google news initiative

startups lab
india report
2022

Building a stronger future for news and media journalists in India

Google News Initiative

in partnership with

ECHOS designing desirable futures   DIGIPUB News India Foundation

Google for Startups

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intro

GNI Startups Lab: helping to build the future of journalism in India.

The GNI Startups Lab is a program from the Google News Initiative (GNI) in India to support news organisations at an early stage of development with the aim of setting these news startups on a path to financial and operational sustainability. The initiative was created in partnership with Echos Innovation Lab and DIGIPUB News India Foundation.

Echos is an independent design-led innovation lab with a history of successful design thinking initiatives and digital product creation in India and Asia-Pacific. DIGIPUB News media foundation works to help foster the creation of a healthy and strong news ecosystem for the digital age in India.

The GNI Startups Lab aims to support news media startups and contribute to the acceleration of the news ecosystem in the digital environment. It began in December 2021 and over the course of 16 weeks, entrepreneurs from 10 news media startups had access to mentorship, training and workshops on topics such as audience-centricity, digital products, business models, marketing, strategy, community building and fundraising.

the program

The cohort learned through a combination of theoretical and practical methods, engaged with a global community of news entrepreneurs and became part of a supportive group of professionals facing similar challenges from different backgrounds. Every week, the startups had a combination of:
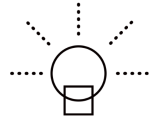
Inspirational talks

These were 60-min online live sessions in which participants learned from news professionals and entrepreneurs as they shared their stories, best practices and references.
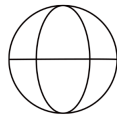
Workshops

These meetings consisted of 180-min interactive sessions with expert strategic design leaders where the startups had the chance to put theory into practice and learn by doing. All of it while working on their particular problem spaces. In total, each startup participated in 8 workshops.

Mentorships

60-min sessions for each individual startup with Echos' strategic designers where they would assess the work developed and provide tailored recommendations. In total, each startup had 8 mentoring sessions.
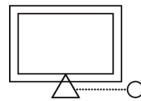
Online learning platform

Online, participants had a range of curated and original content available according to each week's theme.

In this report, we will present a brief summary of the results achieved by some startups at the end of the program so that others can reflect on the concepts, try them out and improve them.

Filip Shen
News Industry Relations & Programs Lead | APAC Partnerships at Google

Juliana Proserpio
Co-Founder & Chief Design Officer at Echos - Innovation Lab

Anand Vardhan
DIGIPUB. Founder of The Public India & Lokmat Hindi Daily-up

the startups

The selection process

Chosen from 70+ applicants from five Indian regions, the ten news startups showcase an array of different journalism types such as investigative, broadcast, political, data and local news organisations giving a voice to underrepresented communities.

After several extensive rounds of evaluation, the selection committee analysed each applicant through different eligibility requirements to determine overall fit for the GNI Startups Lab program. In addition, criteria like language, geography, gender, content, innovation and x-factor (value-added that the startup brings to the market) contributed to ensure the diversity of the program.

Region

The startups are from several regions of India; 3 are based in the South, 3 in the North, 1 in the East, 2 in the Western and 1 based in the Northeast

Age

They range in age from 7 months to under 6 years, with an average age of 3 years

Language and Journalistic type

Together, the companies cover a wide range of journalistic types in different languages such as English, Hindi, Malayalam, and Hurdu just to name a few

Gender

Gender diversity is present across the different startups having various storytellers share their unique perspectives

Size

While the teams size of the startups vary from 2 to more than 20 people, the participating teams will consist of a maximum of 8 individuals

the startups

The startups

BehanBox

Our mission is to bring the voices of women and gender diverse persons center stage, as they are often relegated to footnotes in the media. Through our analysis of laws and policies combined with on ground reportage, our mission is to create useful resources for women and gender diverse persons to be equal participants in India's democracy.

Bisbo

We convert everydays' boring news and make them into dramatic videos, with a gripping opening, a smooth story flow sometimes going back and forth into the story to make it movie-like experience but always sticking to the facts, the sources to which we share at the end of the video.

EastMojo

We are a mobile-first, multimedia digital platform delivering timely, regional and contemporary news for, by, and of the region's stakeholders. Our editorial policies prioritise accuracy over speed, voices over noise, and truth over trends, often at the cost of views, to ensure a credible product that resonates with our readers.

ED Times

ED Times is a youth media publication; the No. 1 Source For In-depth News Stories That Matter To Millennials. It's where Indian Millennials comment on news and stories around them, an opinions place by and for really young people.

Headline Network

Our mission is to decentralise news media in India by tackling the asymmetric distribution of power in the hands of a few. We operate a network of Citizen Journalism platforms in Indian languages that enables underrepresented citizens to post local news and create awareness of ground level issues while creating a source of ancillary earnings in the process.

the startups

Main Media

We disseminate hyper-local rural news, often ignored by mainstream media in vernacular language. We started our pilot project in 2018 from one of India's most backward regions – Seemanchal, which consists of Kishanganj, Purnia, Katihar and Araria districts of Bihar.

Suno India

Our mission is to be the go-to-platform for credible and well-researched multilingual audio content which is on par with international podcasts. We want to continue to shine a spotlight on under-represented and under-reported stories using audio as a medium and want to stay editorially independent.

The Bridge

To put it simply - We are the ONLY sports media house fully focussed on Indian Sports, with a special emphasis on Olympic Sports like no other. Employing a wide range of textual, visual and audio storytelling, we aim to bring all the stories and the people behind into the spotlight, thereby bridging the gap in Indian Sports.

The Cue

Our mission has always been to bring to the viewers stories that are left out or marginalized from the larger mainstream media and bring the needed impact through in-depth reporting, unique storytelling, and multimedia narrative.

The Probe

The Probe is an independent ad-free digital news media platform. As an independent media outlet we are privileged to have unfettered freedom without external influencers be it commercial or political. Our core focus areas: Investigations, Solutions, Impact and Development

2
audience

In our experience, the path to creating a sustainable company lies in knowing exactly who the audience is and experimenting with the creation of offerings that are relevant to them. And although the selected 10 startups received a mix of strategic and tactical advice on product development and business modelling during the program, it all started with a clear understanding of their audiences' untapped needs and aspirations.

Essentially, the future of journalism and news media companies is tied to the relevance of the content and value proposition they offer to their audience. News consumers expect support to manage their daily life challenges, make decisions and be entertained. With changes in the way news has been consumed over the years, being attentive to new audience habits and behaviours is fundamental for new journalistic initiatives to thrive. And design thinking methods and tools are great facilitators in this process.

The 10 news media startups participating in the GNI Startups Lab India have different audiences, so these teams embarked on a journey of discovery to find their audience's needs, pain points and aspirations. Through interviews and prototypes, the startups were able to learn more about audience behaviours and come up with tailored offerings for different segments of their audience.

In this, the startups found some common patterns. For example, membership models are more likely to succeed when they serve specific niches, such as underrepresented groups and hyperlocal communities. More lessons are presented in this report, as well as the tools and corresponding processes for those who want to dive deeper into the understanding of the audience.

2

the audience

2.1.

Audience learning in news and media products in India

The media and journalism sector has been profoundly impacted by changing consumer behaviours. In addition to the changes from analogue mediums (print magazines and newspapers) to digital, access to information has increased and diversified. Audiences want more tailored content delivered through different platforms and formats, which has led media and news professionals to bring their visions forward through websites, blogs, videos and other mediums.

In this scenario, design thinking methods can be leveraged not only to help news outlets create and deliver value for their audience, but also to capture value and produce sustainable business models.

2.2.

How to change your way of thinking to understand your audience

As part of the efforts to create new financially sustainable businesses, it is important to understand the behaviour of news consumers and increase the predisposition for them to move from passive visitors to members. Ethnographic research methods such as interviews and observations can help media organisations collect feedback, understand their audience's challenges more deeply, and develop hypotheses on how to better meet these particular needs.
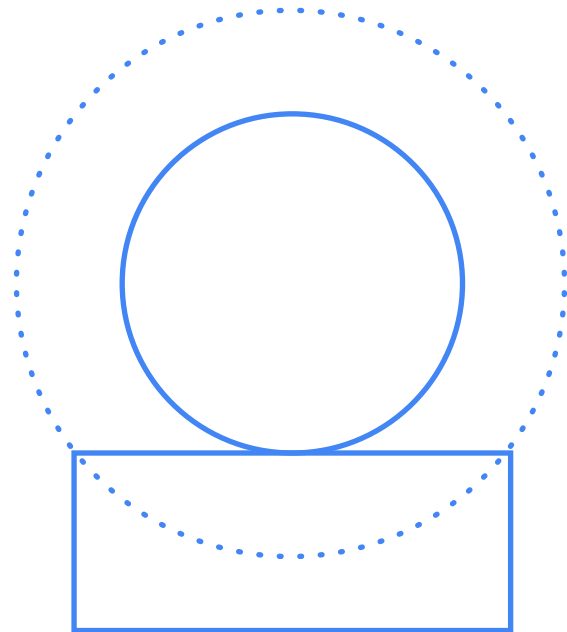
2.3.

Tools and practices to better understand your audience
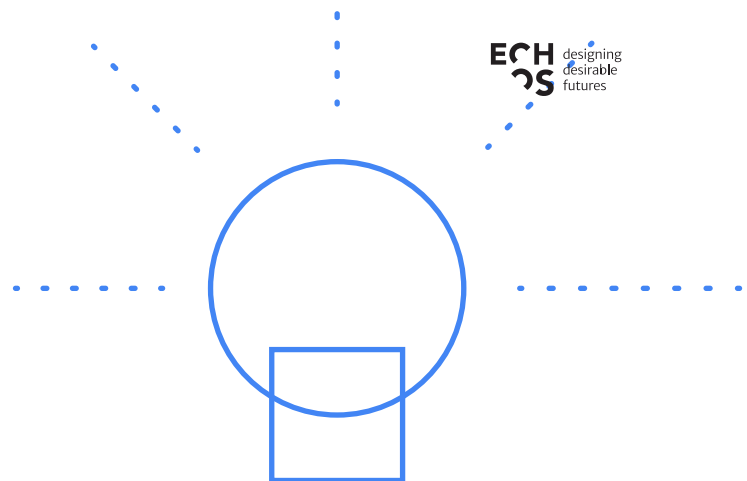
In-depth interviews

Unlike quantitative research methods that can be done through email or forms, interviews require teams to spend time with their audience. The goal is to learn from them and gain insights into the context in which people use and interact with their products and services. Dealing with small sample sizes, this method helps analyse people's thoughts and feelings, as well as exploring the reasons by asking 'why'. Also, it is possible to collect detailed feedback, understand how the audience thinks and consumes information, in addition to mapping audience habits and routines.

Quantitative research

Aims to collect information from a broad group of people through digital forms. In addition to obtaining data on the profile of audiences, quantitative surveys can collect information on respondents' preferences, desires and dissatisfactions. The clear and objective results help to develop a strategy to meet specific user self-reported preferences, providing content that is relevant to the audience in their particular context. When combined with in-depth research, usually the result is a richer picture of the audience.

Personas and journey maps

Personas are fictional characters that represent different audience groups. They are created based on the data collected during the research process and, although fictional, they represent the motivations, pain points, goals and needs of real people. Personas must be created with the researched data that is analysed, classified and translated into specific audience needs. Data that were once abstract gain a face and become a human figure that is easier to relate to during the design process.

The organisations that succeed in the digital economy are those that understand what users expect or value. Understanding the persona's context, and translating their routine into a User Journey Map provides insights into their involvement in every step of the experience with products or services. As a consequence, their thoughts, emotions and frustrations can be captured and will become opportunities to design experiences that help them achieve their goals as easily and effortlessly as possible.

In an environment where debates about "audience" can seem abstract, personas help make these conversations tangible and grounded on real people and their needs.

2.4. case study

Headline Network

Context

Headline Network is on a mission to decentralise news media in India by tackling the asymmetric distribution of power. It operates a network of Citizen Journalism platforms in Indian languages that enables underrepresented citizens to post local news while also creating awareness of ground level issues.

Team

- **Avinash Rogye**, Director of Business and Growth.
- **Pakshal Lodha**, Director of Platforms and Technology.
- **Kunal Punamiya**, Director of Partnerships.

Goals

The problem that Headline Network set to solve was that, from its perspective, conventional news media in India is centralised, while audiences crave localised news content. In order to serve these local communities that don't often see themselves, or their stories, reflected in the news, Headline Network created a multilingual platform that invites citizens to participate in the creation and distribution of local news. The platform connects content creators and content consumers, and users are also rewarded for their participation. Seeking scalability and sustainability, the startup's challenge was to consistently grow and acquire new users.

The insights from the audience research suggested that the startup should focus on improving the value delivered to content creators. After all, with the right value proposition the startup could attract enough creators to make the platform appealing to content consumers.
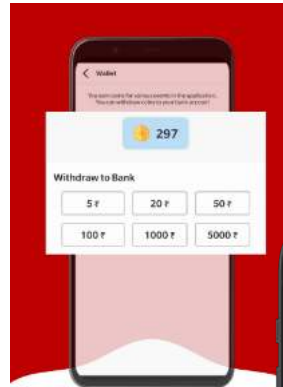
Through ideation, the team realised they wanted to grow the number of content pieces they received, and at the same time provide motivation for existing and new journalists to publish in their platform. The company then ran an experiment, a targeted campaign called "All India Competition for Excellence in Journalism," offering the winner a INR 10,000 (USD 180) prize for high quality journalistic production.

The competition was open to all participants and received 276 entries from more than 120 regions across India. Along with prize money, the winners were awarded with certificates for their work. "We expected not more than 100 entries on the basis of our user base, but we received a whopping 276 entries, which clearly exceeded our expectations. We saw a great rise in the number of new first-time citizen contributors & these users eventually turned into constant contributors," said the co-founder Pakshal Lodha. The experiment resulted not only in more quality content being published on the app, but also in a method that will continue to be used to boost audience engagement. Based on the success of the campaign, the startup plans to hold regular competitions to acquire new users and also activate existing ones.
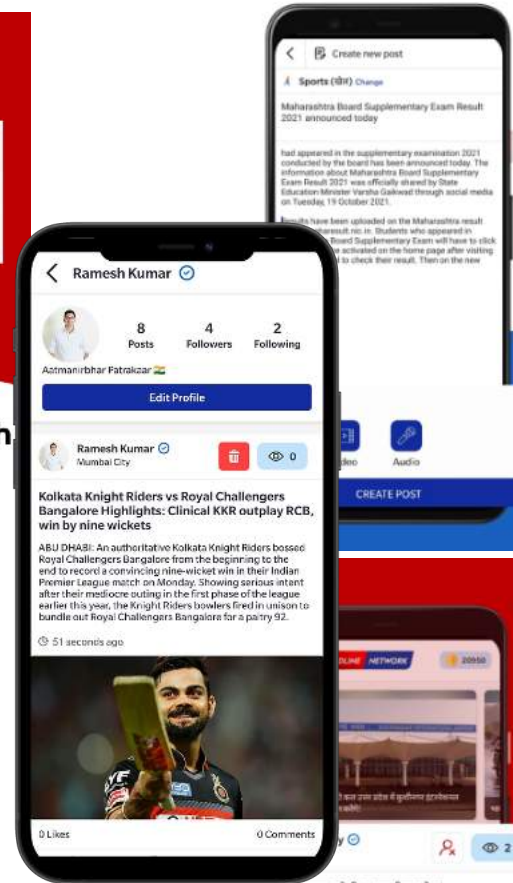
Submit News
समाचार सबमिट करें

NEWS, SHOPPING AND EARNING APP

READ NEWS

POST NEWS

SHARE NEWS

SHARE PRODUCTS

EARN COINS

GET CASH

SHARE NEWS AND PRODUCTS. GET COINS PER VIEW AND PER SALE.

Get Points Per View & Per Sale

हर व्यू व सेल पर पैसे कमाए

Withdraw Cash
पैसे विथड्रॉ करें

Local News
लोकल न्यूज़

Kolkata Knight Riders vs Royal Challengers Bangalore Highlights: Clinical KKR outplay RCB, win by nine wickets

ABU DHABI: An authoritative Kolkata Knight Riders bossed Royal Challengers Bangalore from the beginning to the end to record a convincing nine-wicket win in their Indian Premier League match on Monday. Showing serious intent after their mediocre outing in the first phase of the league earlier this year, the Knight Riders bowlers fired in unison to bundle out Royal Challengers Bangalore for a paltry 92.

"

We expected not more than 100 entries on the basis of our user base, but we received a whopping 276 entries, which clearly exceeded our expectations. We saw a great rise in the number of new first-time citizen contributors & these users eventually turned into constant contributors.

— Pakshal Lodha

3
product development

When we talk about media products, we refer to intangible goods that create value for an audience such as websites, blogs, podcasts, newsletters, videos and apps, just to name a few. In building these offerings, the challenge for content creators is not only in perfecting the language and technical skills, but also in being involved in different parts of the production process to ensure that these products are serving their audience's different needs.

In the following pages, we share some of the lessons from the first GNI Startups Lab India.

3.1.

Lessons from news and media products

In the search for audience attention, news outlets have been diversifying their content distribution channels. During the GNI Startups Lab program, participants uncovered a wide range of opportunities to deliver value by increasing the frequency of interaction through different products: newsletter, website, apps and other channels such as social networks. Diversifying goes beyond content to deliver a tailored experience for each person in the audience throughout the process of discovering, consuming and sharing information.

However, this practice could be perceived as invasive and overwhelming if the audience feels "bombarded" by the amount of content. To avoid this perception, it is necessary to consider the needs and context of users as starting points in the development and distribution of any news media offering. Knowing the audience and what information they need in a particular context, and then using the right medium to reach them helps avoid the feeling of content overload.
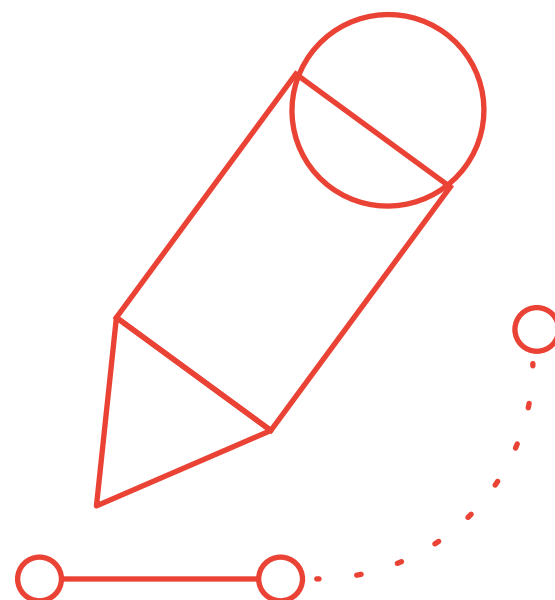
3.2.

Audience-oriented products

By experimenting with different products, some startups ended up finding news opportunities to explore different customer segments. At the beginning of the program, most startups were entirely focused on the final audience (business-to-consumer), but when revisiting their products along with their corresponding communication, distribution and marketing channels, they uncovered opportunities to explore the business-to-business (B2B) model. In most cases, the pivoting also brought new monetization opportunities.

3.3.

How to think about news and media products

In the development of digital products, there are several gains in quickly testing and validating both the product attributes against audience desirability, and the feasibility and viability of the business model. After clearly uncovering the audience's needs, news outlets will have to validate if their offer really solves for that particular need and how much value is recognised from the product they're developing.

During the program, we built quick and cheap testable models with the minimum feature set required so that people could see and evaluate what we were offering. The feedback gathered would inform whether the product was desired and whether we could move forward or if we would have to pivot and conduct more research. Doing so allowed the startups to reduce risk and uncertainty while developing new concepts for products and business models.

When it comes to prototyping, testing and iterating products and businesses, the idea of failing fast can be a hard concept to accept. But being open to failing quickly and cheaply in search of the right problems to solve for, often produces the best results for the audience and the company.
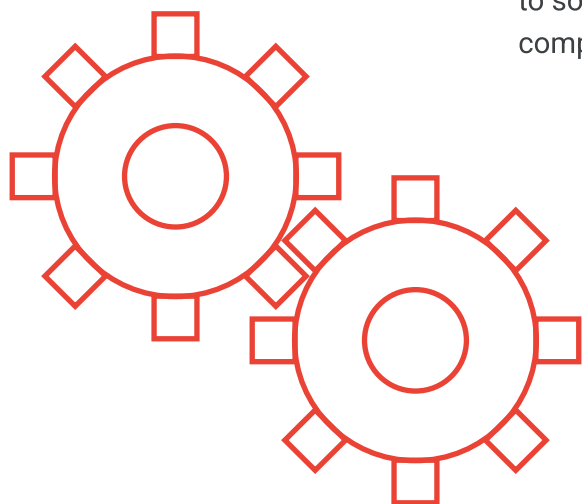
3.4. case study

Suno India

Context

Suno India is a podcast platform that provides well-researched multilingual audio content on issues that matter. By being independent, Suno India shines a spotlight on under-represented and under-reported stories using audio as a medium through its website and audio streaming services such as Spotify, Google Play and Apple Podcasts.

Team

- **Padma Priya** is an independent journalist who has written for leading media houses.
- **Rakesh Kamal** has developed education and advocacy programmes for multiple organisations.
- **Tarun Nirwan** is an information technology and digital media expert.

Goals

At the beginning of the program, the startup's three main challenges were:

1. It was not getting proper analytics on its user's demographics and preferences.
2. Suno India didn't have any control over other podcast platforms on how they push its content
3. People generally don't listen to podcasts on websites (the average listening time on the startup's website was 3 minutes)

As a first step, the team performed audience research to get a better understanding of their audience's needs. They learned that people were interested in listening to intimate conversations from the ground and in-depth stories on underreported issues. As one of the interviewees articulated why a sense of intimacy matters:

"It's the sense of connection. 100% of attention. It's like talking to a friend. Telling free-flowing stories matters. It connects more."

Based on the insights gathered, the organisation decided to create its own app to be able to provide a better user experience, control the distribution of the content and get a deeper understanding of its audience's behaviours through analytics. Additionally, Suno India set out to change its podcast format in order to provide the sense of intimate conversations the audience was craving.

Moving forward, the company aims to gather accurate insights about its audience's demographics and habits with proper analytic tools and offer them a one-on-one experience through profile-based recommendations. Some ideas explored for the podcast format ranged from the way each script would be created to sound conversational, to the way it would be recorded considering the tone and nuance of the voice that would provide the intimate and personal touch, ultimately creating a connection with the audience. Since the app was launched after the program, the average listening time is 12:52 minutes.
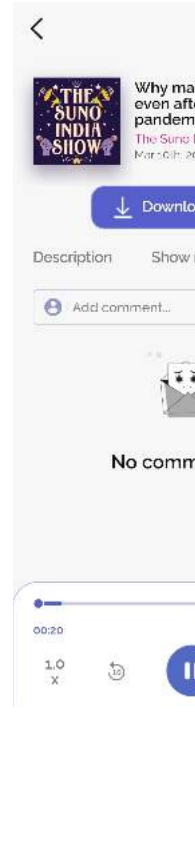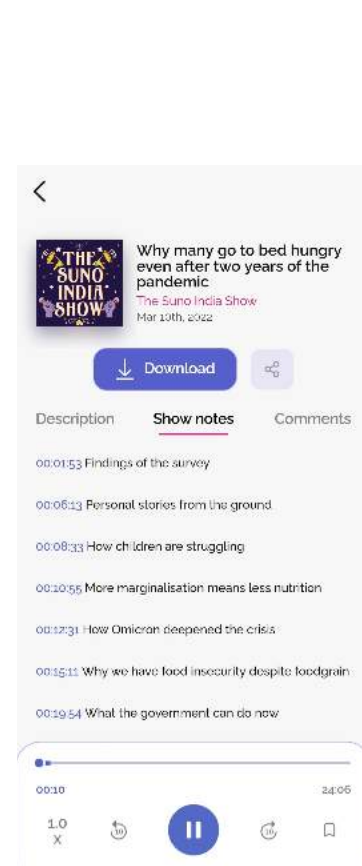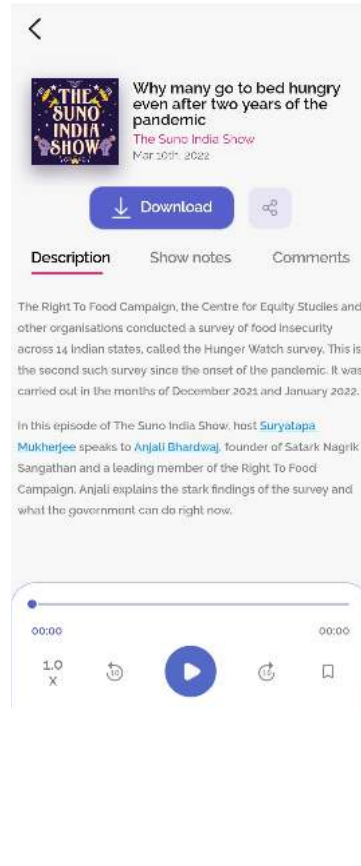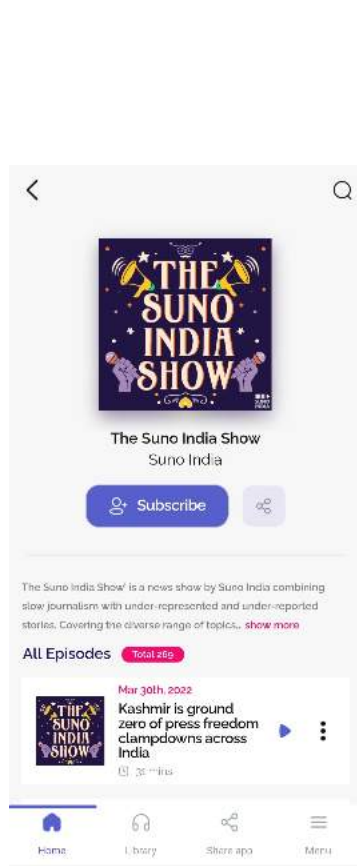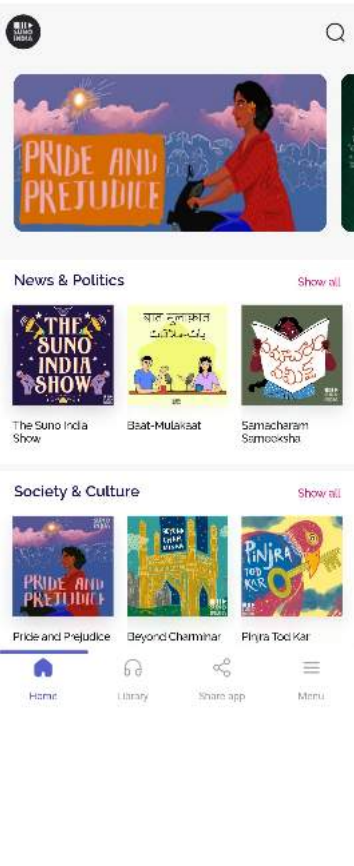
> **We have developed a few interacting features on our podcast app based on our research about audience needs. These features would surely give us some competitive advantage.**

— Tarun Nirwan

4
Business mode and investment

In addition to creating value for the audience, news and media organisations also need to create value for the business. It is during the business model design that the feasibility and sustainability of the business are explored further. During this stage, it must be defined not only how to generate revenue, but also the company's differentiators from competitors, the definition of the target audience and how they will be reached, and the key partners and cost structure of the whole operation among other important things.

4.1.

How to rethink your business model?

There are several reasons for a business model to be rethought, such as the reduction or retraction of the audience, weakening of the brand, changes in market behaviour, emergence of competitors with better value propositions or even the consolidation of a new disruptive technology. The review of the business model begins with basic reflections on the company's mission and vision. Next, it is necessary to analyse the current and future market scenario, considering current competitors, substitute offerings and audience needs. Many external factors such as politics and economics also affect the decision.
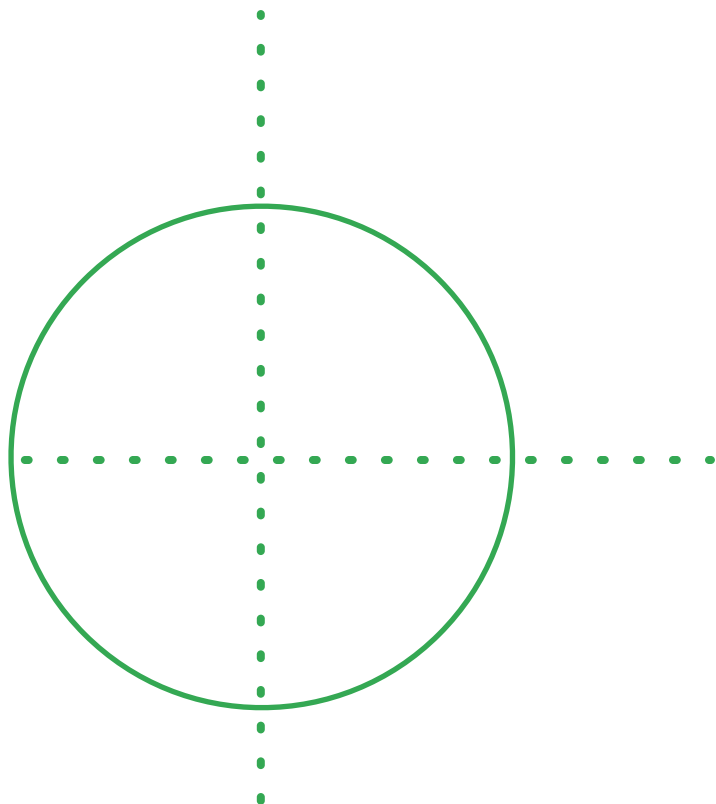
4.2.

Tools and practices to rethink your business model

A good business model contains clear and succinct answers about the audience, the product, the communication channels, resources and partners involved in the creation and delivery of products and services. If this does not happen, or the answers do not make sense in the current context, it is necessary to revisit the organisation's business model.

Regarding revenue streams, it is possible to think of several strategies that are already successfully practised in the market: subscription, spontaneous public contributions, tie-in sales or even a non-profit model, linked to donations, companies and institutes.

During the Startups Lab India, we experimented with new ideas for business models patterns and profitability archetypes. We covered how to create value for the startups and explored how to use the 55 most common business model patterns to help them create new ideas for their own companies using the business model canvas.

The startups were provided with templates outlining the mechanisms of the respective patterns such as Add-on, Revenue Sharing, Licensing, Crowdfunding and more, along with practical examples to help them come up with new business models from scratch.
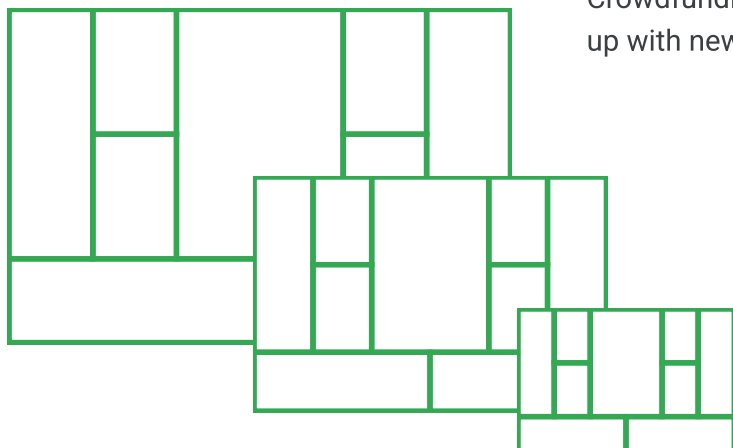
4.3.

Investment

At the tail end of our 16-week program, we had a special guest who is part of a well-known not-for-profit investment fund for independent media. He shared his view on the news media startups landscape and left the startups with advice on how to pitch but also from his experience, tips and secrets of the trade shared during the conversation.
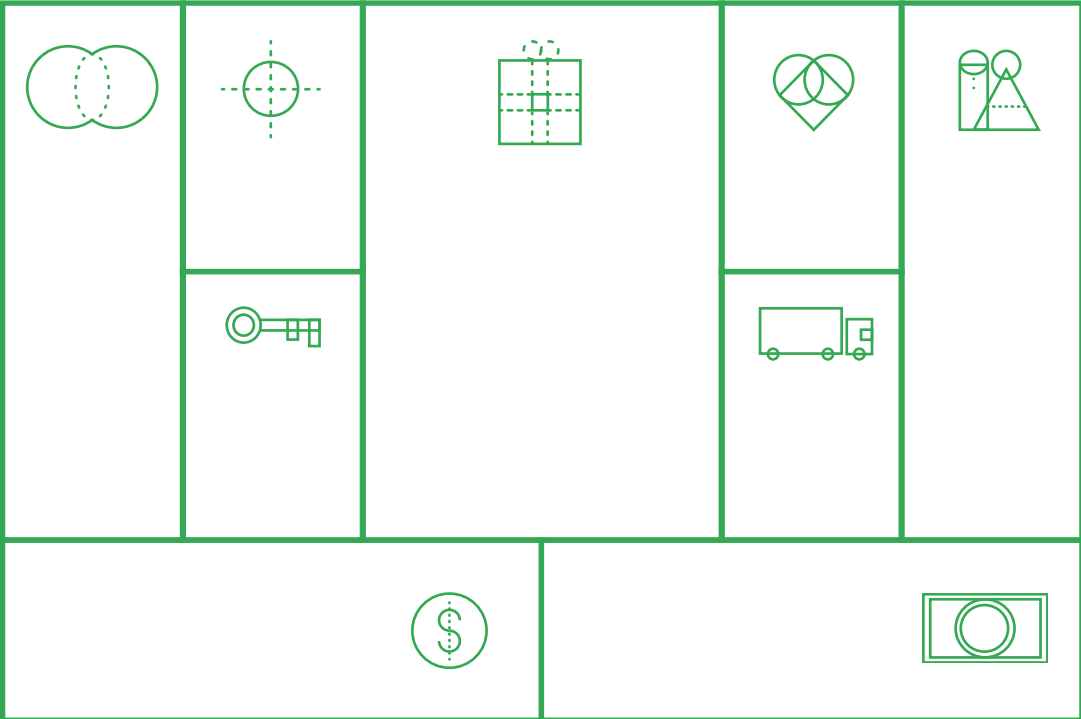
4.4. case study

EastMojo

Context

EastMojo is an independent mobile-first multimedia digital platform delivering timely, regional and contemporary news for, by, and of the region's stakeholders. The organisation's editorial policies prioritise accuracy over speed, voices over noise and truth over trends, often at the cost of views, to ensure a credible product that resonates with their readers.

Team

- **Karma Paljor** is an award-winning journalist, co-founded Atvi Infotainment in 2018. He is a Chevening Scholar and Aspen fellow.
- **Tanushree Hazarika** is an entrepreneur with 12 years of experience in launching and running two successful startups. She is a management graduate from Boston University, USA and an Aspen fellow.

Goals

The company's primary challenge was trying to level up from its current position and find new revenue streams while continuing to grow its audience.

During the program, the team experimented with the creation of new offerings that would cater to the particular needs of their audience. The startup generated a wide range of ideas using the business model canvas tool to prototype and experiment with new offerings and business models. In the end, the company selected three key offerings to experiment with and test the viability:

- **Citizen journalism platform:** The goal is to create a community that participates in the production of news, especially from remote parts of the country

- **Journalists safari:** Inviting professional journalists from around the world to travel to India and stay for a few days in small towns so that they can uncover unique stories and report on local issues faced by the community

- **Masterclass:** A series of masterclasses where both citizens and journalists can learn from experts

For each offering, EastMojo's business model now contains clear information about the audience and their particular needs, the products and services, the communication channels, resources and partners to make these ideas technically and financially viable. The startup is now in the execution phase to fulfil its mission of raising the voices of local communities.

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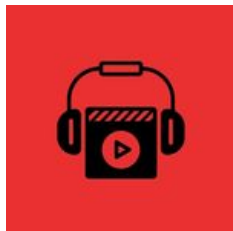
The [Startups] Lab came at a time when we were working on ways to level up from our current position. There were many questions on our minds such as quantity vs quality, expansion to other states, new content buckets and most importantly monetisation. Through the lab, we were able to test new content products and also launched our support model which we eventually want to grow to a reader revenue model.

— Karma Paljor

5
Growth and marketing

High-growth organisations are the ones that have their business models designed to be repeatable and scalable. This is one of the most important factors that news media startups have to consider and it should be clearly articulated as part of the business model design phase. If there is no clear definition of growth, it will be hard to choose the right channels and reach the right audience.

5.1.
how to foster digital growth

Digital growth must be a systematic process.The gathering and analysis of data is essential for the growth of journalism startups, and with the appropriate tools it is possible to collect relevant information to expand the points of contact and optimise interactions with the audience. During the GNI Startups Lab, experts from Google shared tools and strategies for audience growth. We also leveraged 19 different marketing channels and worked on each startup's implementation plan to break through to new and existing customers across the whole growth-marketing funnel.

For example, a newsletter is an important tool for growth as it usually leads to the website where the audience can spend more time consuming information that is relevant to them. However, it is essential that best practices are applied such as: frequency and timing, use of clear subject line, quality and relevancy of content, visuals, compelling call-to-action among others. Newsletter subscribers usually represent a loyal and engaged audience, so it is necessary to respect the request for unsubscribing options and transparency in relation to data usage and storage policies.

When browsing the news organisation website or app, a good user experience, the hierarchy of the content, accessibility of the menu, speed of loading and appropriate format for different devices are essential to continued interaction and use of the products.
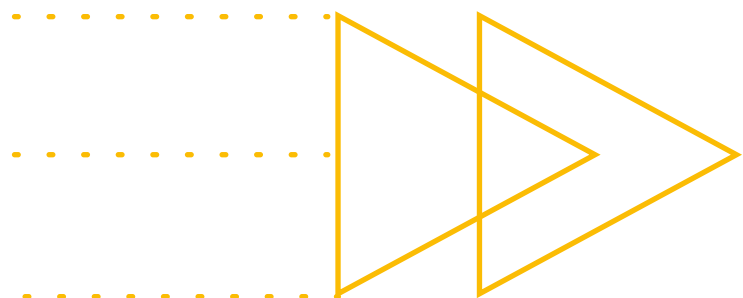
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BehanBox

Context

BehanBox aspires to bring the voices of women and gender diverse persons to the centre stage. Through the analysis of laws and policies combined with on ground reportage, its mission is to create useful resources for women and gender diverse persons to be equal participants in India's democracy.
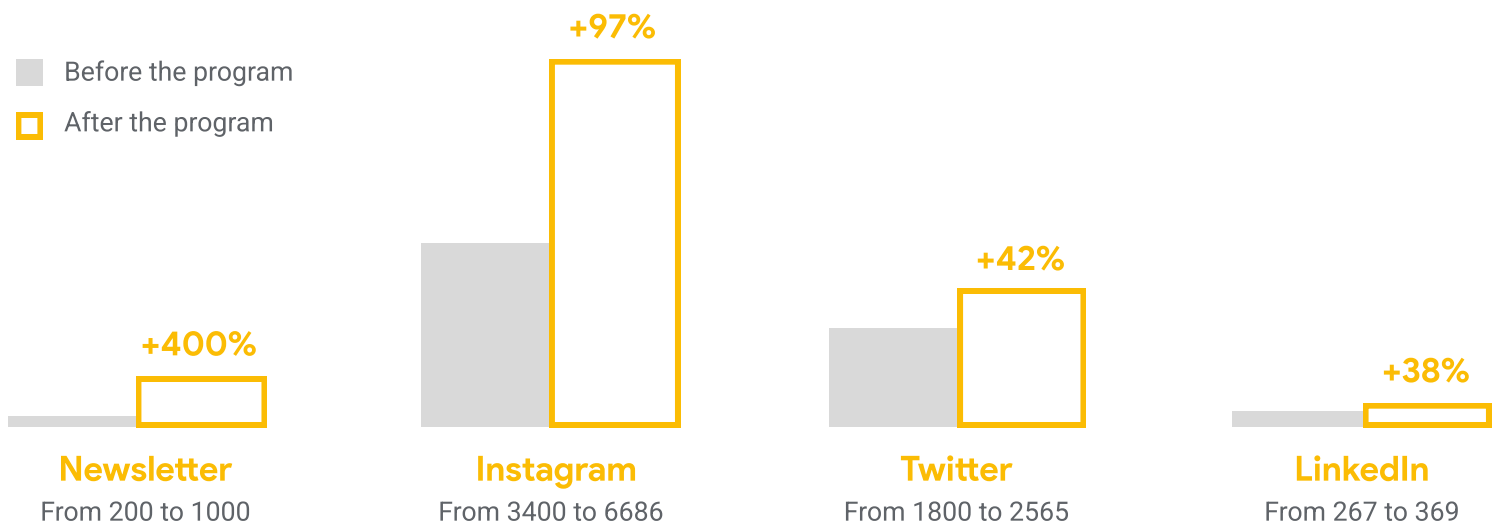
Team

- **Bhanupriya Rao** is the founder of Behanbox. She has been an independent researcher and journalist writing on gender, governance and social justice.

Goals

The challenge that the newly founded startup was facing was the lack of strategies to grow its audience. The business needed not only a clear understanding of its audience's needs but also the tactics and channels to help the company expand its reach.

BehanBox systematically ran several experiments and spent a lot of time with its audiences to understand their needs and aspirations. By doing so, the startup learned that it could make a better impact in individuals' lives through targeted content, grow their user base by creating events, increase customer lifetime value by creating retention strategies and experiment with new business models to increase revenue.

A better understanding of their audience's needs has allowed BehanBox to experiment with new offerings and achieve significant growth during the three months of the program:

Before the program
After the program

+97%
+400%
+42%
+38%

Newsletter
From 200 to 1000

Instagram
From 3400 to 6686

Twitter
From 1800 to 2565

LinkedIn
From 267 to 369

The startup is certainly creating a growing platform to influence change about gender inequality in India.

Why It Is Hard For Disabled Women, Queer Persons To Leave Abusive Partners

Bengaluru: Reema*, 32, has been married for about five years but the man she thought would be her life partner has turned out to be a ... Why...

Geetika Mantri　　　　　　June 16, 2022

Illustration by Bailey Mariner/ Healthline.com

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"

The biggest win for us was the shift in our own mindsets from a journalist thinking to a product and business thinking. This thinking is helping all our future innovation and taking our journalism to bigger audiences.

— Bhanupriya Rao

6

The state of news media in India through the lenses of the Startups Lab program

During our 16-week program, we collected insights from different sources and identified common themes. By outlining the most relevant events that are currently taking place and impacting the journalism industry in India, we wanted to capture a snapshot of the current state of news media in the country. The findings are split into two parts. In the first, we present interesting findings that emerged from the startups' audience research. In the second part, we offer an overview of the industry in India.

6.1.

Findings from the audience research

Some of the key themes and trends that emerged from our work with the startups were:

- Different audiences expecting of news and media startups to be organically a part of their everyday lives and contributing in change-making
- Audiences wanting to engage more closely with the startups
- Raising the voices of local communities and supplying authentic and relevant local content
- Giving perspective so that people can make better daily decisions
- Providing inspiration and entertainment using different multimedia resources
- Creating contextual experiences so that content can be consumed everywhere at any time
- Generating deeper emotional connections with the audience through content
- Emerging value exchange opportunities that go beyond money and enable new business models
- Language segmentation as a pathway to growing audience and revenue
- Mobile is leading the way Indians consume and share information
- The popularisation of non-cash payment methods among the young population

Generally, it can be concluded that audiences across the country want something to believe in, a vision that they can relate to and the opportunity to participate in the process by establishing close relationships with news and media companies. In return, people expect to have their voices heard, to be represented, and to see impact in the communities that they are part of. They want to trust and turn to news in order to make better decisions, get inspired and feel that they belong to a place.

We've found opportunities within language segmentation by pairing content and targeted advertising in vernacular languages. Another interesting finding was the opportunity to leverage the exchange of value within the startups' ecosystem. For example, by offering trust in exchange for free access to information, while providing Socially Responsible Growth Funds with community impact in exchange for money. By mapping out the different stakeholders in their networks, the participants of the GNI Startups Lab India were able to identify new untapped audiences and design new business models to explore the exchange of different values such as products and services, money and credit, information and other intangibles.

Additionally, data shows that mobile phones are still, and increasingly, leading the way the Indian population consumes and shares information, and this has a strong impact on the design of new offerings. Also, the audience payment behaviour in India has been shifting towards digital with more people adhering to cashless payments, especially among the younger generation. Thus, creating opportunities for growth as numerous research shows that cashless payments are economic boosters.

6.2.

Overview of the journalism industry

In this section, we share the main themes, key topics and general trends specific to the news and media industry in India as for May, 2022. These findings are based on insights that the 10 startups gathered during audience research, as well as from inputs from the DIGIPUB team.

- New waves of Covid and the role of media in identifying early breakouts
- The polarisation of media and the confidence crisis in news and politics
- Government-controlled media to shape public opinion (political bias)
- The rise of independent media outlets standing up Government and corporations
- The emergence of digital news media organisations
- The increase in data-driven journalism
- The growth of fact-checking activities to fight fake news
- Advertisement as the main revenue source
- The search for reader-supported independence of news outlets
- Quality journalists facing the challenges of digitisation
- Bigger media houses being owned by giant corporates having vested interest
- Government trying to control social media news outlets in the name of regulations or guidelines
- Journalists being targeted by the government for asking questions
- No accreditation or recognition of social media journalists by the government

In summary, the rise of independent news outlets leveraging technology and the tension between journalists and the government were the major themes identified. While digitisation and the use of technology to combat fake news help build trust in news and media organisations, the attempts of the government to shape public opinion has the opposite effect. In addition, the loss of revenue from advertising and the search for audience-supported business models add up to the challenges that we have witnessed throughout the program.

Yet, these challenges also present unparalleled opportunities for news and media companies that seek to serve their communities and deliver value by keeping them informed, entertained and enthused.

7

the maturity self-assessment

Our maturity assessment is a resource that's been designed inspired by a number of different sources to help participants better understand the level of maturity of their products and services according to the three pillars of the GNI Startups Lab India program: Product Development, Growth & Marketing and Finance & Investment.

For that, each company assessed the following areas: OKR Methodology, Problem awareness, Early-adoption, Validation, Product-market fit, Minimum viable product (MVP), Agile, Metrics, Business Plan, KPIs, Growth, Pitch, Audience understanding and involvement, Innovation monitoring, Openness for improvement and failure, and prototyping culture.
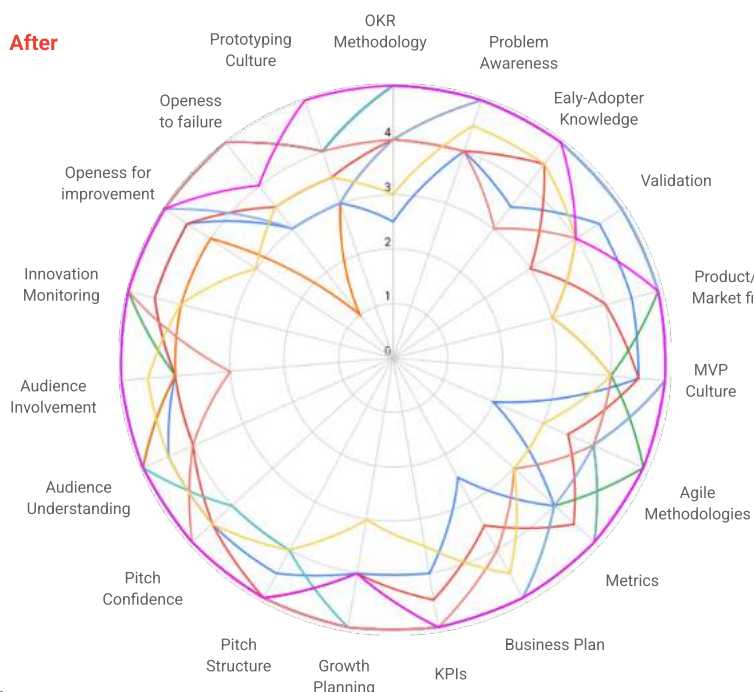
7.1.

The results of the self-assessment pre and post program

The graphs below show the comparison between the assessment before and after the program. The results expose how well each organisation did in each area and what areas need further improvement.

Before
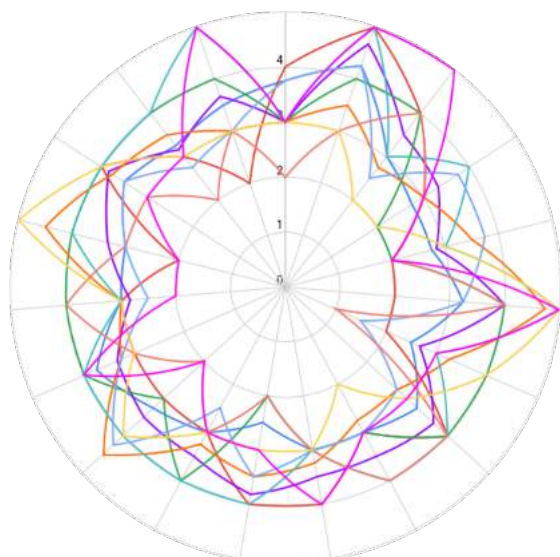
After

Summary of program impact comparing the pre and post-program self-evaluation.

The assessment essentially measured the startups' level of maturity regarding audience awareness, product development, growth, marketing, finance and investment on a scale running from 0 (low maturity) to 5 (high maturity). Examination of the chart clearly shows that all startups experienced a substantial increase in all areas evaluated. Compared to the first assessment at the start of the program, there's a significant shift from the middle of the graph (moderate maturity) towards the edges (high maturity), demonstrating an elevated increase in performance felt by the participants. The values that experienced significant changes are innovation monitoring, audience research, pitch confidence as well as early-adopter mindset, validation and product-market fit.

The results also suggest that the majority of the organisations benefited most from the program by developing a better understanding of their audience as well as a product-thinking mindset. They incorporated Design Thinking in strategic planning and product development, and invested time to conceptualise and experiment with business models with audience-centricity as its North Star.

For the startups to achieve these improvements, they were exposed to different skills, including the mastery of new concepts and the ability to spend time with the audiences they are serving. They had to talk to them, learn, and experiment with new offerings to solve their audience's untapped needs. Ultimately, the organisations are now better equipped to sustainably provide high-quality reporting for local communities, single-topic audiences and previously underserved communities across India with empathy, collaboration and experimentation at the core.

thank yous

Thank you to the team of people who collaborated to make the GNI Startups Lab India possible

Startups

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Guest Speakers

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