

Validity and Verifiability: Toward a Hybrid Framework for Evaluating Digital Humanities in India

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Abstract

This article examines how evaluative infrastructures in Indian higher education — such as the UGC’s Academic Performance Index (API), NAAC’s accreditation rubrics, and NIRF rankings — continue to marginalise digital scholarly work by equating academic value with print-based authorship and closure. Taking digital curation as a diagnostic form, it traces how infrastructural, collaborative, and multilingual labour remains epistemically invisible within systems designed for singular outputs. Drawing on global debates in digital humanities, it situates the Indian case within broader questions of legitimacy and rigour. The paper proposes a hybrid evaluative framework that integrates processual, collaborative, and infrastructural criteria into institutional assessment. Grounded in Indian intellectual and policy contexts, it argues that recognising digital scholarship is an act of epistemic accountability, redefining what counts as knowledge, and who is authorised to produce it, in the contemporary humanities.

Introduction

This article examines a structural crisis at the heart of humanities scholarship in India: the persistent inability of academic institutions to recognise electronic scholarly resources as legitimate forms of intellectual labour. Despite the methodological rigour, conceptual innovation, and collaborative infrastructure that such projects demand, they remain excluded from the frameworks through which scholarly value is assigned, and academic legitimacy is conferred.^[1] Monographs and journal articles continue to monopolise evaluative rubrics. In the Indian context, the University Grants Commission’s^[2] Academic Performance Index (API),^[3] the National Assessment and Accreditation Council’s (NAAC)^[4] Self-Study Report (SSR),^[5] or the National Institutional Ranking Framework’s (NIRF)^[6] ranking system privileges recognisable and traditional research outputs over born-digital contributions. Digital scholarly work is rendered structurally invisible, or worse, misclassified as technical support, pedagogical aid, or administrative extension. However, these are the constitutive frameworks that provide the core mechanisms through which academic performance is audited in India. Together they regulate individual promotion, institutional accreditation, and national rankings, establishing the quantitative logic by which research value is assigned. In a moment when knowledge is increasingly generated within digital platforms, collaborative annotation, multimodal collections, and public-facing infrastructures, the continued reliance on print-centric evaluative models imposes a powerful form of epistemic erasure.^[7] Projects that build archives, curate metadata, design interfaces, or sustain multilingual corpora are rarely seen as producing knowledge. Instead, they are evaluated through the vocabulary of service: useful, but not scholarly, foundational but not credited. This erasure not only obscures the labour that sustains contemporary research, but it also narrows the intellectual horizon of the university itself.^[8]

While this article focuses on the Indian academic system, these challenges are global. Calls to address them have appeared consistently over the past two decades, as digital humanities has grappled with the problem of how digital

work is recognised and credited within academic institutions. Earlier efforts to define the field [Svensson 2010] [Svensson 2016] emphasised that digital humanities was less of a discipline than a landscape whose uneven global distribution mirrored existing hierarchies of knowledge. Domenico Fiormonte continues in the same vein by foregrounding the “geopolitical and the cultural-linguistic composition of the discipline” [Fiormonte 2012, 62], arguing that infrastructural and linguistic asymmetries reproduce cultural dependence even within ostensibly open digital systems. Subsequent interventions by [Fitzpatrick 2011] and [Drucker 2014] have questioned the adequacy of traditional peer review and authorship models for evaluating multimodal and collaborative scholarship. [Risam 2018] and [Posner 2012] have further shown how the invisibility of labour in digital projects reflects deeper inequities in the academic valuation of work. Extending this argument, [Horváth et al. 2024] and [Horváth et al. 2025] shift attention from infrastructures to users, showing how multilingual and non-Latin-script practitioners navigate these inequities in practice, and calling for institution-level reforms — in libraries, funding, and evaluation — to create linguistically inclusive forms of digital scholarship. In parallel, [Dahiya et al. 2025] highlight how such structural tensions manifest in the Indian university system, where digital humanities pedagogy oscillates between humanistic inquiry and techno-positivist training, reflecting deeper curricular and institutional rigidities. While it would be possible to draw formal comparisons with Euro-American institutional models, such a gesture risks recentring the very inequities this paper seeks to unsettle. The point, rather, is to acknowledge that India is not derivative of or exceptional to the global frame, but that systemic specificities expose the limits of that frame itself.

This article takes digital curation as a site of examination not because it is the only form of electronic scholarly labour, but because it renders visible a set of structural tensions that apply more broadly across the domain of digital scholarship. Curation sits at the intersection of infrastructure, authorship, and interpretation; it demands methodological innovation, multilingual negotiation, and public-facing design. As such, it functions as a diagnostic form, foregrounding the invisibilities, exclusions, and classificatory failures that attend many types of digital work within the Indian academic system. Whether in annotated corpora, multimodal editions, or born-digital platforms, the epistemic labour involved in making electronic resources discoverable, legible, and reliable is consistent across forms. By following the labour of curation across institutional rubrics, metadata infrastructures, and memory projects, this paper proposes a broader reconfiguration of how academic value is assigned to electronic scholarly resources in India.^[9]

As we examine this issue, two overlapping challenges emerge. First, at a global level, existing evaluative systems have proven ill-equipped to recognise the complex intellectual labour embedded in electronic resources. The interpretive work of digital design, the methodological innovation of interactive platforms, the collaborative ethos of open-access infrastructures, cannot be easily mapped onto institutional categories structured around individual authorship and citation metrics. Second, in the Indian context, these global tendencies are intensified by rigid evaluative frameworks such as the UGC’s Academic Performance Index (API), NAAC’s assessment rubrics, and NIRF rankings. These frameworks not only privilege conventional scholarly forms, but also marginalise those that operate across media, across disciplines, and across publics.

While Indian digital humanities scholarship has grown steadily over the past decade, much of the published work has focused on questions of pedagogy, infrastructure, and method. The volume *Digital Humanities in India: Learning by Doing* [Dodd and Menon 2024], for instance, foregrounds the infrastructural constraints and pedagogical experiments that have shaped digital humanities projects in the Indian university system. It maps the collaborative, often improvisational nature of digital research in resource-constrained environments and calls for broader institutional support. My argument builds on this foundational work but shifts the focus to a different, yet structurally related, site of concern: the systems of evaluation through which digital scholarly labour is rendered visible, or not, within the academy. If Dodd and Menon have helped to define how DH is being done, this paper asks how it is being counted, where it is located within institutional architectures of legitimacy, how it is assessed, and what remains unintelligible within current evaluative grammars. By foregrounding the absence of a coherent framework for recognising electronic scholarly resources, particularly in Indian institutional contexts, this essay extends the conversation from questions of capacity to those of epistemic value.

Forms of Knowledge, Frames of Legitimacy

Despite the rhetoric of inclusivity and reform, the Indian university remains a fixed and unyielding structure, fundamentally incapable of accommodating heterogeneity. As Gauri Viswanathan (2015) shows, the institutionalisation of English literary study under colonial rule was never meant to foster pluralism — it was a disciplinary project, designed to regulate and normalise elite subjects through selective exposure to moral and aesthetic values [Viswanathan 2015]. The humanities in India thus emerged not as a site of critical inquiry, but as a mechanism of rule, tightly bound to a canon, a language, and a civility coded as universal. This legacy persists in the postcolonial university, where what passes for neutrality is in fact the sediment of historical exclusions. Debaditya Bhattacharya critiques the disciplinary structure of the university not as a neutral or apolitical space, but as a historically entrenched mechanism of enclosure. In his reading, specialization and disciplinarity operate less as tools of openness than as strategies of control that “seek to patrol boundaries, prescribe modes of knowing, and foreclose the possibility of unauthorised intellectual entry” [Bhattacharya 2018, 5]. The emergence of the “new humanities” — including digital, environmental, affective, and post-humanist modes of inquiry — offers a profound opportunity to reimagine the terrain of knowledge production. These fields challenge the inherited borders between disciplines, as well as between the human and the non-human, the material and the virtual, the textual and the embodied. As Supriya Chaudhuri argues, the humanities must reckon with the “post-human condition” [Chaudhuri 2018, 22] in which the figure of the human is no longer singular, autonomous, or self-contained, but enmeshed in networks of interdependence with machines, animals, environments, and code [Chaudhuri 2018, 23]. The new humanities do not simply expand the canon; they demand a transformation in how knowledge is constituted, who is authorized to speak, and what forms of mediation count as legitimate. Amlan Das Gupta acknowledges the university as a uniquely valuable site for the development of digital humanities, especially for “sustained critical reflection” and the creation of “new protocols of metadata” and “new tools for visualization and collation” [Das Gupta 2018, 83]. Yet this optimistic vision exists in tension with the structural conservatism of many Indian institutions, which often lack the epistemic flexibility and infrastructural responsiveness required to integrate these new modes of inquiry. While Das Gupta does not frame the university as hostile to digital humanities, his emphasis on the need to build capacities — rather than reform existing systems — suggests a quiet recognition of institutional inertia.

A growing body of scholarship has engaged this problem, converging around several overlapping critiques. Roopika Risam has argued that digital projects emerging from decolonial or community-driven imperatives are often dismissed precisely because they foreground modes of knowledge production that institutional systems are not built to recognise [Risam 2018]. In such cases, significance lies not in where a project is published, but in what it makes visible, who it includes, and how it circulates. Similarly, Anne Burdick and her collaborators have argued that the aesthetic, material, and infrastructural choices embedded in digital scholarship are not supplementary, they are constitutive. They write, “Design in dialogue with research is simply a technique, but when used to pose and frame questions about knowledge, design becomes an intellectual method” [Burdick et al. 2012, 13]. Usability is not an afterthought; it is an argument. Nor can this labour be separated from its infrastructure. Christine Borgman has made clear that digital collections must be sustained, through metadata revision, interface upkeep, preservation strategies, all forms of labour that rarely appear in CVs,^[10] yet determine the scholarly reliability of the resource itself [Borgman 2007]. Matthew Kirschenbaum’s notion of the “processual ontology” of digital humanities reinforces this view: What matters is not merely the artefact but the sequence of intellectual, technical, and collaborative decisions through which it is formed [Kirschenbaum 2008]. As Lauren Klein and Catherine D’Ignazio have argued, the care-based, collaborative, and often undercompensated labour that digital scholarship demands is “a form of invisible labor” that is “precarious,” disproportionately undertaken by “women and people of color,” and largely unacknowledged within systems of academic credit [D’Ignazio and Klein 2020, 200]. This labour — performed by librarians, archivists, curators, and early-career scholars, particularly those outside Euro-American institutions — is not supplementary but fundamental to the sustainability of digital work. The failure to account for this labour is a systemic reproduction of inequality. Together, these interventions call not just for the inclusion of digital work within existing evaluative frameworks, but for a reconsideration of how scholarly value itself is assigned. The legitimacy of digital scholarship cannot rest on its resemblance to traditional forms. It must be read on its own terms — as iterative, hybrid, and socially embedded. Its contribution lies not only in argument, but in form, infrastructure, and the conditions of its making.

While global literature on digital humanities, particularly in the United States and Europe, has produced a robust body of critique around scholarly legitimacy, peer review, and institutional evaluation, these debates often assume the existence

of a mature field. In India, by contrast, digital humanities remains a nascent and often project-bound formation, shaped more by infrastructural improvisation than by disciplinary coherence.^[11] As such, the exclusions this paper documents cannot always be located in a formalised Indian DH discourse, but in institutional behaviours, policy omissions, and the lived experiences of digital scholarship. This difference reflects the deeper asymmetry between where the field is written about and where it is actively being built.

Curation as Scholarly Method

Digital scholarly projects have increasingly come to occupy the space between research, infrastructure, and public engagement. They take the form of annotated corpora, multimedia archives, interactive platforms, and metadata-rich collections, each demanding modes of expertise that exceed conventional disciplinary boundaries. Their value lies not only in what they present but in how they are structured: in their architecture, their accessibility, their iterative design, and their responsiveness to multiple publics. Yet these forms of labour remain institutionally ambiguous, largely because they fail to resemble the scholarly genres against which academic rigour is measured. This paper takes up one specific instance of digital scholarly work — curation — as a site through which to explore this misrecognition. Curation, as used here, refers not simply to the management or digitisation of materials, but to the interpretive, infrastructural, and methodological labour involved in rendering knowledge accessible, legible, and durable. Through the examination of university-based curatorial projects in India, this section illustrates how curation performs the core functions of scholarship, selection, contextualisation, annotation, and theorisation, yet remains peripheral to academic evaluation.^[12] In doing so, it offers a critical account of how digital labour is epistemologically central and institutionally marginal. This shift emerges from the confluence of digitisation mandates, public engagement imperatives, and epistemic pressures to account for what the archive omits. As institutions grapple with NAAC's emphasis on societal outreach, with the *National Education Policy's* (NEP) call for interdisciplinarity, and with the infrastructural demands of open-access research, curation becomes the method through which these competing obligations are held together. But this method is not neutral. It is situated within linguistic, disciplinary, and technological constraints that determine what is seen, sorted, and sustained.

Projects like *Bichitra: The Online Tagore Variorum* at Jadavpur University^[13] foreground this convergence of editorial labour and platform design [Jadavpur University 2013]. Built to enable comparative reading across Tagore's drafts, revisions, and publications, the project demanded not only philological rigour but infrastructural creativity, interface decisions, metadata categories, encoding hierarchies. The scholarly value of *Bichitra* lies not only in the corpus it curates but in the interpretive scaffolding it invents. As Sukanta Chaudhuri notes, engaging meaningfully with Tagore's corpus requires more than "a simple database of images and transcriptions." Because of the complexity and variability of Tagore's works, the platform must offer "conceptually fundamental" tools — detailed and structured enough to support serious textual understanding through data mining [Chaudhuri 2015, 10]. The interface becomes the expression of its scholarship.^[14] Other platforms, like *Pad.ma (Public Access Digital Media Archive)*,^[15] extend this logic further. Built collaboratively by academics, artists, and software developers, it curates politically sensitive video materials, many in vernacular contexts, and invites users to annotate, challenge, and extend the metadata [Pad.ma n.d.]. Annotation, in this context, is not descriptive but argumentative. The platform stages disagreement as a method of curation. As Nishant Shah argues, the digital condition reconfigures authorship as a networked, collaborative process shaped by platforms, protocols, and users where meaning is distributed through infrastructural participation [Shah 2010] [Shah 2017]. What matters is not who composed the archive, but how it remains open to competing forms of use. Platforms such as *Khidki Collective* ^[16] and *QAMRA* ^[17] extend the epistemic commitments of digital curation beyond institutional frameworks, staging archival work as an ethical, affective, and infrastructural intervention. *Khidki Collective* works at the intersection of public scholarship and regional memory, translating intellectual histories of the Deccan into accessible multimedia forms [Khidki Collective n.d.]. Through roundtables, essays, lectures, and curated digital artefacts, *Khidki* renders visible the lived textures of belonging, nostalgia, and spatial identity in a region often flattened by national or metropolitan narratives. *QAMRA*, by contrast, builds a living archive of queer experience in India, foregrounding visual cultures, personal testimony, and affective memory as central modes of historical recovery [QAMRA Archive n.d.]. It reclaims stories long excluded from institutional memory, offering a space where gender, sexuality, and image-making

converge in practices of self-representation. In both projects, curation is central to their intellectual positions. Through metadata, interface, and community dialogue, these platforms stage arguments about visibility, legitimacy, and the conditions under which knowledge becomes public. Their work exemplifies a shift in scholarly authority: from the authored monograph to the collaborative infrastructure, from textual finality to care-based design.

The misrecognition of labour in the Indian university emerges from an evaluative ecosystem that continues to define scholarship through a narrow genealogy of outputs that are textual, authored, bounded, and citation ready. The University Grants Commission's Academic Performance Index (API), for instance, lists monographs, journal articles, and externally funded projects as primary indicators of scholarly productivity. There is no category for collaborative metadata architecture, no provision for the intellectual design of repositories, no scoring mechanism for the creation of vernacular corpora. The university knows how to read the journal article, the citation, the conference paper. It does not yet know how to read the infrastructure that enables those texts to circulate. As a result, digital curators are forced into a kind of rhetorical double labour: building the archive and then narrating its scholarly legitimacy in a vocabulary not built to accommodate.^[18] To curate is not to prepare material for future analysis, but to enact a theory of knowledge in real time. The curator decides what is preserved, how it is described, what forms of access are enabled, and what epistemologies are privileged. To curate is to make an argument about value, legibility, and future use. When universities fail to credit curatorial labour, they erase the methodological ground on which much of today's scholarship stands. To see curation as a scholarly method is to recognise that form, infrastructure, and public accessibility are not peripheral to knowledge, but constitutive of it. A metadata field is not neutral. A search architecture encodes assumptions. A platform's openness or opacity determines who can enter and what they will find. The curated collection is itself an intervention into how knowledge is structured, accessed, and authorised.^[19]

Curation, then, is not an isolated exception within the university, but a paradigmatic instance of a broader transformation in the form, labour, and temporality of digital scholarly projects. It exemplifies the convergence of research, design, and infrastructure that now characterises much of contemporary humanities work: platforms that are iterative rather than conclusive, authored by teams rather than individuals, structured around access rather than closure. The dilemmas faced by curators — how to render fragments legible, how to encode context, how to build for users not yet imagined — are the dilemmas of digital scholarship writ large. Whether in the creation of linguistic corpora, multimedia editions, data visualisations, or public history portals, the same questions recur: what counts as scholarly method when knowledge is mediated through interface? What forms of rigour are legible to institutions built on print? This examination of curation offers a lens through which we understand how digital projects demand, and produce, a different conceptual grammar of scholarly value.

Verification, Value, and Peer Review

If digital curation is to be recognised as a legitimate mode of scholarly labour, it must be supported not only through institutional policies but through the rethinking of the evaluative frameworks that govern academic legitimacy. In India, academic value is tethered to a limited set of outputs, peer-reviewed publications, citation counts, and journal rankings, and it is formalised in structures such as the UGC's Academic Performance Index (API), NAAC's accreditation rubrics, and funding protocols issued by state research bodies. These systems remain calibrated to traditional textual scholarship.

To be published, in the academic sphere, is to be sanctioned by a system of editorial and peer oversight whose parameters are historically shaped by print-based models of authorship. Digital projects often fall outside these contours. As such, they challenge the core assumptions upon which scholarly publishing, and the economies it supports, are built. That challenge is precisely why they remain peripheral. Their value is not unrecognised; it is unaccommodated. The problem, then, is not that digital projects are unrecognisable. It is that they are published outside the regimes of value that govern academic credibility.

A curated archive may involve developers, designers, cataloguers, historians, language specialists, and user interface experts, each contributing a distinct layer of knowledge. Yet institutional frameworks have no grammar to parse this complexity. Who counts as "the author" of a digital edition? Is the person who designed the metadata schema less of a

scholar than the one who wrote the funding proposal? Should the interface designer be acknowledged as a co-author, or merely thanked in the acknowledgements? These questions are not semantic; they determine who is cited, who is promoted, and who is credited. In the absence of clear authorship conventions for multimodal, multi-contributor projects, the scholarly labour embedded in digital work becomes diffused and often invisibilised.

In response to these conditions, global digital humanities has begun to develop more nuanced models of attribution. The Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT),^[20] now used by many academic journals and digital repositories, lists fourteen contributor roles, from “Conceptualization” and “Data Curation” to “Software” and “Visualization”, and allows contributors to be recognised across multiple domains of scholarly labour [Brand et al. 2015]. Yet this model has not been widely adopted in Indian academic contexts. Technologists, project managers, junior researchers, and curators, those whose labour makes the project legible, are rarely co-authors on the papers that follow.^[21] Miriam Posner notes that DH projects, while framed as collaborative, often replicate hierarchical authorship structures that obscure technical labour under the guise of neutrality [Posner 2012]. If DH reconfigures what counts as scholarly labour, then our evaluative frameworks must do the same. This paper argues that the issue is not just attribution but legibility. Who gets named, and how, is not merely a matter of fairness; it is a question of whether we understand scholarship as a solitary act or a distributed process. If digital scholarship makes it harder to locate labour in the figure of a single author, then that is not a flaw, but a conceptual invitation to move beyond a model of scholarly output that privileges authored closure. It is an invitation to adopt protocols that reflect the collaborative, iterative, and infrastructural realities of digital research.

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This challenge of authorship leads to a deeper institutional question: What makes scholarly work verifiable? Peer review has long functioned as a marker of scholarly rigour, but its institutional apparatus, characterised by disciplinary gatekeeping, anonymity, and editorial discretion, has been critiqued as structurally conservative and exclusionary. As Mario Biagioli argues, peer review historically served less as a neutral evaluator of knowledge than as a system for regulating entry into institutional credibility [Biagioli 2002]. This concern is amplified in digital scholarship, where the epistemic labour often lies not in propositional argument but in metadata design, interface architecture, and sustained infrastructural maintenance, elements that evade traditional criteria for peer evaluation [Fitzpatrick 2011] [Borgman 2015].

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The UGC’s API system, which governs promotions and appointments, allocates credit primarily to traditional textual outputs. As the *2018 UGC Regulations* make clear, research publications only in “refereed journals” and “UGC-listed journals” are considered for API scoring [University Grants Commission 2018, Table 3B]. Digital resources, such as metadata corpora, interface designs, or collaboratively curated archives, do not appear as recognisable forms of scholarly output within this matrix. NAAC’s SSR follows a similar logic. Digital resources are referenced only under Criterion 4.2, which notes that, “development in the field due to availability of digital mean” and that “providing remote access to eresources in the library have become a matter of necessity” [National Assessment and Accreditation Council 2020, 17]. Neither criterion treats digital collections as outputs of research or as authored contributions. Even the *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*, while foregrounding the importance of digital engagement and interdisciplinary scholarship, limits its references to digitisation and technology to pedagogical transformation and administrative delivery. Chapter 23 encourages the use of technology platforms in higher education and proposes the creation of a “National Educational Technology Forum (NETF)”,^[22] yet at no point does the policy define standards for evaluating digital humanities outputs or curatorial research [Ministry of Education 2020, Ch. 23]. In the absence of a framework, the university continues to recognise digital labour only when it is retrofitted to textual form.

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This refusal is institutionalised in systems built to reduce complexity into auditable units. While this is often (and perhaps justifiably) explained as a defence against academic fraud, predatory journals, paper mills, and inflated publication lists, such safeguards have disproportionately favoured conventional publication venues and citation indices. In doing so, they obscure the work of collaborative, multilingual, public-facing digital scholarship.

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There is little published scholarship in India that addresses how curatorial, infrastructural, or multilingual digital labour is evaluated within academic systems. This absence highlights the need for frameworks capable of recognising non-textual, collaborative, and iterative forms of scholarly contribution. Peer review, as global DH scholars have argued,

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need not remain adversarial or text-bound; it can be collaborative, iterative, and aligned with project life cycles [Fitzpatrick 2011]. For India, this requires integrating digital scholarship into the API, NAAC’s SSR, and funding frameworks. It demands new workload models that recognise infrastructure-building, multilingual metadata, and collaborative authorship as legitimate forms of knowledge production.^[23]

Toward a Hybrid Framework for Evaluating Digital Scholarship in India

If the preceding sections have outlined the epistemic and institutional exclusions faced by digital scholarly projects in India, this section turns toward the question of what might be done. Recognition cannot remain rhetorical; it must be encoded in forms that are legible to the systems that govern scholarly value. The challenge is not only to validate digital scholarship, but to develop evaluative models that are methodologically rigorous, contextually grounded, and structurally embedded. Existing frameworks, such as those proposed by the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the American Historical Association (AHA) have laid important groundwork, particularly in recognising multimodal forms and collaborative labour [Modern Language Association 2024] [American Historical Association 2015]. But these models remain shaped by infrastructures, workflows, and assumptions drawn largely from Euro-American institutional contexts. In India, digital scholarship unfolds through a different set of conditions: linguistic pluralism, infrastructural asymmetry, project-based labour, and regulatory systems that still privilege the authored monograph over the curated archive, and the textual over the infrastructural. It is in this gap that a hybrid evaluation model becomes necessary as a coherent system attuned to the forms that digital scholarship now takes. What follows is a conceptual framework for recognising scholarly labour where it currently goes unacknowledged. It seeks to account for not just what a project produces, but what it sustains, who it includes, and how it redefines the very conditions of academic work.

This model draws on existing digital humanities (DH) evaluation frameworks, particularly those developed by MLA, AHA, and NEH, but extends them in key directions to meet the structural, linguistic, and epistemic demands of the Indian academic context. A graphical representation of this can be seen in Table 1.

Dimension	Conventional Mode	Contextual Expansion in Hybrid Model
1. Global Standards + Local Realities	International DH evaluation frameworks (MLA, AHA etc.)	Calibrated to Indian academia (UGC API, NAAC, NEP), resource constraints, linguistic diversity, and cognitive justice traditions
2. Theoretical + Practical Synthesis	Conceptual critiques of authorship, exclusion, and epistemic legitimacy	Nine actionable principles to guide peer review, policy reform, and funding evaluation
3. Multimodal + Textual Legitimacy	Print-centric, authored, textual outputs as normative forms of scholarly rigour	Recognition of metadata, platforms, paratexts, vernacular interfaces, ethical design, and care-based infrastructural labour
4. Institutional Reform + Scholarly Reimagination	Expanding existing frameworks to include more outputs (e.g., digital articles)	Rethinking rigour itself: embracing collectivity, iteration, infrastructure, and new epistemic forms beyond textual closure

Table 1. Four Dimensions of the Hybrid Nature of the Evaluation Model

What distinguishes this framework is its grounding in the specific epistemic, infrastructural, and institutional conditions of Indian higher education. Unlike existing models developed in Euro-American contexts — which often assume access to

stable infrastructure, established digital scholarship ecosystems, and flexible evaluation mechanisms — this framework responds to the lived realities of resource-constrained, multilingual, and policy-driven academic environments. It does not simply adapt global standards; it rethinks what counts as scholarly labour from the ground up. By drawing on Indian intellectual traditions such as cognitive justice,^[24] and by foregrounding infrastructural, affective, and collaborative work as core scholarly practices, the framework offers a regionally situated yet conceptually expansive model of evaluation. It is not a universal checklist but a context-sensitive structure for recognising rigour, authorship, and innovation in forms long excluded from academic legitimacy. In doing so, it makes a methodological and political claim: that digital scholarship in the global South must be evaluated on its own terms, not by retrofitting it to inherited models, but by building new ones from the critical vocabularies of its own traditions. The nine principles for designing an evaluation framework for digital humanities scholarship in India is listed below:

1. Multimodal and Multilingual Sensitivity

While many global DH frameworks recognise multimodality, few grapple with the linguistic infrastructure of multilingual metadata, vernacular scripting, and transliteration. The hybrid model insists that evaluative criteria must extend beyond usability or aesthetics to include linguistic inclusivity, script variation, and the epistemic labour of cross-script metadata creation.

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2. Infrastructure as Scholarly Proposition

Existing frameworks often treat infrastructure as a neutral backdrop. This model rejects that separation. Drawing on Stephen Ramsay's assertion that building can be an argument, it insists that infrastructure, metadata logics, interface architecture, preservation design, is itself a form of scholarly thought [Ramsay 2014]. When platforms shape public memory, control access, or generate epistemic visibility, they must be evaluated as propositional forms, not technical supports.

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3. Ongoing and Iterative Evaluation

Following Kathleen Fitzpatrick's call for process-aware review, this model emphasises lifecycle-based evaluation [Fitzpatrick 2011]. Digital projects, especially in resource-constrained contexts, rarely conform to a linear production timeline. They evolve through failure, feedback, and community uptake. One-time peer review is insufficient. Evaluation must track sustainability, uptake, and iterative responsiveness, recognising that versioning and revision are not signs of instability, but markers of methodological maturity.

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4. Attribution and Distributed Authorship

Unlike traditional evaluation models that privilege sole authorship, this framework recognises that digital scholarship is often collaborative and layered. It foregrounds the need to document, credit, and evaluate labour that is infrastructural, affective, or design-based. Building on models like the CRediT taxonomy and adapted for the humanities, the framework insists that project contributors, including metadata specialists, coders, interface designers, and archivists, be formally named and credited. This is particularly urgent in the Indian context, where the labour of project fellows and contract researchers is routinely disaggregated from institutional reward systems.

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5. Embedded Institutional Reform

While global evaluative frameworks offer useful models, their institutional assumptions do not always align with the Indian academic context. Here, the challenge is epistemic: Universities continue to privilege abstract, text-bound, and singular authorship models shaped by colonial-modern legacies. A meaningful framework for evaluating digital scholarship in India must draw on local intellectual traditions that interrogate how legitimacy is assigned.

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6. Inclusion of Affective and Ethical Labour

Projects that deal with marginalised communities, contested memory, or historical trauma involve significant affective

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and ethical judgement: decisions about anonymity, interface legibility, and representational justice. This labour is often invisible but epistemically central. The hybrid model proposes that ethical curation, not only what is shown, but how and why, is a reviewable scholarly component, particularly when digital projects work with oral histories, sensitive images, or community-contributed data.

7. Expanded Reviewer Composition

Interdisciplinary output demands interdisciplinary review. The hybrid model calls for peer review bodies that include domain experts, curators, designers, technologists, archivists, and community stakeholders, especially in fields where institutional memory is short and where documentation functions as a proxy for argument.^[25] This ensures that scholarly labour is reviewed in its own idiom, not judged against inapplicable textual norms.

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8. Processual Paratexts as Scholarship

Version logs, data models, controlled vocabularies, documentation protocols, these are not peripheral materials. They are the argumentative scaffolding of the digital project. The hybrid model insists that these be reviewed, cited, and archived with the same seriousness as introductions or literature reviews.

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9. Academic Infrastructure as Public Platform

Finally, the hybrid model recognises that in the Indian context, digital projects often stand in for absent state archives. They are infrastructures of access, repair, and public memory. Their review must reflect this dual status, acknowledging that to build a corpus, translate a script, or sustain an archive is to produce knowledge.

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Below is a visual representation of the proposed evaluation framework:

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Principle	Core Idea	Implication for Evaluation
1. Multimodal and Multilingual Sensitivity	Recognize cross-script metadata, linguistic diversity, and vernacular infrastructure	Value metadata creation, transliteration, and multilingual access as scholarly labour
2. Infrastructure as Scholarly Proposition	Platforms, metadata, and interfaces are intellectual constructs	Treat infrastructure design as a scholarly argument, not just technical support
3. Ongoing and Iterative Evaluation	Digital projects evolve over time	Evaluate version history, community uptake, and sustainability as markers of rigour
4. Attribution and Distributed Authorship	Credit must reflect collaborative and layered contributions	Use detailed contributor taxonomies (e.g. CRediT) to acknowledge design, coding, annotation
5. Embedded Institutional Reform	Align evaluation with India's epistemic traditions and institutional context	Integrate cognitive justice and vernacular legitimacy into evaluative models
6. Inclusion of Affective and Ethical Labour	Ethical design and care-based decisions are central	Treat curatorial judgement, community sensitivity, and representational choices as scholarly input
7. Expanded Reviewer Composition	Review must match interdisciplinary and infrastructural complexity	Include designers, archivists, coders, and community stakeholders in peer review panels
8. Processual Paratexts as Scholarship	Documentation and scaffolding are not supplementary	Review version logs, data models, and metadata documentation as part of the project's scholarly output
9. Academic Infrastructure as Public Platform	Digital scholarship often fills the role of absent public institutions	Evaluate infrastructure not just as research output, but as public epistemic intervention

Table 2. Principles for Evaluating Digital Scholarship

This framework is a local extension of global models — one that recognises that scholarly value in India must account for its infrastructural, multilingual, and political conditions. It treats value as something not only argued, but enacted: in interfaces, in workflows, in care. It responds to a simple proposition: that scholarship today is not just what we say, but what we make possible. The *National Education Policy 2020* articulates a future-oriented vision of higher education in India, repeatedly invoking digital transformation, flexible learning pathways, and interdisciplinarity [Ministry of Education 2020]. However, its engagement with digitisation remains largely pedagogical, it champions online education platforms, blended classrooms, and digital literacy initiatives without extending this vision into the realm of research evaluation.

A hybrid evaluative framework must fill this lacuna by aligning NEP's digital ambitions with a recognition of digital scholarly labour. This means acknowledging that the same infrastructures that enable online learning, metadata models,

interface architectures, multilingual platforms, are also sites of research and innovation. A truly transformative policy cannot restrict digital engagement to delivery systems; it must account for the epistemic labour of building them.

To this end, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) and other NEP-linked regulatory bodies^[26] should:

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- Develop formal evaluation guidelines for digital scholarship, specifying criteria for metadata architecture, interface design, and multilingual content as reviewable components.
- Create project lifecycle templates that accommodate iterative, collaborative, and versioned outputs, moving away from the linearity assumed in conventional publication timelines.
- Recommend adoption of attribution models (such as CRediT) for all public-funded research platforms to ensure fair and visible credit across roles.
- Encourage the development of peer review protocols suited to digital collections, platforms, and archives, possibly through interdisciplinary panels that include technologists, curators, and domain scholars.
- Mandate institutional reporting of digital scholarly outputs not just as teaching or outreach tools but as research infrastructure under NAAC and NIRF audit categories.

The NEP speaks often of “flexibility” and “multidisciplinarity”; this framework proposes the criteria that can give those terms academic substance. Without such provisions, the NEP’s digital turn will remain incomplete, expanding access without recalibrating recognition.

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Conclusion: Towards Recognition

Digital collections are not peripheral to scholarship, they are among its most vital contemporary forms. They materialise scholarly labour in code, metadata, interface, and community practice; they carry argument not only in words but in form and structure. Their marginalisation is not a matter of ambiguity, but of institutional inertia, systems built for a different media ecology, struggling to recognise the contours of digital epistemology. What is required is not token inclusion, but structural realignment: a decisive shift in how we define rigour, interpret method, and assign academic value.

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Though this article has taken digital curation as its focal point, the concerns it raises cut across the entire digital scholarly landscape. The exclusions it traces, the devaluation of infrastructure, the suspicion of collaboration, the invisibilisation of process, are not exclusive to curated archives. They underwrite the institutional reception of linguistic corpora, digital tools, memory projects, and public-facing platforms. Curation offers a particularly generative site of analysis because it embodies the epistemic tensions at the heart of digital scholarship: between permanence and iteration, authorship and collectivity, structure and critique.

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To treat curation as a method is to make a broader claim: that digital scholarship requires a reimagining of what counts as knowledge, and how that knowledge is recognised. It is not the form that must approximate older genres, but the frameworks of evaluation that must evolve. A hybrid evaluative model, grounded in iteration, multilingualism, and infrastructural care, does not dilute standards; it sharpens them. It names the work that has long sustained research in silence. It affirms that metadata is not mere administration, that interface is not mere design, that access is not ancillary to interpretation. This is not a call for parity between digital and print, it is a call to unlearn the hierarchies that have governed scholarly value for too long. The question is not whether digital work meets academic standards, but whether those standards are capacious enough to meet the digital.

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At stake is nothing less than the future of the humanities. A field that cannot acknowledge the infrastructural, distributed, and multimodal conditions of its own present risks rendering itself irrelevant to the very publics it claims to serve. To take digital collections seriously is an act of accountability: to memory, to community, to the evolving forms through which knowledge is built and shared. The task before us is to build the frameworks that can meet these newer forms with clarity and resolve.

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Notes

[1] For instance, the UGC’s Academic Performance Index (API) Regulations (2018) do not list digital collections, curated platforms, or infrastructure-based outputs as recognised forms of research contribution. See [University Grants Commission 2018, Appendix III, Table 1].

[2] The University Grants Commission (UGC) is the statutory body in India responsible for coordinating, determining, and maintaining standards of higher education. It oversees funding, accreditation, and faculty evaluation frameworks for universities and colleges.

[3] The Academic Performance Indicator (API) is a points-based system introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India to evaluate the performance of faculty members for recruitment, promotions, and career advancement. It primarily rewards peer-reviewed publications, research funding, and teaching-related activities.

[4] The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to assess and accredit higher education institutions in India. Its evaluation framework emphasizes institutional infrastructure, teaching quality, and outreach activities.

[5] The Self-Study Report (SSR) is a comprehensive document submitted by higher education institutions in India as part of the NAAC accreditation process. It outlines institutional performance across a set of criteria, including curricular aspects, research output, infrastructure, and community engagement.

[6] The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) is an initiative by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, that ranks higher education institutions based on parameters such as teaching, research, graduation outcomes, outreach, and perception. It influences funding, admissions, and institutional prestige.

[7] I use *epistemic erasure* to name a specific institutional effect: the removal of certain forms of scholarly labour from visibility at the point of audit, credit, and reward. It is related to but distinct from epistemicide, which denotes the destruction of knowledge traditions [de Sousa Santos 2014] from epistemic violence, which marks the silencing of subaltern knowers within dominant discourses [Spivak 1988], and from epistemic injustice, which tracks testimonial and hermeneutical wrongs done to knowers [Fricker 2007]. Epistemic erasure is often produced administratively rather than polemically. It occurs when evaluation systems recognise only authored texts and citation metrics and therefore fail to read infrastructural, collaborative, multilingual, and interface-level work as knowledge. In digital humanities, this erasure intersects with critiques of infrastructural invisibility and care labour.

[8] See [McPherson 2012]. Tara McPherson argues that digital infrastructure, often seen as neutral or technical, encodes epistemological and ideological assumptions that shape scholarly legibility. She critiques the tendency to render platform-building and codework invisible within traditional academic hierarchies, suggesting that these forms of labour demand recognition as deeply intellectual and political acts.

[9] While this article focuses on digital curation as a diagnostic form of scholarly labour, it recognises that the field of digital humanities in India encompasses a broader range of practices — including natural language processing (NLP), GIS-based spatial analysis, computational literary studies, and digital pedagogy. These domains pose their own evaluative challenges and epistemic tensions. However, the emphasis on curation here reflects its centrality to questions of legibility, authorship, and infrastructural labour — dimensions where institutional exclusions are particularly visible and where recognition frameworks remain most underdeveloped.

[10] She writes, “[s]cholarship resulting in digital objects is especially risky in the humanities, where printed books remain the gold standard... Given the difficulties in getting credit for documentary publications in new forms and forums... few fields value the publication of data as scholarly products” [Borgman 2007, 239]

[11] See Padmini Ray Murray’s conceptualisation of *jugaad* in Indian Digital Humanities in “Making Culture: Locating the Digital Humanities in India,” *Visible language*, 49.3, 2015.

[12] The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) relies primarily on publication volume, citation indices, and research funding as proxies for research quality. These metrics systematically exclude non-textual, infrastructural, and collaborative digital outputs. See *NIRF Ranking Methodology Document*, 2023

[13] *Bichitra* is a digital variorum of Rabindranath Tagore’s works, hosted by Jadavpur University. It enables comparative reading across multiple drafts, editions, and translations, and exemplifies editorial scholarship embedded in interface design [Jadavpur University 2013].

[14] For a technical overview of the platform’s design and textual collation engine, see [Chaudhuri, Bhowmik, and Bose 2015] “Collation: Prabhed and its predecessors”, in *Bichitra: The Making of an Online Tagore Variorum*.

[15] *Pad.ma (Public Access Digital Media Archive)* is an online video archive built by a network of scholars, activists, and artists. It allows for collaborative annotation of politically sensitive audiovisual materials, often in vernacular contexts [Pad.ma n.d.].

[16] See *Khidki Collective*’s digital repository at <https://www.khidkicollective.in>, especially its curated roundtables and multimedia dossiers on regional memory and identity.

[17] See *QAMRA*’s archive at <https://qamra.in>, which foregrounds affective visual practices and queer life worlds through annotated images and oral narratives.

[18] This reflects widespread institutional practice, as documented informally in faculty review processes and workshops, including *Digital Humanities in India: Learning by Doing* [Dodd and Menon 2024].

[19] [Fitzpatrick 2011] and [Borgman 2015] argue that scholarly value in digital contexts resides not only in content but in infrastructure, such as interface design and metadata logic. See Fitzpatrick, *The Humanities, Done Digitally*, 2012; Borgman, *Big Data, Little Data, No Data*, 2015.

[20] The Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) defines fourteen roles commonly used in academic research, including “Conceptualization,” “Software,” and “Data Curation,” allowing for transparent attribution of scholarly labour. For full details on the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT), see: <https://credit.niso.org/>

[21] This pattern of uneven authorship credit has been well documented in digital humanities scholarship. Miriam Posner has argued that technologists and project managers — despite being central to project design — are often excluded from authorship in favour of more conventionally recognised intellectual roles (“What’s Next: The Radical, Unrealized Potential of Digital Humanities” [Posner 2012]). Lauren Klein and Catherine D’Ignazio similarly demonstrate how infrastructural and care-based labour is disproportionately performed by women and junior scholars and frequently rendered invisible in traditional credit systems (*Data Feminism*, [D’Ignazio and Klein 2020]). In the Indian context, contributors to large-scale digital projects — such as metadata curators, software developers, and field researchers — rarely receive equal academic credit.

[22] The National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) is a policy proposal under NEP 2020 to create an autonomous body that will provide evidence-based guidance on the use of technology in Indian education. As of 2025, it remains in various stages of implementation.

[23] While frameworks such as CRediT and the MLA's *Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Scholarship* touch upon ethical contribution, few explicitly foreground metadata or affective labour as peer-reviewable scholarly components.

[24] Coined by Shiv Visvanathan, cognitive justice refers to the recognition and co-existence of multiple knowledge systems, including those rooted in vernacular, indigenous, and subaltern traditions, often marginalized by dominant academic epistemologies [Visvanathan 2009].

[25] The NEH Office of Digital Humanities (USA) includes software developers and metadata specialists in review panels for large-scale infrastructure grants, setting a valuable precedent for interdisciplinary evaluation.

[26] For precedent, see the NEH's Office of Digital Humanities, which provides detailed scoring guidelines for platform design, sustainability, and collaborative authorship in funded proposals.

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