A Study of Viewership Preference Patterns of News Channels with Special Reference to Zee News

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Abstract: It was once called the media revolution. A better description today would be 'media explosion'. There are innumerable media-generated stimuli that are floating around in the environment of the human sensory system, bombarding it with an electrifying intensity and velocity. The common man has become both a beneficiary and a victim of the proliferation of media channels. The human need for entertainment is as old as the human species is. The cable and satellite television channel industry has been going all out to woo the viewers in catering to this fundamental need of theirs. The genre of news channels is a key player in the whole spectrum of media. The present study is based on the identification of viewership preference patterns of news channels with special reference to Zee news. Through this channel Zee Network has always been on a quest to bring out the truth. It is the strong belief of the channel that has been the guiding spirit in its dedication and integrity in reporting unbiased news. As a result of this study it was found that viewers of news channels are not hungry for news alone. They would like their news to be served to them with all the possible garnishing and topping. The competition in the news channel industry in the current scenario hinges on this very factor. The paper attempts to explore the impact of news anchors on the viewership, the effect of repositioning efforts, and preference for interview based news programmes.

The paper has come up with the research finding that Zee News, which was the pioneer among the news channels in the cable and the satellite TV industry has gradually slipped to the fourth position. This has been primarily because of inadequate attention paid to the training of anchors and lack of consistency in image of the channel.

Key words: Media, Viewership, Positioning

I.   Introduction

The Indian entertainment and media industry has outperformed the Indian economy and is one of the fastest growing sectors in India. It is riding on the back of economic growth and escalating income levels that India has been experiencing in the past years. This is significantly benefitting the entertainment and media industry in India as this is a cyclically sensitive industry and it grows faster when the economy is expanding. An added boost to the entertainment and media industry in India is from the demographic point of view where the consumer spending is rising due to increasing disposable incomes on account of sustained growth in income levels and reduction of personal income-tax over the last decade.

Fig1: Projected growth rates of entertainment & media industry

(Source: PWC Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2010-2011)

SEC	Print Media		TV		Satellite TV		Radio		Films	
	Reach in millions	Reach in %age	Reach in millions	Reach in %age	Reach in millions	Reach in %age	Reach in millions	Reach in %age	Reach in millions	Reach in %age
A1	7	95%	8	96%	7	84%	3	37%	2	30%
A2	14	90%	15	95%	12	78%	5	30%	4	25%
B1,B2	32	81%	36	91%	27	67%	10	25%	8	19%
C	34	70%	42	86%	29	59%	11	23%	9	18%
D	29	53%	43	78%	27	49%	11	20%	10	17%
E1,E2	21	30%	45	65%	65	38%	11	16%	11	15%

Fig2: Comparative reach of different media types

(Source: IRS 2011, Round 2, as quoted in Jagran Prakashan Draf Red Herring Prospectus filed with SEBI on Dec, 2011)

Indian advertising spend, as a percentage of GDP, is only 0.34 per cent, which is way below the percentages for both developed and developing countries. This provides an immense potential for growth since advertising revenues are the key to every segment in the Indian entertainment and media industry. Even if India were to reach the global average, the advertising revenues generated would almost be equal to the current advertising revenues, which are estimated at about US$ 3.5
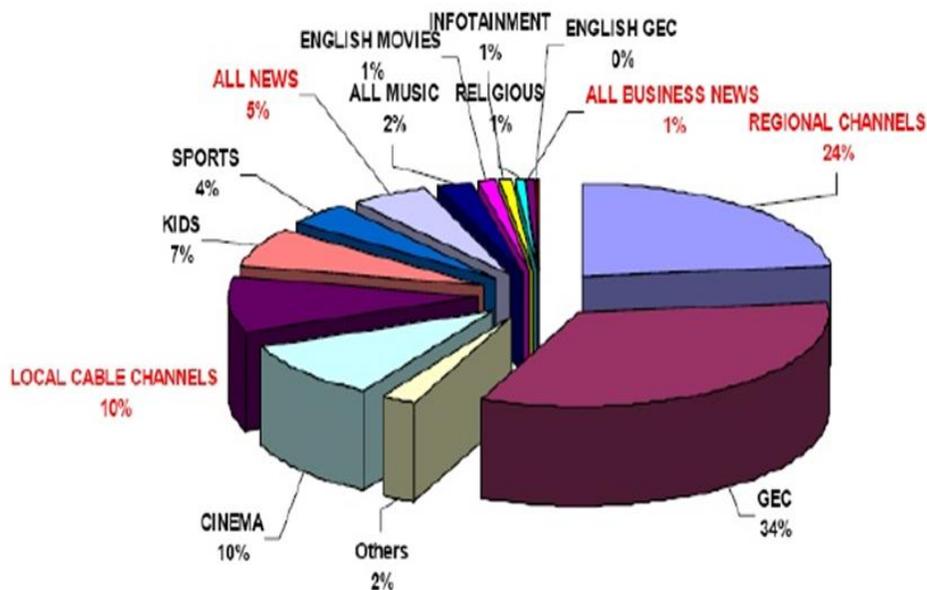

Fig3: Vierwership share of news & regional channels

II. About Zee News

It was established in 1993. In 1994, it started its first morning and evening news bulletins. In the year 1999 it became the first 24-hour news channel. It was also the first pay news channel. 72% of its revenue comes from advertising, which is its main source of income and as it is a paid channel 25% of its revenue comes from subscription. Zee News has unveiled its new positioning with the focus on 'bringing life to Hindi journalism on television'. From the earlier tagline of 'Haqeeqt jaisi khabar vaisi', the channel has now progressed to a more contemplative mode with 'Zara sochiye'.

This channel from Zee Network has always been on a quest to bring out the truth. It is the strong belief of the channel that has been the guiding spirit in its dedication and integrity in reporting unbiased news. As a socially responsible news channel, Zee News has dared to walk a different path to bring the truth out even if it means staying away from the hype and trivial sensationalism. Zee News globally has spread across most of Asia, Middle East, Europe and America and has carved a unique position for itself in the global media space. The wide network of Zee News stretches out to more than 60 countries worldwide. The largest nationwide network of reporters and stingers connected through advanced communication links. The channel has always been considered as a pioneer and leader in the field of investigative journalism, with programming that goes deeper and far beyond the usual news and current-affairs programmes.

III. Review of Literature

Valaskakis (1983) in his study examined television viewing tastes and habits among the Indians of the Eastern and Central Arctic. The findings revealed that the amount of different types of programming was significantly different among the Indians. Accordingly, the underlying assumption is that, the males who are heavily engaged in television's sports fare, would underestimate the mean world of television. Lowery and DeFleur (1988) showed in their research that children tend to watch more television than do adults prefer to watch adult programs, and usually watch as late into the night as do adults. Despite their emergence from the more limited world of childhood and their increased reliance on peers, adolescents continue to spend a great deal of their time watching television. Sinichi Shimizu (1993) in her study found that MTV programmes are changing the entire music scene in Asia. Multinational rock music or world music is becoming the mainstream popular music among the youth in Asia, while the traditional style is becoming obscure and obsolete. Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1996) found in their study that about 48% upper class and 62% middle-class Indians watch Television for more than two hours per everyday. Fatima (2000) suggests through research that TV has a long-term effect on people's thinking. Therefore, instead of glamorization, portrayal of crime and commercialization, positive trends need to be introduced on the TV channels in order to save our values. Bukhari (2002) concludes that the youth is getting liberated ideas regarding the placement and position of women in the society. Giacomo Corneo (2002) found out in his research that in OECD countries watching television is by far the most time-consuming form of leisure. Surprisingly, television viewing is positively correlated with work hours across countries. Workers and capitalists are shown to exhibit opposite preference orderings over equilibria. The relative ability of those two groups in capturing a country's government may explain which equilibrium is selected. Verma and Larson (2002) in their study found that adolescents watch television for 12 hour per week on an average. The study further indicates that Television viewing is seen as a major source of stress relieving activity. It was concluded in the study that 29% of viewers watch television for purpose of learning/education. Ahluwalia and Singh (2011) found in their study that on an average, children watch two hours or less of TV daily and most of them indulged in bedtime TV Viewing. They watched TV primarily for entertainment and for learning.

IV. Research Methodology

A descriptive research study has been used for the purpose of the study. Simple random sampling was used to collect the responses through an objective-type, multiple-choice, structured questionnaire comprising 16 questions. The sample size for the purpose of the study was 150. In all 225 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 150 were selected on the basis of their being effective (66.67% effectiveness).

Table1: Distribution of respondents as per demographic variables:

	No.	%
Gender		
Male	112	74.7
Female	38	25.3
Age		
20-30	35	23.3
31-40	55	36.7
41-50	40	26.7
51-60	20	13.3
Marital Status		
Single	45	30.0
Married	105	70.0
Educational Qualification		
Professional	55	36.7
Post Graduate	38	25.3
Graduate	25	16.7
Intermediate	22	14.7
High School	10	6.7

V. Analysis of Respondent Profile

The set of respondents that were included in this research study had a heterogeneous composition. Almost three-fourths of the respondents were males and the remaining one-fourth were females. Among the male respondents, the maximum number belonged to the 31-40 age bracket. The second highest number of male respondents was from the 41-50 age bracket, followed by the 21-50 group at the third place. The lowest number of male respondents in this survey belonged to the 51-60 age bracket. The age-wise break-up of the female respondents followed a similar pattern though the percentages belonging to the different class intervals were much smaller than in the case of the male respondents. An overwhelming majority of respondents, in both the male and female categories, were married. As far as their educational credentials are concerned, it was found that the highest percentage of male respondents were professionally qualified, followed by post-graduates, graduates, Intermediates and, finally, Matriculates. In the case of the women respondents, the same trend was followed but again the corresponding percentages were much smaller.

VI. Data Analysis

Table 2: Analysis of data as per questions

S. No			Response (%)
1	Time spent on watching TV	0-2 hrs 2-4 hrs 4-6 hrs >6 hrs	28% 41% 24% 7%
2	Time spent on watching news channel	<1hr 1-2 hr	66% 24%

		2-3 hrs	6%
		>3 hrs	4%
3	Preference for news channel	Aaj Tak	37%
		Star News	14%
		India TV	3%
		Zee News	15%
		NDTV	18%
		IBN7	4%
		Others	9%
4	Viewership of Zee News	Yes	70%
		No	30%
5	Short comings in Zee news Channel	Presentation Style	45%
		Correspondent News	9%
		Interesting News	18%
		Quality news	9%
		Variety of news	17%
6	Observation of change in Zee news	Yes	35%
		No	63%
		No response	2%
7	Major changes observed in Zee news	Logo	25% (71.42% of those who observed changes)
		Programes & content	10% (28.58% of those who observed changes)
8	Source of knowing repositioning of Zee news	Newspaper	3% (8.57% of those who observed changes)
		Hoardings	21% (60% of those who observed changes)
		Internet	6% (17.14% of those who observed changes)
		Other	5% (14.2% of those who observed changes)
9	Where do you place Zee news	Educational	5%
		Entertainment	12%
		Informative	62%
		Other	19%
10	Rating of Zee news on scale of 1 to 5	Excellent	5%
		Good	30%
		Average	36%
		Below Average	23%
		Poor	6%
11	News anchors effect viewership	Yes	90%
		No	10%
12	Change in the quality after repositioning	Yes	27.15%
		No	72.85%

VII.   Test of Hypotheses

H$_0$: People do not want interview-based programming in news channels

H$_1$: People want interview-based programming in news channels

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sides)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.510(A)	15	0.074

At 10% significance level the table value of chi-square is 22.31. The calculated value of chi-square is 23.51; hence we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis that people want interview programs in news channels.

H_0: Frequent repositioning of Zee News makes impact upon people's mind

H_1: Frequent repositioning doesn't make any impact on people's mind

	value	Df	Asymp. sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.779(a)	4	.148

The table value of chi-square at degree of freedom 4 and significance level 10% is 7.78. Since the calculated value of chi-square (6.78) is less than the table value we accept the null hypothesis that frequent repositioning of channel makes impact upon people's mind.

VIII.   Major Research Outcomes

The study was aimed at finding out the role of qualitative factors in determining the preference for viewership of news channels. The final outcomes of the study can be summarised in the following manner:

> * In the genre of Hindi news channel channels not only news programs but also 11other programs were shown, important among these are entertainment, interviews, comedy sports etc.

> * The Hindi-speaking audience likes entertainment everywhere and in news channels also.

> * Two years back Zee News was at No. 2 and now it is at No.4. It is losing its market share although it is attached with one of the oldest and biggest media houses of India.

> * Year 2012 saw Zee's third repositioning, every time it changes its punchline as well. The major reason for change in punchline is to refresh the image of the channel as per the changing scenario. But it is found that people don't have much time to always notice these things.

> * There is need to retain the popular anchors as viewership is affected a lot by the presence or absence of the popular anchors. Zee News should also start anchor building/mentoring programmes and aim at improvement in anchor presentation style.

> * Zee News should also improve its entertainment-programming quality. It is one of its weak areas.

IX.   Conclusion

The paramount significance of media in today's society can hardly be over-emphasised. The role of media has become so all-pervasive that it has become an integral part of the fabric of society and whether we acknowledge it or not, it plays a very influential role in shaping our thought processes and attitudinal patterns.

In the past twenty years of the media revolution, the identity of news-based television channels has undergone a metamorphosis of sorts. In the days when Doordarshan as the state broadcaster was the one and only source of news bulletins (that too just two in a day – one in Hindi and the other in English), there was an objectivity inherent in the news being disseminated. But as the number of news channels multiplied and the 'news readers' became 'news

presenters', the objective quality of news was replaced by a stark subjectivity. News was no longer 'colourless, tasteless, odourless' like in the bulletins of Doordarshan; it acquired a flavour of its own. Furthermore, every subsequent news channel that joined the bandwagon lent its own distinctive flavour to news; there were now different 'brands of news'.

Zee News was the pioneer among news channels in cable and satellite television. It retained its pride of place for some time but then gradually started losing out its more dynamic and enterprising competitors.

There is a very strong need on the part of Zee News channel to do a rigorous rethink on its positioning strategy vis-a-vis the ever-changing dynamics of the viewers. News channels in India are not just information-providers; they are expected to cater to the need for infotainment, which has become very rampant in the TV-viewing audience in the two decades of prevalence of cable and satellite television in India.

Zee News should try and be less experimental about its brand identity and bring in more of consistency in its perceived image among its vast consumer base. It should go in for a thorough competitor analysis and gauge its relative strengths and weaknesses in the light of what other news channels are doing and why they have far overtaken this channel.

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XI. WEBSITES

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