

DESIGN AND BRANDING GUIDELINES FOR HARMONIZATION OF DIGITAL FOOTPRINTS: INDIAN GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

ABSTRACT

Website design is an integral part of website accessibility and has a major impact on the usability of a website and the branding of the organization. The website design comprises various elements such as color, fonts, images, object placement, languages, technology etc. This paper presents a study and summary of guidelines for the branding and design of government websites of India in terms of a Digital Brand Identity Manual. These guidelines were developed with a focused approach to harmonize the digital footprints of government in terms of websites, ensuring design uniformity. These guidelines were developed through the study of government websites from multiple countries and the websites of big-brand companies. The design and branding guidelines mainly cover areas such as color, typography, logo, icons and styles, images, content, accessibility, performance, mobile apps, and social media. Applying the components of these guidelines may have a major impact on the usability, harmonization, and branding of government websites. These guidelines will also be helpful for the management and operations of government websites.

Keywords – Government website, Design, Branding, Guidelines, Harmonization, website, India

1. INTRODUCTION

The website serves as an online medium to publicize government information and services to citizens, transcending the boundaries of location and time. In a country like India, with its diverse demography and languages, content, design, and accessibility are given high priority for government websites. Design is a crucial factor impacting the usability and accessibility of a website. Website design is developed with various elements, e.g., aspect ratios, color patterns, layout, selection of font design, size, content, language, images, technology support, etc. For government websites, the interest area is "design for all," integration of users into the information society, branding, and uniformity of websites. The branding of a website depends on elements, such as the unique logo, iconography, typography, color, and positioning of common elements [1]. For citizens accessing government websites, the visual

experience is the first thing they experience. For establishing the credibility of a website, good-looking visuals provide a major opportunity [2]. Subject to ease and uniformity across government websites, users perceive websites as being trustworthy or untrustworthy [3]. A semiotic analysis of the six most trusted and six least trusted websites was carried out and identified various elements that contribute to the trustworthiness or untrustworthiness of a website [4]. There is a need for a set of guidelines for the development of branding and the uniformity of government websites.

This paper is a presentation of work conducted for the development of a set of guidelines with the intent of creating a visual identity on government websites. This project is executed by the National Informatics Centre, an e-governance implementation body under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India. This project is executed under the guidance and funding of MeitY. The output document is named the Digital Brand Identity Manual (DBIM), which has identified a minimal set of guidelines for government websites related to design and branding. These guidelines are in addition to the existing Guidelines for Indian Government Websites (GIGW) guidelines [5].

2. NEED – DIGITAL BRANDING GUIDELINES

The government website helps to integrate government information resources, make government information public, and promote the capability of the government to serve enterprises and citizens [6]. The adoption of digital technologies in the government has grown multi-fold with the advancement of technologies and the impetus provided by the Digital India program, which promotes the use of technology in delivering services and benefits to citizens. The digital footprint of the Government of India, consisting of websites, mobile apps, and applications, has expanded and often serves as the first point of contact or a preferred medium for citizens seeking information and services. However, amidst this rapid growth, there is a noticeable lack of a consistent user experience and uniform branding across government platforms. Consequently, there is a recognized need to harmonize the government's digital footprint across all channels. The harmonized footprint will

invoke higher trust and create better recall value for the citizens. It will facilitate simplified citizen interaction by enabling easy discovery of content and services. A proper design guideline for government websites is crucial to allow a smooth interaction across all websites. A good website should contain multiple vital elements like an intuitive interface, contemporary design, easy navigation, easy-to-understand content, optimized graphics, multimedia and performance [7].

3. OBJECTIVE OF DIGITAL BRAND GUIDELINES

The objective of having www.gov.in as the root in the digital ecosystem for government websites is to conceptualize a harmonized digital footprint for the government, ensuring a seamless and unified experience for users. By providing one branding, one digital system, and one experience, www.gov.in intends to simplify the user journey for citizens seeking government services and information. Positioned as an embedded entity in the search and access process, www.gov.in will serve as the harmonization layer, bringing clarity to the abundance of information.

The need to create a single gateway to all government services through a user-centric, unified, and seamless digital ecosystem and To bring about harmonization in the ecosystem, there is a need for a root that anchors the process. www.gov.in to act as this root and drive this initiative while placed at the apex level of the tree structure for digital systems as part of ministries, departments, and technology products. The following building blocks have been envisaged to enable the harmonization layer for the digital footprint:

- Digital Brand Identity Manual (DBIM) and Experience Toolkit
- GOV.IN and Centralized Content Management System
- Centralized Content Publishing
- Central Dashboard and Analytics

4. METHODOLOGY

For the development of design guidelines for Indian government websites, a detailed study was conducted by involving experts from the government and private sectors who are primarily working in website-related areas like design patterns, website development, website deployment, user interface and user experience, information security, etc. The Chief Information Officers from selective ministries of the Government of India have also

been consulted for their valuable inputs. The five major areas have been identified for study: corporate branding, international government branding guidelines, national guidelines and design systems, international guidelines, and national government websites. The details of this study are described in the next section. Multiple discussions and deliberations were conducted after the conclusion of the guidelines. The final guideline is compiled in the form of a manual called the Digital Brand Identity Manual (DBIM).

5. STUDY

The following are the five areas selected for study and for collecting information to develop design and branding guidelines for Indian government websites. These 5 selected areas have been selected with consideration of national and international government websites and the branding of famous brands.

5.1 Corporates

Approach to brand-related policies, visual elements, and messaging: As a use case, Facebook has been studied from the perspective of brand asset guidelines. The major considerations for corporate branding with the observations are as follows:

- Color palette: Bold and profound colors are used for the primary palette, while hues of grey for secondary palette. Brand colors of products are inspired from their perceptive values.
- Typography: Typeface offers a modernist, inclusive, and warm outlook. Heading and body text have a variation of the selected typeface.
- Use of Components: Components are designed and tested on the basis of use cases and design templates.
- Tone of voice: Use of inclusive language that also aligns with the brands' overall messaging strategy.
- Iconography and logo: Logos and icons follow a pre-specified scale and size. Testing of logos and text was conducted on different use cases.

5.2 International Government Branding Guidelines

Approach to defining identity and connectivity with citizens. As a use case, Coca-cola brand guidelines have been studied in detail. The key considerations are described as:

- Color palette: Combination of bright and dark color for the primary color palette. Brighter

colors used for sub-pages and intuitive navigation.

- **Typography:** Serif font family is used for the headings while sans family is used for body text and sub-headings.
- **Use of Components:** Components to be designed and tested based on the use case and designed templates.
- **Tone of voice:** Use of warm yet authoritative language that aligns with the government's overall messaging strategy.
- **Iconography and logo:** Logo designed differently for print media and online platforms. Separate categories of icons are created to create recall values for the information.

5.3 National Guidelines and Design Systems

Study of available guidelines on accessibility and unified visual identity of the Indian digital footprint. In this use case, the User Experience Design and Technology (UXDT) guidelines of the National Informatics Centre and the guidelines of UX4G, a Digital India initiative designed to enhance the user's experiences for accessing digital services with the goal of creating user-friendly, personalized experiences, have been followed. The considerations are:

- **Visual Identity:** A combination of colors for the websites, navigation scheme, consistent information architecture, and visual branding (logos, etc.)
- **Typography:** The Sans font family is used for the headings and body text.
- **User Navigation:** Navigation and UX writing to be the same for all websites to give a unified outlook.
- **Accessibility:** Multilingual options are to be considered to cater to audiences with language barriers. Captions are to be provided for all pre-recorded and live audio and video content. Platforms to have multilingual options.
- **Iconography:** The Emblem of India is used consistently across all pages of websites.

5.4 International Guidelines

Global digital design standards, brand recall and recognition, and enhanced global visibility. As a use case, the brand guidelines of the City of Boston and the design systems of the New Zealand and Singapore governments have been studied in detail. The key points are:

- **Visual Identity:** Use of National Identity Elements

- **Typography:** Sans Serif Font family used for the print media while sans font family used for all digital platform communications.
- **Imagery:** Original images along with a focused messaging / storyline should be used.
- **Accessibility:** Content should be accessible through assistive technologies.
- **Iconography and logo:** Logos to be predefined for different use cases and used as per the given scale and size.

5.5 National Government Websites

Landscape mapping of selected 5 websites to document the as-is scenario of branding. As use case multiple National Government websites of India have been studied including the Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The studied points are:

- **Visual Identity:** Use of Indian flag colors as the primary color palette.
- **Accessibility:** English and Hindi are used in adherence to India's multilingual policy along with GIGW guidelines for universal accessibility.
- **Overall Branding Consistency:** Lack of consistency across brand elements - color schemes, typography, website layouts.
- **Information Architecture:** Inconsistent navigation schematic across different websites.

6. GUIDELINE AS DIGITAL BRAND IDENTITY MANUAL (DBIM)

Based on the summarized theoretical and empirical background, twenty guidelines for the usable design and branding of government websites are derived. The main goal of these guidelines is to support website developers in the design phase, considering harmonization across all government websites. The following sections summarize these guidelines, using the same structure as in the theoretical background. The primary purpose of the DBIM is to define the key elements that will contribute to a unified and consistent visual identity for the Government of India in the digital realm. The DBIM aims to achieve two overarching goals:

- **Act as a style guide:** The DBIM outlines the elements necessary to bring harmonization to the digital footprint of the Government of India.
- **Maintain brand integrity:** Present a cohesive and compelling brand presence to both national and global audiences.

6.1 Colors

Colors are one of the most important aspects of website design. Colors are used to attract attention, differentiate things, express meaning, drive conversions, and drive brand generation. Color allows users to notice and identify objects in a space. Guidelines under this heading define the color palettes available for various types of citizen-facing digital platforms.

- **Primary Palette:** This represents the primary functions and objectives of the entity.
- **Functional Palette:** The functional palette is for application across functional elements of the digital platforms, such as text, background, etc.

6.2 Icons and styles

Icons and styles are visual representations of specific objects. Icons are used as distinctive elements for navigation on a website, to make it easier to locate and follow certain information on the website and draw attention to a particular interest element of the website.

- **Functional Icons:** These are patterns of globally recognized symbols that maintain consistent meanings across different platforms.
- **Contextual Icons:** set of icons that are contextual to the various functions performed by government entities and their schemes, programs or service offerings.
- **Style variation:** only one icon style must be used across the digital platform to maintain consistency.
- **Icon Sizes:** Using multiple standard sizes ensures consistency while adapting to different contexts and screen sizes.

6.3 Typography

Typography represents arrangements of texts and letters to make them legible and visually appealing to the reader. Typography involves font style, appearance, and structure, which ultimately aim to convey specific messages. Typography brings the text to life and ensures effective usage. The subcomponents are:

- Typeface and styles
- Multilingual support
- Type Scale, color and pairing

6.4 Logo

A logo is a graphic mark. Emblem is used to aid and promote public recognition and identification. It serves as a self-explanatory image that people can use to connect with their respective brands. A good logo is instantly recognizable, memorable, and

closely connected with the brand's core values and ideas.

- **Identity System:** The State Emblem of India represents the identity of the government website and must be used in a consistent manner across all platforms.
- **Logo Lockup variation:** The principles of lockup are designed to ensure flexibility across different platforms.
- **Color variations:** This varies according to the selection of the palette.
- **Generic Branding: Headers and Footers:** Various design patterns for headers and footers have been developed for further selection and application.

6.5 Imagery

In digital branding, imagery plays an essential role. From websites to apps, it shapes user experiences and reinforces the brand identity. DBIM outlines recommendations to select, create, and implement imagery for cohesive visual storytelling across all digital properties of the different government entities.

- **Technical considerations** in terms of file size, Alternative Text, Permissions and Licensing, Headshots.
- **Best Practices & Recommendations** in terms of colors, lighting, composition focus and sharpness, subject and story, perspective, and simplicity.

6.6 Content

This describes fundamental recommendations for all digital properties, emphasizing the principles essential for structuring and styling the content. It ensures consistency in brand identity and enhances the user experience.

- **Content strategy:** this includes content grouping, identification of personas, and information architecture.
- **Content creation and formatting:** This consists of tone of voice, language check, writing styles, formatting, etc.
- **Content Categories and Grouping**
- **Content life cycle:** Establish a systemic procedure for reviewing, updating, and archiving content to ensure it remains accurate and relevant.
- **Central Information Publishing System:** to display uniform and consistent content from a centralized publishing system across all government websites.
- **Improving Multilingual Visibility:** The website has the ability to display the content

in multiple languages as per government guidelines.

6.7 Accessibility

Accessible web design is not just an ethical obligation; it ensures adherence to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and Accessible India Campaign guidelines, allowing a larger number of users to search for and consume information from the website. While GIGW 3.0 is a comprehensive guide to ensuring accessibility for government entity websites.

- **Perceivable:** Information and interface components must be presented in ways all users can perceive. This includes incorporating alternatives for any non-text content, ensuring that all users, regardless of their ability, can understand the information on our site, and creation of content that can be presented in different ways without losing information or structure.
- **Operable:** All users should be able to operate the interface and navigation. Users should have sufficient time to read and use content on the website, and must have adequate means to navigate, find content, and determine where they are.
- **Understandable:** The design should be consistent and predictable, users must be assisted in avoiding and correcting any mistakes in input, and the information should not be complex or hidden under layers of navigation.
- **Robust:** The content must be robust enough and compatible enough to be interpreted by a variety of user agents, including assistive technologies.

6.8 Performance Enhancement

To ensure positive UX, government entities must employ appropriate metrics to track and measure the user experience on websites. Some of the key aspects that must be monitored are loading performance, interactivity, and visual stability. The suggested points to be considered are:

- Page performance enhancement
- User interaction responsiveness
- Visual stability and optimization
- Resource management and monitoring
- Analytics applications

6.9 Mobile App

The need for a unified and harmonized digital experience on mobile applications across the government's digital footprint becomes paramount.

It would help in fostering trust and reliability among users of government mobile applications. In order to maintain visual and functional harmonization throughout all the applications being built by government entities, it is imperative to refer to the recommendations defined in this document and GIGW 3.0.

- **User interface and user experience (UI/UX) design:** This is regarding adherence to the defined design guidelines.
- **Data Security and privacy:** Apps should be in compliance with security guidelines, well audited, transparent regarding data sharing, user consent enablement.
- **Application hosting:** All the mobile applications for government programs and services preferably be hosted on the Government App Store.

6.10 Social Media

This covers social media management, offering recommendations for content creation, audience engagement, and performance measurement. It seeks to empower the government to harness the full potential of social media as a powerful tool for public outreach, information dissemination, and citizen engagement, fostering a stronger and more cohesive connection between the government and its citizens. The detailed guidelines are:

- Indicative Content Types for Social Media Posts
- Role of Chief Information Officer in Social Media Communications
- Use of data & information
- Key Deliverables for Social Media Harmonization
- Engaging Youth with Short Videos
- Dos and don'ts

7. DISCUSSION

Detailed guidelines for design and branding for government websites have been discussed. This compilation of guidelines enables an easier overview of important elements that have to be considered when designing and developing government websites in gov.in domain with consideration of digital harmony. Many other guidelines that already exist will not be affected by these guidelines. These guidelines will act as an addition to existing guidelines. This study provides a comprehensive and structured summary of design and branding guidelines for government websites in India, which are relevant not only for the study but also for practitioners. Applying a few of the components of these guidelines may have a major impact on the harmonization of digital footprints as websites and branding among the public. These guidelines will also be helpful in terms of management and operations of government websites. A future study should examine to what extent the overall application of these guidelines improves the digital brand image of

government websites, harmonization of digital footprints, ease of usability, performance of the website in terms of technology, error avoidance, social media involvement, and enhances user satisfaction. Further, it should be investigated whether the postulated guidelines lead to a higher impact of the digital branding of the government in public.

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