

## **INDIAN TELEVISION CHANNELS AND CONTENTS: FROM GLOBALIZATION TO GLOCALIZATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Television industry in India has come a long way from public broadcaster Doordarshan controlled social and developmental programs to modern day entertainment shows dominated by the national and international television channels. The globalization of media has also brought about remarkable changes in the television broadcasting services in India and abroad. The television soap operas (fiction) and the reality shows (non-fiction) aired in General Entertainment Channels (GECs) have certainly affected the local culture, environment and people in India. The satellite television channels have expanded their services in various regions in India and found new opportunities for income generation through broadcasting and advertising. Practically, the article establishes the fact that, though the content seems Indian in terms of production values, the origin of some of these popular programs are undoubtedly from the transnational borders which affect local values, lifestyles and food habits.

**Key words:** Indian television, television industry, television contents, transnational borders, rural heartland.

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## **Preamble**

There is a remarkable growth and development of television industry in India and abroad. Television has emerged as a prominent means of education, entertainment and advertisement. Television broadcasting has also become a million dollar industry in India. It has contributed notably towards the Gross National Product. Television has also brought about dramatic changes in all walks of life including culture. The contents of television channels have undergone a sea change in the age of liberalization of broadcasting. The transnational channels have reached out to local areas in different regions of India and affected the values and other aspects of human life. The article primarily deals with the Indian television contents which have traversed from the transnational borders to rural heartland on the basis of qualitative research methodology.

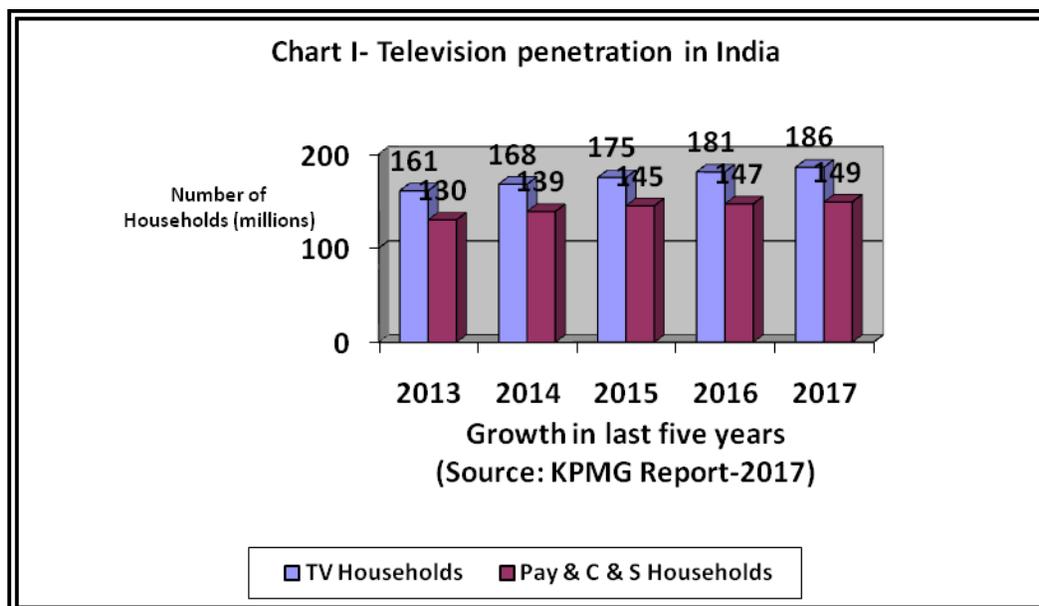
## **Television Industry in India**

Television is indeed the marvel of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which is basically an audio – visual medium of communication based on the optimum use of sight and sound. This unique medium communicates information, education, advertisement, entertainment, publicity, propaganda and other services to the mankind by combining the elements of sound, picture, motion, color and drama. It simultaneously appeals to one's sense. The presence of these rich characteristics of theatre in television makes the communication process more effective and helps the viewers in the perception of information. Television is mainly responsible for the rapid shrinking of the world – a world without boundaries. It is obvious that television plays a dominant role in modern society. It is widely understood that television has both positive and negative impact on people.

Television is one of the most powerful forces man has ever unleashed upon himself. Today people spend most time watching variety of television programmes both domestic and foreign. It is very well said that television is the heavy weight of all mass media. It denotes the importance television has assumed in our lives and the dramatic changes it has brought about in our modern society. The highly advanced TV cameras can also take breath taking pictures or space and the deep sea in close proximity. The advanced television technologies have paved the way to easily access the Internet on television itself instead of a conventional computer monitor. Thus, television has become a multi-faceted medium compatible with new communication technologies.

Although DD has improved its production quality and extended its services in response to the competition from the private broadcasters, the Indian television market has now become much more diverse and open to global influences in its content (Sinclair and Harrison 2004:13). Indian Doordarshan does not hold any monopoly in the television market under the existing circumstances. A good number of private cable and satellite channels (C&S channels), both Indian and foreign have entered the television industry. There are about 190 million C & S television homes in India in 2018 which has resulted in the television penetration of 65 percent. The television reach in terms of cable and satellite TV subscribers' base stood at 160 million at the end of 2018 financial year. There is about 82 percent of the total number of television households in India as of now. The timeline presents the value of the Indian TV industry from 2007 to 2015 and provides a projection of the value until 2021.

### Chart : Television penetration India



### Competitive Television Industry

Television has become one of the major platforms where India is experiencing the influences of global culture. The easy availability of international television channels through satellite since the beginning of the 1990s forced the liberalization of a television market, which was until then closely shielded as a national monopoly by the state broadcaster *Doordarshan*. This opening up of the market led to a profusion of satellite channels. Although some of the early international services such as *STAR TV* still remain prominent in the cultural market, the most successful

networks are from India. In addition, there has been a strong growth of Indian language television channels other than Hindi, such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Marathi and so on.

The rise of FTA genre saw a commensurate increase in interest from advertisers, with the spot rates for these channels increasing by about 50-70 per cent during the year. Regional channels were impacted more, due to a higher chunk of local advertising and a deeper cut in advertisements especially in Hindi channels (Bajpai, 2016:01).

The TRAI tariff and interconnection orders released in March 2017 are expected to play a critical role in ensuring an equitable distribution of revenues across the TV value chain, and finally usher in monetary benefits that the process of digitization had intended to (Broadcast Audience Research Council India, 2017:02). The television industry is expected to grow at a CAGR of 14.7 per cent over the next five years, reaching a size of Rs 1,165.6 billion by 2021. The industry has indeed embraced the growing popularity of digital media to create cross platform content with a view to ensure engagement of the brand with consumers on an 'on-demand' basis (Menon, 2017:06).

The Indian Pay TV Industry is the third largest in terms of households after the USA and China in terms of value. In absolute numbers while China has 378 million households (HH), the USA has 118 million HH, and India has 183 million HH. The penetration level in the United States of America is almost 98 percent, while in China and India it ranges between 70 and 80 percent, indicating a clear upswing of at least 20 percent in next 4–5 years, given the pace of digitization (Mulchandani, 2017:08).

Television in India has sustained its growth as an important medium for both broadcasters and advertisers in view of its unparalleled reach and viewership. It remains as a dominant digital media due to proliferation of 4G and Smartphones. It has achieved commendable growth of around 9 percent in 2017 with Rs.600 billion business (KPMG India, 2017:05). The television advertising contributes to approximately 41,000 crore of revenue vis-a-vis 34,000 crore of subscription revenue in India. The Indian Pay TV Industry offers a very big opportunity for

broadcasters. The overall industry contribution to GDP of the country has gradually moved up from 0.3 percent over the last 7–8 years to 0.55 percent of GDP in 2017. Television industry is poised to grow in future with digitization and opening of FDI the industry which would increase the contribution to GDP.

### **Regional Television Market**

Although transnational television channels have been blamed for ‘cultural invasion’ over the past decade, their impact in stimulating growth of Indian channels cannot be overlooked. In fact Zee Corporation was one of the greatest beneficiaries in the initial years of evolving satellite television in India. Launched in 1992, Zee TV is one of the most popular Indian television brands now. Zee Corporation produces programs for Zee group of channels. It also has a cable distribution arm, Siticable, which is also one of India’s largest multi system operators (MSOs); it also has internet service provision. At the international level, Zee has developed services for Indian communities residing in UK, US, Africa, and other places. Zee presently has over 35 channels across genres in different Indian languages such as general entertainment, movies, music, news, life style, education, food, comedy, sports etc.

In rural India there are about 50 percent of television households. It was imperative for broadcasters to capture the rural audiences which lie at the bottom of the pyramid. Regional television market also witnessed a rapid growth with new television channels coming up in languages like Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Bangla, Kannada, Marathi, Oriya among others (Dundoo, 2012:03).

The Sun TV network is the leading network with its service spread in the entire South India. It is one of India’s largest media conglomerate holding a bouquet of thirty two leading channels in four South Indian languages; Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada. It also reaches to more than 95 million households in India. Sun TV group of channels can also be viewed in 27 countries across the world including US, Canada, Europe, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The Sun TV Network enjoys the connectivity with the Southern Diaspora erasing geographical boundaries and distances.

The dominance of Hindi entertainment channels has been checked by the regional channels in India. The regional television is no more the poor country cousin of the national channels. They have made their presence felt nationwide with a widening viewership, although Hindi channels together still dominate. The Sun TV, Star Plus, Colors and Zee TV have dominated the television industry in the South. The major production houses are generating fresh content and experimenting with concepts beyond traditional daily TV soap operas (Roy and Laghate, 2016:10).

The era of digitization would enhance the regional space of television channels. The television producers and advertisers can select target audiences region wise in a cost-effective manner. Each region has its nuances, culture, value system and different level of progression that sets a kind of backdrop around which one creates the content. Region specific television programmes should be broadcast to protect the cultural pluralism and promote regional development in India.

The Star India acquired the Maa TV network for Rs 2500 crore to grow the regional pie within its bouquet. The year of 2016 witnessed a flurry of regional channel launches. In 2017, Star India launched its first ever regional language sports channel marking a growing realization among media networks and broadcasters about the rising power of the Indian language market. The South Indian viewers have considerably increased over a period of time with a larger appetite for GEC and news as compared to the Hindi speaking market. The BARC report also revealed that South Indian viewers prefer GEC and movie channels in their own languages. Hence, the broadcasters have focused their attention on South India.

**Table: List of Select Regional Channels in India.**

Sl. No.	Channel Name	Name of the Company	Language	Date of Permission
1.	Colors Super	Viacom 18	Kannada	19-01-2016
2.	Sarathi	KCB Builders & Developers	Punjabi	16-08-2016
3.	Xclusive TV	Angel Admark Pvt. Ltd.	Malayalam	01-02-2013

4.	Star Suvarna HD	Asianet Communications	Kannada/ Bengali/ Malayalam	06-01-2017
5.	SAB Tamil	Sony Pictures	Tamil	19-02-2016
6.	Sony BBC Earth	Discovery Communications	Regional Indian languages	13-02-2017
7.	ETV Plus	Eenadu Television Pvt. Ltd.	Telugu	19-01-2015
8.	Sangeet Marathi	Media Worldwide Ltd.	Marathi	10-08-2015
9.	Maa HD	Star India	Telugu	01-03-2016
10.	Bangla Talkies	Media Worldwide Ltd.	Bengali	10-08-2017

**Source: Annual Report, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2017.**

Colors Kannada launched its new channel named Colors Super with HD variant in 2016. Colors also launched HD versions for Marathi, Bangla and Oriya language channels. Sarala Jeevan is another Kannada infotainment channel launched in 2016. Star Suvarna has also launched another channel named Star Suvarna Plus in Kannada. Recently launched Star Vijay, Zee Tamil, Star Vijay Super, Star Maa, Zee Telugu, ETV, Gemini TV etc., and the channels listed in the above table. The data clearly indicates towards the trend that regional television market will witness further expansion in the days to come (Sathyaprakash and Ravi, 2011:11).

The film and sports contents have increased considerably in the regional television channels which have attracted the age group of 15-30 years. This has resulted in advertisers looking into regional television channels focusing on rural audiences. The Southern language markets continue to account for 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the regional viewership in 2018. The Zee TV and Sun TV continued their dominance in the contemporary South Indian Television industry. The major players in the television market have launched new channels in regional languages in recent years. **Impact of Television on Regional Culture**

Scholars have examined the cultural, social, economic and political impact of television in modern times across the globe. Studies have reported that international television channels have adversely affected the cultural pluralism in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Middle East and rest of the world. The European and American channels have increased the consumerism and western cultural dominance over the eastern countries according to the empirical evidence.

Sen (2000:12) observed that commercialization of existing territorial channels has brought about the deregulated television regime which has promoted the Western capitalist values and degenerated the cultural ethos and moral values (Page and Crawley, 2001:09) have reported that the satellite television revolution has impacted the culture in South Asia. They have noted that three important developments underpin the media revolution which has changed the way south Asians see the world - the demise of communism, the increasing integration of world markets and very rapid advances in communications technology.

Gillespie and Cheesman (2002:04) noted that media production, circulation and consumption in South Asia were increasingly central to national and transnational, political and cultural processes-religious re-nationalization and diasporization in particular. They have cautioned that cosmopolitanism and communalism have increased over a period of time in the age of economic liberalization and satellite television.

Moorti (2008:07) remarked that the contemporary Indian television had enmeshed in an interconnected network. The international television channels have articulated the transnational values and approaches in different countries through adaptations, remakes and dubbed foreign shows in regional languages.

The Indian general entertainment channels have become more regional specific and reflect 'Indian values' through rooted Indian stories'. The leading reality shows of Indian television are either inspired or based on popular shows or formats from other parts of the world, especially, United States and Europe. The Indian popular television shows like Indian Idol (American Idol), Katron Ke Khiladi (Fear Factor and Master Chef Australia), Comedy Nights (British show), Dus Ka Dum show (Drew Carey), India's Got Talent, Splitsvilla (American show

Flavour of Love) and so on were greatly inspired by the foreign television contents. These serials have really affected the local values and ethical norms and persuaded the women and young generation to blindly adopt western values and life styles.

The Hindi television channels have broadcast certain serials like Hello friends (remake of the popular sitcom Friends) and Jassi Jaise Koi Nahin, a popular series aired in Sony TV (American series Ugly Betty). There are such instances in South Indian television channels which have promoted westernization of local culture, life styles and food habits. The new trend of homogenization of contents in GECs has also focused the attention of media critics in India. The Tamil serial *Metti Oli* is remade as *Shubh Vivah* in Hindi and comes back as *Shubha Vivaha* in Kannada. This is a clear case of homogenization of contents. There is not much of a difference in terms of production design, narrative techniques or look of these serials.

The new trend of remakes from Southern languages to Hindi has resulted in the popularization of Southern culture in Northern India. The Hindi serial Pavithra Rishta (remake of Tirumathi Selvam from Tamil), Dil Se Diya Vachan (remake of Tamil serial Idayam), Rakt Sambhand (remake of Telugu serial Ratha Saphami), Mayke Se Bandhi Dor (remake of Telugu serial Kolangal), Choti Maa (remake of Telugu serial Chitti Pinni), Dil Se De Dua (remake of Telugu soap Sravanti) and so on.

The remake from Hindi to Southern languages has also resulted in the expansion of South Indian film industry. They include – Nagin (remake of Hindi serial), Amruthavarshini (remake of Hindi Saath Nibhana Sathiya), Sreeman Srimathi (remake of Hindi Bhabi Ji Ghar Par Hai), Pattedari Pratibha (remake of Hindi Detective Didi), Yare Ni Mohini (remake of Tamil Yaradi Mohini) and other ventures have boosted Southern film industry.

There is a visible trend of television broadcasting which has travelled from transnational borders to regional areas in India. The soap operas have depicted stories reflecting rural values and ethos both in visuals and spirit. The quality and breadth of regional content has expanded in recent years both in fiction and non-fiction. But fiction still continues to be the main driving force and the content is also tailor made for regional audiences. The television channels are increasingly

looking at regional stories or tweaking the pan India story for regional sensibilities. As a result content production cost has also gone up reflecting on the improved production quality in regional language television content.

## **Conclusion**

The early soap operas had narrated the stories of the Indian middle class, their struggles, and other pressing social issues. They were also the landmark depictions of the great Indian family. These were the shows which not only entertained the audiences but also educated them on various aspects of human life and values. With the emergence of C&S television, contents on TV channels also underwent a sea change with Star TV broadcasting shows which have depicted themes like sexuality, criminality, consumerism, westernization and other negative tendencies. The reality shows have also adversely affected the human values and behavioral patterns in modern times. The contents on GECs are being scripted keeping the rural values and ethos in mind. The remakes and dubbed versions of shows across genres are broadcasted among all Indian languages, clearly indicating towards homogenization of the content, albeit at the surface level. The remakes and adaptations in both fiction and non-fiction are generously shared among Hindi and regional language channels. The television market is all set to expand more in rural areas than in the urban centers of the country. The popular shows broadcast in the television channels are undoubtedly from the transnational borders.

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