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THE ORANGE ECONOMY IN INDIA:
Growth Trajectory, Sectoral Composition, Employment Dynamics, and Policy Prospects

A Comprehensive Analysis of Creative Industries as Drivers of Economic Transformation

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The Orange Economy comprising creative, cultural, and intellectual-property-driven industries has emerged as a strategic growth lever for India, formally recognised in the Economic Survey 2025–26 and the Union Budget 2026–27. This paper provides a comprehensive, data-driven assessment of the growth trajectory, sectoral composition, employment dynamics, and policy architecture of India's creative economy. Drawing on secondary data from national accounts, industry reports (FICCI–EY, PwC), regulator publications, UNCTAD/WIPO databases, and academic working papers, the study maps media and entertainment (M&E), animation–visual effects–gaming–comics (AVGC), live entertainment, the creator economy, handicrafts and handloom, and creative goods exports. The M&E sector expanded from ₹2.50 trillion in 2024 to ₹2.78 trillion in 2025 (9 percent year-on-year), with digital media crossing ₹1 trillion for the first time. Creative occupations account for roughly 8–9 percent of total employment (approximately 40–57 million workers) significantly higher than Turkey, Mexico, South Korea, and Australia while the narrower WIPO copyright-industries definition places the sector's GDP contribution under 1 percent, underscoring a measurement and formalisation gap. Live entertainment crossed ₹100 billion in 2024, generating substantial spillovers into tourism and hospitality. The paper reviews the WAVES 2025 summit and Budget 2026–27 initiatives (AVGC Content Creator Labs, Indian Institute of Creative Technologies, National Institute of Design), presents eighteen analytical tables, and identifies regulatory fragmentation, venue shortages, IP enforcement gaps, skill mismatches, and the absence of a unified national accounting framework as binding constraints. Findings position the Orange Economy as a high-multiplier, employment-intensive pathway complementary to traditional manufacturing and services engines, with a stated ambition of a US$100 billion valuation by 2030–32 contingent on closing measurement, formalisation, and IP gaps.

Keywords: *Orange Economy; Creative Industries; Media & Entertainment; AVGC; Live Entertainment; Creator Economy; Handicrafts; Intellectual Property; Employment; India; Economic Survey 2025–26; Union Budget 2026–27; WAVES 2025*

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1. Introduction

The concept of the Orange Economy, popularised by Iván Duque Márquez and Felipe Buitrago Restrepo (2013) in a report published by the Inter-American Development Bank, refers to the set of activities that transform ideas, creativity, culture, and intellectual property into economic value. The colour orange was chosen deliberately because it was the pigment associated with culture, creativity, and identity in ancient civilisations. Unlike traditional industrial sectors that rely primarily on physical capital and natural resources, the Orange Economy derives value from human imagination, artistic expression, and knowledge. The concept overlaps substantially with the older and more widely used term "creative economy," popularised by Howkins (2001) and subsequently adopted by UNCTAD and UNESCO; in this paper the two terms are used interchangeably, following the convention adopted in most recent Indian policy documents.

Globally, creative industries contribute between 0.5 percent and over 7 percent of GDP across countries and employ more than 6 percent of the workforce in many advanced economies (UNCTAD, 2022, 2024; WIPO, 2023). Creative-services exports reached a record US$1.7 trillion in 2024 against creative-goods exports of US$709 billion (UNCTAD, 2024). India possesses exceptional endowments for creative economic expansion: the world's largest film industry by volume (approximately 29 percent of global output), a young demographic (nearly 65 percent of the population below 35 years), rapid digital adoption (over one billion broadband subscribers), and a rich continuum of traditional crafts, performing arts, and contemporary digital content.

India's policy engagement with this framework has been comparatively recent. The turning point was the inaugural World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES 2025), held in Mumbai in May 2025, followed by the Economic Survey 2025–26, which for the first time devoted formal analytical attention to the Orange Economy, and the Union Budget 2026–27, which announced a concrete set of institutional commitments AVGC Content Creator Labs in schools, a new National Institute of Design, and continued support to the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT) in Mumbai. Commentators have described this as the most ambitious creative-economy policy statement in India's post-liberalisation history.

Yet the enthusiasm surrounding the Orange Economy sits uneasily alongside a basic empirical problem: India does not maintain a dedicated national-accounts category for the creative economy, so its contribution to GDP is not directly measured but must be pieced together from at least three distinct and only partially overlapping data sources industry revenue reports (principally the FICCI–EY Media & Entertainment Industry Report), occupation-based labour-force estimates (built on the Periodic Labour Force Survey), and the WIPO copyright-industries methodology applied to India by the Esya Centre. This paper maps what each of these sources says, flags where they diverge, and draws out the resulting policy implications.

This paper provides a comprehensive, data-driven assessment of the growth trajectory and future prospects of India's Orange Economy. It integrates the latest official statistics, industry reports, and academic literature to answer four interrelated questions: (1) What is the current scale and composition of India's creative economy? (2) Which sub-sectors demonstrate the strongest growth momentum? (3) How does India's creative employment and wage structure compare with selected peer economies? (4) What policy and institutional reforms are required to unlock its full potential as a high-multiplier growth engine?

2. Conceptual Framework and Scope

Buitrago Restrepo and Duque Márquez (2013) deliberately avoided proposing a single universal definition of the Orange Economy, arguing that the boundary between "creative" and "non-creative" activity is inherently fuzzy. They instead distinguished creative goods (tangible outputs such as crafts, published works, and recorded media) from creative services (intangible outputs such as advertising, architecture, and software development), a distinction that UNCTAD has since adopted as the basis for its international trade statistics. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO, 2015) offers a narrower and more operational definition built around four categories of copyright-relevant industries Core, Interdependent, Partial, and Non-Dedicated Support which is the definition typically used when countries attempt to estimate the sector's contribution to GDP through the System of National Accounts.

India's own empirical literature has generally followed a third, occupation-based approach: Kukreja et al. (2022, 2024) identify "creative occupations" within the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) using a concordance between the National Classification of Occupations and internationally recognised creative-occupation taxonomies, which allows employment (but not value-added) to be estimated for both the organised and unorganised segments of the workforce. Following international conventions (UNESCO, ESSnet-Culture, UNCTAD), the Orange Economy in this paper encompasses: (a) core cultural and creative domains performing arts, visual arts, heritage, literature, music, film, television, radio, and digital content; (b) design, architecture, advertising, and fashion; (c) software, games, and interactive media; and (d) related support activities generating intellectual property and cultural value. The analysis focuses primarily on media & entertainment, AVGC, live events, creator economy, handicrafts and handloom, and creative goods exports, while acknowledging the broader continuum that includes traditional crafts and heritage tourism.

Table 1. Definitional Dimensions of the Orange Economy

Dimension	Description
Core inputs	Creativity, culture, individual talent, and intellectual property
Output categories	Creative goods (tangible: crafts, design, film, published works) and creative services (intangible: advertising, architecture, software, R&D)
Originating concept	Buitrago Restrepo & Duque Márquez (2013), Inter-American Development Bank
Global accounting proxy	WIPO copyright-based industries: Core, Interdependent, Partial, and Non-Dedicated Support Industries
India's working definition (employment)	Occupation-based measure using PLFS creative-occupation codes (Kukreja et al., 2022, 2024)
India's working definition (output)	Sector-wise industry revenue estimates (FICCI–EY M&E reports; Ministry of Textiles for handicrafts)

Source: Compiled from Buitrago Restrepo & Duque Márquez (2013), WIPO (2015), and Kukreja et al. (2022, 2024).

Table 2. Timeline: Evolution of the Orange Economy Concept and India's Policy Response, 2013–2026

Year	Milestone
2013	Buitrago Restrepo & Duque Márquez coin "Orange Economy"; IDB publishes The Orange Economy: An Infinite Opportunity
2015	WIPO publishes the Guide on Surveying the Economic Contribution of Copyright-Based Industries
2020	Esya Centre publishes the first India-specific creative-economy measurement (Patnaik, 2020); World Bank publishes Orange Economy: As a Driver of Jobs for Youth
2022	ICRIER/ADBI publish Creative India: Tapping the Full Potential (Kukreja, Puri & Rahut)
2024	UNCTAD releases Creative Economy Outlook 2024
2025 (May)	WAVES 2025 — inaugural World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit — held in Mumbai
2026 (Jan–Feb)	Economic Survey 2025–26 formally designates the Orange Economy a policy priority; Union Budget 2026–27 announces AVGC Content Creator Labs, a new National Institute of Design, and continued IICT support

Source: Compiled by the author.

3. Literature Review

The scholarly and policy literature on the creative economy has expanded considerably over the past two decades. Foundational contributions by Howkins (2001) and Florida (2002) established creativity as a distinct economic resource. Duque and Buitrago (2013) formalised the Orange Economy framework, emphasising intellectual property and cultural industries as infinite-opportunity sectors. Subsequent global reports by UNCTAD (2018, 2022, 2024), UNESCO, and WIPO have provided comparative metrics and policy toolkits. The World Bank (2020) extended this framing specifically to youth employment in developing economies, arguing that the Orange Economy's low capital intensity makes it a disproportionately important channel of job creation for young, underemployed populations a point of direct relevance to India's demographic profile.

In the Indian context, early work focused on discrete sub-sectors Bollywood, handicrafts, and IT-enabled services rather than a unified creative economy lens. Patnaik (2020), writing for the Esya Centre, produced the first dedicated empirical measurement of India's creative economy using the WIPO copyright-industries methodology, estimating the gross value added of copyright-relevant industries at ₹888.89 billion in 2016–17 (0.58 percent of GDP). Kukreja, Puri, and Rahut (2022), in an ICRIER/ADBI working paper, took a complementary occupation-based approach using PLFS data, estimating average creative-economy employment of 39.73 million (8.30 percent of total employment) over 2017–18 to 2019–20 a

share exceeding the corresponding figures for Turkey, Mexico, South Korea, and Australia and documenting an 88 percent wage premium for creative over non-creative occupations. Recent ICRIER working papers (2025–2026) estimate cultural-creative employment at approximately 57 million workers in 2025 (nearly 9 percent of the workforce), with female employment more than doubling since 2017–18.

FICCI–EY annual Frames reports (2023–2026) and PwC Global Entertainment & Media Outlook editions have become primary sources for media and entertainment (M&E) statistics. These reports consistently document digital media overtaking television, the rapid rise of online gaming, and the post-pandemic recovery of live events. Sector-specific analyses of AVGC (NASSCOM), gaming (India Gaming Report series; Mordor Intelligence, 2026), and creative goods exports (UNCTAD-based analyses) further enrich the evidence base. Studies on the creator economy (ISB–Hashfame, 2026) document a fourfold increase in active creators between 2020 and 2025, with non-metro markets driving growth. Gupta (2026) analyses GDP and employment contribution trends for 2020–2025 and concludes that the digital creative industry is growing markedly faster than traditional cultural industries.

Despite this progress, gaps remain. Measurement challenges persist because creative activities cut horizontally across industrial classifications. Informal and traditional cultural occupations are often undercounted. The occupation-based PLFS estimates, the WIPO/Esya copyright-industries estimate, and the FICCI–EY industry-revenue estimate are constructed on different definitions, cover different reference periods, and are not additive. This absence of a reconciled national account is the central empirical gap this paper works around.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To trace the conceptual evolution of the Orange Economy framework and its adoption in Indian policy discourse.
2. To map the size, growth trajectory, and sectoral composition of India's Orange Economy, including media and entertainment, AVGC, live entertainment, creator economy, and handicrafts and handloom.
3. To assess India's employment and wage structure in creative occupations relative to selected comparator countries.
4. To situate India's performance within global creative-trade trends reported by UNCTAD.
5. To review the policy architecture introduced through WAVES
6. To identify the structural constraints measurement, formalisation, and intellectual-property enforcement that limit the sector's growth, and to outline policy directions consistent with the government's stated 2030–32 growth ambition.

5. Research Methodology

This is a descriptive and analytical study based entirely on secondary data; it does not involve primary survey work or econometric estimation. Data have been compiled from four categories of sources: (i) international-organisation reports (UNCTAD, WIPO, World Bank); (ii) Government of India sources (Economic Survey 2025–26, Union Budget 2026–27, Ministry of Textiles Annual Report 2025–26, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting statistical handbooks, Press Information Bureau releases, and the official WAVES 2025 outcome report); (iii) industry and market-research reports (FICCI–EY Media &

Entertainment Industry Report 2026, PwC, NASSCOM, eGrow Foundation, Mordor Intelligence, ISB–Hashfame, IBEF); and (iv) peer-reviewed and working-paper academic literature (ICRIER/ADBI, Dasgupta et al., Gupta 2026). The reference period covers primarily 2017–2026, with projections to 2030 where available. The analytical method is descriptive trend analysis, cross-country and cross-sectoral comparison, and tabular presentation rather than inferential.

A methodological limitation must be stated explicitly. Because India lacks a single, government-maintained "Orange Economy" or "Creative Economy" satellite account, the figures compiled originate from at least three non-harmonised measurement traditions occupation-based labour statistics (PLFS-derived), industry revenue reporting (FICCI–EY), and the WIPO copyright-industries value-added methodology (Esya Centre) which use different sectoral boundaries, different reference years, and different units of account. These figures are therefore not additive across tables, and the reader should treat each table as an independent estimate drawn from its cited source rather than as a component of a single reconciled national total.

6. Growth and Structure of India's Orange Economy

6.1 Media and Entertainment: The Core Engine

India's media and entertainment (M&E) sector encompassing television, print, film, digital media, gaming, animation and VFX, radio, music, live events, and out-of-home advertising is the most closely tracked and, by revenue, largest single component of the Orange Economy. According to successive FICCI–EY estimates, the sector reached ₹2.50 trillion in 2024 and approximately ₹2.78 trillion in 2025 (9 percent year-on-year), and is projected to cross ₹3 trillion by 2027. Digital media has emerged as the largest segment, while online gaming, animation & VFX, and live events record the highest compound annual growth rates (CAGRs). Digital media crossed ₹1 trillion in annual revenue for the first time in 2025, overtaking television; digital advertising alone rose 26 percent to ₹947 billion.

Table 3. Media & Entertainment Sector Size and Growth (₹ Billion)

Segment	2024	2025	2026 (E)	2027 (P)
Digital Media	802	903	1004	1104
Television	679	676	671	667
Print	260	262	264	267
Online Gaming	232	260	288	316
Filmed Entertainment	187	196	204	213
Animation & VFX	103	113	130	147
Live Events	101	119	142	167

Out-of-Home Media	59	66	73	79
Music	53	60	68	78
Radio	25	27	28	30
Total M&E	2502	2682–2780	2873	3067+

Source: Compiled from PwC India / FICCI–EY / industry estimates cited in Economic Survey and secondary analyses (2024–2027 projections). Note: 2025 total ranges across sources (₹2.68–2.78 trillion).

Table 4. Key High-Growth Segments – Approximate CAGR (2024–2027)

Segment	Approx. CAGR Range	Key Drivers
Live Events	15–20%+	Post-pandemic recovery, youth demand, digital ticketing
Animation & VFX	12–15%	Global outsourcing, domestic OTT demand
Online Gaming	10–14%	Smartphone penetration, vernacular content
Digital Media	10–12%	OTT expansion, short-form video, advertising
Music	12–15%	Streaming, live performances, independent artists

Source: Derived from industry reports and Economic Survey 2025–26 commentary.

6.2 Employment and Wage Structure

The most rigorous employment estimate available remains Kukreja, Puri, and Rahut's (2022, 2024) occupation-based analysis of PLFS data, which finds average creative-economy employment of 39.73 million persons 8.30 percent of India's total employment over 2017–18 to 2019–20. More recent ICRIER estimates place cultural-creative employment at approximately 57 million workers in 2025 (nearly 9 percent of the workforce), representing a roughly 40 percent increase from 40.6 million in 2017–18. Female creative employment rose to 18.8 million (34 percent share), more than doubling since 2017–18. This employment share is markedly higher than the corresponding figures for Turkey (1.0 percent), Mexico (1.5 percent), South Korea (1.9 percent), and Australia (2.1 percent). Creative occupations also carry a substantial wage premium, paying on average 88 percent more than non-creative occupations, and contribute an estimated 20 percent of national gross value added on the occupational measure.

Within India's creative workforce, the tertiary (services) sector accounts for the largest share (50.73 percent), closely followed by the secondary sector (47.62 percent), while the primary

sector's contribution is minimal (1.65 percent) a distribution that inverts the pattern observed among non-creative workers. India's creative workforce is disproportionately urban (roughly two-thirds) and young (nearly one-third aged 15–29). The top ten "creative districts" identified by location quotient include six non-metro districts Budgam (Jammu & Kashmir), Panipat (Haryana), Imphal (Manipur), Sant Ravidas Nagar (Uttar Pradesh), Thane (Maharashtra), and Tiruppur (Tamil Nadu) indicating that creative-economy employment is considerably more geographically dispersed than the metro-centric policy narrative might suggest. Direct M&E jobs are estimated at 2.75 million, with more than 10 million indirect jobs (FICCI–EY 2025–26).

Table 5. Creative Economy Employment Estimates

Indicator	Estimate	Reference / Source
Creative occupations share of employment	8–9%	ADB–ICRIER; ICRIER 2025
Cultural-creative employment (PLFS-based)	57 million (≈9%)	ICRIER working paper, 2025
Change since 2017–18	+40% (from 40.6 million)	ICRIER, 2025
Female creative employment	18.8 million (34% share)	ICRIER, 2025
Direct + indirect M&E jobs	2.75 million direct; >10 million indirect	FICCI–EY 2025–26
AVGC professional demand by 2030	2 million	Economic Survey / Budget 2026
Wage premium (creative vs non-creative)	88% higher	Kukreja et al., 2022

Source: Compiled from ADB–ICRIER, ICRIER PLFS-based estimates, FICCI–EY, and official documents.

Table 6. Cross-Country Comparison: Creative Economy's Share of Total Employment

Country / Region	Creative Employment Share (approx.)
India	8–9%
Australia	2.1%
Republic of Korea	1.9%
Mexico	1.5%
Turkey	1.0%

Source: ADB–ICRIER and Kukreja, Puri & Rahut (2022, 2024).

6.3 Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming & Comics (AVGC)

The AVGC sector is prioritised in Budget 2026–27 with dedicated talent-development outlays. Global demand for Indian animation and VFX capacity, combined with domestic content needs, underpins strong projected growth. Government data place India's online gaming market at ₹23,200 crore in 2024, projected to rise to ₹31,600 crore by 2027, while the animation and VFX segment stood at ₹10,300 crore in 2024, projected to reach ₹14,700 crore by 2027. India had an estimated 425–591 million total gamers (approximately 18 percent of the global gaming population), of whom roughly 425–488 million were online gamers. Regionally, North India accounts for the largest share of gaming-market revenue (32 percent in 2025), followed by South India (26 percent, anchored by the Bengaluru and Hyderabad game-development clusters). Skill shortages remain a binding constraint, with the Economic Survey projecting demand for approximately two million AVGC professionals by 2030.

Table 7. AVGC Sector Snapshot

Indicator	Estimate
Animation & VFX revenue 2024 (₹ bn)	103
Projected 2027 (₹ bn)	147
Online Gaming revenue 2024 (₹ bn)	232
Projected 2027 (₹ bn)	316
Active / online gamers (approx.)	425–591 million
Projected professional demand by 2030	2 million
Strategic importance	Shift from services exports to IP ownership

Source: Economic Survey 2025–26, Budget documents, FICCI–EY, Mordor Intelligence, industry estimates.

6.4 Live Entertainment and Concert Economy

Live entertainment crossed the ₹100 billion mark in 2024 (₹101 billion) and expanded further in 2025, recording among the fastest growth rates in the M&E sector (approximately 15–20 percent CAGR projected through 2027; one estimate cites 44 percent growth in 2025 on the back of ticketed concerts). Large concerts generate significant multiplier effects across hospitality, transport, security, and local commerce. Tier-II cities are increasingly included in touring circuits. The Coldplay concerts in Mumbai and Ahmedabad (2025) alone generated an estimated economic impact of ₹641 crore (tickets + travel + hospitality + logistics). Policy bottlenecks multiple clearances, venue scarcity, and foreign-artist payment restrictions are explicitly flagged in the Economic Survey.

Table 8. Live Events / Concert Economy Indicators

Indicator	Value
Live entertainment size 2024	₹101 billion (crossed ₹100 bn milestone)
Projected trajectory	Strong double-digit growth expected (15–20%+ CAGR)
Key spillovers	Tourism, hotels, F&B, logistics, security, media
Coldplay concerts (Mumbai & Ahmedabad, 2025)	₹641 crore estimated economic impact
Policy recommendations (Survey)	Single-window clearance; heritage venues; visa & forex facilitation

Source: Economic Survey 2025–26; EY estimates and media reports.

6.5 Creator Economy

India's creator economy expanded more than fourfold between 2020 and 2025, reaching over 4 million creators (from approximately 0.96 million). Non-metro creators now constitute the majority (66 percent, up from under 50 percent). Average engagement rates rose from 1.8 percent to 7.2 percent, and annual creator campaigns increased from roughly 14,000 to 42,000. YouTube's ecosystem alone is estimated to have contributed over ₹16,000 crore to GDP and supported hundreds of thousands of full-time-equivalent jobs. Brand spending on creator campaigns has increased substantially, with vernacular and casually oriented content driving growth in non-metro markets.

Table 9. Creator Economy Key Metrics

Metric	2020	2025
Number of creators	0.96 million	4.12 million
Share from non-metro	<50%	66%
Average engagement rate	1.8%	7.2%
Annual creator campaigns	14,000	42,000

Source: ISB–Hashfame Creator Economy Report (2026).

6.6 Handicrafts and Handloom: The Traditional Creative Economy

Handicrafts and handloom represent the Orange Economy's oldest and most labour-intensive segment, employing an estimated 64.66 lakh (6.466 million) artisan workers, of whom women account for 64 percent of all artisans and 71 percent of handloom weavers. Handicrafts exports (excluding hand-knotted carpets) rose from ₹20,082.53 crore in FY2014–15 to ₹33,122.79 crore in FY2024–25 a 65 percent increase over the decade and edged further to ₹33,424.18 crore in FY2025–26. The largest export categories in FY2024–25 were

woodwares (₹8,524 crore), embroidered and crocheted goods (₹4,350 crore), art metal wares (₹4,386 crore), hand-printed textiles (₹3,217 crore), and imitation jewellery (₹1,511 crore).

Table 10. India's Handicrafts Exports by Product Category, FY 2024–25

Category	Export Value (₹ crore)
Woodwares	8,524
Embroidered & crocheted goods	4,350
Art metal wares	4,386
Hand-printed textiles & scarves	3,217
Imitation jewellery	1,511
Other craft categories (residual)	11,134.79
Total handicrafts exports	33,122.79

Source: Ministry of Textiles, Annual Report 2025–26; Press Information Bureau.

6.7 Creative Goods Exports and India in Global Creative Trade

India ranks among the leading developing-country exporters of creative goods. Jewellery, fashion accessories, carpets, and toys are major categories; the UAE and the United States are key destinations. UNCTAD's Creative Economy Outlook 2024 provides the most authoritative comparative benchmark: globally, creative-services exports reached a record US$1.7 trillion in 2024 more than double the US$709 billion recorded for creative-goods exports with creative services now accounting for 20 percent of total global services exports. India's own creative-goods and creative-services exports have grown, but remain roughly one-tenth of those of the People's Republic of China, underlining substantial unrealised export potential. At the narrower, national-accounts level, the Esya Centre's WIPO-methodology estimate remains the only official-style measurement of India's copyright-relevant industries: gross value added of ₹888.89 billion in 2016–17, equivalent to 0.58 percent of GDP.

Table 11. Global Exports of Creative Goods and Services, 2017–2024

Indicator	2017	2022	2024
Creative goods exports (US$ bn)	599	713	709
Creative services exports (US$ bn)	1,085	1,400	1,700

Creative services share of total services exports (%)	—	19	20
Creative goods share of total merchandise trade (%)	—	2.9	3.0

Source: UNCTAD, Creative Economy Outlook 2024.

Table 12. India's Copyright-Relevant Industries: Gross Value Added, 2016–17 (WIPO Methodology)

Category	GVA (₹ billion)	Share (%)
Core Copyright Industries	397.6	44.74
Interdependent, Partial & Non-Dedicated Support	491.3	55.26
Total Copyright-Relevant Industries	888.89	100.00
Contribution to India's GDP (2016–17)	—	0.58

Source: Patnaik (2020), Esya Centre, applying the WIPO (2015) methodology. This remains the most recent official-style estimate available.

6.8 Tourism Linkages of the Orange Economy

Creative industries generate substantial spillovers into tourism and hospitality. Domestic tourist visits reached 2.9 billion in 2024 (+17.5 percent year-on-year). Travel and tourism contributed 5.22 percent to GDP in FY24 and supported 8.46 crore jobs (13.3 percent of employment). Medical and wellness tourism recorded a CAGR of 12.4 percent over 2009–2024. Heritage site utilisation for curated cultural and commercial events is a key policy recommendation linking the Orange Economy to regional development.

Table 13. Tourism Linkages of the Orange Economy

Indicator	Value
Domestic tourist visits 2024	2.9 billion (+17.5% YoY)
Travel & tourism contribution to GDP (FY24)	5.22%
Jobs supported (direct + indirect)	8.46 crore (13.3% of employment)
Medical & wellness tourism CAGR (2009–2024)	12.4%

Source: Economic Survey 2025–26 / Ministry of Tourism estimates.

6.9 Policy Architecture: WAVES 2025 and Budget 2026–27

The inaugural WAVES 2025 summit, held in Mumbai from 1–4 May 2025 and inaugurated by the Prime Minister, drew over 100,000 registrations, delegates from more than 100

countries, and over 3,100 companies. According to the official outcome report, the summit catalysed media and entertainment deals and investment commitments exceeding ₹10,000 crore (approximately US$1.1 billion), including ₹8,000 crore in Maharashtra state government agreements among them a ₹3,000 crore film-city investment and a ₹2,000 crore media campus and ₹1,328 crore in direct transactions through the WAVES Bazaar platform. The summit also launched the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT) in Mumbai, backed by a ₹400 crore investment, and secured adoption of the WAVES Declaration by representatives of 77 countries.

Table 14. WAVES 2025 Summit: Key Outcome Indicators

Indicator	Value
Summit dates and venue	1–4 May 2025, Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai
Total registrations	100,000+
Countries represented	100+
Companies represented	3,100+
Startups participating	350+ (127 connected directly with investors)
WAVES Bazaar business generated	₹1,328 crore
Maharashtra government MoUs	₹8,000 crore
Total M&E deals / investment commitments	₹10,000+ crore (US$1.1 billion)
IICT Mumbai investment	₹400 crore
WAVES Declaration	Adopted by representatives of 77 countries

Source: Official WAVES 2025 outcome report, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (2025).

Table 15. Union Budget 2026–27: Key Orange Economy Policy Initiatives

Initiative	Details
AVGC Content Creator Labs	15,000 labs to be established in schools nationwide
New National Institute of Design	New campus in eastern India, established via a "challenge route" to decentralise design education
IICT, Mumbai	Continued financial and structural support as the National Centre of Excellence for AVGC-XR skilling

Live entertainment / concert economy	Explicit policy recognition of spillover benefits to hospitality, transport, and logistics
AVGC skilling target	2 million professionals required by 2030 (Economic Survey projection)

Source: Ministry of Finance (2026), Economic Survey 2025–26; Union Budget 2026–27.

7. Challenges and Structural Constraints

Despite strong momentum, several structural constraints impede faster scaling:

1. **Measurement and accounting gap:** India has no unified national account for the Orange Economy. The most recent official-style GDP estimate (Esya Centre's WIPO-methodology figure) dates to 2016–17; more recent figures come exclusively from industry revenue reports that use different sectoral boundaries and are not directly comparable to national accounts. Current sector valuation is variously reported as US$25–35 billion (M&E basis) and as a narrower US$19 billion creator/influencer-economy estimate, with little clarity on how these figures relate to one another.
2. **Regulatory fragmentation:** Multiple clearances for live events and content production raise transaction costs and delay scaling.
3. **Venue and infrastructure deficits:** Shortage of large-capacity, purpose-built venues limits concert and event scale; heritage site utilisation remains underdeveloped.
4. **IP enforcement and monetisation gaps:** Weak protection and limited formal IP markets reduce incentives for original creation and global licensing. The Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023 addressed film piracy specifically, but enforcement across other creative sub-sectors remains uneven.
5. **Skill mismatches:** AVGC and high-end digital production face shortages of industry-ready talent relative to the projected two-million professional requirement by 2030.
6. **Informality and labour vulnerability:** A large share of creative employment—particularly in handicrafts, gig-based content creation, and platform-mediated freelance work—sits outside formal social-security and labour-protection frameworks.
7. **Access to finance:** Creative enterprises, especially early-stage and traditional artisans, face collateral and valuation challenges.
8. **Platform and export dependency:** India's rapidly growing digital-creator segment is heavily dependent on foreign technology platforms for distribution and monetisation; creative exports remain roughly one-tenth of China's despite a comparably large cultural and creative-occupation base.

Table 16. SWOT Matrix of India's Orange Economy

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Large, young, urban-skewed creative workforce (8–9% of employment); 88% wage premium; deep and geographically dispersed cultural/craft base; strong M&E growth (₹2.78 tn in 2025)	No unified national account; informal and gig employment under-protected; weak IP enforcement in several sub-sectors; venue shortages; skill gaps in AVGC

Opportunities	Threats
WAVES/Budget 2026–27 institutional momentum; ₹10,000+ crore in fresh investment commitments; rising global demand for creative services; handicraft export growth; non-metro creative districts for decentralised investment	Platform/algorithm dependency of digital creators; export share still roughly one-tenth of China's; measurement gap could undermine future policy targeting and evaluation

Source: Compiled by the author from the sources reviewed.

8. Policy Prospects and Recommendations

The medium-term outlook for India's Orange Economy is favourable. Demographic dividends, digital infrastructure, rising discretionary spending on experiences, and global appetite for Indian narratives create a supportive demand environment. If regulatory simplification, venue expansion, skill development, and IP reforms proceed, the sector can deliver high employment elasticity and export diversification. Projections suggest the broader M&E industry can approach or surpass ₹3 trillion by 2027, with AVGC and live entertainment continuing to outpace average growth. Realising the stated ambition of a US$100 billion valuation by 2030–32 will depend on closing the measurement, formalisation, and IP gaps identified above.

Priority policy actions include:

1. Institutionalise a dedicated Orange Economy / Cultural and Creative Satellite Account within India's System of National Accounts, harmonising the PLFS occupation-based, WIPO copyright-industries, and FICCI–EY industry-revenue methodologies so that a single, comparable time series becomes available.
2. Implement a genuine single-window clearance system for live events and large productions, integrating central and state permissions; ease visa and forex norms for foreign artists.
3. Systematically open selected heritage sites for curated cultural and commercial events under conservation-compliant guidelines to expand event capacity and cultural tourism.
4. Accelerate AVGC and design skill pipelines beyond the announced Content Creator Labs and IICT expansion through public–private partnerships, industry-aligned curricula, and apprenticeships targeting the projected two-million professional requirement by 2030.
5. Strengthen IP registration, enforcement, and monetisation mechanisms—extending the model of the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023 to music, design, and digital content—including easier collective management and digital rights infrastructure.
6. Extend formal social-security coverage to gig-based and informally employed creative workers, building on existing labour-code provisions for platform workers.
7. Improve access to finance for creative MSMEs and individual creators through specialised credit products, IP-backed lending pilots, and risk-sharing facilities.
8. Leverage non-metro creative districts (Panipat, Tiruppur, Thane, Imphal, Budgam, and others) for decentralised cluster investment rather than concentrating new infrastructure exclusively in metros.

9. Pursue export promotion for creative goods and services more aggressively, given that India's creative exports remain roughly one-tenth of China's despite a comparably large cultural and creative-occupation base; integrate Orange Economy objectives into tourism, urban development, and export promotion strategies.

Table 17. Priority Policy Actions and Expected Outcomes

Policy Action	Expected Outcome
Satellite account / measurement reform	Reliable tracking toward 2030–32 valuation targets; better policy targeting
Single-window clearances	Lower transaction costs; faster event scaling
Heritage venue utilisation	Increased event capacity; cultural tourism
AVGC talent mission	Reduced skill gap; higher global competitiveness
IP reform & formalisation	Greater investment, licensing, and monetisation
Creative finance facilities	Enterprise growth and formalisation of MSMEs/creators
Decentralised cluster investment	Inclusive regional development beyond metros

Source: Author recommendations aligned with Economic Survey direction and industry analyses.

9. Conclusion

India's Orange Economy has transitioned from a peripheral cultural domain to a recognised strategic growth frontier over 2025–26, propelled by the WAVES 2025 summit, formal recognition in the Economic Survey 2025–26, and a concrete institutional package in the Union Budget 2026–27. The underlying growth is real: the media and entertainment sector alone grew approximately 9 percent in 2025 to reach ₹2.50–2.78 trillion, digital media crossed ₹1 trillion for the first time, live entertainment surpassed ₹100 billion, handicraft exports have grown 65 percent over the past decade, the creator economy expanded fourfold, and the sector employs a workforce share (8–9 percent) nearly four times that of Australia. Creative occupations exhibit an 88 percent wage premium and strong inclusivity potential for youth and women. At the same time, this paper's central methodological finding deserves to be stated plainly: India's Orange Economy is measured inconsistently across at least three non-harmonised statistical traditions; its most recent official-style GDP contribution estimate (0.58 percent, from a WIPO-methodology study) dates to 2016–17; and current sector-valuation figures cited in policy discourse range from roughly US$19 billion to US$35 billion depending on definitional scope—a spread that reflects genuine measurement weakness

rather than merely differing emphasis. Structural constraints—regulatory fragmentation, venue shortages, IP enforcement gaps, skill mismatches, informality, and platform dependency—limit full potential realisation. Realising the sector's stated ambition of a US$100 billion valuation by 2030–32 will depend less on further announcements of institutional infrastructure, welcome as these are, and more on closing the measurement gap, formalising the sector's substantial informal and gig workforce, strengthening intellectual-property enforcement, expanding venue and skill capacity, and pursuing aggressive export promotion. With appropriate facilitation, the Orange Economy can complement manufacturing and traditional services as a distinctive, inclusive, and high-multiplier engine of India's next phase of growth.

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