



JOURNAL OF MASS MEDIA AND MANAGEMENT

ISSN: 3049-3021 (Online)

Journal Website: www.jmmm.in

Research Article

SR: JMMM/09/2026
ISSUE:03

Reconfiguring Media Practice Education in India: Evidence from Online Pedagogy during the Digital Shift

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Abstract

Online education moved rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving media education in India in a state of reconfiguration. The media programmes, traditionally based on hands-on studio work, field production, teamwork, and embodied learning, were forced into digitally mediated pedagogies with inadequate infrastructure. This paper will consider negotiating the digital turn by Indian media educators and learners based on a large-scale qualitative dataset that included interviews with media faculty ($n = 75$), student focus groups ($n = 109$), and institutional documents from 12 universities. The results not only indicate profound structural problems, such as unequal access to devices and connectivity, limited viability of teaching real-world production skills online, and dependency on platforms, but also mention pedagogical possibilities, such as mobile journalism (MoJe), virtual newsrooms, cloud-based editing, a hybrid assessment Model, and increased use of open-source production tools. The paper claims that the digital shift revealed old inequalities in media education, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, new competencies aligned with modern media industries are being built at a rapid pace. The study provides a framework for grounding the rethinking of media education by analysing institutional responses and teaching practice informed by hybrid, flexible, and context-sensitive pedagogies.

Keywords : Media education, online learning, digital pedagogy, media practice, digital literacy, mobile journalism, virtual classrooms.

Introduction

Media education in India was defined by the abrupt shift to online learning in March 2020. With universities moving to Zoom, Google Meet, and institutional LMS platforms, instructors and students were forced to grapple with some basic challenges: Can the media production, editing, field reporting, sound design, and collaborative storytelling, the heart of media practice in the pedagogy of higher education, be taught effectively online? What changes to pedagogy occurred? What are the impacts of inequity of access? What are some of the lessons that the sector can learn from future hybrid models?

Although there is increasing academic attention to pedagogy in online media worldwide (Hodges et al., 2020; Ghode, 2021; Buckingham, 2020), the Indian context has been understudied. The nature of higher education in India has been confronted by considerable digital disparities, inconsistent institutional capacities, a heterogeneous mix of state-run and privately owned universities, and a rapidly growing media industry powered by digital platforms. The distinct ecosystem has provided insights not represented in Western-centric literature. Although there is increasing academic attention to pedagogy in online media worldwide (Hodges et al., 2020; Ghode, 2021; Buckingham, 2020), the Indian context has been understudied. The nature of higher education in India has been confronted by considerable digital disparities, inconsistent institutional capacities, a heterogeneous mix of state-run and privately owned universities, and a rapidly growing media industry powered by digital platforms. The distinct ecosystem has provided insights not represented in Western-centric literature. The article explores both difficulties and developments, arguing that the digital turn has been disruptive and has prompted pedagogical rethinking with long-term effects on media practice education .

Literature Review

Education Media practice education takes on an experiential, collaborative, embodied learning process in production, editing, reportage, sound work, and multi-modal storytelling (Deuze, 2006; Kolb, 2014). According to the researchers, it is a learning-by-doing field in which students acquire tacit knowledge through practice, in-situ experiments, and feedback (Raessens, 2017; Flew, 2019). Clustering around the pedagogy is the studio environment, which includes physical, social, and sensory (Ettema, 2020). Online education disputes these beliefs. Practical media skills are dependent on presence, materiality, proximate collaboration, and immediate troubleshooting (Caldwell, 2018). The researcher states that the digital mediation practice has a dangerous tendency to turn the practice-based courses into theoretical ones (Buckingham, 2020). Instead, others emphasize possibilities of platform literacy and digital workflows (Mares, 2021).

Global Scholarship on Online Media Pedagogy

Studies that took place and post-COVID-19 identify recurrent issues, including limited access to digital infrastructure (Dhawan, 2020); digital fatigue and cognitive overload (Nortvig et al., 2018); inequalities in home learning setups (Jandric et al., 2020); challenges in assessment (Watermeyer et al., 2021); reduced cooperation with peers (Rapanta et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there was also innovation: virtual newsrooms (Shabbir, 2021), the use of cloud computing in editing practice (Ritchin, 2020), and a move towards mobile journalism (Westlund & Quinn, 2018). The experts believe that online pedagogies may foster platform literacy, data literacy, digital archiving, and storytelling in the social media ecosystem (Couldry & Hepp, 2018; Jenkins et al., 2016).

Indian scholarship

Among Indian researchers, there are also problems of bandwidth disparity, device scarcity, and heterogene-

ity in institutional readiness (Nayyar et al., 2020; Rani & Babu, 2021). According to studies, media students found it problematic to access editing software, cameras, and studio equipment at home (Kumar & Sharma, 2022). Nevertheless, there are records of innovative modifications, such as smartphone-based production and asynchronous project-based learning (Raghavan, 2021). Most of the research, however, is limited to single institutions or small samples. The limited multi-site, practice-based research in India that specifically examines how media teaching was reconstituted in the digital turn is limited. This article fills that gap.

Context: Online Media Education in India

The Indian higher education digital transformation occurred against the background of complicated socio-technical inequalities, institutional heterogeneity, and changing regulatory frameworks. This shift was unique to media education, whose already delicate balance between theory and practice was impacted. The contextual dynamics that influenced the media pedagogy of online media can be understood in terms of three dimensions that are related to the other two, and that are: structural digital divides, institutional preparedness levels, and the changing regulatory and industrial environment in which the media practice is applied. The first and most widely recognized is the continuation of India's digital divide, which played a significant role in how faculty and students navigated the transition. Even though India has experienced a tremendous increase in smartphone use and internet penetration, these benefits have not been distributed equally. Metropolitan students usually possess secure Internet connections and have their own gadgets. However, the representatives of Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns, and especially the rural residents, tended to rely on prepaid mobile data, ad hoc networks, and communal gadgets. These differences could not be considered only as technical inconveniences; they transformed the pedagogical opportunities of online media learning. Students who relied entirely on

smartphones struggled to work with editing software, multimedia production, and large video files. Most of them did not have access to a quiet study space, and female students complained more than others about the household responsibilities that weighed on them during synchronous classes. Those inequalities led to unequal learning processes in one classroom, and some forms of viable preparation became practically unavailable to some parts of the student population. Although the availability of affordable data plans made India a mobile-first country, the dilemma between affordability and accessibility was a hallmark. The other significant factor that determined the quality of online media education was institutional preparedness. The media schools in India are highly diverse in terms of technical facilities, faculty training, finances, and administrative potential. Relatively better transitions were made by private universities that previously had a learning management system (LMS), such as Moodle or Canvas, installed and that included synchronous classes, discussion forums, assessment modules, and other digital submission portals. Conversely, many publicly owned universities did not have stable platforms at first. They also reverted to the ad hoc solution, including uploading PDFs, posting Google Drive links, and using simple video conferencing software to conduct classes. The faculty of various institutions indicated that they lacked centralised technical support, minimal training in digital pedagogy, and institutional licences to use software or other digital production tools. There was not a consistent use of LMS as well, which implied that students had to work in several platforms, Google Classroom in one class, Microsoft Teams in another, which resulted in fragmentation and cognitive overload. The absence of virtual options increased the feeling of pedagogical discontinuity in media programmes that are largely based on studio instruction, equipment rooms, editing laboratories, and field assignments. Numerous members of the faculty have improvised using publicly available tools, open-access trials of editing packages, or mobile apps,

thereby changing the nature of practical training in ways that often contradict pre-existing curricular objectives. The existence of regulatory responses by authorities such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Ministry of Education, and state departments of higher education provided general guidelines on online teaching. Nevertheless, they rarely touched the requirements of practice-based disciplines. The Four-Quadrant Model that was proposed in the UGC and included e-content, video lectures, discussion forums, and assessments was conceptually strong but applicable to the theoretical courses. This Model did not fit philosophically with courses taught by media educators who needed to practice their craft, have a quick feedback cycle, and be in a collaborative production environment. The emergence of national digital repositories like SWAYAM, e-PG Pathshala, and SWAYAM Prabha increased access to learning resources but did little to offset the loss of physical equipment, studios, and face-to-face mentorship. Furthermore, the UGC's Blended Learning Guidelines in 2021 promoted the adoption of hybrid models and emphasized academic flexibility. Nonetheless, these principles provided very few guidelines on how to incorporate virtual production tools, mobile journalism procedures, or how to work remotely and edit, skills that were becoming increasingly pertinent to the modern media industry. The wider media environment in India also significantly influenced the demands for media education at this time. The accelerated growth of digital newsrooms, OTTs, influencer cultures, and social media-driven content ecosystems has transformed the skills that were considered industry-ready. News companies began to embrace remote reporting and distributed production workflows; entertainment companies began to use more cloud-based collaborative editing; and digital marketing agencies required knowledge of analytics, platform-specific storytelling, and short-video production. This meant that most faculty members faced the twin burden of adjusting their teaching to the online platform and, at the same time, redesigning their

curricula to suit new industry demands. This was especially difficult for institutions with limited resources to cover software licences, virtual labs, or even high-end equipment. Meanwhile, students' daily exposure to platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok (and ShareChat until its prohibition), and others offered the possibility of incorporating platform-specific storytelling into coursework. Several teachers used this knowledge to delegate mobile journalism, mini video productions, and social media campaigns, thus balancing institutional limitations and the new industry practice. The digital divide, institutional differences, and changing regulatory and industrial landscapes together comprised a highly connected ecosystem in which online media education in India was practiced. These contextual processes did not merely predetermine logistical opportunities; they also affected pedagogical decisions, curriculum redesign, and the type of student engagement. These constraints imposed by media education, in different ways and to varying degrees, on media educators, have led to both serious problems and substantial innovations, as discussed in the following sections. This contextual background will be important for interpreting the practices, experiences, and pedagogical experiments recorded in the study to follow.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative multi-site study design based on an in-depth field incursion into Indian institutions of higher learning that provide media programmes. NVivo (QSR International) was used to organise, code, and analyse the data, enhancing auditability and reliability. To obtain a broad and heterogeneous set of teaching and learning experiences in the transition to the digital realm, the research team at first contacted 100 media faculty members and 200 media students in fifteen universities in India. Following the inclusion criteria, including one semester of experience in online teaching/learning,

the final dataset consisted of 75 faculty subjects and 109 student subjects from 12 universities, including central, state, private, and specialised media institutions. This kind of multiple-phase sampling increases the credibility and representativeness of the data, as well as their analytical rigor. The faculty sample comprised educators in journalism, television production, filmmaking, advertising, digital media, sound design, and visual communication. It covered the experience levels of early-career lecturers and senior professors with more than 20 years of pedagogical practice. The undergraduate and postgraduate programmes were sampled to ensure that student participants are varied in terms of gender, socio-economic background, geographical location, and specialisation in the specific programmes. Such a measure guaranteed that the data were representative of the structural heterogeneity of Indian media education. The data was collected through semi-structured and in-depth interviews that were held using Zoom, Google Meet, telephone, and voice notes in the event of low connection. Interviews with the faculty lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, and student interviews were between 30 and 50 minutes. Audio recording and informed consent were used to record all the interviews and transcribe them verbatim. Syllabus changes, reports on LMS use, academic schedules, e-teaching instructions, and internal memos were also included in the study as institutional documents. These sources served as a significant triangulation layer, enabling the research team to test interview assertions against institutional practices and policy guidelines. The analytical process adopted the six-stage approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) to thematic analysis, including immersive familiarisation, open coding, production of preliminary categories, consolidation of themes, review of themes, and articulation of themes. The coding procedure began with 585 open codes, which were narrowed to 28 substantive categories and eventually synthesised into five central themes. A 25 percent subsample of the transcripts was coded inde-

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pendently by two researchers, and agreement between the coders was 87 percent. Any remaining transcripts were combined to produce a concurrence. Sample analysis was enhanced by triangulation of faculty interviews, student interviews, and institutional documents. All respondents were assigned alpha-numeric codes (e.g., F34 faculty, S88 students), and all distinguishing information about institutions was removed. Participants were educated about confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time.

Findings and Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis presupposes 75 interviews with faculty and 109 interviews/focus groups with students, as well as institutional documents of twelve universities. It was a large data set that made it possible to conduct multi-perspective triangulation and the identification of five key themes that characterised the transformation of media practice education during the transition to online learning in India: (1) infrastructural inequalities and the digital divide, (2) reconfigured practical production pedagogy, (3) changing assessment practices, (4) platform dependency and new digital literacies, and (5) institutional adaptation and pedagogical innovation.

Qualitative data has been analysed iteratively and systematically using NVivo to organise, code, retrieve, compare and develop themes, as the data is too large to analyse qualitatively and interpretatively in one sitting. These initial codes produced 585 open codes which were then reviewed and reduced to 28 substantive categories. These categories were then explored in terms of conceptual relationships and combined to create five core themes. Table X summarizes the general development of the coding process and the five themes to which the findings belong. This coding framework offers a clear and concise description of reduction of the initial observations to the higher-order analytical themes in the large qualitative data set.

Table 1. NVivo-Based Coding Framework

Analytical stage	Description	Outcome
Data sources	Faculty interviews, student interviews/focus groups, and institutional documents from 12 universities	75 faculty + 109 students + institutional documents
Initial coding	Line-by-line/open coding of interview and documentary material using NVivo	585 open codes
Category development	Comparison, consolidation and grouping of related open codes into substantive analytical categories	28 substantive categories
Theme development	Further synthesis and review of categories to identify overarching patterns	5 central themes
Final thematic structure	Consolidated themes used to organise the findings and thematic analysis	5 themes

As shown in Table 1, the qualitative analysis progressed systematically from 585 open codes to 28 substantive categories and, ultimately, five central themes.

Table 2 (continued). Five Central Themes Identified Through the Analysis

Theme	Focus of analysis evidenced in the manuscript
1. Infra-structural Inequalities and the Digital Divide	Device access, internet connectivity, mobile-data dependence, unstable connections, unequal learning environments and gender-related constraints
2. Reconfigured Practical Production Pedagogy	Online teaching of production-oriented subjects, smartphone-based production, mobile journalism, editing applications, sound production and movement from institutional studios to domestic settings
3. Changing Assessment Practices	Process-based assessment, reflective writing, storyboards, shot lists, production diaries, asynchronous submissions and challenges concerning originality and individual contribution
4. Platform Dependency and New Digital Literacies	Use of Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Moodle, Google Classroom and WhatsApp, alongside emerging skills in OBS Studio, Canva, YouTube Studio, Instagram and collaborative digital workflows
5. Institutional Adaptation and Pedagogical Innovation	Virtual newsrooms, low-bandwidth teaching, cloud-based collaboration, remote film festivals, online exhibitions, peer-review groups and virtual guest lectures

Table number 2 presents the five central themes that emerged from the coding process and guided the subsequent thematic analysis and interpretation of find-

ings.

Infrastructural Inequalities and the Digital Divide

Differences in digital access were insurmountable across the 109 student participants. Almost two-thirds said they use smartphones as their main devices, and a large proportion relied on prepaid mobile data plans rather than broadband. According to students in rural and small towns, their connection was unstable, and they often dropped calls and could not participate in a live demonstration.

One student explained: “A majority of the classes I enrolled in were on mobile data.” My attempts to connect to the Wi-Fi would crash whenever my father used it or someone streamed something at home. So, it was impossible during editing sessions. (S14)

This was supported by faculty observations. More than 75 percent of the 75 faculty members said that synchronous class meetings were often interrupted by connection problems, especially for students from lower-income families.

One of my teachers (senior editing) wrote: In most classes, 10 or more students were dropping out or missing important steps. It was not very pleasant to show an editing timeline when half the class could not read it clearly. (F27) bandwidth limits also had a direct impact on learning outcomes, particularly in courses that used large video files, studio simulation, or screen-sharing technologies. Some learners noted that downloading the project videos or exporting video files would put their data plans under significant strain. This unequal load influenced learning involvement and led to exhaustion and inactivity. The gender-related restrictions also became prominent: almost 40 percent of female students reported lacking personal space at home, having household duties, or not feeling comfortable in front of the camera.

One student said, “I could not turn on my video during

the presentation because people kept walking behind me.” It was awkward and non-professional. (S42) Therefore, infrastructural inequality became a technical, as well as a socio-cultural obstacle, which re-established pedagogical interchange.

Reconfiguration of Practical Production Pedagogy

Among the 75 faculty respondents, there was overwhelming agreement that teaching practical media courses online was potentially more challenging than ever. Classes based on production, like cinematography, studio broadcasting, field reporting, editing, and sound design, needed to touch the equipment, provide fast feedback, and include an embodied practicum, which was severely shaken.

One of the faculty of cinematography told me: I can teach the theory of lights, but until students can work with lights, and stand adjust, and reflectors, the learning will be incomplete. (F11)

Thereupon, the University faculty reformed courses based on smartphones and available software. This led to a pedagogical shift toward mobile journalism (MoJo), short-form video stories, and the creation of digital-first content. Almost 70 percent of students reported using their phones for all production assignments in online semesters. This shift, although necessitated, created fresh pedagogical options. Students claimed to have become more confident in shooting, recording audio, and editing with mobile applications- all the skills that are becoming increasingly useful in digital newsrooms.

One student explained: Smartphones were turned into our studio. We must learn to use our imagination in a limited space, but that is what the industry demands. (S06)

Editing educators followed by editing open-source and mobile-friendly software like DaVinci Resolve, Shotcut, Kinemaster, and CapCut. A faculty member commented: I had to learn new applications to arrive where they

were. It altered my perception of what constitutes being professional in editing. (F63) Sound and radio teachers introduced creativity at home by promoting the use of household items to record Foley sounds. Students cited creating ambient soundscapes with kitchen appliances, fans, or street noise. Therefore, real-world pedagogy left the institutional studios and moved to the domestic setting, and this, in many ways, changed the sensorial, spatial, and material background of media practice learning.

Assessment Dilemmas and Reimagined Evaluation

One of the most congested aspects was assessment. The classic studio-based assessments, such as live editing, in-class production, and anchored news bulletins, were not replicable online. Faculty professors were found to have changed assessment rubrics to emphasize process documentation, reflective writing, planning materials, and asynchronous submissions (81 percent). An instructor of media production wrote: We stopped analysing the product and evaluated the thinking process, through storyboards, shot lists, and and production diaries. Students were transformed into more contemplative filmmakers. (F38) Nevertheless, students were concerned about the workload. The majority of 109 student participants expressed that online assessment was too much of a documentation task and said reflection reports, technical logs, and presentations took more time than the time they spent in production.

One student remarked: In the case of each two-minute video, we needed to prepare several different documents. During lockdown, it was overwhelming. (S51)

Evaluation of honesty also came to focus. In the absence of studio monitoring, faculty had trouble assessing the personal contribution to group work and the originality of assignments submitted electronically. In general, online evaluation has compelled a reconsideration of evaluation logic, altering the balance between the creative, the process, and the product.

Platform Dependency and Emergent Digital Literacies

By spreading throughout the dataset, digital platforms became essential mediators in pedagogy. Almost every student and professor turned to tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, MS Teams, Moodle, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp for regular academic activities. Nevertheless, this reliance was not purely logistical. It created a new platform for student literacy. More than 60 percent of students claimed to have become more competent with OBS Studio to livestream, Canva to design digitally, YouTube Studio to analyse, and Instagram Reel to tell short stories, and Google Drive to work collaboratively.

One student explained:

I began examining viewer retention for my YouTube uploads after my teacher told me to monitor engagement. It made me think like a platform-native developer. (S29)

The faculty also developed complementary skills. Most of them reported learning how to compress files to smaller sizes, optimise videos for low-bandwidth transmission, try out cloud-based editing, and use asynchronous pedagogies. This new platform literacy in the skill ecosystem, digital workflow management, and analytics awareness is highly congruent with the current demands of the media industry, indicating that the digital transformation broadened the conceptualization of media practice education.

Institutional Adaptations and Pedagogical Innovations

The twelve universities had a diverse experience. LMS platforms were better integrated in private universities, and organized digital ecosystems were formed. Some of them created virtual newsrooms using Trello, Slack, shared Drives, and cloud editors. Faculty promoted collaborative scripting, allusion to distance, and shared reportage. Low-bandwidth instructional models were

implemented at public universities, including pre-recorded lectures, audio notes, WhatsApp groups, and compressed learning content. These strategies portrayed a context-driven innovation, even though they were not resource-intensive. The institutions also tried experiments with remote film festivals, online exhibitions, peer-review groups, dissertation defences, and cross-institution virtual guest lectures. Students valued the exposure to national and international professionals, and this could hardly be achieved in the old physical-only teaching before the pandemic.

As one student noted, we had a visit from a Los Angeles cinematographer, something that would never have happened in the offline classes. (S88)

These technologies indicate that, despite being disruptive, digital change has prompted a new pedagogical paradigm that could continue to play a central role in future hybrid educational practices.

Implications for Media Practice Education in India

This has important implications for the future of media practice education in India, which concerns the need to rethink infrastructure, curriculum, and pedagogy as linked aspects and not separate entities. The digital transformation revealed that access to devices, bandwidth, and consistent learning conditions are not technical in nature but rather fundamental pedagogical conditions. In media practice education, where high-resolution videos, multi-track audio, and synchronous demonstrations are used, the lack of stable infrastructure fundamentally alters the learning process. Institutions should therefore view digital infrastructure as an equity imperative rather than value-added. At the same time, the ubiquitous shift to mobile-based and open-source production tools in the mainstream curriculum indicates the need to incorporate those workflows into the mainstream curriculum. What was improvised during the pandemic, which taught MoJo techniques, used household objects as sound design, or had to do with an open-source edit-

ing software, is now showing itself as pedagogically useful and close to the digital-first media industry in India. This is the time to change the curricular assumptions that give high-end equipment a monopoly on professional learning. The practice of assessment also needs to be retooled to account for the experience of online teaching. Although the transition to process-based assessment enhanced metacognitive learning and induced conscientious reflection, it introduced new learning burdens on students and course-specific unequal expectations. A more consistent approach might be possible in a balanced Model that appreciates creative artefacts and combines reflective and process-oriented elements. Moreover, the emergence of platform literacy among learners implies an imminent need for media programmes that incorporate platform-specific storytelling, distribution solutions, and analytics as Part of core courses, rather than having these capabilities marginalized or treated as electives. Lastly, the institutional responses are various, and this proves that Indian media education cannot be based on a single Model. Rather, pedagogical approaches should be dynamic, context-specific, and sensitive to different institutional possibilities. The implications can be traced to the future, when hybrid forms of teaching, flexible curricula, and broadened conceptions of media practice will be the main themes for the sustainability and relevance of media programmes in India.

Toward a Hybrid Pedagogical Framework

The development of the new pedagogical practices in the digital turn offers grounds to consider media education reimagined through a hybrid Model, which combines the affordance of the online and studio-based learning. A hybrid practice acknowledges that the flexibility of digital pedagogy, its inclusivity, and focus on platform literacy do not have to reduce the embodied and experience-based aspects of studio learning. Rather, such modes may coexist to enrich students' creative, technical, and analytical abilities. The pandemic forced educators

to re-theorise production as something that could take place outside the formal studio and be spread to domestic settings and spaces of daily life. This reconceptualization widens the geography of learning, which enables students to pursue endless experimentation with available tools. By making the home the continuation of the studio, hybrid pedagogy enriches students' sensory and material experience of media practice. It is also crucial to institutionalise the multimodal teaching architectures established during the online semesters. Synchronous demonstrations were combined with asynchronous tutorials, low-bandwidth options, and peer feedback systems to provide a diversity of entry-level to both high and low access and skill students. The retention of these modalities will make them more accessible and deepen the pedagogue's depth. Simultaneously, platform literacy should be foregrounded in practice education and not as a supplementary skill to it, but as a fundamental aspect of modern media work. By incorporating analytics, audience participation tactics, and online distribution into daily course activities, learners will be able to place their creative practice within broader platformed ecologies. Lastly, evaluation in a hybrid Model needs to be concerned with creative output as well as reflective insight, recognizing that professional media practice necessitates technical skill, conceptualization, and the ability to explain the process. The hybrid Model, then, is not just an attempt to bridge the gap between online and offline teaching but a substantive re-conceptualisation of media pedagogy, one sensitive to the infrastructural conditions of India, changes in the industry, and the fact that the boundaries between physical and online creative work have become highly permeable.

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