

# Digital Content trends in South Asia

The region as a whole has a long way to go in ideating and implementing qualitative and impact oriented ICT and digital content interventions. This is evident from more than 300 nominations that came to Manthan Award from the South Asian countries

PRITAM SINHA

The digital gaps within and across societies is largely evident from the existing digital content trends apart from other indicators. This divide is a 'revealing' one in entire South Asian region.

Despite the region having diverse interventions in ICT and digital domain, the focus on digital content, that drives the whole of digital trends, is missing at policy and advocacy levels. However, there are few emerging trends in this domain meeting user standards, expectations and satisfaction. This was demonstrated during the 2008 Manthan Award South Asia conclave held in last quarter. The Award platform provided a useful ground to undertake a content analysis in South Asian countries. The following is a brief on the findings that emerged out of the nomi-

nations and winning practices with key recommendations that emerged out of the 3 days consultation process in end quarter of 2008:

### Analysis Findings

The following is a country specific brief account of the trends in ICT and digital content as reflected through the process. The findings are classified under various heads of the Manthan Award platform.

### @ Afghanistan

The need to spread internet literacy and that too in local language in Afghanistan is a need felt reality. The lone Afghani nomination entitled 'Sea Monkey' - font developed in local Pashto language is a reflection of this. This is an indication that as English language is not popular, there is an urgent need to spread computer literacy and the local Pashto language as a

chosen language vehicle to spread ICT and digital content in the country even in remote areas.

### @ Bangladesh

A look at the nominations from our Eastern Neighbour and the instant comment could be - 'Bangladesh is a country of innovations despite constraints'. A testimony to this is the quality of nominations from the coastal country. The nominations spread across categories from e-education to community broadcasting and livelihood. The impressive point is six out of the 13 nominations from Bangladesh emerging as winners, making the country's success rate almost 50%.

All might not be winners, but Creative Canvas, Win Corporate and World Net, and Cell Bazaar all drew admiration for their e-content practices. Mention must be made of Cell Bazaar, the practice being lauded for its mall concept inscribed in the mobile applications for buying and selling. Overall, the diverse nominations and winning practices from Bangladesh is an eye opener to the fact that ICT and digital content could work wonders in a country like Bangladesh, besotted with multiple challenges in social, economic and political frontiers. This shows that the more difficult the living con-

ditions are, the better the human mind and efforts get directed towards surmounting the hardships.

### @ Nepal

Nepal sent 3 nominations which were in the categories of Community Broadcasting, E-Localisation and E-Culture and Development. Out of those, Equal Access won in the first category because of its inclusive approach to make information available wherever the end user might be staying. The work being done by the other two nominees is also commendable. The nominations from Nepal is expected to scale up by next year, once the country settles politically and is better positioned to use ICT and digital content innovatively. Otherwise, Nepal desires more of ICT and digital content interventions beyond the Community radio networks to have a multi-pronged approach towards technology facilitated development.

### @Pakistan

Pakistan is a country that would require a wholesome approach in ICT and digital content practices. The country is still to have qualitative as well as quantitative practices in ICT. For Manthan Award there were two nominations from Pakistan in e-health and e-Culture and entertainment. This could be a point to demonstrate that the country

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has vast scope to ideate and experiment in ICT and digital content practices to address its own social, economic and governance challenges. An integrated approach towards development in Pakistan must have technology and digital inputs as fundamental elements of holistic and all round growth for the communities.

#### @ Sri Lanka

The nominations from Sri Lanka gives an interesting picture of a country making hard hitting efforts in deployment and usage of ICT and digital content tools and applications despite political and social turmoil at times. The island nation had the maximum number of nominations with the count of 18. Three of these won in different categories. It must be brought to notice that most of the nominations, as far as their work is concerned, were in some way or the other linked to the ethnic violence that has engulfed Sri Lanka for long now. Other issues of development have also affected the ICT and digital content initiatives. The winners, be it Gemidiriya Foundation, Dambadeniya Development Foundation Community Radio or Information Accessibility for the Print Disabled, have taken excellent initiative to improve the lives of those in need with the help of innovative means. The

other nominations also deserve praise for its efforts to bridge social, cultural and economic gaps.

#### @ Bhutan

Although the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan was represented with a single e-News nominee, the landlocked country has a long way to go with more development work and innovative use of technology.

[www.Bhutannewsonline](http://www.Bhutannewsonline) is a good effort by Bhutanese citizens in the USA and yet more needs to be done to facilitate ICT and digital practices in the Himalayan Kingdom to overcome geographical, social and economic divides.

#### @Maldives

Maldives is a typical case of a country with little ICT and digital practices. There was only a lone nomination from the Oceanic country. Maldives is a challenging case for the entire ICT fraternity as to how to facilitate and connect the island country and its citizens into various ICT and digital networks and activities for greater intra and inter information and communication framework

#### @ India

India's diversity is equally reflected in its various ICT and digital content practices. The Manthan Award for four years now have witnessed to diverse ICT and content prac-

tices from India, the Award so far was India specific. For this year, there were 226 nominations out of which only 22 nominations were short listed and considered for recognition, placing the success rate at roughly 10%. This indicates the difficult and quality testing of nominations by the Grand Jury of the Manthan Award. This also reflects the fundamental point that despite numerous ICT and digital content practices, the quality interventions can only provide the much needed input in giving out result and impact oriented output.

#### Long way to go

All ICT and digital content interventions in South Asia are nothing but recent trends of one - two decades in experimenting and experiencing in old and new technology tools and applications to meet diverse and multiple challenges across communities in one of the most underdeveloped regions of the world. The outcomes are equally diverse in terms of its impact and utility in meeting expectations of the common man in addressing their day-to-day needs. In this, the role of the public, private and the civil society agencies have been active in enabling and facilitating technology tools towards development and empowerment. In all various ICT led development efforts, the challenges have been

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equally glaring and hard. The turmoil witnessed is in social, political, cultural and economic domains all of which have contributed in slowing down various technology approaches.

Irrespective of all these, the region as whole has a long way to go in ideating and implementing qualitative and impactful ICT and digital content interventions. What is desperately required is a multi pronged approach at all levels including at policy levels leading to a desirable and result oriented ICT and digital content interventions. On top of this, involving the stakeholders is a must with the needs and voices of the communities taking the centre stage in designing and implementing any ICT and digital programme. It is ultimately the communities who really decide on what and how of technology must determine their fate and needs.

Content analysis done by Pritam Sinha, Research Associate, Digital Empowerment Foundation, New Delhi. He can be contacted at [pritam@defindia.net](mailto:pritam@defindia.net)

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