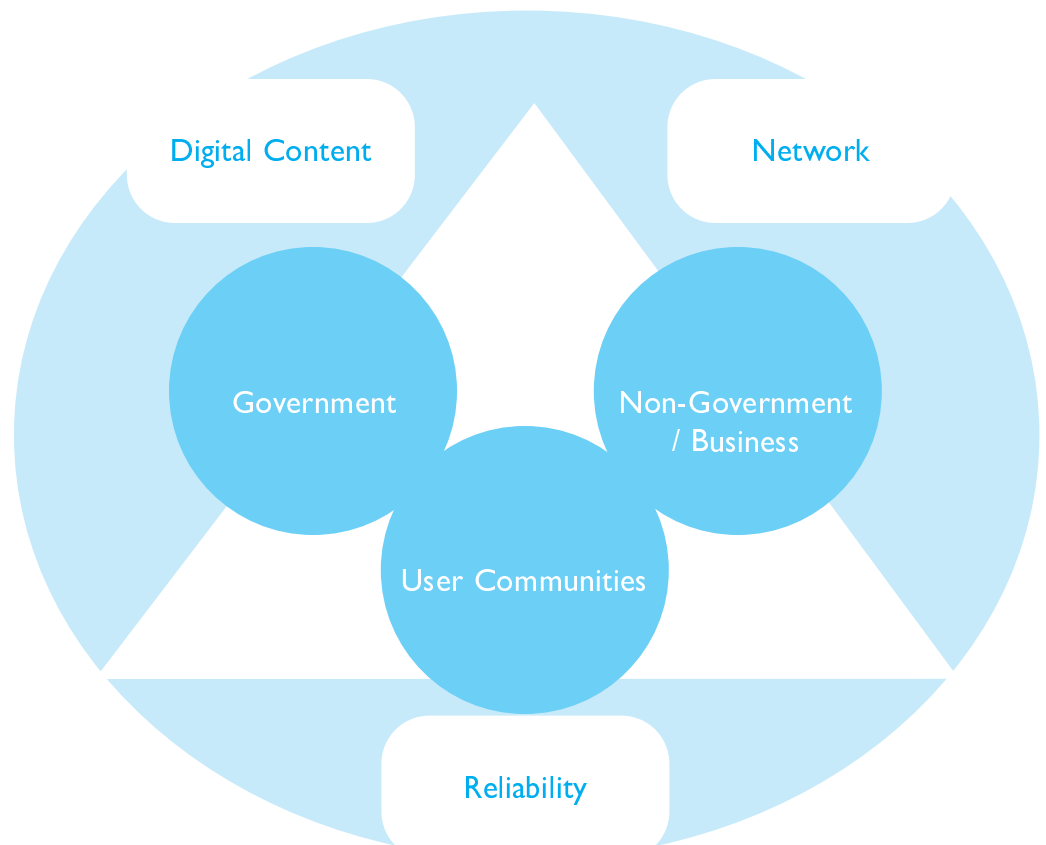
The identified challenges in digital content are many:

Adjusting to virtual demand and supply chain for digital content across multiple distribution channels in sync with reasonable bandwidth connections; Supporting and retaining digital innovation in terms of promotion of innovative digital content products and the skills and talent; Building up demand for digital content through appropriate mechanisms like making familiar content services available on the Internet; This

*"Digital content and digital delivery of content and information are becoming ubiquitous... Network convergence and widespread diffusion of high-speed broadband has shifted attention towards broadband content and applications that promise new business opportunities, growth and employment."*

- OECD, September 2005

The major task for a nation is to understand and act on the full potential of digital content in creating its digital future.



There is the need for a national strategy in those which lacks one such that promises to make a country visible and relevant in a connected digital world, and ensure that the country is oriented in being innovative, informed and capable as a nation in creating its digital future with a assured and confident digital ecosystem with a content-rich digital environment that facilitates its user citizens in engaged creating, discovering, sharing and using content in a digital form for varied fulfillment.

calls for development of broadband and digital spectrum based content applications made with specific users in mind ; Digital convergence that requires new models for creating, distributing and earning income from content, and ensuring that right conditions are fostered for the transition; Actual control of digital content in the hands of creators the way they want their content to be controlled, protected and shared ;

Protecting indigenous cultural property and knowledge through appropriate digital content strategy; Optimising digital content for search ; Maintaining content quality and relevance by making content affordable, easily searchable ; National priority in digitising content of national relevance ; Adding value to creative digital content works at both Commercial and public creators domain so that content gets richer by day;

Making public information more available for access and reference ; Creating a national network of connected digital programme of key institutions for rich digital experience ; Exclusion of communities from digital content purview and their eventual inclusion ; Adopting open interoperable standards and formats that overcomes the limit in migration of content and accessibility by different hardware and software ;

Having a licensing regime that nullifies the loss due to difficulties associated with managing rights. This calls for licensing methods that are cost effective and encourage use throughout the life of digital content ; Identifying national repositories for generating and preserving digital content and recognising their roles in content collection, preservation, access, management; Deepening engagements and raising awareness

## Framework for digital content governance

### Greater Visibility

An alternative framework for digital content strategy is about making the critical areas visible and relevant in a connected digital world. The issue areas have to be ensured that the current approach in governing digital content for development are innovative, informed and capable in handling hard and soft issues in Internet Governance including vital aspects of digital content keeping in mind diverse cultures and needs and yet vast scope in the digital future.

To that end, an important starting point for any digital content governing strategy is recognising that the value of content is in what it delivers and enables for end-users. The strategy must enable that the key digital content influences on the user environment is based on apt analysis of specific and generic digital content issues, and the digital content challenges that a society face.

### Need for a Digital Content Strategy

The development of a digital content strategy as a key action of a government's Digital Strategy is must. This including the creating of greater scope for the citizens to enjoy the benefits of the digital world through instant access to knowledge resources (whether cultural, scientific, heritage, archival, broadcasting or community); the economic benefits that flow from higher productivity; and government services that are customised to individual needs. The strategy must include for a successful digital future - Connection, Confidence and Content. While connection facilitate provision of high-speed broadband and digital platforms that will enable the transmission of larger amounts of more complex digital content, Confidence must ensure to use skills and a secure on-line environment and provide capability to engage in a digital world. The availability of user oriented content will help drive demand for broadband and digital television, improve the return on investment in capability, and create opportunities for community and commercial use.

### National Policy Documents

There is need for a set of national policy documents that govern digital content activities related to overall national digital strategy. Such a policy emphasis must outline how the institutions are going to handle the digital subject within its ambit and relevancy. Such a policy framework must have provisions:

- >> To develop a digital content strategy
- >> To plan coherent digital programmes
- >> To ensure and reinforce digital content traffic and accountability
- >> To demonstrate that specialised funds can and will be used responsibly and consistently in digital content promotion, outreach and safety
- >> To ensure that digital materials are made available for current and future use
- >> To assist public and non-governmental agencies in designing digitization programmes
- >> To make a comprehensive policy statement on the digital content and strategy
- >> To provide content security measures that ensures the protection of digital content during use and transactions.



among stakeholders in digital content matters, its relevance, necessity and preservation.

### Governing Issues

The key issues in digital content governance have been reemphasised time and again in recent times. There is still the hammering out efforts in scoping out the exact role of technology policy and strategy in regulating access to digital content. There are hurdles in digital technology and content protection measures and digital rights management without compromising the rights of the consumers and users to exercise legitimate rights, such as the user privacy, by giving content producers and generators legal protection for their activities. This raises the point of assigning the role of deciding such cases whether in the hands of the government agencies or an independent non-partial entity

without the feel of gradual privatization of the government's role in protecting intellectual property rights and in setting technical standards for digital content generation and exchange.

Lack of effective policy mechanism has to do with complexity in governing the digital content ecosystem via the Web. Often there is the lack of right policy documents to govern digital content activities within the institution. What is missing is policy thrust that outlines how the set of identified institutions are going to handle the digital content subject within its established domain and accountability. This includes measures to address the increasing security issues to ensure the protection of digital materials being operated, exchanged and transacted. This also includes the policy distinction in public and pri-

vate generated content.

Currently, the policy thrust in countries like India is very little on giving a small within the larger space in ICT and e-Governance framework. In other digital initiatives at non-public domain, it is not given the larger considerations as other aspects of ICTD are given. In many cases, digital content and governance are considered to be peripheral to any digital initiatives and thus in greater danger of being redundant. Overall, the gap in not having a digital content policy to bring considerations for digital governance up front and centre is largely evident.

### Two Possible Approaches

Two possible approaches to the development of a digital content policy can be considered. The first is to have a policy that narrowly focuses on the steps to ensure accessibility to the existing digital content within

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the overall digital strategy for development. The second approach is to have a more comprehensive policy cover areas including selection and licensing of content vendors, acquisition of digital technology and models to boost national digital content base, identifying national organisation to monitor and regulate content, creating a pool of content available with cultural specifics, taking care of content being accessed timely and with relevance and affordability.

### Policy Commitment

Regardless of any chosen approach for the digital content policy, it is important that the policy be fashioned for actual implementation and allegiance. The policy need not have only general principles which will not be effective in actively achieving digital content objectives. Instead, the content policy must contain concrete actions



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and activities that the institution is committed to implement and achieve. One key consideration for the nature of a policy statement should be that it is measurable and worth to evaluate its success of the digital program and work as guide for any further policy refinement, given the evolving nature of digital ecosystem. Concrete actions that can be measured should be incorporated into the document and roles for each action should be identified with assigned responsibilities and accountability.

#### **Leadership counts**

As with any development initiation, any digital content

strategy and approach must be guided by relevant and required leadership. Activities surrounding the creation, access, and preservation of digital content calls for right leadership and governance efforts. For example, Canadian Heritage has a strategy to support and develop Canadian cultural resources on the Internet. Through the Canadian Culture Online program and the Canadian Heritage Information Network, Canadian Heritage administers funding programs, policy initiatives, and R&D activities aimed at developing a critical mass Canadian cultural content on the Internet.

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Leadership and governance supports right approach to the management of digital resources with scope for standards and practices and experiences to be shared across sectors. This also facilitates right data management, content management, content services, and web content traffic management in congruence. This facilitates inter-sector approaches where the management of digital content sector becomes integrated and concretised. This could overcome the generic trend of putting digital content issues concerning the creation, access and preservation of digital resources subsumed

under the overarching information technology area of a country. Appropriate roles and responsibilities for the management of digital content resources then become clear and properly organised.

#### **Involving Multiple Stakeholders**

Digital content segment must be managed with the involvement of multiple stakeholders. This means that decisions regarding access or preservation or setting policy stamp on digital content are derived after prior distribution of these policy matters across a number of different stakeholders with diverging interests. This assumes important as stakeholders are spread across diverse spectrums, with some concerned with commercial value, others in their generation, and others with access to and re-use of digital material.

#### **India Needs a National Digital Content Strategy**

This calls for a national vision or strategy for digital content in India. This is more so if India wants to maintain and preserve the already launched digital framework in various ICT and e-Governance strategies. Such a content strategy will augment the rudimentary move to have meaningful, cultural specific and quality content that contributes to national growth and prestige, and reflects greater digital inclusion. Strong leadership and key stakeholders is needed to navigate India in the ever expanding digital world.

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