The Indian Government's Web Identity: An Analysis

Shilpa V
Graphic & Communication Design, Acharya School of Design, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Bijoy P. Joseph
Student 3rd Year / 6th Semester, Graphic & Communication Design, Acharya School of Design, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Abstract

We live in a period where digital communication plays an integral role in citizen-government interactions. This holds reason enough to attest to the significance of the design and usability of government infrastructure on the internet- or, to be particular, the websites. The Indian Union’s executive comprises 58 distinct ministries and 93 departments, most of which operate their websites independently. Apart from the use of a “.gov.in” URL, they appear to not adhere to any form of distinctive visual identity or any system thereof. To establish a basis for comparison, and to draw inspiration to propose potential solutions, this study will look into the work done by various Western governments in branding their governments or their nation itself, like the Dutch, Swiss, and German Governments. This study aims to propose measures to bring consistency and personality to the Indian government’s websites, through adequate design solutions. The implications of this academic venture are far-reaching, including but not limited to better governance, better accessibility of government resources, better trust in the government, elevation of user experience.

Keywords: Visual Identity, Government, Democracy, Web Design, India.


Introduction

We live in an era where digitalization has become downright rampant. Everything you need, from food to a fun excursion can be found and experienced online. It is imperative that in this era, a government, as a responsible democratic body, streamlines the average citizen’s accessibility to the resources and tools on offer online. India is the largest democracy in the world, in terms of population. The sheer size of the population (140.76 crores as of 2021) demands a streamlined and well-oiled system of governance.

A centralized graphic design system can greatly improve the Indian government's ability to serve its citizens through its websites. By ensuring consistency across all government websites, users will be able to easily navigate and access the information they need. This will promote transparency and accountability, which are crucial in promoting trust in the government.

The primary objective of this academic venture is to identify the key problem areas lying in the relevant research area, being the Indian government’s web design. This is to be done through surveys that generate valuable user input.

The secondary objective of this project is to generate guidelines for viable design solutions to the problems identified during this research project. This can be done by drawing inspiration from the work done by aforementioned western governments in this realm.
Review of Literature

**Studio Dumbar: The Dutch Government - The Visual Identity that integrates all 175 Dutch government organizations**

Documentation on building the visual identity of the Rijksoverheid (the national government of the Netherlands). This article speaks about how Studio Dumbar brought all 175 organizations of the Rijksoverheid together and combined them to serve a common interest.

**Studio Dumbar: The Netherlands-Branding of the nation - A new outlook for the future**

This article adds further proof to the narrative that the establishment of good design practices can help in building the brand of the nation as a whole, internationally.

**Methodology**

- Identify the problems present in the field of research, pinpoint them, and then generate a concise problem statement.
- Assess the problem statement to create questions relevant enough to be asked in a user survey.
- Create a poll via Google Forms, and send out a poll to the audience. Generate insights data on the poll questions.
- Assess the poll results and generate insights based on the poll data.
- Draw inspiration from already existing work and stipulate ample guidelines to solve the issues found during research.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Analyzing the problem statement, six relevant questions were derived to be asked in a survey. The target audience for said survey was set as any citizen who has ever used the Indian government’s services on the web. The Questions were:

1. How satisfied are you with websites and web services run by the Indian government?
2. Do you think each Indian government website looks and feels different?
3. Do you think establishing a centralized design system will help with achieving consistency and enhancing usability?
4. In general, how much do you think these websites serve their purpose?
5. Do you think (.in.gov) websites use and propagate too much non-relevant media, such as, say, pictures of the prime minister?
6. Have you, personally, had usability issues while, say, paying your electricity bills/paying income tax/looking for information using (.in.gov) websites?

Each question was accompanied by a scale of 1-5, to be rated by the person taking the survey. 1 is to be the lowest rating, with 5 being the highest. The scale was labeled as such:

![Figure 1. Questionnaire Scale](image)
Results and Discussion

How satisfied are you with websites and web services run by the Indian government?

50% of the respondents opted for the least level of satisfaction. All responses lie in the spectrum of dissatisfaction. This data shows a clear trend of dissatisfaction with the web resources on offer among the users.

Do you think each Indian government website looks and feels different?

66.7% of the respondents, an overwhelming majority, think that the Indian government’s websites lack a cohesive visual identity. The next question was framed in order to establish the need for a redesign.
Do you think establishing a centralized design system will help with achieving consistency and enhancing usability?

The looming need for a redesign of the web resources in question is established here. The entirety of the surveyed population leaned towards the answer “yes.”

In general, how much do you think these websites serve their purpose?

Here, again, we see the continuing trend of the entirety of the surveyed population leaning toward a negative answer. This categorically implies that the websites in question are not effective enough in serving the huge population of India.
Do you think (.in.gov) websites use and propagate too much non-relevant media, such as, say, pictures of the prime minister?

Figure 6. Do you think (.in.gov) websites use and propagate too much non-relevant media, such as, say, pictures of the prime minister?

Have you, personally, had usability issues while, say, paying your electricity bills/paying income tax/looking for information using (.in.gov) websites?

Figure 7. Have you, personally, had usability issues while, say, paying your electricity bills/paying income tax/looking for information using (.in.gov) websites?

Results

The data collected through the survey indicates and establishes the need for a comprehensive redesign effort of the Indian government’s websites. As discussed earlier, we will undertake an evaluation of such efforts done in the past by other governments in order to draw inspiration for this redesign effort. We will consider the redesign done by Studio Dumbar for the Netherlands government, as this is the most relevant piece of work pertaining to the intentions of this research project.

The Rijksoverheid

The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy. This means that the head of state is a King or Queen whose powers are laid down in the Constitution. In the Netherlands, the powers of the monarch are extremely limited. Under the Constitution, the ministers, and not the monarch, are responsible for what the Government does.

Studio Dumbar’s Work

“Our aim was to reduce the distance between the government and its citizens and, in doing so, make a sincere attempt to gain their trust.”
The challenge with working with such a high number (175) of different governmental organizations is, of course, the immense diversity. According to them, “The main challenge was to strike a balance between ‘rules’ and ‘freedom’. For the ‘rules’, we defined a color palette, basic layouts, and a new typeface in collaboration with type designer Peter Verheul, designed exclusively for the government. Each organization can employ these elements with a large degree of freedom.”

The end results have also been highlighted by studio Dumbar in their report: “The previously fragmented portfolio of government organizations and services has now been branded with one clear identity. This dramatic transformation has huge benefits, both internally and externally; from now on, Dutch citizens and companies are always clear about who is contacting them. Financially, the project led to annual savings of around € 8 million just one of the reasons why it continues to attract the attention of governments and organizations from all over the world.”

Figure 8 (a-f). The Visual Identity that Integrates All 175 Dutch Government Organizations.
Discussion

From Studio Dumbar’s work on the Rijksoverheid, and the aftermath thereof, it can be safely inferred that good graphic design does indeed play a role in citizen satisfaction when discussed in the context of governments. It can streamline services, and build effectiveness and trust of the resources on offer from the government. It is also evident that a tangible monetary advantage lies in store, should we decide on a comprehensive rebrand that establishes identity for our system.

However, it is beyond the scope of this research project to design a comprehensive rebrand like the one Studio Dumbar did for the Rijksoverheid. Time, budget, and personnel constraints make this a herculean task. Instead, this research project would like to propose a conceptual redesign of the way the Indian government functions on the web.

As previously established, here in India, we follow a very fragmented approach to governmental web design. Each department under each ministry of the Indian government operates its own websites independently, not adhering to any visible identity or guidelines thereof.

Conclusion

Centralisation

- The websites run by all Indian governmental entities can be brought under the same domain, and every department can be given a separate URL under the same. This ensures the availability of all relevant resources at the same place.

- This centralized web destination can be the india.gov.in website which currently serves as the de facto face of the Indian state on the web.

- Links to relevant ministries/departments can be displayed right on the home screen with a degree of prominence in the hierarchy so that access is easy for the average visitor.

- The list of the ministries/departments should be sorted, by default, by the most used at the moment that a user enters the website. This can be done by inculcating basic data analytics software into the infrastructure. The user should be provided with other options to sort, like “alphabetical” etc.

- A search button is to be added.

Transparency

- A space to compile all government press releases and announcements should be created. India as a country of 1.42 billion, has to rely on a lot of different news agencies for press releases. Each ministry’s press releases and announcements are presented separately and it is tedious for the average user to keep track. This has to be fixed.

Usability

- A lot of unusable/unrelated media consume a major portion of the real estate on many Indian government websites, in the form of banners, ads, portraits of politicians, etc. This hinders the usability and hierarchy of the websites and hence needs to be fixed.

- A significant portion of the Indian government’s web resources run on slow/outdated servers. This makes the sites unreliable, unsafe, and hence unusable. A more reliable infrastructure needs to be built and maintained to fix this.

- The citizens need to be heard. For a network of such a scale, a user-friendly grievance redressal system is imperative but is currently not in place. This needs to be addressed.
Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to a host of good souls who guided and motivated me through this project.

Firstly, I would like to thank my research guide, Prof. Shilpa V., for her invaluable guidance and support throughout the project. Her insights and expertise were instrumental in shaping the direction of my research.

I am also grateful to all the participants who took the time to participate in this study. Their willingness to share their experiences and insights was crucial in helping me to collect the data necessary to conduct my research.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Krishna Harilal, who provided me with invaluable proofreading support. Her attention to detail and dedication to ensuring the accuracy of my work were greatly appreciated.

Thank you all for your support and guidance

REFERENCES
