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**A RESEARCH UPON VARIOUS DEVELOPMENTS
IN INDIAN SATELLITE TELEVISION CHANNELS:
PRIVATISATION, CONVERGENCE AND
BROADCASTING**

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A Research upon Various Developments in Indian Satellite Television Channels: Privatisation, Convergence and Broadcasting

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Abstract – In India till 1991 there was only one television channel –Doordarshan, the public service broadcaster. With the opening up of the Indian economy in early 1990s enabled the entry of private broadcasters in India. The number of television channels has proliferated manifold. By 2005 India had more than 200 digital channels. The number of television channels has grown from around 600 in 2010 to 800 in 2012. This includes more than 400 news and current affairs channel. Technological changes have caused intense competition in news and general entertainment channels, as a result of which there is growth in regional and niche channels. The growth of cable and satellite television and direct to home television services has continued to drive television as the most preferred medium among advertisers.

Broadcasters are also tapping into online and mobile media to increase their revenue. This paper seeks to study the impact of privatisation on media policy of the Government of India and how it has evolved various institutional mechanisms to deal with the growth of television as the medium to study the effect of privatisation and convergence on media regulations as television is the most powerful medium. The visual images transmitted by television reach large section of the Indian population irrespective of linguistic and cultural differences.

The paper initiates with mankind, globalization and the contemporary mass media role played through multiple media approach at the dawn of third millennium and the need to address the challenge of technological pluralism. Then the concepts and influences of new media technologies related communications through the internet, cell phones, multimedia, gaming and animation, portals, etc, are enunciated. Perspectives of Culture, new media culture and its impact on society are dealt with. Later, the importance of studies on culture and relevance of technology in cultural studies are explained.

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INTRODUCTION

Satellite television can be defined as television broadcasting using satellite technology. Television came to India in 1959 and satellite television in form of Satellite Instructional Television Experiment in 1975. After 1982 when Indian National Satellite (INSAT) was launched there came a sharp rise in number of transmitters, began colour television and telecast of Asiad games increased private investment in television sets. In early nineties new face of satellite television entered Indian households in the name of Cable & Satellite television (C&S TV) and transnational content entered Indian households. Today one third of Indian television households have access to C&S TV.

Beginning of Satellite Television in India was marked by world first techno-social experiment SITE- Satellite Instructional Television Experiment- for education & development purposes. That followed number of other

experiments like SITE Continuity, School Television, UGC Country Wide Class Room, Jhabua Development Communication Project, Indira Gandhi National Open University transmission and lately channels like Training and Development Communication Channel and Gyan Darshan for educational and social development purposes.

Technologies per se provide the scope of democratization at the same time creates issues related to control and access for others who do not own it. The paper examines the notion of 'satellite television' as democratizing force and concept of community television sets as one important component of all development communication experiments in India. The paper examines various projects and how the technology 'reached' 'the poorest of poor' and the divides of 'rich-poor', 'men-women' 'urban-rural' were somewhere brought into main text. At the same time it reports that satellite television in India has come a long way since 1975-

SITE days but one thing is common over the years that it invariably has remained with people who 'had' and 'have' other technologies.

Television began in India in 1959 as an educational project supported by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Ford Foundation. Television was based on the model of a public broadcasting system prevalent in many countries of Europe. In independent India, the political leaders recognised the value of information and its use for accelerating the process of development. Thus was started a model of public broadcasting committed to inform, educate and entertain the people. In the decades since 1959, vast changes have taken place in the television landscape of India. In its early years, apart from being used as an educational tool, television was also misused as a mouthpiece for the central government and the party in power. Programming was primarily in Hindi and much of the news and current affairs focussed on Delhi – the seat of political power (Singhal and Rogers, 2001).

Indian television in its infancy was managed by All India Radio. In 1976, television was separated from radio and given a new name – Doordarshan. The practice of accepting advertisements on Doordarshan was started in 1976. By the mid-1970s, the proportion of entertainment programmes including feature films and song and dance sequences along with commercial advertisements and sports coverage had increased considerably while the school and rural telecasts had begun to take a backseat. In 1982 before the Asian games to be held in Delhi National broadcasting was introduced. With the Asian games also came colour television in India.

The central government launched a series of economic and social reforms in 1991 under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. Under the new policies the government allowed private and foreign broadcasters to engage in limited operations in India. Foreign channels like CNN, Star TV and domestic channels such as Zee TV and Sun TV started satellite broadcasts.

Starting with 41 sets in 1962 and one channel, by 1991 TV in India covered more than 70 million homes giving a viewing population of more than 400 million individuals through more than 100 channels. In 1992, the government liberated its markets, opening them up to cable television. Five new channels belonging to the Hong Kong-based STAR TV gave Indians a fresh breath of life. MTV, STAR Plus, Star Movies, BBC, Prime Sports and STAR Chinese Channel. Zee TV was the first private owned Indian channel to broadcast over cable. As of 2010, over 500 TV Satellite television channels are broadcast in India. This includes channels from the state-owned Doordarshan, News Corporation owned STAR TV, Sony owned Sony Entertainment Television, Sun Network and Zee TV. Other than English and Hindi channels there was growth in the regional media in

television too. Sun TV (India) was launched in 1992 as the first private channel in South India. Today it has 20 channels. Channels of the Sun TV network are also available outside of India. Recently Sun TV launched a DTH service. The Raj Television Network was started in 1994 and continues to be an important player in the South Indian cable TV provider space.

The advent of satellite television in the 1990s is landmark in the history of television broadcasting in this country as it changed the television landscape. Indian television suddenly became much for entertainment driven. The cable TV industry exploded in the early 1990s when the broadcast industry was liberalized, and saw the entry of many foreign players like Rupert Murdoch's Star TV Network in 1991, MTV, and others. Further, in a reflection of India's growing diaspora, Indian channels have also been aggressively increasing their presence across international markets. General Entertainment channels like Zee TV, SET, Star Plus and Colors are available in approximately 169, 77, 70 and 50 countries respectively. In addition to the Indian diaspora, offerings are also targeted at the local population, primarily through dubbed or subtitled content. ZEEL launched its second Arabic channel, Zee Alwan, in 2012, and industry discussions suggest that the response has been positive. ZEEL has been syndicating Indian dramas dubbed in Mandarin to Chinese television channels since 2006 and became the first Indian channel to receive landing rights in China in 2012.

Television in India is a huge industry and has thousands of programmes in all the states of India. Approximately half of all Indian households own a television. As per FICCI Report 2013 there are 730 million TV Viewers in India and 800+ TV channels.

INDIAN TELEVISION IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

Last decade refers to global connectivity, compression of time and space and market ruling over the State. All over the world remarkable changes and challenges marked the end of the twentieth century. The changes mainly in technology of communication and transportation, deregulation of capital, liberalisation and desire of cultural exchanges and challenges to regulate for the reluctant State, global competition, market driven economy and increasing interdependence of global economy are realities of the nineties. Globalisation increasingly brought the realization that the State is losing power and freedom of action and an unprecedented movement of cultural homogenisation is taking place across the globe.

UNESCO comments that as the globalisation of markets, technology and information sweeps the world, growing homogenisation is countered by accelerating fragmentation: people are brought increasingly together at the same time they are driven apart. The twentieth century has been the most disastrous in human history in social and political

terms. 'Emergence of culture is an important factor in determining the status of an individual in society or of a nation in the world is a matter of great significance' Singh (1998).

Audiovisual landscapes encompassing television, radio, cinema, video game and multimedia sectors in respect of both production and distribution/broadcasting (including cable and satellite) and other areas of culture (publishing, the arts, cultural institutes and heritage) have a special role to play in any society. These sectors often referred to as 'cultural industry' face the threat of 'imperialism' all the more in the era of globalisation. Public policies of legislative, regulatory or financial measures put in place by the State in co-operation with other parties are of special importance in such a circumstance. These cultural goods are different from other goods and services, and deserve different and/or exceptional treatment. This differential treatment has to reflect even in the international trade agreements and in the demands for effective and strong regulatory frameworks to redefine cultural policies focusing on the promotion and development of cultural industries.

As tariffs, quotas, import licensing, and other long visible trade barriers come down, other concerns become more obvious. The "cultural exception" is just one of the possible means for achieving this objective of promoting cultural diversity (http://www.unesco.org/culture/industries/trade/html_eng/question18.shtml#18). Government regulations, quotas, exemption and concessions, subsidies, supply restrictions, and intellectual property protections are few of the responses for cultural protection-exception to counter fears of cultural homogenisation.

Sinclair (1997) comments that the STAR's strategy of 'going local' shows how much language and culture have emerged as 'tangible markets'. Hamelink (1994: 111) commented, "A basic ingredient is missing for global culture."

Culture provides people with a sense of identity, a past, destiny and dignity. Culture is bound to time and space. Global culture is inherently weak as it has no historical and spatial location...but there undoubtedly is a process of cultural globalisation".

The trends of localization, cultural adaptation of global products and the role of language in regionalization support Hamelink's comment. From the audience perspective, younger generations are growing up watching the western content values and understand little of their indigenous media.

Commercialisation, the diminishing role of the State, the threats to public service broadcasters and the impact of western contents on domestic productions in

form of 'genres, formats or production values' are all facts indicating that protection measures are required. Canada, China, Australia and France are few examples where parameters exist to ensure local content on television to restrict different types of foreign programmes. Against this trend, India, Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong and Japan are few of the countries that have opted for an 'open sky' policy.

India is one of the few nations with capabilities in satellite technology having influenced developments on the television front. Post-1990 satellite television in India has become transnational in nature. It coincided with the entry of multinational companies in the Indian markets under the Government policy of privatisation. The implications were private ownership in disguised forms, absence of censorship or any such controls, autonomy and commercialisation of the medium and economic, political and cultural implications of transnational messages. The concept of television as an intimate and family medium is being utilized to its fullest to influence the rapidly expanding middle class in India (estimated to be 222-250 million of the 535 million people with access to television). Today 535.4 million people have access to television in a country of 100 million people.

Nowadays Indian television means regional television networks, language channels, country/language approach by commercial broadcasters and preference for public service broadcaster due to economic and other considerations by Indian audiences. Indian television also means confusion for national identity, lack of language representation, division of urban-rural areas, co-existence of private and public systems, dilemmas of prioritisation of education upon entertainment, development over market and so on. India is in this context a very interesting case in point for cultural diversity debate as the diversity inherently brings complexities.

NEW MEDIA, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Mass Media activities have been commendable at any point of time of history in informing, educating or entertaining the people all over the world. Every media have had their share of effects on the society and has been responsible in their own way for changes in socio-economic and cultural aspects.

At the same time, when these mass media are viewed individually for their performances and effects, it is found that the birth of any other new mass media is a result of overcoming the shortcomings sighted in the earlier ones. Therefore it calls for the need to recognize the possibility of a plurality of mass media-high, intermediate and low, - co-existing and amenable for application to different sectors of

economy and society. It needs to be recognized that all mass media are appropriate, contextually.

Endorsing technological pluralism is an important challenge of the twenty-first century. Computer mediated communication systems constitute an entirely new form of media called "collaborative mass media" which mixes elements of one-to-many information flow and many-to-many cooperative dialogue. The new media technologies include the Internet, multi-media, portals, mobile phones, gaming & animation and many others.

Internet, the global community of millions of interconnected computer networks, connects private and public alike into an unregulated electronic community where millions of people linked together compute on the "information superhighway". This network of networks links internationally tens of thousands of businesses, universities and research organizations with millions of individual users. Call it World-Wide-Web or cyberspace, what is vital is that it has made people communicate, do business, relax and live. As one of the new media technologies, the internet has revolutionized the concept of mass media.

Multimedia, yet another part of the new media uses a combination of different content forms of different media, in contrast to media that only use traditional forms of printed or handproduced material. Multimedia includes a combination of text, audio, still images, animation, video and interactivity forms. It also describes electronic media devices used to store and experience content. Multimedia is distinguished from a mixed media in fine art. The term "rich media" is synonymous for interactive multimedia. 'Hypermedia' can be considered one particular multimedia application.

Mobile telephony has dramatically altered the forms of human communication and interaction through space and time. As a giant new media, mobile phones occupy an integral place in young people's lives, not as a means of social differentiation but as a necessary part of social communication through the maintenance of key social networks. For adolescents, mobile phones offer the possibility of transgressing parental and other authority, of demonstrating, a means of negotiating spatial and parental boundaries, and avoiding parental surveillance which, is assumed to be less likely for young adults who have left home. In 1995, cell phone arrived in India, with a target set that in five years it should increase five times its initial numbers. In Oct. 2005, India had 68 million users of cell phones.

Creativity and cognition has got immense boost due to digital cultural communication in the form of Animation and even gaming industry today. Today the new media technologies have users in more than 200 countries.

Many studies reveal facts on its usage, which is continuing to expand rapidly, with thousands of

systems adopting New Media standards every year. According to Arvind Singhal and Everett Rogers (2002) 'No other nation like India provides a better example of the role of the new communication media in the development, process through which a country moves from being an agriculture-based economy towards becoming an information society'.

New media developments have influenced the global communication processes. Several significant studies all over the world during the turn of the new millennium, on the impact of new media reveal many interesting facts. A study on the on-line advertising found that individuals liked the feeling of exercising control over what they wanted to see, and the ability to tap into vast amounts of information on diverse topics. Graphics and images were found to enhance their experiences. Another study indicates that Internet use has a positive contribution to scholarly productivity. The results of a study in the Asian nation of Thailand indicate that students and faculty did not use the Internet extensively for communication. Student respondents lacked the necessary skills for communicating on the Internet and did not perceive the Internet as an educational communication tool, whereas faculty respondents did! The study suggests that technical difficulties, language and cultural barriers hinder student use of the Internet. One more study on instruction in higher education revealed that students exhibited higher order reasoning and thinking skills in these courses (Bloom's taxonomy).

Studies conducted to know the feasibility of undertaking researches on Internet recommend the need for widespread computer accessibility, for instruction in Internet use and information evaluation, for faculty involvement, and for faculty-librarian collaboration in promoting responsible, informed and appropriate use of the Internet as a research option. Culture, etymologically enunciated means a set of habits which is cultivated consistently, i.e., cultivated habits over a period of time. Culture of one time need not be the culture of another time in history. As a whole, the day-to-day life style led by communities in societies of different geographies aggregate to different cultures. Some of today's life styles connected concepts of culture are work culture, corporate culture, media culture, mass culture, cultural hegemony, etc.

Technology change resulting in urgent changes on human life, by the beginning of 21st century has dictated the life-styles forcing inevitable acclimatization. Change in life-styles has blurred the existing cultural practices and the facets of it have undergone severe changes. So, formal studies of the cultural changes are inevitable to avoid paranoid and apprehensions.

Surprisingly, despite being heavy users of new media, non-elite urban middle-class men continue to be attached to previous family arrangements. The striking continuity of non-elite and their gender culture in the

face of new meanings introduced by foreign media suggests that institutions are fundamentally important in rooting the fit between cultural orientations and institutional structures. Social theorists today often emphasize the mutually reinforcing nature of culture – meanings, norms, values – and structure – the way society is organized. But contemporary theorists too often sidestep consideration of the relative causal importance of cultural and structural factors.

NEW TRENDS IN SATELLITE TELEVISION

So, we have seen the impact of television in our lives. Now let us have a look at the new developments in the field of television.. Do you depend on an antenna to watch television? In that case your television set relies on terrestrial transmission. Television content can be delivered in a variety of ways. It can be distributed through terrestrial transmission. In this system, an antenna connected to the television viewer is used to receive the signals telecast by the broadcaster's transmitter. This is the traditional method of television broadcast. Other methods of delivery include distribution through cable networks and direct broadcast satellite.

Have you ever thought how the cable operator in your area supplies all those bouquet of channels? The cable distribution in India can be seen as a chain which begins with the signal sent by the broadcaster to the cable operator. The cable operators then relay these signals to our homes. There are free to air channels and pay channels. For the free to air channels, the broadcaster does not charge the cable operator. Examples of free to air channels include Aaj Tak, Sahara and Times Now. Pay channels like Sony and Star Plus charge a certain amount of money per subscriber per month.

Where would you ideally place your television set? In the living room, is it? However the arrival of new delivery platforms is going to change this forever. How about watching your favourite channel on your mobile phone? This has already become a reality in India. This way, you will not miss your favourite television programme while you are traveling.

Another interesting technology is Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) which allows you to watch television on computers and mobile phones. This allows the consumers to watch television, record programmes and share their experiences with their friends with the help of an internet connection and a set top box provided for the purpose. Under this system, a cell phone can be used to schedule the recording of a programme. This will offer the consumers greater choice, control and convenience. Many of the major Indian channels provide video clips of their programmes through their websites.

New media allows greater audience participation. You will learn more about this in the module on new media. Television has invented its own ways to meet the challenges put forward by internet. Audience backed shows where the audience decides the winner is an example. Ask your mother if there were any such programmes on Indian television 15 years back. The answer will be 'no'. This is because new media is a recent addition to the media scene and television had no such challenges in the past. Reality television is another new trend. Have you seen programmes like 'Indian Idol', 'Big Boss' and 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa'? They are examples of reality television.

IMPACT OF PRIVITISATION:

Privatisation has impacted the growth of television industry both in terms of numbers of channels as well as the variety of programmes .It has also led to the popularity of entertainment channels over news channels.

There was a worldwide trend during the 1980s towards the commercialisation of television. Herman and Mc Chesney (2001) argue that during this decade the policies of deregulation and privatisation were applied to national broadcasting and telecommunication systems that were traditionally regulated and often publicly owned and operated. This had a detrimental impact on public service programs which were replaced with more and more entertainment programming.

The television industry is still struggling to produce quality content and the main reasons for it are-high carriage fees and low subscription revenue which limit the broadcasters ability to invest in quality content and the lack of good quality talent for the media industry.

Television slowly became an industry that involved huge money. With huge investment, the producers needed assurance of returns. As the economy opened, the Indian producers became aware of the cultural products abroad. These two phenomena combined, triggered several producers to copy programmes. The copyright laws couldn't keep pace with the rapid growth of Indian television. TV formats would fail to fall within the definitions of the law. How could one protect their original work was the rising question?. Intellectual property rights and specifically copyright laws were expected to provide a mechanism to protect such work.

A lot of popular television formats such as 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' licensed to the UK based Celador, was bought by Kaun Banega Crorepati [Star TV]. This was 'replicated' by Sawal Dus Crore Ka on Zee TV and further by Koteeswaran on Sun TV. These quiz and drama programmes have raised

various copyright issues which might become much graver in the future. As these quiz and drama programmes are also a major source of revenue for the television industry. (Thomas: 2001)

The quickest and easiest way to create a large audience base is to serve entertainment appeals to the lowest common denominator of popular taste i.e. crime, sex and violence. There has been a surge in programmes of this kind like –CID, Crime Patrol, Koochni, Dastak etc. The television programmes began to have an urban bias as the advertisers were interested in the urban middle class population. They conveyed consumerist and materialist culture (Munshi: 2012).

A positive development was the availability of less biased news and current affairs programmes than in the days of the Doordarshan monopoly. But the growth in concentration of ownership and ownership of TV channels by political parties have also led to the creation of biased news and propaganda vehicle for the political parties.

CONCLUSION

Today Indian television has become the mirror of cultural diversity present in the Indian society; it unites Indian society mainly through dependence on respective film industries while disparity still exists in terms of representation of identity and access.

What happened in Indian markets is a clear indication of collision of culture and commerce. The legal frameworks may be sound on paper but that does not ensure implementation. 'Unity in Diversity' the catchy slogan of the Government of India appears to be in disparity with the ground reality. Indian consumers have multiple choices and the Indian Government is working hard to cope with the changes in the media environment in its own tortoise style. Indian television in the era of globalisation is witnessing 'the elimination of the government monopoly and the attempt at broadcasting regulation (as) mere reactions' (Mehta, 1998) due to technological developments and market forces.

The aim of education and development through television was made to seem outdated, and rural India was no longer a viable constituency to cater to. Western programmes and Indian-produced programmes on the private networks conveyed consumerist and material values. There have been some positive developments too with the coming of the private satellite channels with the availability of less biased news and current affairs programming than in the days of Doordarshan monopoly. This led to an improvement in the quality of the televised public sphere though it still leaves much to be desired.

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