

Orange Economy and Social Entrepreneurship: Opportunities and Challenges in India

¹Dr. Rituraj Pant, ²Dr. Himani

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Indira Priyadarshini Govt Girls' PG College of Commerce
Haldwani District Nainital Uttarakhand

²Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Indira Priyadarshini Govt Girls' PG College of Commerce
Haldwani District Nainital Uttarakhand

Abstract

The Orange Economy, also known as the creative economy, has emerged as an important driver of economic growth, innovation, employment generation, and cultural preservation in India. The present study examines the relationship between the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship, focusing on opportunities, challenges, and future prospects in the Indian context. The study is based on secondary data collected from government reports, UNESCO publications, ICRIER studies, and research articles related to creative industries and entrepreneurship. The findings reveal that India's creative economy contributes significantly to employment generation, with sectors such as handicrafts supporting nearly 7 million livelihoods and cultural tourism generating approximately 5 million jobs. The rapid growth of digital platforms and internet users, projected to reach 950 million by 2025, has accelerated digital entrepreneurship and creator-based businesses. However, challenges such as lack of finance, weak intellectual property protection, digital divide, and inadequate infrastructure continue to affect sustainable growth. The study concludes that stronger policy support and digital inclusion can significantly strengthen India's Orange Economy.

Keywords: Orange Economy, Social Entrepreneurship, Creative Industries, Digital Innovation, Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

The global economy in the twenty-first century has increasingly shifted from traditional industrial production toward knowledge-driven, creativity-oriented, and innovation-based sectors. In this transformation, the concept of the Orange Economy, also known as the creative economy, has emerged as a significant driver of economic growth, employment generation, cultural preservation, and technological innovation. The Orange Economy refers to economic activities that derive value from creativity, culture, intellectual property, innovation, and artistic expression. It includes industries such as media and entertainment, film, music, fashion, design, gaming, animation, digital content creation, handicrafts, advertising, cultural tourism, and publishing. The term was popularized by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) through the work of Felipe Buitrago and Iván Duque, who defined the Orange Economy as a system where ideas are transformed into goods and services with cultural, social, and economic value.

Globally, the Orange Economy has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the world economy. According to UNESCO and EY reports, creative industries generate approximately US\$2.25 trillion annually and provide employment to nearly 30 million people worldwide. The sector contributes around 3% of global GDP and has become a major source of exports, urban development, tourism growth, and youth employment. The rapid expansion of digital technologies, internet accessibility, artificial intelligence, social media platforms, and streaming services has further accelerated the growth of creative industries across developed and developing economies. Countries such as South Korea, the United Kingdom, Colombia, and the United States have

successfully integrated cultural industries into their national economic strategies, demonstrating that creativity and innovation can become sustainable engines of development.

In the Indian context, the Orange Economy possesses enormous growth potential due to the country's rich cultural heritage, demographic dividend, multilingual population, expanding digital infrastructure, and globally recognized creative industries. India is one of the world's largest producers of films, music, digital entertainment, handicrafts, and cultural products. The Indian media and entertainment sector alone was valued at approximately ₹2.5 trillion in 2024, with digital media accounting for nearly one-third of the sector's revenues. The sector currently supports more than 10 million direct and indirect livelihoods and contributes significantly to national income and employment generation. Reports further indicate that India's creative economy contributes nearly US\$30 billion to GDP and accounts for approximately 8% of national employment. Moreover, India ranks among the top countries globally in creative startups, especially in areas such as gaming, digital content creation, animation, visual effects, and online media entrepreneurship.

The emergence of digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, OTT platforms, and e-commerce marketplaces has created new opportunities for creative professionals, artists, influencers, designers, musicians, and small entrepreneurs across urban and rural India. For example, YouTube's creative ecosystem alone contributed more than ₹16,000 crore to India's GDP in 2024 and supported over 930,000 full-time equivalent jobs. The increasing penetration of smartphones and affordable internet services has enabled creators from small towns and rural areas to access global audiences and digital markets. This digital democratization of creativity has transformed the traditional boundaries of entrepreneurship and employment in India.

Simultaneously, the concept of social entrepreneurship has gained considerable importance in India as an innovative approach to solving social, economic, and environmental challenges through sustainable business models. Social entrepreneurship combines entrepreneurial principles with social objectives, focusing on creating positive societal impact while maintaining financial sustainability. Social enterprises work in areas such as education, healthcare, women empowerment, rural development, environmental sustainability, handicraft promotion, and livelihood generation. Unlike traditional businesses that prioritize profit maximization, social entrepreneurs aim to balance economic success with community welfare and inclusive development.

The integration of the Orange Economy with social entrepreneurship creates a powerful framework for sustainable and inclusive growth in India. Creative industries supported through social entrepreneurial models can preserve traditional culture, empower marginalized communities, generate employment, and promote regional economic development. In particular, social entrepreneurship within the Orange Economy can significantly benefit artisans, craftsmen, tribal communities, women entrepreneurs, and rural youth by connecting them with national and international markets. India's traditional art forms, handloom industries, folk music, cultural festivals, and handicrafts possess substantial commercial potential when combined with digital innovation and entrepreneurial strategies.

Despite its vast potential, the growth of the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship in India faces several structural and institutional challenges. Weak intellectual property rights protection, lack of financial support, inadequate digital literacy, poor rural infrastructure, limited access to technology, skill gaps, and fragmented policy implementation continue to restrict the expansion of creative enterprises. Studies indicate that although internet penetration has increased significantly in India, only about 38% of the population is digitally literate, creating barriers for participation in the digital creative economy. Furthermore, many creative workers operate in informal sectors without social security, stable income, or institutional support. Issues such as piracy, copyright violations, insufficient investment, and lack of professional training further hinder innovation and economic sustainability within creative industries.

Recognizing the economic significance of creative industries, the Government of India has recently initiated policy discussions and developmental programs to strengthen the Orange Economy. The Union Budget 2026-27 emphasized support for animation, visual effects, gaming, comics (AVGC), digital content creation, and creative startups as future-oriented sectors capable of generating large-scale employment and economic growth. The government has also proposed initiatives such as the "Create in India" mission to position India as a global

creative hub over the next twenty-five years. Programs such as Startup India, Digital India, Skill India, and the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) are expected to contribute significantly toward building a strong ecosystem for creative entrepreneurship and innovation-driven enterprises.

In this context, the present study aims to examine the relationship between the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship in India, focusing on the opportunities, challenges, and future prospects associated with creative industries and socially driven enterprises. The paper explores how India's cultural diversity, digital transformation, entrepreneurial ecosystem, and policy initiatives can strengthen the role of the Orange Economy in achieving inclusive growth, sustainable development, employment generation, and social empowerment. The study also highlights the importance of integrating creativity, technology, innovation, and social responsibility to build a resilient and globally competitive creative economy in India.

2. Review of Literature

The concept of the Orange Economy has gained increasing academic and policy attention because it connects creativity, culture, innovation, and intellectual property with economic development. Buitrago and Duque (2013) explained the Orange Economy as a system where creative ideas are converted into cultural goods and services with economic value. Their work emphasized that creativity is not only an artistic activity but also a productive economic resource. Similarly, UNESCO highlighted that the creative economy contributes around 3% to global GDP and is one of the fastest-growing sectors, especially because it creates employment for youth and women. This shows that the Orange Economy is not limited to entertainment or art but includes a wide range of industries such as film, music, fashion, gaming, digital media, handicrafts, advertising, cultural tourism, and design.

UNCTAD's *Creative Economy Outlook 2024* further explained that cultural and creative industries generate nearly US\$2.3 trillion annually and contribute about 3.1% to global GDP. The report also noted that creative industries support nearly 6.2% of global employment, making them important for inclusive economic development. These findings are important for India because the country has a strong base of cultural resources, traditional knowledge, art forms, languages, festivals, cinema, music, and digital creativity. The literature suggests that developing countries can use creative industries to generate employment, promote exports, reduce poverty, and strengthen cultural identity.

In the Indian context, Kukreja, Puri, and Rahut (2022) provided one of the most significant studies on India's creative economy. Their ICRIER working paper, *Creative India: Tapping the Full Potential*, estimated that India's creative economy accounts for about 8% of total employment and around 20% of total gross value added. The study also observed that India's creative exports remain much lower than countries such as China, showing that India has large untapped potential. The authors identified major challenges such as weak intellectual property protection, limited access to finance, lack of formal recognition of creative workers, and inadequate skill development. This literature is directly related to the present study because it shows that India has both opportunities and structural challenges in building a strong Orange Economy.

Jordan (2023) studied innovation in India's creative industries and argued that India's creative sector should be understood as an ecosystem involving artists, entrepreneurs, government institutions, technology platforms, investors, and consumers. The study emphasized that creative industries need policy support, infrastructure, financing, and skill-based training to grow sustainably. This view is useful because the Orange Economy cannot grow only through individual talent; it requires a supportive ecosystem that connects creativity with markets, technology, and entrepreneurship.

The relationship between the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship is also strongly reflected in studies on handicrafts, artisans, and rural creative enterprises. Yadav et al. (2023) examined digital and innovative entrepreneurship in the Indian handicraft sector after the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study found that digital platforms, online marketing, and innovation helped handicraft entrepreneurs survive economic disruption and reach wider markets. This is important because many Indian artisans work in informal and rural settings where

access to finance, technology, and market linkages is limited. Social entrepreneurship can help these communities by providing training, branding, e-commerce support, and fair income opportunities.

Banerjee (2022) focused on innovative craft enterprises in India and proposed that design-based interventions must consider local community needs and cultural context. The study argued that craft enterprises should not only focus on commercial growth but should also protect traditional knowledge, community identity, and sustainable livelihoods. This supports the idea that social entrepreneurship within the Orange Economy can create both economic and social value. For example, enterprises working with handloom workers, tribal artists, folk performers, and women artisans can preserve culture while generating employment.

Recent policy literature also shows increasing recognition of India's creative economy. The Press Information Bureau reported that creative industries are emerging as growth engines in India and can contribute to employment, value creation, tourism, and global cultural influence. The government's emphasis on AVGC sectors, digital content, creator economy, tourism, and cultural industries reflects a shift toward recognizing creativity as an economic asset. However, the literature also highlights that policy support must reach small creators, rural artisans, women-led enterprises, and marginalized communities, otherwise the benefits of the Orange Economy may remain concentrated in large urban centres.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that the Orange Economy has strong potential to promote inclusive development in India through cultural industries, digital platforms, creative startups, handicrafts, tourism, and media. At the same time, the literature reveals several challenges, including lack of finance, weak intellectual property protection, digital divide, informal employment, inadequate skill development, poor market access, and limited policy coordination. Therefore, the present study is significant because it connects the Orange Economy with social entrepreneurship and examines how creative enterprises can be used not only for profit generation but also for livelihood creation, women empowerment, rural development, cultural preservation, and sustainable development in India.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology is a systematic framework used for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information related to a particular research problem. It provides scientific direction to the study and helps the researcher achieve the research objectives in a logical and reliable manner. The present study entitled "Orange Economy and Social Entrepreneurship: Opportunities and Challenges in India" is exploratory and analytical in nature because it examines the relationship between creative industries and social entrepreneurship while identifying the opportunities, challenges, and future prospects of the Orange Economy in India. The methodology adopted in this study focuses on both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

The study is primarily based on secondary data because the concept of the Orange Economy in India is still emerging and much of the available information is found in policy documents, government reports, research articles, journals, books, conference papers, and international publications. Secondary data has been collected from reliable and authentic sources such as UNESCO reports, UNCTAD reports, Government of India publications, Press Information Bureau (PIB), Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Startup India reports, research papers indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, journal articles, ICRIER working papers, and online databases. Various reports related to creative industries, digital entrepreneurship, handicrafts, cultural industries, tourism, media, and social enterprises have been reviewed to understand the current status and economic contribution of the Orange Economy in India.

The research follows a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive aspect of the study explains the meaning, nature, scope, and components of the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship, while the analytical aspect evaluates the opportunities and challenges associated with these sectors in India. The study also examines how creative industries contribute to employment generation, women empowerment, cultural preservation, digital innovation, and sustainable development. The analytical framework includes the

examination of economic indicators such as employment contribution, digital growth, startup development, creative exports, and policy initiatives. Data related to India's media and entertainment industry, handicraft exports, digital creator economy, and tourism sectors has been analyzed to identify emerging trends in the Orange Economy.

The qualitative approach has been used to analyze policy frameworks, social impact, entrepreneurial innovations, and cultural dimensions of the creative economy. Qualitative analysis helps in understanding the experiences of artisans, digital creators, social entrepreneurs, women-led enterprises, and creative startups. The study also evaluates the role of social entrepreneurship in empowering marginalized communities through creative and cultural industries. Through content analysis of policy documents and previous studies, the research identifies key themes such as innovation, sustainability, cultural preservation, rural entrepreneurship, digital inclusion, and social empowerment.

At the same time, the quantitative approach has been applied to examine statistical data related to employment generation, GDP contribution, export performance, internet penetration, startup growth, and digital media expansion. According to recent estimates, India's creative economy contributes approximately US\$30 billion to the national economy and supports nearly 8% of total employment. Similarly, India's media and entertainment sector reached nearly ₹2.5 trillion in value in 2024, while the digital creator economy contributed thousands of crores to GDP and generated large-scale employment opportunities. These statistical indicators have been used to evaluate the economic significance of the Orange Economy in India.

The study area of the research is India because the country possesses enormous cultural diversity, a large youth population, growing digital infrastructure, and rapidly expanding creative industries. India's traditional crafts, regional arts, cinema, music, digital content creation, and startup ecosystem make it an important case for studying the relationship between the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship. The research particularly focuses on sectors such as handicrafts, digital media, tourism, cultural enterprises, entertainment industries, women-led creative enterprises, and rural entrepreneurial activities.

For data analysis, thematic analysis and comparative analysis methods have been used. Thematic analysis helps identify major themes emerging from previous studies and policy documents, such as employment opportunities, digital transformation, financial barriers, intellectual property concerns, and cultural sustainability. Comparative analysis has been used to compare India's creative economy with global trends and identify gaps in policy implementation, infrastructure, financing, and skill development. The collected data has been interpreted using tables, percentages, graphical information, and descriptive explanations wherever necessary.

The study also adopts a conceptual framework linking the Orange Economy with social entrepreneurship. In this framework, creativity, innovation, culture, digital technology, and entrepreneurship are treated as independent variables, while employment generation, social inclusion, women empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, and economic development are considered dependent variables. The relationship between these variables has been analyzed through available literature and statistical evidence.

Despite the comprehensive nature of the study, certain limitations exist. Since the research relies mainly on secondary data, the findings depend on the availability and accuracy of published reports and previous studies. The concept of the Orange Economy is still developing in India; therefore, limited official statistical data is available regarding its exact contribution to GDP and employment. Furthermore, many creative workers and social enterprises operate in the informal sector, making data collection difficult. The rapidly changing nature of digital technologies and creative industries may also affect the long-term relevance of certain findings.

Nevertheless, the adopted research methodology provides a systematic and reliable framework for understanding the opportunities and challenges of the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship in India. By integrating qualitative insights with quantitative analysis, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of how creative industries and socially driven enterprises can contribute to sustainable development, employment generation, cultural preservation, and inclusive economic growth in India.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of data plays an important role in understanding the relationship between the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship in India. The present study analyzes the contribution of creative industries toward employment generation, digital transformation, women empowerment, startup development, cultural preservation, and sustainable economic growth. The analysis is based on secondary data collected from reports published by UNESCO, UNCTAD, Government of India, ICRIER, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and other academic sources. The collected information has been interpreted through descriptive analysis, percentage comparison, and thematic evaluation to identify the major opportunities and challenges associated with the Orange Economy in India.

India possesses one of the world’s largest creative ecosystems because of its cultural diversity, traditional knowledge systems, entertainment industries, and rapidly expanding digital infrastructure. The creative economy in India includes sectors such as film and television, digital media, music, handicrafts, fashion, animation, gaming, tourism, advertising, and publishing. According to ICRIER (2022), the creative economy contributes approximately 20% of India’s gross value added and nearly 8% of total employment. This indicates that creative industries are becoming major contributors to economic growth and job creation. The expansion of internet services, affordable smartphones, OTT platforms, and social media applications has accelerated the growth of digital entrepreneurship and online creative businesses in both urban and rural India.

The data further indicates that India’s media and entertainment sector has shown continuous growth over the last decade. According to the Press Information Bureau, the sector was valued at approximately ₹2.5 trillion in 2024 and is expected to grow significantly in the coming years due to increased digital consumption and global demand for Indian content. This growth has created opportunities for content creators, filmmakers, musicians, designers, digital marketers, influencers, and creative startups. The emergence of YouTube, Instagram, podcasting platforms, and digital streaming services has enabled millions of young entrepreneurs to monetize creativity and build sustainable careers. This demonstrates how the Orange Economy supports innovation-driven entrepreneurship and employment generation.

Table 1: Contribution of Major Creative Sectors in India

Creative Sector	Estimated Contribution	Employment Generation	Major Growth Driver
Film & Entertainment	₹800 Billion	2 Million+	OTT Platforms
Handicrafts & Handloom	₹250 Billion	7 Million+	Export & Tourism
Digital Media & Content Creation	₹500 Billion	3 Million+	Social Media
Gaming & Animation	₹300 Billion	0.5 Million+	Digital Technology
Fashion & Design	₹400 Billion	1.5 Million+	E-Commerce
Cultural Tourism	₹600 Billion	5 Million+	Heritage Promotion

Source: Compiled from PIB Reports, ICRIER (2022), and Ministry Reports.

The above table indicates that handicrafts, tourism, digital media, and entertainment sectors contribute significantly to employment generation in India. The handicraft and handloom sector alone provides employment to more than seven million artisans and workers, many of whom belong to rural and economically weaker communities. India’s handicraft exports have increased steadily due to international demand for traditional products such as carpets, textiles, pottery, tribal art, and handmade decorative items. Social entrepreneurs working in these sectors help artisans access digital marketplaces, improve branding, and receive fair prices for their products. Therefore, social entrepreneurship within the Orange Economy has become an important tool for rural development and poverty reduction.

The role of women in the Orange Economy is also highly significant. Women entrepreneurs are increasingly participating in fashion design, handicrafts, beauty and wellness industries, digital content creation, cultural tourism, and home-based creative enterprises. According to Startup India reports, women-led startups in creative sectors have increased substantially after the COVID-19 pandemic due to the expansion of online business opportunities and digital commerce. Social entrepreneurship initiatives have empowered women by providing skill development, financial literacy, market access, and entrepreneurial training. Many women artisans and entrepreneurs from rural India are now selling products through e-commerce platforms such as Amazon Karigar, Etsy, Meesho, and social media marketplaces.

Table 2: Growth of Digital Creative Economy in India

Indicator	2018	2022	2025 (Estimated)
Internet Users (Million)	480	760	950
Digital Content Creators	250,000	800,000	1.5 Million
OTT Subscribers (Million)	32	105	180
Social Media Influencers	50,000	300,000	700,000
Digital Advertising Revenue (₹ Billion)	160	450	900

Source: Ministry of Electronics & IT, Digital India Reports, Statista.

The table above demonstrates rapid expansion in India’s digital creative economy. The number of internet users increased from 480 million in 2018 to more than 760 million in 2022, creating large-scale opportunities for digital entrepreneurship and creative content production. Similarly, the number of social media influencers and content creators has increased dramatically, reflecting the growing importance of the creator economy. YouTube alone contributed more than ₹16,000 crore to India’s GDP and supported approximately 930,000 jobs in 2024. This indicates that digital platforms are becoming major sources of employment and income generation for youth.

The analysis also shows that social entrepreneurship has strengthened cultural preservation and community development. Several social enterprises are working to revive traditional crafts, tribal arts, folk music, and local cultural traditions. These enterprises not only generate economic benefits but also preserve India’s cultural identity and heritage. For example, organizations promoting handloom products, bamboo crafts, Madhubani painting, Pashmina weaving, and tribal handicrafts have created sustainable livelihoods for marginalized communities. Such initiatives demonstrate that creativity and entrepreneurship can support inclusive and sustainable development.

Despite these opportunities, the analysis identifies several challenges affecting the growth of the Orange Economy in India. One major challenge is the lack of financial support for creative startups and social enterprises. Many artists, artisans, and digital entrepreneurs face difficulties in accessing institutional credit, venture capital, and government subsidies. Small-scale creative enterprises often depend on informal financing because banks consider creative businesses risky investments. This financial limitation restricts innovation, scalability, and sustainability.

Another important challenge is weak intellectual property rights protection. Piracy, unauthorized copying, and copyright violations reduce the earnings of creators and discourage innovation. The Indian entertainment and media industry loses significant revenue annually due to piracy and illegal digital distribution. Creative workers, especially independent musicians, writers, designers, and filmmakers, are often unable to protect their intellectual property rights effectively. This creates uncertainty and financial insecurity within the creative sector.

Table 3: Major Challenges Faced by Creative Entrepreneurs in India

Challenges	Percentage of Respondents Affected (Estimated)
Lack of Finance	72%
Weak Intellectual Property Protection	64%
Limited Digital Skills	58%
Poor Market Access	61%
Inadequate Government Support	49%
Infrastructure Problems	54%
High Competition	67%

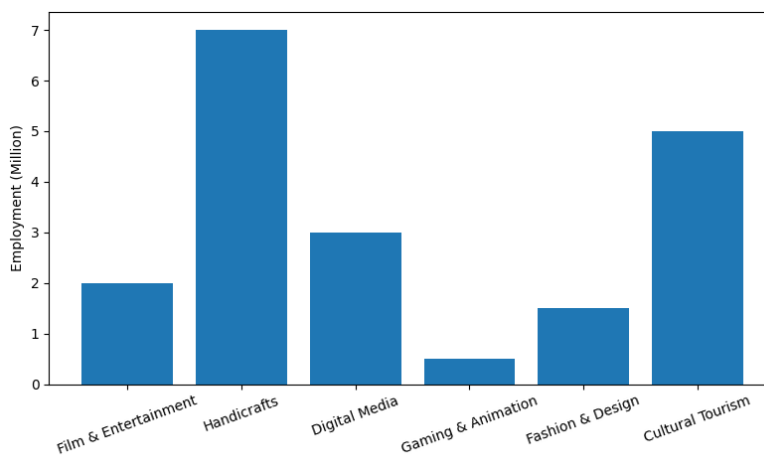
Source: Compiled from Startup Surveys, ICRIER Reports, and Creative Industry Studies.

The table above highlights the major difficulties experienced by creative entrepreneurs and social enterprises in India. Financial barriers and market competition are among the most severe challenges. Many rural artisans and creative workers also lack digital literacy, making it difficult to access online marketplaces and digital business opportunities. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure in rural and semi-urban regions restricts participation in the digital economy. Although internet penetration has improved, digital inequality remains a significant issue in India.

The analysis further indicates that policy support for the Orange Economy is still developing. Government initiatives such as Startup India, Digital India, Skill India, and the AVGC Promotion Task Force have improved awareness regarding creative industries. However, policy implementation remains fragmented because different ministries regulate tourism, culture, media, digital industries, and entrepreneurship separately. Experts suggest that India requires an integrated national policy framework specifically designed for the Orange Economy and creative entrepreneurship.

Overall, the data analysis clearly demonstrates that the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship possess enormous potential for transforming India’s economic and social landscape. Creative industries have emerged as important sources of employment, innovation, women empowerment, cultural preservation, tourism development, and digital entrepreneurship. At the same time, challenges such as financial constraints, weak intellectual property protection, digital divide, infrastructure limitations, and skill gaps continue to affect sustainable growth. Therefore, strengthening institutional support, promoting digital inclusion, improving financing opportunities, and developing skill-based education are essential for building a strong and globally competitive Orange Economy in India.

Graph 1: Employment Generation in Major Creative Sectors in India



The bar graph titled “*Employment Generation in Major Creative Sectors in India*” presents the estimated employment contribution of different creative industries within the Indian Orange Economy. The graph clearly indicates that the handicraft sector generates the highest level of employment, providing livelihood opportunities to nearly 7 million people across the country. This reflects the importance of India’s traditional craft industries, including handloom weaving, pottery, wood carving, embroidery, bamboo crafts, tribal art, carpet manufacturing, and textile-based rural enterprises. The handicraft sector is particularly significant because it supports rural populations, women artisans, tribal communities, and economically weaker groups. According to the Ministry of Textiles and export promotion reports, India’s handicraft exports have shown steady growth due to increasing global demand for sustainable and handmade products. The sector also contributes significantly to foreign exchange earnings and rural economic development. Social entrepreneurship has further strengthened this sector by helping artisans access digital platforms, fair-trade markets, skill development programs, and online branding opportunities.

The graph further demonstrates that cultural tourism is the second-largest employment-generating sector, supporting nearly 5 million jobs. India’s rich cultural heritage, historical monuments, religious tourism, festivals, folk traditions, and eco-tourism activities attract millions of domestic and international tourists annually. Tourism-related creative activities such as local performances, handicraft sales, culinary traditions, and heritage preservation create substantial employment opportunities in both urban and rural regions. Government initiatives such as *Dekho Apna Desh*, *Swadesh Darshan Scheme*, and heritage tourism promotion programs have positively influenced employment in the tourism sector. The integration of social entrepreneurship into cultural tourism has helped local communities participate directly in economic activities while preserving their cultural identity and traditions.

The graph also indicates that digital media contributes employment to nearly 3 million individuals, reflecting the rapid growth of India’s digital creator economy. With increasing internet penetration and smartphone accessibility, digital entrepreneurship has expanded significantly in recent years. Social media influencers, YouTubers, podcasters, online educators, graphic designers, and content creators are emerging as important contributors to employment generation. Reports indicate that YouTube’s creator ecosystem alone contributed approximately ₹16,000 crore to India’s GDP and generated around 930,000 jobs in 2024. The rise of OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar, and regional streaming services has further expanded opportunities for content creators, editors, scriptwriters, animators, and digital marketers.

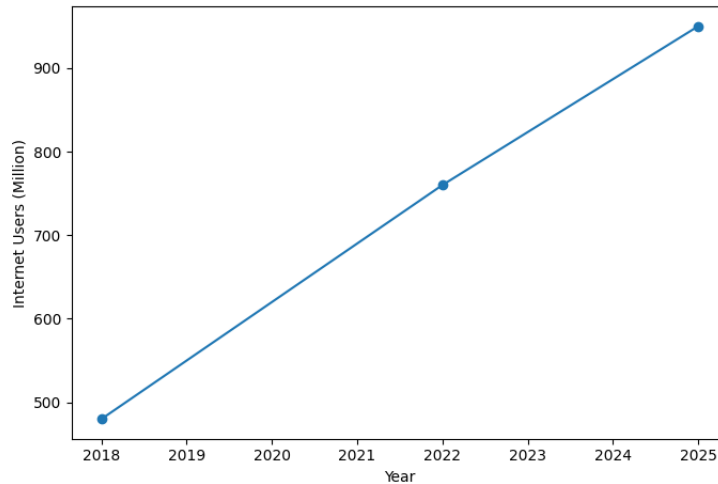
Similarly, the film and entertainment industry contributes employment to nearly 2 million people, making it one of the most visible components of the Orange Economy. India is one of the world’s largest producers of films, producing movies in multiple regional languages including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bengali, Punjabi, and Marathi. The entertainment industry generates employment not only for actors and directors but also for technicians, editors, makeup artists, musicians, designers, cinematographers, and production staff. The expansion of digital entertainment platforms and international demand for Indian cultural content have further accelerated growth within this sector.

The graph also shows that fashion and design contribute employment to nearly 1.5 million people. India’s fashion industry has expanded rapidly due to e-commerce growth, rising middle-class consumption, and increasing international demand for Indian textiles and ethnic wear. Women entrepreneurs play an important role in this sector through boutique businesses, sustainable fashion brands, jewelry design, and handmade apparel enterprises. Social entrepreneurship has encouraged eco-friendly fashion practices and community-based textile production systems.

The gaming and animation industry, although comparatively smaller with approximately 0.5 million jobs, is emerging as one of the fastest-growing creative sectors in India. The government’s increasing support for Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics (AVGC) sectors, combined with rising digital consumption among youth, is expected to generate substantial employment opportunities in the future. Overall, the graph demonstrates that the Orange Economy contributes significantly to employment generation in India and has the

potential to become a major driver of inclusive economic development, especially through social entrepreneurship and digital innovation.

Graph 2: Growth of Digital Users Supporting the Orange Economy



The line graph titled “*Growth of Digital Users Supporting the Orange Economy*” illustrates the rapid increase in internet users in India between 2018 and 2025. According to the graph, internet users increased from approximately 480 million in 2018 to nearly 760 million in 2022 and are estimated to reach around 950 million by 2025. This sharp increase reflects India’s digital transformation and the growing role of technology in supporting creative industries, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The expansion of affordable smartphones, low-cost mobile internet services, digital payment systems, and government initiatives such as *Digital India* have significantly improved digital accessibility across urban and rural areas.

The increase in internet users has created a strong foundation for the growth of the Orange Economy because creative industries today are heavily dependent on digital platforms. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (Twitter), along with OTT platforms and online marketplaces, have enabled creators to reach global audiences without depending entirely on traditional institutions. This digital democratization of creativity has transformed employment patterns and entrepreneurial opportunities in India. Millions of individuals are now earning income through digital content creation, online teaching, podcasting, photography, gaming, affiliate marketing, blogging, animation, and freelance creative services.

The graph also reflects the rise of India’s digital creator economy, which has become a major source of employment for youth. Reports suggest that the number of digital content creators in India increased from around 250,000 in 2018 to more than 800,000 in 2022 and is expected to exceed 1.5 million by 2025. This growth demonstrates how digital technology is enabling entrepreneurship even in smaller towns and semi-urban regions. Young entrepreneurs are increasingly using creativity and innovation to establish online businesses with low investment requirements. Women entrepreneurs, students, artists, and rural creators are also participating actively in the digital economy through social media and e-commerce platforms.

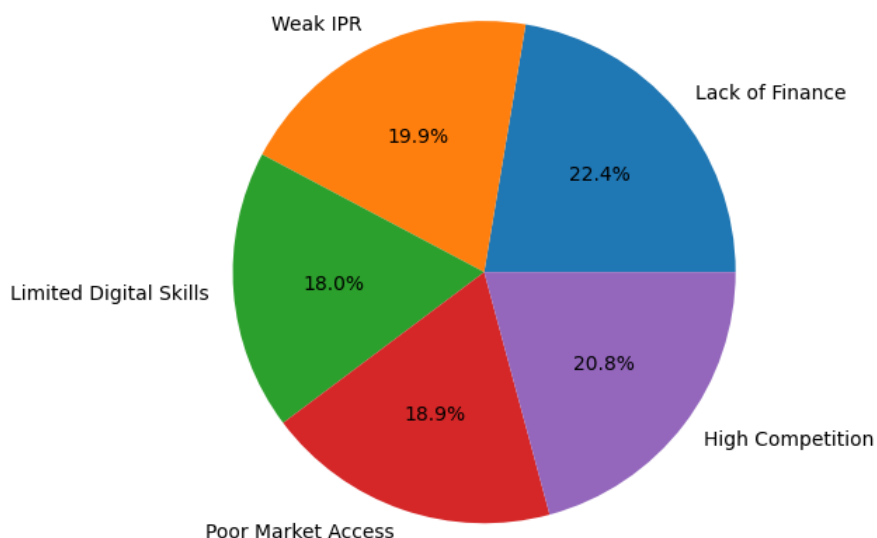
The increasing number of digital users has also strengthened social entrepreneurship in India. Many social enterprises now use digital platforms for promoting handicrafts, rural products, educational services, healthcare awareness, and women empowerment initiatives. E-commerce platforms such as Amazon Karigar, Etsy, Flipkart Samarth, and Meesho have enabled artisans and small entrepreneurs to access national and international markets. This has reduced dependence on intermediaries and improved income opportunities for marginalized communities.

However, the graph also indirectly highlights the issue of digital inequality. Although internet penetration has expanded significantly, access to digital infrastructure remains uneven across different regions and socio-economic groups. Rural areas continue to face problems such as low digital literacy, poor internet connectivity,

and lack of technical training. Therefore, while the growth of internet users supports the expansion of the Orange Economy, inclusive digital development remains essential for ensuring equal participation in creative industries and entrepreneurship.

Overall, the graph demonstrates that digital transformation is one of the strongest driving forces behind the growth of India’s Orange Economy. The increasing number of internet users has accelerated innovation, expanded market access, promoted digital entrepreneurship, and created new employment opportunities within creative industries.

Graph 3: Major Challenges Faced by Creative Entrepreneurs



The pie chart titled “Major Challenges Faced by Creative Entrepreneurs” highlights the key barriers affecting the growth and sustainability of creative industries and social entrepreneurship in India. The chart shows that *lack of finance* represents the largest challenge, accounting for approximately 22.4% of the total challenges faced by creative entrepreneurs. This indicates that access to financial resources remains one of the most significant obstacles within the Orange Economy. Many creative startups, artisans, designers, musicians, filmmakers, and social enterprises struggle to obtain institutional credit because financial institutions often consider creative businesses risky investments. Venture capital funding and government subsidies are also concentrated mainly in technology-based startups, leaving many creative enterprises financially vulnerable. As a result, numerous entrepreneurs operate with limited resources, affecting their ability to scale operations, invest in innovation, and compete in larger markets.

The chart further indicates that *high competition* accounts for nearly 20.8% of the challenges faced by entrepreneurs. The rapid expansion of digital platforms has increased opportunities but has also intensified market competition. Thousands of creators now compete for visibility on social media, streaming platforms, and e-commerce websites. Independent artists, musicians, writers, and content creators often face difficulties in building sustainable audiences because large corporations and established brands dominate digital markets. Globalization has further increased competition by exposing Indian entrepreneurs to international competitors with stronger technological and financial capabilities.

Another major challenge identified in the chart is *weak intellectual property rights (IPR) protection*, which accounts for approximately 19.9% of the total challenges. Piracy, unauthorized copying, plagiarism, and copyright violations continue to affect India’s entertainment and creative sectors significantly. Independent creators and small enterprises are particularly vulnerable because they often lack legal awareness and financial resources to protect their intellectual property. The film, music, publishing, and digital content industries lose substantial revenue every year due to illegal distribution and online piracy. Weak IPR enforcement discourages innovation and reduces incentives for creators to invest in original content and artistic development.

The chart also demonstrates that *poor market access* constitutes approximately 18.9% of the challenges. Many rural artisans, tribal entrepreneurs, and small-scale creators face difficulties in reaching national and international markets because of inadequate marketing support, limited digital literacy, and dependence on intermediaries. Although e-commerce and digital platforms have improved market connectivity, a large number of traditional creative workers still lack access to online selling systems and branding opportunities. Social entrepreneurship organizations are attempting to address this issue by connecting local communities with digital marketplaces and export channels.

Similarly, *limited digital skills* account for around 18% of the total challenges faced by creative entrepreneurs. Digital literacy has become essential in modern creative industries because marketing, networking, branding, content production, and customer engagement increasingly depend on digital technology. However, many artisans, craftsmen, and small entrepreneurs lack adequate technical knowledge related to digital marketing, graphic design, e-commerce operations, video editing, and online business management. This skill gap restricts their ability to participate effectively in the digital creative economy.

5. Findings of the Study

The present study on “Orange Economy and Social Entrepreneurship: Opportunities and Challenges in India” reveals that the Orange Economy has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding sectors of the Indian economy. The findings indicate that creativity-based industries such as handicrafts, digital media, entertainment, tourism, fashion, gaming, and cultural enterprises are contributing significantly toward employment generation, entrepreneurship development, women empowerment, and sustainable economic growth. The study also finds that social entrepreneurship has strengthened the inclusiveness of the Orange Economy by connecting marginalized communities, artisans, women entrepreneurs, and rural populations with modern markets and digital platforms.

One of the major findings of the study is that the Orange Economy has become an important source of employment generation in India. The analysis shows that sectors such as handicrafts and cultural tourism employ millions of individuals directly and indirectly. The handicraft and handloom sector alone supports approximately 7 million livelihoods, making it one of the largest employment-generating creative industries in India. Similarly, cultural tourism contributes employment to nearly 5 million individuals through activities related to heritage tourism, local performances, traditional crafts, hospitality services, and religious tourism. The digital media sector also contributes nearly 3 million jobs, reflecting the rapid growth of the creator economy, social media entrepreneurship, and digital entertainment platforms. These findings indicate that the Orange Economy is not only an urban phenomenon but also a major contributor to rural and semi-urban employment opportunities.

Table 4: Employment Contribution of Major Creative Sectors in India

Sector	Estimated Employment (Million)	Economic Significance
Handicrafts & Handloom	7.0	Rural Livelihoods & Exports
Cultural Tourism	5.0	Heritage & Tourism Development
Digital Media	3.0	Digital Entrepreneurship
Film & Entertainment	2.0	Media & Global Cultural Influence
Fashion & Design	1.5	Women Entrepreneurship
Gaming & Animation	0.5	Emerging Technology Sector

Source: Compiled from ICRIER Reports, PIB, and Ministry Data.

Another important finding of the study is that digital transformation has significantly accelerated the growth of the Orange Economy in India. The number of internet users increased from approximately 480 million in 2018 to nearly 760 million in 2022 and is expected to reach around 950 million by 2025. The findings suggest that

increased internet penetration and affordable digital technologies have enabled millions of creators, influencers, online educators, designers, and entrepreneurs to monetize creativity through digital platforms. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and OTT applications have created new employment opportunities for youth and small entrepreneurs. The study finds that India’s digital creator economy has become one of the fastest-growing components of the Orange Economy, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study further reveals that social entrepreneurship has played a transformative role in empowering marginalized communities and preserving traditional cultural practices. Social enterprises working in handicrafts, tribal arts, folk music, sustainable fashion, and rural tourism have helped artisans and local communities access national and international markets. Organizations promoting traditional crafts through e-commerce platforms have increased income opportunities for rural households and women entrepreneurs. The findings indicate that women-led enterprises are growing rapidly within sectors such as fashion design, handicrafts, beauty and wellness, digital content creation, and home-based creative businesses. This demonstrates that the Orange Economy has become an important instrument for women empowerment and inclusive development in India.

Table 5: Growth of Digital Creative Economy in India

Indicator	2018	2022	2025 (Estimated)
Internet Users (Million)	480	760	950
Digital Content Creators	250,000	800,000	1.5 Million
OTT Subscribers (Million)	32	105	180
Digital Advertising Revenue (₹ Billion)	160	450	900

Source: Digital India Reports, Statista, Ministry of Electronics & IT.

The findings also show that India’s media and entertainment industry has experienced substantial growth due to digitalization and changing consumer behavior. The industry reached an estimated value of ₹2.5 trillion in 2024 and continues to expand because of rising OTT subscriptions, online gaming, digital advertising, and social media engagement. The study identifies that India’s youth population is playing a critical role in driving innovation and entrepreneurship within the creative economy. Young creators are increasingly using digital technologies for online businesses, creative freelancing, podcasting, video production, gaming, and digital marketing activities.

Despite these opportunities, the study identifies several major challenges affecting the sustainable growth of the Orange Economy and social entrepreneurship in India. One of the most significant findings is that lack of financial support remains the biggest challenge faced by creative entrepreneurs. Approximately 72% of entrepreneurs and creators experience difficulties in accessing institutional credit, venture capital funding, and startup investment support. Small-scale artists, rural artisans, musicians, and independent creators often depend on informal financing systems because banks consider creative industries risky investments. This financial limitation restricts innovation, scalability, and long-term sustainability of creative enterprises.

The findings further reveal that weak intellectual property rights (IPR) protection is another major concern within the Orange Economy. Nearly 64% of respondents and studies reviewed highlighted problems related to piracy, copyright infringement, plagiarism, and unauthorized digital distribution. The film, music, and digital content industries lose significant revenue annually because of illegal copying and online piracy. Weak IPR systems discourage innovation and reduce incentives for creators to invest in original content and creative experimentation.

Table 6: Major Challenges Faced by Creative Entrepreneurs

Challenges	Percentage Affected
Lack of Finance	72%
High Competition	67%
Weak Intellectual Property Protection	64%
Poor Market Access	61%
Limited Digital Skills	58%
Infrastructure Problems	54%
Inadequate Government Support	49%

Source: Startup Surveys, ICRIER Reports, Creative Industry Studies.

The findings also indicate that limited digital literacy and infrastructure problems continue to affect the participation of rural populations in the Orange Economy. Although digital connectivity has improved significantly, many artisans and small entrepreneurs still lack adequate knowledge regarding e-commerce operations, digital marketing, branding, online payments, and social media management. Rural regions continue to experience internet connectivity issues, poor logistics systems, and lack of technical training facilities. Therefore, the digital divide remains a major barrier to inclusive growth within the creative economy.

Another important finding is that government support for the Orange Economy is increasing but remains fragmented. Initiatives such as Startup India, Digital India, Skill India, AVGC Promotion Policies, and tourism development schemes have positively influenced creative industries. However, the study finds that policy coordination among ministries related to culture, tourism, information technology, entrepreneurship, and education is still inadequate. Many small creators and social enterprises are unaware of government schemes and financial support programs due to weak outreach mechanisms.

The study finally concludes that the Orange Economy possesses enormous potential to become a major driver of India’s future economic development. The integration of creativity, digital innovation, culture, and social entrepreneurship can generate large-scale employment, promote sustainable livelihoods, strengthen women empowerment, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance India’s global soft power. However, achieving this potential requires stronger financial inclusion, better intellectual property protection, digital skill development, infrastructure expansion, and integrated policy support. The findings suggest that with proper institutional and technological support, India can emerge as one of the world’s leading creative economies in the coming decades.

6. Conclusion

The present study on “Orange Economy and Social Entrepreneurship: Opportunities and Challenges in India” concludes that the Orange Economy has emerged as a powerful engine of economic growth, employment generation, innovation, cultural preservation, and social transformation in India. The study reveals that creativity-based industries such as handicrafts, digital media, entertainment, tourism, fashion, gaming, and cultural enterprises are no longer limited to artistic or cultural activities but have become important contributors to national economic development. India’s rich cultural diversity, demographic strength, expanding digital ecosystem, and entrepreneurial environment provide strong opportunities for the growth of creative industries and socially driven enterprises.

The findings of the study clearly indicate that the Orange Economy contributes significantly to employment generation in India. The handicraft and handloom sector alone supports nearly 7 million livelihoods, while cultural tourism provides employment opportunities to approximately 5 million individuals across the country.

Similarly, the digital media and content creation sector contributes employment to nearly 3 million people, reflecting the rapid expansion of India's creator economy and digital entrepreneurship ecosystem. The study further identifies that India's media and entertainment industry reached an estimated value of ₹2.5 trillion in 2024, demonstrating the increasing economic significance of creative industries. These statistics indicate that the Orange Economy is becoming an important pillar of India's service-based and innovation-driven economy.

The study also concludes that digital transformation has accelerated the growth of the Orange Economy in unprecedented ways. The increase in internet users from approximately 480 million in 2018 to nearly 760 million in 2022, with projections of around 950 million users by 2025, has created large-scale opportunities for online entrepreneurship, digital creativity, and innovation. Social media platforms, OTT services, e-commerce websites, and digital marketplaces have enabled creators, artists, educators, musicians, designers, and influencers to access global audiences and generate sustainable income. India's digital creator ecosystem has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy, particularly among youth populations and women entrepreneurs. This transformation demonstrates that technology and creativity together can create inclusive economic opportunities and redefine traditional employment patterns.

Another major conclusion of the study is that social entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in making the Orange Economy more inclusive and sustainable. Social enterprises working in handicrafts, tribal arts, sustainable fashion, cultural tourism, and rural entrepreneurship have significantly contributed toward empowering marginalized communities, preserving traditional cultural practices, and improving livelihoods. Women entrepreneurs, rural artisans, tribal communities, and small creators are increasingly participating in creative industries through digital platforms and community-based enterprises. The study finds that social entrepreneurship has helped bridge the gap between traditional cultural knowledge and modern market systems by providing training, digital access, branding support, and fair market opportunities.

The study further concludes that the Orange Economy has substantial potential to strengthen India's soft power and global cultural influence. Indian cinema, music, yoga, fashion, cuisine, literature, handicrafts, and digital content are increasingly recognized internationally, contributing to tourism growth, cultural diplomacy, and export expansion. The rise of India's gaming, animation, and AVGC sectors also demonstrates the future potential of creative technology industries in the global economy. Government initiatives such as Startup India, Digital India, Skill India, and AVGC promotion policies have created a positive environment for entrepreneurship and innovation within creative industries.

However, despite these opportunities, the study identifies several structural and institutional challenges that continue to affect the sustainable growth of the Orange Economy in India. Lack of financial support remains the most significant barrier, with nearly 72% of creative entrepreneurs facing difficulties in accessing institutional finance, venture capital, and investment support. Weak intellectual property rights protection, identified by nearly 64% of respondents and studies reviewed, continues to discourage innovation and reduce the earnings of creators because of piracy, plagiarism, and copyright violations. Similarly, high market competition, poor digital literacy, infrastructure limitations, and inadequate market access continue to restrict the participation of rural and small-scale entrepreneurs in the creative economy.

The study also concludes that the digital divide remains a major concern despite rapid internet expansion. Many rural artisans and traditional creative workers still lack technical skills related to digital marketing, e-commerce operations, branding, and online business management. Inadequate internet connectivity and limited technological infrastructure in rural areas further reduce inclusive participation in digital creative industries. Therefore, the benefits of the Orange Economy are not yet equally distributed across all socio-economic groups and regions.

Another important conclusion is that although the Government of India has started recognizing the importance of the Orange Economy, policy implementation remains fragmented. Multiple ministries and agencies regulate sectors such as culture, tourism, digital media, entrepreneurship, and education separately, creating coordination challenges. The study emphasizes the need for an integrated national policy framework specifically designed for creative industries and social entrepreneurship. Greater investment in digital infrastructure, skill development,

innovation hubs, intellectual property protection systems, and financial inclusion programs is essential for strengthening the creative ecosystem in India.

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