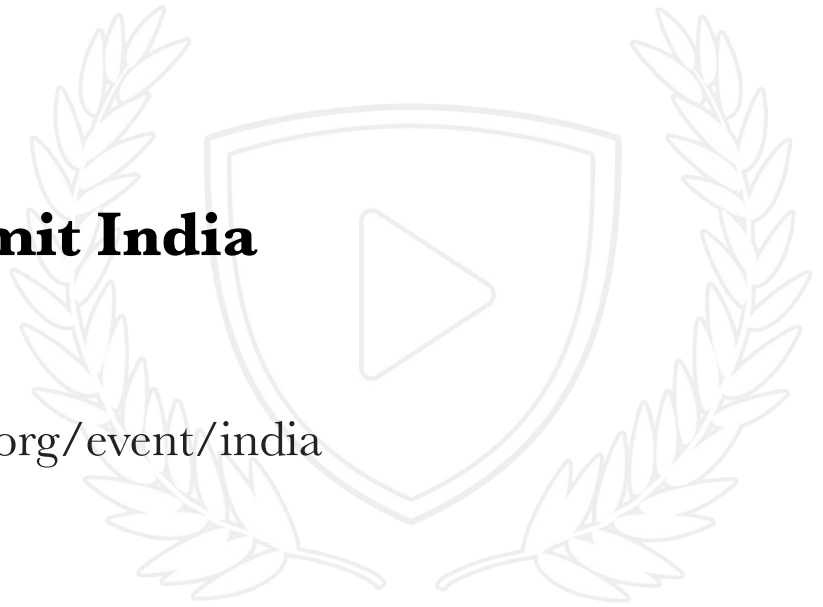


Open Video Summit India

December 15, 2009

Bangalore, India

<http://openvideoalliance.org/event/india>



Meeting summary

The Open Video Summit in Bangalore, India brought together approximately thirty participants from diverse backgrounds: academia, the free software movement, film, technology, and activism. The group spent the day exploring the issues surrounding online video at large, as well as factors specific to India. The event was organized by iCommons, the Centre for Internet and Society, India; the Open Video Alliance; and the Magic Lantern Foundation. The event was made possible with support from the Ford Foundation.

The goals of the event were threefold. First, to create a network of people and stakeholder organizations to enable future coordination around research and actions. Second, to create a framework for open video in India—a working conception of the areas of interest in India. Finally, the meeting served as a prelude to the research that will grow out of the iCommons/OVA partnership with CIS India. The key areas of focus were technology and sound IP/telecommunications policy for video, though this meeting was primarily for setting a framework in which to research these issues.

The meeting facilitator, OVA general coordinator Ben Moskowitz, opened the discussion with a general definition of open video. Open video is “the movement to promote free expression and innovation in online video through open standards, open source, and participatory culture.” Like the free software, free culture, and open source movements, it draws from a set of assumptions about the transformative potential of information technologies—and the idea that the digital medium enables people to become active cultural producers, as opposed to passive consumers. There is also more narrow definition

of open video: that the basic technologies for transmission of video must be open source and their usage royalty-free. The relevant areas of interest here are HTML5 and standardization of codecs and delivery.

Another set of concerns relative to open video describe the levels of access to cultural materials, and the freedom to use these materials in transformative ways. Yet the connectivity environment in India cannot yet support sustained national interactions with online video. The idea that a lone producer can reach millions through self-distribution online is perhaps a ways off here—for now, routing video through the net is less feasible than distribution in local communities. Thus, open video in India has less to do with the ability of individuals to express themselves with fluid multimedia, and more to do with the ability of communities to take ownership of their own histories.

Early morning

The summit opened with a series of short talks from participants on projects and movements related to open video. These presentations were meant to stimulate participants and touch on areas of interest in technology, intellectual property, and telecommunications policy.

Dean Jansen, Participatory Culture Foundation

Jansen presented PCF's Universal Subtitles project. The aim of the project is to make open and collaborative subtitling possible for any video on the internet.

The state of subtitles on the web is poor. There are two main problems—first, that the subtitle files are atomized and reside in inaccessible pockets. Second, that it is tedious for most users to create subtitles.



Universal Subtitles Firefox extension

The project has three components: first, an open subtitles lookup standard. Second, a distributed system of repositories for storing subtitles—in essence, a community database to store translations. Lastly, a set of fast and easy transcription and alignment tools, with a simple interface for users to quickly generate subtitle files. PCF is currently building a

Firefox extension to queue and load subtitles for any video, but these features could also be achieved with a simple javascript app, or even built into custom hardware and services. The key is to build an open ecosystem for collaborative subtitles.

This ecosystem approach to solving the fragmented state of subtitles has a few benefits: First, subtitles can be created and queued anywhere. Second, anyone can participate, drawing users into a collaborative process. Following Jansen's presentation, participants discussed several of the potential applications in linguistically rich India, and how such tools might be deployed to improve rural education.

Nagarjuna G, Free Software Foundation India

Nagarjuna spoke on the role of software in a free society. He takes a long-term, telescoping view of history and the implications of adopting proprietary systems for recording, storing, and distributing data.

“What is the root of the nature of the road blocks that are being laid by the proprietary society on the way to free society, and how do we clear them?” he asks. To answer this, Nagarjuna poses an inverted question—how *would* one introduce roadblocks to a free society? First, he concludes, business interests would want us to believe that knowledge is power. They would build systems for digitizing knowledge that do not belong to the public domain—systems that are effectively private ciphers. Second, they would seek to institute legal protections that guard against unauthorized use of the cipher, whether those uses are commercial, academic, or exploratory (in fact, some current laws prohibit even trying to understand how these ciphers work). Because they can legalize and normalize these schemes, they effectively control the protection, storing and distribution of power.

In the context of video, one example of this phenomenon is the system of proprietary codecs. Codecs (short for “compression-decompression”) are the technology that enable users to shrink raw video files to a size that is appropriate for distribution over the web. The industry standard codecs, like H.264, belong to a private consortium, and distributors must pay license fees to use them. Moreover, they maintain a large patent pool, which makes the development of competing codecs very difficult. Aside from making distribution more expensive and difficult for small broadcasters, this arrangement makes the development of an interdependent ecosystem of video compression technology much more difficult and expensive. The consortium thus exercises control over the use of web video as a tool for communication.

In the long-run, private enclosure of basic web technologies (which are, at root, reading and writing technologies) presents a number of practical and ethical problems. If the system of proprietary technology continues to expand, Nagarjuna contends, we will in several generations have a historical analogue to slaves being prohibited from reading and writing.

Namita Malhotra, PAD.MA and the Alternative Law Forum

Malhotra presented PAD.MA, the Public Access Digital Media Archive. She explained the project as both archive and tool for multi-layered recontextualization of video and film.

“PAD.MA is an online archive of densely text-annotated video material, primarily footage and not finished films. The entire collection is searchable and viewable online, and is free to download for non-commercial use. PAD.MA is a way of opening up a set of images, intentions and effects present in video footage, and resources that conventions of video-making, editing and spectatorship have tended to suppress, or leave behind. This expanded treatment then points to other, political potentials for such material, and leads us into lesser-known territory for video itself... beyond the finite documentary film or the online video clip.



The screenshot shows the PAD.MA website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Pad.ma' logo, 'Back to Videos', 'View: Info', 'Sort: Name', 'Find: All', and a search box. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'Bar Dancers Case: Meeting of the Bar Owners Association II' and the year '2005'. The main content area features a video player with a thumbnail of a man speaking at a microphone. To the right of the video player is a text block titled 'Bar Dancers Case: Meeting of the Bar Owners Association II' dated July 31, 2005. The text describes a public meeting organized by the Bar owners association against a proposed ban on dancing in bars in Maharashtra. It details the historical context, the government's proposal, the opposition from women's groups and unions, the implementation of the ban on Independence Day, and the subsequent challenge in the Bombay High Court and the Supreme Court. Below the text are buttons for 'Download' and 'Help'. At the bottom of the page, there is a metadata section with fields for Director, Source, Collection, Category, Contributor, Created, Published, and Last Modified, followed by 'Editor' and 'Map' buttons.

Public Access Digital Media Archive

The design of the archive makes possible various types of ‘viewing’, and contextualisation: from an overview of themes and timelines to much closer readings of transcribed dialogue and geographical locations, to layers of “writing” on top of the image material. Descriptions, keywords and other annotations have been placed on timelines by both archive contributors and users. At the moment, PAD.MA has 468 ‘events’ on video, mostly from Mumbai and Bangalore. This adds up to 8 days 17 hours 37 minutes 41 seconds of fully transcribed video footage, which we expect to grow to more than 400 hours by early 2010.

The PAD.MA project is initiated by a group consisting of oil21.org from Berlin, the Alternative Law Forum from Bangalore, and three organisations from Mumbai: Majlis, Point of View and Chitrakarkhana/CAMP. PAD.MA is based on the Oxdb framework.”

Late morning

After lunch, the meeting facilitators collected suggestions on topics of discussion, which were categorized and arranged into discussion groups.

The summit broke into four sub-groups roughly aligned around broad interest areas that were collaboratively defined.



Organization of thematic groups

Education and Access to Knowledge

The consensus of the group was that primary education in India is still treated as a traditional process where there is an inequality between teachers and students. Asking questions is not encouraged and exams are based on rote memorization. These factors discourage real learning, and the result is that the system rewards unskilled reproduction. A goal for open video advocates should be to reduce the gap between domain expertise and software expertise, because currently students are taught to simply use software as opposed to critical application of software in pedagogy.

The idea is not to replace classrooms, but to augment the process of education and development with video. One example is Dhoodhwala (Milkman), a collaborative effort to improve educational material and videos by sharing, indexing, subtitling, transcribing, archiving and annotating. Another tactic is encouraging youth to author and share educational material using simple devices like mobiles or webcams, which are far more accessible and common than laptops and camcorders. This format lends itself to non-internet connected youth and families via Bluetooth and LAN dissemination.

Video Distribution

The distribution group began with an ethical premise, that openness does not necessarily lead to equitability. In recreating community structures online, how can leaders ensure

both justice and equal access? The discussion also occurred against the backdrop of an immature network backbone. Discussions of potential business and community models for distribution must take into account the relative dearth of bandwidth, which will necessitate creative solutions until there is more public investment in end-user net infrastructure.

Some statistics were shared by industry participants (though they are in need of sourcing and verification). The middle class of net users is relatively small. Broadband penetration, in geographic terms, is less than 20%. Only 17 million or so Indians have broadband, mostly DSL. The cheapest DSL subscriptions are not priced affordably (in Delhi, it costs about 499 rupees per month, about the same as the power bill). Moreover, the connections are not always unlimited. There is frequently a data cap—1GB, 8GB, and so on—which makes the buffet of video content available to developed countries less accessible to Indians. Furthermore, the threshold for what constitutes “broadband” is much lower—256-784 Kbps, for instance, is considered broadband. There is lots of stuttering and pre-buffering. YouTube drags.

New public investment in infrastructure is one way to quickly improve access to network. The state-run BSNL, for instance, is the third largest mobile operator, and has been successful in democratizing access to cellular technology. There are a few isolated spots—really, blips in the national network—that provide public Wi-Fi. Access to advanced broadband may one day become a populist touchstone—the National Rural Employment Guarantee Agency, for example, may have a role to play. For now, broadband access is inconsistent at best. Finally, while there are very few if any public facilities that provide broadband access, cyber cafes are reasonably popular. To bridge the bandwidth gap will require some social innovation along with infrastructural investment.

Despite this, the common uses of the internet are changing in India. Until recently, net access was a necessity because of work, email and so on. Increasingly, the net is a medium for entertainment; social networking, YouTube, movies, porn, gaming. Yet broadband investment is neglected because wireless is a growth market. Mobile operators in India are most profitable in the world. Until there are 800 million potential subscribers, offered one participant, broadband will be relegated to businesses: “There is simply more money to be had in the wireless market. University of Michigan professor of business C.K. Prahalad is fond of saying that the bottom of pyramid is where you find the most lucrative markets. Someday, we will find the threshold where serving broadband will be extremely lucrative, and growth will occur relatively quickly.”

On the supply side, where content is a motivator for broadband development, there are still substantial roadblocks to self distribution. Magic Lantern shared its experience as one of the only Indian NGOs to distribute its documentaries online. “Of course we must buy server space, which is expensive. It’s passable for 10-15 features, but we have over 200 films. At the most we can put up trailers—and full resolution economics are very difficult.” One solution worth exploring is resource sharing with other small producers, a kind of interest group agglomeration. Pad.ma points the way toward community uploading archives, perhaps even located geographically. A modular software for archiving and storage might be installed in terminals at the market, for example, where producers and consumers can visit and have digital interactions and even monetary transactions.

“Pooling can also be a solution for compensating producers,” offered one participant. “It’s possible to have open video, sponsored by businesses, but governed by a community—ad syndication networks that underwrite 15 minutes of video per each ad.” This could be the net equivalent of NDTV (New Delhi television),” offered another participant. “NDTV started as great alternative to the state-run news and worked similarly.”

India is host to many incredibly diverse communities, some concentrated in geographic space and others linked only culturally. A robust online video medium enables hyperlocal media created by and tailored specifically for niche communities.

*“At the most we can put up trailers
—and full resolution economics
are very difficult.”*

-Magic Lantern Foundation

User-generated and amateur content is almost always relevant and interesting to a small universe. But in India, hyperlocal and context-sensitive media can be a preferred model for production and distribution. A popular example for students of participatory media is the story of *Malegaon ke Sholay*. There is a parallel film industry in the village of Malegaon, which takes existing intellectual properties and remakes them for a local audience. *Malegaon ke Sholay* uses local actors and familiar locales to retell the story of Bollywood’s biggest hit. Malegaonians love to go to the theater and see friends and family in the film. But it is probably less interesting outside of Malegaon.

For the first time, the internet may open tiny markets, such as the parallel film industry in Malegaon, and even ones that are not unified in geographic space. The familiar long-tail

thesis might actually play out in a more substantive way in linguistically and culturally diverse India. Hyperlocality is potentially a solution to sustainability, preserving indigenous cultures and values, linguistic diversity; censorship; and enabling communities to take control of their own histories. Or perhaps these stories will make no money. No matter; they will at least find niche audiences. Open video potentially strengthens cultural preservation through education; community hubs for uploading and archiving content are potentially good ways of facilitating this kind of exchange.

Take the story of Savita Bhabi, the lusty pornographic cartoon character, and her sudden disappearance from the Indian web...

Of seemingly heightened interest in India is the difficulty of separating the wheat from the chaff. “How do people find and get what they need?”, “How do we make meaning of the glut of available content?”, “How do we reconstitute meaning, or regulate communications on the internet?” These strong concerns are perhaps a reflection of a different traditions of discourse, or perhaps the early part of a cycle in the internet development of every society. This would be a very interesting topic for further research. India’s democracy is similar to Western democracies, yet different in many ways. The tone, tenor, and shape of political violence; the enforcement of community standards; the role of the government in mediating public discourse, and different conceptions of “protected speech” are all inflections that may yield interesting observations. Take the story of Savita Bhabi, the lusty pornographic cartoon character, and her sudden disappearance from the Indian web. The Department of Telecom’s net filtering actions are not transparent; they are usually politically and culturally motivated, and content just disappears. “They are *very* sensitive about visual material,” offered one participant. Video content may be politically problematic.

And so, tempered by technological, economic, and cultural challenges, online video distribution is in a very unique crossroads. The vision of the multimedia citizen, who participates in a daily pastiche of video interactions, continually recontextualizing and using other's voices, in real time and delayed—cannot yet descriptive of the Indian experience. Video is more and more a primarily vocabulary, but this vocabulary is still on the horizon for India.

Yet despite the difficulties, representatives from Magic Lantern Foundation expressed hope that perhaps India is near the tipping point for the rollout of network: “YouTube

really becomes popular in 2006, and we have Cisco predicting that 90% of internet traffic in 2013 is video. Things can happen very quickly.”

Technology and Free Software

Free software is very important to support local producers and educational missions with video. Piracy of paid solutions is an open secret, but to sustain broad civic education the government will need to embrace public investment in the development and distribution free software for video.

Yet free software is immature when it comes to video. First, there is a lack of good and efficient offline video editing software. The only full solutions are Cinelerra and Kino, though participants agreed that there is probably not a professional-grade FOSS video editing solution available yet. Online video editing is far away from being good. How good are free software tools for making and editing videos? Are open technologies easy to use?

Open and royalty-free playback technologies are also immature, but essential to ensure that producers are barred from speaking because they cannot afford to make royalty payments. A major challenge is building an ecosystem that supports open and royalty-free formats. Video devices that did not support open video formats were seen as a problem and there was some discussion around this. Finally, the problem of bandwidth and the ability to watch videos online in India was discussed in detail. Some possible solutions discussed were intelligent caching in local networks, encoding at lower bit rates, and improved routers.

Intellectual Property and Film

The group primarily addressed issues of access and how they interplay with intellectual property laws.

Piracy was a major thread. “Things have changed rapidly in the recent years where access has become very easy,” offered one participant. “The way we access videos, music, and other material today was just not possible before.” Furthermore, attitudes toward piracy are still evolving: “It is generally considered an act of piracy if I download stuff which is normally available outside, but downloading a Chinese or Japanese film may not be an act of piracy since the film is not normally available in the market.” Participants discussed local protectionism, and the prevailing belief among law enforcement that pirating

Kannada films is a worse kind of piracy. “You cannot buy pirated Kannada films easily—there is a popular belief that it is ‘our’ industry and the film chambers here are pretty strict.”

Piracy is a *goonda* (“thug”) act in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka today. There are continually TV channels which are banned by the government due to piracy reasons. What about pirated online access? It is difficult since bandwidth is so limited, but Mininova (a popular torrent site for filesharing) is among the top 50 most accessed websites in India today.

Why is piracy so widespread in India? What informs attitudes? One interpretation is that the local governments lack the will or capacity to rein in piracy, and that it is a symptom of underdevelopment. But the participants in the group almost unanimously rejected that view, urging that developmentalism is a poor lens with which to view the situation. “Look at the comparative purchasing power of US and India,” offered a participant. “By purchasing an original DVD, an average Indian would be spending around 20% of his yearly salary.” In some cases, access is so difficult that piracy is an imperative. There are not cultural institutions like libraries available to many Indians. The topic of access, piracy, and intellectual property regimes in India is much too rich to do justice here, but there is an emerging literature (much of it from CIS) on these issues.

The group also spent some time discussing the cultural frontiers of video. One topic of discussion was the Mysore Mallige sex scandal, in which a couple took a video of themselves having sex. When they gave it to the shopkeeper for editing and formatting, the shopkeeper put it online and it created a scandal. This is a fairly routine story in the West, but Indians are generally more culturally conservative, and these are brand new issues to be grappled with. The sudden explosion of democratic media may have much greater cultural consequences in a place like India, when contrasted with societies that have had a longer incubation period for democratic media.

Lastly, and perhaps most theoretically, the participants explored the interesting idea that Westerners might use intellectual property regimes to limit adaptations of their creations inside folk culture. Storytelling, myth, and even political reality are more regulated than ever before. Will the importation of Western IP regimes hurt the ability of communities to take ownership of their own histories?

Afternoon

Reports of groups

The thematic groups presented insights from their discussions.

Synthesis by Nishant Shah

(Director of Research portfolio, Centre for Internet and Society)

The one day Open Video Summit organized by the Centre for Internet & Society, iCommons, Open Video Alliance, and Magic Lantern, brought together a range of stakeholders to discuss the possibilities, potentials, mechanics and politics of Open Video. Nishant Shah, who participated in the conversations, was invited to summarize the impressions and ideas that ensued in the day.

The notion of free and open is under great debate even under that, and I think even when you side with a camp, there are going to be further splinters. There are many ways of defining the free and open, and I think that the tension, rather than being resolved, needs to be sustained and creatively perpetrated to keep an internal checks and balances on not getting carried away with it. All the groups did indeed circle around this in different, often tangential ways—that there is need to define, variously and almost endlessly, in defining the context of the free that we are dealing with.

Open video, in that matter, has gone through different iterations, and I think it is nice that different stakeholders have defined it variously, and also looked at the problems that it might lead to. However, for the sake of synthesis, I am going to let you have your own idea of free and open but instead look at five key words which have emerged, in my selective hearing, through the day: Access, Archive, Share, Remix, Repurpose. And it is these five that we need to now imbricate these concepts across different thematic that emerged in the groups today.

Access has been one primary question that almost everybody dealt with; access has its legacies in the open and free culture movements, where technological access, dealing with questions of open standards and content, of bandwidth and infrastructure. More interestingly, in an emerging information society like India, there are other concerns of language, access, privilege, bandwidth, education and so on. To contextualize access and to put it into different perspectives is something that different participants have voiced the need for.

Archive is a preoccupation with most people because archiving has close relationships with knowledge and subsequently retrieval and usage. If knowledge is being digitized so

that it is made accessible to different people, there are older questions of representation, voice, empowerment, participation, ethics, privacy and ownership crop up. In education, archiving has to do with the curricula building and knowledge production. In networking, collaboration and film making, it is the kind of issues that pad.ma is trying to tackle with. It also leads to notions of access, distribution and so on.

“Sharing” almost fully defines the spirit of the open and free culture movements. There is a need to understand and explore what sharing means. When does it infringe laws and what kind of regulation needs to be advocated so that sharing becomes possible. How does one overcome questions of piracy, stealing, and intellectual property reform? More interestingly, what do we share and who do we share it with? Tools by which sharing leads to innovation? How does it lead to new participation and learning practices and pedagogies? What kind of open distribution models and networks can be built up?

Remix has been of great value because it means that you are being converted into some sort of a stakeholder or a contributor to the process. Networking and nodes, network-actor, collaborator, peer-to-peer—the possibility of looking at questions of internet and digital traces is interesting. Or imagine that the act of sharing is also a remix. Sometimes just putting an idea into new contexts and making it available to newer constituencies can also be looked upon as remixing. Remix as a knowledge production aesthetic and mechanics seems to have emerged.

Repurpose is my additional reading of something that perhaps needs no mention to this group, but nonetheless needs flagging. The fact remains, that the technology is not a solution in itself. It is a tool that enables the solutions which one is seeking for. The processes, paradigms, protocols and practices are indeed shaped and mediated by technologies and there are new solution possibilities which are produced. However, there still seem to be anxieties, concerns, questions and problems which are cropping up and need to be addressed outside of technology but within technology ecologies.

Partial list of attendees

Prayas	Abhinav	Srishti School of Art, Science and Technology/Rhizome featured
Sunil	Abraham	Centre for Internet and Society
Shaina	Anand	Chitrakarkhana
Sanjay	Bhangar	Pad.ma
Uday	Bhaskar	
Siddarth	Chadha	Centre for Internet and Society
Tupur	Chatterjee	Breakthrough TV
Ranjan	De	Magic Lantern Foundation
Nagarjuna	G	FSF India
Tatagatham	Goutham	R.V. College of Engineering (Department of Master of Computer applications)
Mahesh	Hanumanthappa	HP Microsoft & VMware Solution Center
Anna	Keune	Media Lab/University of Art and Design Helsinki/ Srishti School of Art, Design + Technology
Namita	Malhotra	Pad.ma/Alternative Law Forum
Kartik	Mehta	Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi
Chandita	Mukherjee	Comet Media Foundation
Geetha	Narayanan	Srishti School of Art Design and Technology and Mallya Aditi International School
Renuka	Prasad	Bangalore University
Prashanth	Ramdas	Gujarat National Law University
Mischelle	Rebello	AOL India
Ashish	Sen	World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters and VOICES
Nishant	Shah	Centre for Internet and Society
Shahjahan	Siraj	Director, Machizo Multimedia Communication
Shreyas	Srinivasan	Geodesic
M.	ThiyagaRajan	Motvik
Suhas	V	R.V. College of Engineering (Department of Master of Computer applications)
Uma	V.Chandru	International Institute for Art, Culture and Democracy
Megha	Vishwanath	
Paromita	Vohra	Magic Lantern distributed filmmaker
Fred	Yeboah	Advanced Information Technology Institute (AITI), (Ghana-India Kofi Annan Centre of Excellen