

DIVERSITY OF PRIMETIME NEWS IN INDIA

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Abstract:

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the diversity of news coverage and news content of public and private news channels. Public Broadcaster DD News and private news channels Times Now was chosen for the present study. To meet out the objectives of the study one constructed week was formed and was spread over a period of six months in 2017 and 2018. The data was recorded digitally from the primetime segment of both the channels from 8 pm to 11 pm. Total 41 hours of content was recorded for the study. The study found significant difference in the coverage of both news channels.

Keywords: Primetime, News Coverage, News Content, Diversity, Television News

1.0 Introduction:

Since 1959, when television was first introduced in India known as *Doordarshan*, India has witnessed a tremendous growth in television industry. Initially television was introduced to Indian audience to educate and inform them through a makeshift studio of All India Radio (AIR) (Kumar, 2020). The programmes were broadcast on selected days of the week. Six years later, in 1965, the daily regular one hour service of *Doordarshan* started. The broadcast consisted of Hindi news bulletins and agricultural programmes. Satellite instructional Television Experiment (SITE) of 1975-1976 has been one of the most important events in the growth of television in India. 2400 villages of six states including Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka were chosen for this project. Programmes related to Agricultural, Health, Family Planning and National integration were broadcast in this satellite experiment. There was total four hours long daily telecast for the villagers. Out of which ninety minutes were allotted to educational programmes. *Doordarshan* started its commercial services in 1976 and it was separated from AIR (Vrat, 2012). The elimination of license fees to have a television set and the advent of advertisement in *Doordarshan*, introduction of color television just before the Asian games held in New Delhi in 1982 and creation of national networks of transmitters linked through satellite made television more popular in India (Subha, 2018).

"In 1988, New Delhi Television (NDTV) became the first private enterprise to produce a news programme, The News Tonight, which was broadcast on the only state channel, *Doordarshan*. NDTV also produced The World This Week, a weekly round-up of foreign affairs and news, for broadcast on *Doordarshan* as well" (Banerjee, 2013). The economic developments in 1991 made way for the private and international broadcasters to function in India. It was the end of the domination enjoyed by *Doordarshan*. Since the economic liberalization policy television industry in India has grown tremendously. From 1959 till 2020, the first half of these years was ruled by *Doordarshan*, but the second half witnessed a fast development in TV business. The journey of TV which initiated with an impermanent studio, has attained a great landmark in the Indian TV broadcast history. Now, it has developed one of the foremost TV broadcasting industry in the world. India positions second (Rotheray, 2010) just after China in terms of largest TV marketplace and number of commercial satellite TV broadcasters has increased from 524 in the year 2010 to 902 in the year 2019 which are being beamed in different languages (TRAI, 2020). According to the report of Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India (2018) 367 news networks are operative in India and offering news round the clock. These news channels are broadcasting news content nonstop according to the policies, focus area and target audience (Dewal & Kumar, 2017). According to a report of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), Government of India (GOI), every second television channel in India is a news channel (*Broadcasting Documents MIB, GOI*, 2018).

2.0 Diversity:

The idea of diversity itself carries diverse meanings. Diversity means presence of many at one point in time (Das, n.d.). Van Cuilenburg (1999) refers media diversity as “heterogeneity of media content in terms of one or more specified characteristics.” Cuilenburg (2000) has suggested three levels of diversity a) diversity in Content Units of information which includes television programs or an article in a newspaper; b) Content bundler which includes distribution channel or a newspaper. Programs and editorial content is focused in it; c) medium type, which includes radio, television or the daily newspaper press and focusses on diversity of content and distribution in the media market; and d) the level of society’s communication system on the whole.

Singh (2018) considers diversity an imperative factor to establish truth in media. Diversity implies whether media reflects social diversity in its structure and content or not. If media reflects the social diversity in its content as witnessed in society, it means media depicts harmony in diversity in social environment. According to her diversity can be of subjects ;different opinions; persons; place; source; audience; listeners; readers; medium; and layout and presentation.

3.0 Primetime:

The primetime is the most important television viewing segment of the day. The programs which are of utmost importance are broadcast during this segment. Primetime is the part of evening television slot. Usually primetime begins from 7pm. This time people are free from their daily routine work and usually watch television. Around 8pm the maximum bulk of the audience watches television and this is the peak time of the primetime. The primetime remains till 11pm. Due to maximum viewership of the television, the advertisement rates are also high at this segment. Nielson (2011) reveals that the normal primetime is from 8pm to 11pm, Monday to Friday, whereas on weekends the primetime begins at 7pm. Cambridge, n.d. defines prime time as the [period](#) between 8 and 11 at [night](#) when the [largest number](#) of [people](#) are [watching television](#).

4.0 Objective:

The main objective of the study is to focus on diversity of coverage of national news and news content broadcast on television news networks during primetime. The study is an attempt to find that which states are given more importance on primetime television news programs and the categories of the content which is being broadcast on television.

5.0 Significance of The Study:

India, with a population of more than 1.3 billion, has become a powerful state in terms of social change, economy, politics, nuclear power, and hordes of other factors (Wilson, Kelston, & Ahmed, 2010, cited in Gupta, 2012). The media of India is keeping its peoples well-informed of what is happening within the country and around the world (Gupta, 2012). The most widespread mass media (Geniets, 2010) having round the clock news stations across the nation and their live inclusion potential, television has emerged itself as the foremost source of news and current issues in India. The study focuses on the primetime news of television news channels. Many studies have been conducted on television primetime news but in the Indian context the area is still lacking. The study is an attempt to fill this gap.

6.0 Review of Literature:

Dewal & Kumar (2017) studied prime time news content of Hindi news broadcaster *Aaj Tak* and English news broadcaster *India Today* for a period of one week during primetime (8pm to 10pm). Total 28 hours of footage was studied. English news channel was showing more varied news content than the Hindi counterpart. Hindi news channel broadcasted 5 programs daily. On the other hand *India Today* showed only two programs daily. News related to politics was given top priority by both the channels.

Garg (2016) in a study discloses that, in India, news on national politics, film sand entertainment, crime and sports occupies almost half of the entire prime time and the share of important news such as related to education has dropped from 1.10 % in 2005 to 0.69 % in 2013 of total prime time. Even news reporting related to Health; Science and Technology; Agriculture registered a drop in 2013.

Singh (2015) in his study on primetime TV news of three private news broadcasters discloses that Indian news channels emphasis on news concerning “Politics” very prominently and news related to Sports/Cricket, and

International issues are also given equal importance¹. Environment related news reports were not covered in the 224 hours of the sample size of news programming. News concerning crime stories were also preferred by *IBN 7* (11 percent).

Singh (2012) found, on the basis of a 2002-2003 sample data of three news channels, that news related to politics (25.1%) was the largest news type that was covered by the news channels. Second largest news items covered were about Sports news stories. Third largest news share was of news related to governmental stories. Items related to Economic news (8.3 %), Crime News (7.1%) found space in top five news most covered by the television news channels. The researcher also found that maximum number (35.2%) of news covered originated in national capital where as 21.7% of news broadcast originated from different state capitals. 11.9% news were from outside India.

Investigating pluralism and political news on national television news networks Kaisii (2011, cited in Dewal & Kumar (2017) found that the politics had the highest share in the content of TV news channels and Hindi channels were more balanced than English new channels in reporting the national and regional political news. Kuthiala and Singh (2006, cited in Dewal & Kumar (2017) conducted a content analysis and revealed that the developmental issues were not given preference and little coverage was given to these issues. Whereas political news and cricket got the highest share in the news content on television news channels.

7.0 Methodology:

Keeping in view the objectives of the study the content analysis method was adopted for the present study. Content analysis is an efficient procedure to study the content of the media (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). For the present study two news channels operated in India were selected. Public Broadcaster *DD News* was chosen purposely and the other news channel *Times Now*, a private news channel, was selected on the basis of the Television Audience Measurement (TAM) ranking of Broadcast Audience Research Council India (BARC India). The researcher found that the English language news broadcaster *Times Now* got the highest TAM ratings² consecutively for four weeks. Riffe et al., (1993) found that “for a population of six months of editions, one constructed week was as efficient as four”. So, one constructed week was first formed and was spread over a period of six months beginning from 9th September, 2017 to 13th February 2018, as shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1
Distribution of Days in Constructed Week

Channel	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
DD News	12 th February 2018	31 st October 2017	17 th January 2018	5 th October 2017	22 nd December 2017	9 th September 2017	26 th November 2017
Times Now	27 th November 2017	13 th February 2018	1 st November 2017	18 th January 2018	6 th October 2017	23 rd December 2017	10 th September 2017

The data was collected by recording the primetime programs using an external audio-video USB 2.0 capturing device for the study. On 9th September, 2017 data was collected from *DD News* and the next day i.e. on 10th September data from *Times Now* was collected. Using the same process all the data was recorded according to the days of constructed week. Each news item presented during primetime (8 pm to 11 pm) in different news programs were considered the unit of analysis. Montage, Teaser and Sign offs were considered in ‘Other Content’ category and were not included in the study. Headlines and Advertisements were also not included in the analysis. The duration of the news items was measured in seconds. In total, 497 news items were broadcast in different news programs by *DD New* and *Times Now* during primetime. A total of 41 hours (total 147621 seconds) were recorded for the analysis. The coverage of news was analyzed with the news which occurred in any part of India. The news items in which more than two locations were involved, were considered under *Multiple State* category and coded accordingly. All the news items were coded and studied under the categories of diversity in news content topic where the content was assessed with the variables as *Politics; Terrorism; Crime/Corruption; Demonstration/Protest; Military & Defense; Natural Disasters; Science & Technology; Environment; Health, Hygiene and Social Issues; Education; Economics & Business; Sports; Films and Television; Human Interest;*

¹ 5.5 percent of the total news stories covered by each channel (*Aaj Tak, NDTV India, and IBN 7*).

² BARC “Weekly Data”, <http://www.barcindia.co.in/statistic.aspx>, 2017.

Human Rights; Development; Court/Judicial Verdict; Foreign Affairs; Agriculture; Accidents; and Government categories.

8.0 Results:

The content of broadcast on both the news channels was categories as News Content; Headlines; Advertisements; and in 'Other' category. The table below shows the duration given to the content by the selected news channels.

8.1 Classification of Content

Table 2
Total Time Devoted to Different Content by Selected News Channels on Primetime

Content	Time Devoted in Seconds to Various Content			
	DD News		Times Now	
	Duration	Percentage	Duration	Percentage
News Content	56492	77.31	60505	81.16
Headlines	3146	4.31	913	1.22
Advertisements	11490	15.72	11744	15.75
Other	1947	2.66	1384	1.86
Total	73075	100.00	74546	100.00

The table 2 above shows that *DD News* (Public Broadcaster) devoted 73075 seconds (20.17 hours) to its overall content during primetime. Private news broadcaster *Times Now* devoted 74546 seconds (20.42 hours) to its overall content. 77.31 percent of the content broadcast by *DD News* was of News Content. Whereas *Times Now* (81.16 per cent) devoted more time to its news content than *DD News*. The public Broadcaster *DD News* (4.31 per cent) spent more time on Headlines than *Times Now* (1.22 per cent). The share of advertisement content was found to be almost similar on both the channels (*DD News* 15.72 % and *Times Now* 15.75%). The 'Other' content category saw not much difference of duration between the channels. 2.66 per cent of time was spent on 'Other' content by *DD News* and 1.86 per cent of time was spent on 'Other' content by *Times Now*.

8.2 Diversity in news coverage:

The present study examined the news coverage of the primetime news content of two news channels. The news coverage was analysed as National News, which occurred in India and Other, which occurred outside India. The table 3 below shows the diversity of the locations involved in the news items.

Table 3
Diversity of News Coverage on Primetime of Selected News Channels

Location	Diversity of News Coverage			
	DD News		Times Now	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
National News	332	80.39	84	100
Other	81	19.61	00	00
Total	413	100.00	84	100.00

The table above clearly shows that both the news channels gave preference to the news originated or occurred in India. More than 80 per cent of news reported on *DD News* were originated in India whereas 81 per cent news story reported on *DD News* originated outside the home country (India). On the other hand hundred per cent of news covered by *Times Now* happened in India. No news of foreign country was reported by *Times Now* during the study period.

8.3 States/UT Involved in National News:

Table 4
Diversity of Locations Involved in Primetime News

	Involvement of States & Union Territories			
	DD News		Times Now	
State Involved	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Andhra Pradesh	2	0.60	0	0.00
Assam	3	0.90	0	0.00
Bihar	3	0.90	5	5.95
Chhattisgarh	1	0.30	0	0.00
Goa	12	3.61	0	0.00
Gujarat	30	9.04	6	7.14
Haryana	14	4.22	4	4.76
Himachal Pradesh	3	0.90	0	0.00
Jammu and Kashmir	14	4.22	18	21.43
Jharkhand	4	1.20	0	0.00
Karnataka	6	1.81	3	3.57
Kerala	0	0.00	2	2.38
Madhya Pradesh	4	1.20	0	0.00
Maharashtra	16	4.82	2	2.38
Manipur	1	0.30	0	0.00
Meghalaya	2	0.60	0	0.00
Nagaland	2	0.60	0	0.00
Rajasthan	11	3.31	0	0.00
Tamil Nadu	5	1.51	2	2.38
Telangana	9	2.71	0	0.00
Tripura	1	0.30	0	0.00
Uttar Pradesh	3	0.90	0	0.00
Uttarakhand	5	1.51	0	0.00
New Delhi	82	24.70	2	2.38
Multiple State 1	1	0.30	0	0.00
J&K and Delhi	1	0.30	0	0.00
Multiple State 2	2	0.60	0	0.00
Meghalaya and Nagaland	2	0.60	0	0.00
Multiple State 3	1	0.30	0	0.00
Multiple State 4	4	1.20	0	0.00
Himachal & Gujarat	0	0.00	2	2.38
Unclear	88	26.51	38	45.24
Total	332	100.00	84	100.00

χ^2 (31, N=416) = 1628.154, $p < .05$

The table 4 above indicates that *DD News* reported the capital of India, New Delhi maximum number of time (24.70 per cent) in its news coverage. On the other hand private news channel *Times Now* focussed more on news related to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) during primetime. Out of total 84 news broadcast by *Times Now* 21.43 per cent of them were related to J&K. News related to Gujarat was found to be on second place on both the channels with 9.04 % on *DD News* and 7.14 % on *Times Now*. States of Northeast India were totally ignored by *Times Now* during primetime. *DD News* being a public broadcaster covered most of the parts of India in its news coverage during primetime. There was some news where more than two locations were involved, and all these news were broadcast by *DD News*. In Multiple State 1, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Madhya

Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand were reported. Multiple State 2 reported news mentioning Tripura, Meghalaya, and Nagaland was broadcast during primetime by *DD News*. Multiple State 3 involved Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh. In Multiple State 4 Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Bihar, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal were reported during. In 45.24 per cent of the stories of *Times Now* and in 26.51 per cent news items of *DD News* involvement of the location could not be identified. The goodness of fit Chi Square test shows a significant difference (χ^2 (31, N=416) =1628.154, $p < .05$).

8.4 Diversity in News Content:

Table 5
Diversity of News Content on Primetime

News Category	Diversity of News Content Category			
	DD News		Times Now	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Politics	50	15.06	34	40.48
Terrorism	11	3.31	8	9.52
Crime/Corruption	31	9.34	22	26.19
Demonstration/ Protest	0	0.00	2	2.38
Military and Defence	19	5.72	7	8.33
Environment	6	1.81	0	0.00
Health, Hygiene and Social Issues	7	2.11	0	0.00
Education	2	0.60	0	0.00
Economics and Business	41	12.35	0	0.00
Sports	20	6.02	0	0.00
Films and Television	8	2.41	1	1.19
Human Interest	10	3.01	0	0.00
Development	16	4.82	0	0.00
Court/ Judicial Verdict	13	3.92	0	0.00
Foreign Affairs	24	7.23	2	2.38
Agriculture	8	2.41	0	0.00
Government	21	6.33	0	0.00
Other	45	13.55	8	9.52
Total	332	100.00	84	100.00

The table 5 above shows the diversity of news content broadcast on both the news channels. The results shows that both news channels rely more on content related to news of Politics. *DD News* broadcast a total of 332 news during primetime out of which 15.06 per cent news stories were related to Political affairs. *Times Now* broadcast total 84 news during the study period on primetime. It devoted 40.48 per cent news to the Politics. News content related to Economics and Business grabbed the second place on *DD News* with 12.35 % of total news share. On the other hand news related to Crime/ Corruption holds second place on *Times Now* with 26.19% of total news share. 9.34 % news of *DD News* were related to Crime. News Concerning Environment; Health, Hygiene and Social Issues; Education; Economics & Business; Sports; Human Interest; Development; Agriculture etc. could not find space on *Times Now* during the study period. News concerning Science and Technology were also not given space on both the news channel during study period. Public broadcaster *DD News* gave more news of Foreign Affairs (7.23%) than *Times Now* (2.38%). The content of the 45 per cent news on *DD News* and 9.52 per cent news on *Times Now* were related to other news category.

9.0 Discussion and Conclusion:

The present study aimed to find out the diversity of news coverage and content of public broadcaster *DD News* and a private news channel *Times Now*. The results of the study shows that both the channels are very much different in

their news coverage. *DD News* had covered more news than *Times Now*. Public broadcaster *DD News* covered more news around the country than *Times Now*. The locations which are near to broadcast center are given preference by both the news channels. *DD News* keeps New Delhi in centre in its news coverage whereas *Times Now* focused on news related to J&K more. Locations which are far from news channels headquarters are given less preference on the news channels. Politics has been the most favorite subject of news coverage on primetime. News related to Economics got more coverage on public broadcaster than its other counterpart.

The present study emphasis on news content and coverage only. Studies on Headlines, Tickers, graphics of news, sound bites, presentation of reporters and anchors, news formats etc. should be carried out to measure the content and coverage in a broad way.

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