

# The orange economy

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**Kashish Makkar** Published 15.04.26



Unmatched returns Sourced by the Telegraph

‘Orange economy’ may well become India’s economic buzzword in 2026. It refers to value creation through creative sectors such as content, gaming, design, and other related intellectual properties. In this year's Union budget, the Centre announced investments and specific projects to boost India's orange economy. This includes proposals for setting up content creation labs in 15000 schools and 500 colleges.

This is exciting — in theory. The government sees massive youth employability potential in this sector. It is also an avenue to earn foreign exchange and is reasonably future calibrated. From a citizen's perspective, this is promising as the government is thinking beyond traditional areas of technical education.

But the orange economy is a system with its own life. It draws from society and its knowledge systems, sciences, policies, and the law to produce creative outputs. It then obtains feedback on its outputs by measuring the impact it has had on these inputs and then evolves its output for the future. The Centre has decimated the orange economy on this practical front.

In the past decade, forces unleashed by the government have not only actively restricted the production and the distribution of creative outputs but also engagement with them. The government has systematically sown distrust in the elements from which the orange economy draws its fodder to evolve. Senior leaders have questioned established facts and the motives of protestors, creating an atmosphere of distrust. For instance, the government submitted in the Supreme Court that a protest for Sixth Schedule rights in Ladakh is a version of Gen-Z unrest. This not only casts a shadow of doubt over the protestors but also brings into suspicion the motives of Gen-Z in any demand they make — whether it is for clean air or water in Delhi. This also has the effect of diluting trust across generations.

This discord is visible in numbers as well. In the 1990s, the World Values Survey indicated that in India 34% of the population felt that most people can be trusted. This increased to 39% in the early 2000s. However, in 2023, the figure fell to 17%. For the orange economy to prosper, it needs conviction in its outputs. This can only happen if there is a baseline of conviction in inputs and in feedback. With interpersonal trust at an all-time low, such conviction dissipates and the quality of stories and imagination deteriorates.

South Korea can be a template to emulate in this aspect. Korean art and music have taken over the global imagination. This can be traced to the Korean government's systematic efforts to stimulate the orange economy in the early 2000s. During its rise, there was significant political backlash, State-supported conflict, and censorship. Yet today, K-pop and K-dramas have been able to deliver unmatched returns for South Korea.

There are two important caveats to note in this context. First, the emergence of Korean art and content on global screens coincided with an era of expanding demand: rising streaming subscriptions, a growing attention economy, and fewer geopolitical barriers to cultural exports. By contrast, the Indian government's push for its orange economy is beginning in a far more hostile market with consumers with scarce attention. Second, South Korea eventually undertook institutional corrections to ensure its success did not remain a stroke of luck. It held politicians accountable and announced reforms. Essentially, it agreed that the orange economy cannot thrive with just investments but needs a culture of trust.

It is imperative that the Centre does not limit its efforts on the orange economy to merely budget announcements. It needs to revive the culture of collective trust as a matter of policy to reap rewards from such investments.

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