

Factly uses digital video to make complex government policies and processes accessible to a broad audience

Factly is an Indian data journalism portal and fact-checking organization that publishes videos and articles about public data, information, and policy matters. It also creates and develops data tools, and offers training in accessing, understanding, and analyzing public data. Ultimately, it aims to provide greater transparency into and accountability for government initiatives across India.

OPPORTUNITY

Factly wanted to make policy and government-related information easily accessible to a larger number of people than it could through text articles. The team saw an opportunity to tell data-driven stories through digital video by building out their in-house video production capabilities and resources, and experimenting with new formats.

APPROACH

Factly expanded its video department, created standardized workflows, and experimented with video formats. The team also created an outreach program to engage school and college students.

Training the team: New staff were hired and the whole team underwent digital video training. Factly used external experts to help train staff when they didn't have the internal capabilities available (e.g., camera operating).

Streamlining the research and scripting process: Factly designed a process checklist to help staff create robust and compelling scripts for their digital videos. The team tested, tweaked, and validated the checklist through the production of two sample videos.

Checklist for digital video research and scripting

- ✓ **Choose** a topic or theme based on relevance, popularity, and other factors (e.g., prevalence of other similar topics/themes) specific to the type of content you want to create.
- ✓ **Create** an initial research document, which will likely be about 3X longer than the final script. Use only credible sources and mark areas that have conflicting information.
- ✓ **Write** a draft and conduct a preliminary table read with an in-house subject matter expert.
- ✓ **Incorporate** feedback, write a new draft, and double check sources.
- ✓ **Conduct** a final table read with the host/presenter and in-house experts to finalize the shooting script.

Experimenting with format: Factly decided to test one format at a time, starting with a presenter-led weekly explainer series on policy and government called "Decode". The series differed from earlier video content, which had simple graphics and no presenter, and enabled Factly to incorporate more humor into otherwise serious topics. The videos required greater resources to produce, but drove significantly more engagement. The team timed the launch of "Decode" to coincide with India's 2019 Parliamentary elections, providing timely explainers on topics like the Parliament of India and the Right to Information Act. When this series gained traction, they launched "Decode Lite" — one-off videos on policy that didn't fit the initial series format.

Incorporating feedback: Based on reviews and feedback, the team made changes to aspects of the videos that weren't resonating with audiences (e.g., certain thumbnails, descriptions, titles, etc.). They also realized the presenter-led format wasn't relevant for every topic, so mixed up the style of the videos to incorporate graphics and voiceover as needed.

Expanding formats: With their newly acquired skills and capabilities, the team then launched new formats called "Pause" and "Edi Fake Edi Nijam" — two series of short videos that analyze social media posts and debunk false information in English and Telugu, respectively.

Partnering with schools and colleges for media literacy curriculum: Factly created two quiz competitions, one for school-aged kids and the other for college students. The competition encouraged students to engage with the "Decode" content and then answer questions about it. More than 15K students participated. The Factly team plans to grow this outreach program and are collating feedback on what students liked about "Decode" and how it helped them improve knowledge levels around public policy and government.

“ We see video as a way of bringing together all the work we have been doing vis-a-vis policy explainers and debunking fake news, in a manner that is easily accessible to a larger number of people than text articles. ”

Rakesh Dubbudu
Founder & CEO of Factly



Poster used to advertise quiz competition to college students.

RESULTS

Factly established a dedicated video studio and team, developed streamlined workflows, and experimented with different formats to increase audience engagement with important political topics.

- **Increase in video publication** from monthly to daily.
- **50% increase in watch time** as compared to the previous year.
- **3X more comments** on videos as compared to the previous year.
- **50% more likes** on videos as compared to the previous year.

LEARNINGS

Plan lead time appropriately and be flexible: Factly found that building the studio took longer than anticipated. The team suggests thinking about possible delays early in the piece and incorporating a degree of flexibility into your schedule. This is especially important when you're working with external partners, as it is not always possible to dictate their timelines.

Build reviews into your workflow: It's rare to get something perfect the first time around, so incorporate this mindset when designing workflows for your video team. Set reasonable deadlines that your teams will hit, but build in time to correct any final mistakes before you press the publish button.

Get to know your audience: It's important to understand your target audience, especially when your content is niche. Not everybody will want to watch everything you put out there, but if you know who is interested then you can deliver on their needs. Factly used audience surveys to help compile feedback and get a better understanding of viewer expectations.