

# DataBaaz uses data-driven digital video storytelling to highlight important issues to Indian youth

DataBaaz is an Indian data and evidence-led, mobile-first, video story platform. It aims to demystify the data around India's big social challenges like education, health, gender, the environment, and governance. Started by IndiaSpend (a data-driven, public-interest journalism nonprofit) DataBaaz tracks India's progress on achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and acts as an accountability watchdog for public spending, aiming to improve transparency and foster better governance.

## OPPORTUNITY

DataBaaz wanted to make the social issues that impact Indian society (such as education, health, and gender) more relevant to younger audiences by translating them into digital video. It saw an opportunity to build up a team of data analysts and visualization experts, strengthen its in-house multimedia storytelling skills, and experiment with new formats, so it could better engage younger digital video audiences.

## APPROACH

DataBaaz set up a business unit and established a digital video space to create data-driven videos, then experimented with different formats to engage young audiences.

**Creating a new business unit:** DataBaaz established an independent unit comprising video editors, producers, graphics specialists, researchers, and data visualization experts. The team was given induction training and introduced to the brand's editorial process. For the first time, DataBaaz set up a production and newsroom studio to shoot segments with a nimble, mobile-first setup. Over the course of the project, the team purchased equipment and software as needed (e.g., mobile phones, design software, online image subscriptions, etc.) and hired several additional staff.

**Building a brand identity for the channel:** The team created a story bank of 20 videos on different topics, and established a library of stock mobile video footage prior to launch. They created a brand identity for DataBaaz that would appeal to a younger, digital-first demographic.

**Launching the channel:** Because DataBaaz was aimed at a mobile-first generation, the first published videos were shot vertically. But the team pivoted to landscape soon after because it was a better orientation for YouTube content. Videos were published on YouTube and cross-promoted through social media and the DataBaaz website.

**Covering the elections:** The 2019 Indian general elections gave the team an opportunity to trial different content formats and distribution methods. For example, they created a new sub-brand (ElectionBaaz) to focus on political news, and published new storytelling formats using motion graphics, which compared political opponents and demonstrated how constituencies fared on basic indices of education, and maternal and child health.

**Experimenting with content formats:** The team experimented with several more new formats to help drive engagement. These included long form storytelling, field reporting, serialized storytelling (e.g., the popular "Urban Warriors" series showed

the human side to infrastructure issues), explainer videos on trending topics like climate change and governance issues, a weekly roundup show looking at a snapshot of the main stories of the week, and short (40 second) videos that compared a statement or action by an influencer with evidence and data.

**Further engaging younger audiences:** DataBaaz created the India Fact Quiz (IFQ) using DataBaaz video assets. IFQ is a digitally gamified quiz that focuses on facts around issues specific to India, designed to engage younger audiences via mobile. It was taken by half a million people within just six months. It was a huge success and attracted the attention and support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

**Measuring success:** DataBaaz uses various metrics to measure video performance, such as cross-platform web traffic and tagging by regular followers. In addition to metrics, DataBaaz gauges success through real-world impact. For example, after a ground report on teen pregnancies in Uttar Pradesh was shown to the state health department and health minister, there was a shift in government policy — adolescent health clinics and counselling services were made accessible to married teens.

## RESULTS

DataBaaz has published a bank of over **500 hard-hitting, data-led video stories** on underreported issues related to health, gender, the environment, education, governance, election, and crime.



## LEARNINGS

**Longer content performs well on YouTube:** DataBaaz initially made short videos (~90 seconds), but found that longer formats worked better for YouTube audiences. It adapted its storytelling style to accommodate this finding by producing more long-form and in-depth videos.

**Building an audience takes time:** For brands experimenting with new formats, building capacity and audience can be slow going. You have to be in it for the long haul as you may not land on the formats, topics, and themes that resonate straight away.

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**Our mission is to improve the quality of public discourse. We do that by using data and evidence to tell stories in public interest. We hope that by making these stories and videos relevant to younger audiences, we can increase awareness and thus generate demand for greater accountability and governance.**

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*Govindraj Ethiraj,  
Founder of DataBaaz*