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Invasion from the skies: the impact of foreign television on India

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Increased competition and shrinking budgets have forced public service broadcasters around the world to reconsider their role. Doordarshan, India's public service television network, shares the problems faced by its counterparts in more developed countries. Although it continues to enjoy the luxury of being the only television network broadcasting its programs from within national boundaries, it has had to change its policies and programming to compete with foreign television channels including Murdoch's Star TV. However, it is the Indian audience that has benefited most from this competition from the skies in the form of improved quality and quantity of programs. This paper reports on an audience survey carried out in India earlier this year to gauge television viewers' perception of these benefits. The paper also gives background on the developments in the television industry in India.

The visibility of television as a mass medium and its perceived impact on audience always generates passionate debate about the role of public service broadcasting in any country. Whether it is the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the USA, BBC in the UK, ABC in Australia, the Television Republik

Indonesia (TVRI) in Indonesia or Doordarshan¹ in India, these public service broadcasters have an important role to play in their respective countries.

As with PBS's mission and the ABC's charter, Doordarshan has its own set of social objectives to live up to. In the United States, the PBS has to present programs that "educate and entertain, inform and inspire" (PBS online 1997, p.1). In Australia, the ABC has to broadcast programs that "contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community" (ABC online policy issues 1998, p.1). Similarly, Doordarshan's social objectives include that it has to: a) act as a catalyst for social change; b) promote national integration; c) stimulate a scientific temper in the minds of the people; d) disseminate the message of family planning as a means of population control and family welfare; e) provide essential information and knowledge in order to stimulate greater agricultural production; and f) promote and help preserve environment and ecological balance (Doordarshan Handbook 1997, p.23).

Like many public service broadcasters, over the past four decades Doordarshan has been criticised (Bhatt 1994, Mitra 1986, NAMEDIA report 1986, Singhal & Rogers 1989, Rajgopal 1993, Ninan 1995) for not meeting its objectives. However, this criticism has been harsher from its viewers as Doordarshan was the only source of television in India from its beginning in 1959 until 1990. Apart from a handful of Hindi soap operas which Indian viewers devoured, as they did not have a choice to switch channels, viewers have had to tolerate uninspiring programming for almost three decades (Kishore 1994). One of the reasons for the dismal performance by Doordarshan was lack of competition. Successive Indian governments legislated All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan as a duopoly. The AIR network was established in 1947². Doordarshan which was part of AIR since its inception in 1959, was separated

from AIR in 1976 as the second public service broadcaster in the country.

However, in the past six to seven years Doordarshan has had to change its policies and programs to maintain its share of viewership and advertising revenue. In early 1990s following advancements in satellite technology and inadequacies in broadcast legislation in India, a number of broadcasters began telecasting their programs directly into Indian homes from foreign locations. These broadcasters use satellite transponders to send their signals into the country, while enterprising cable operators receive these signals via dish antennas and distribute them to individual households for a small fee. As a result, Doordarshan has been forced to respond to this increased competition by increasing the number of channels and programs it broadcasts; improving the quality of its programs and trying to gain credibility for its news programs by offering prime time slots to outside producers. It has also reduced its advertising rates and launched a number of purely entertainment channels to satisfy audience demand.

Today Indian audiences have a wide variety of programs to choose from on both Doordarshan channels and other channels.³ They can watch numerous news and current affairs programs. Therefore, to find out how television viewers in India perceive Doordarshan's current performance, I carried out an audience survey in Bombay (Mumbai) and New Delhi. The survey included questions about the television industry as a whole: Are viewers satisfied with television programming in India at present? Are they satisfied with Doordarshan's performance at present? If television as a medium as a whole gained people's confidence as a source of credible news and information sorely lacking before 1991? The survey also asked whether news and current affairs programs improved sufficiently to provide in-depth information "to those who may not have a formal education" due to this competition in the television industry in India (NAMEDIA report 1986, p.23). This

paper looks at the survey results and discusses the impact of foreign competition on general programming, on public service broadcasting and, particularly news and current affairs programs in India.

Doordarshan — a call for change

After the demise of British rule in the Indian sub-continent, Indian politicians and people whole-heartedly embraced ideals of socialism. Hence, after independence in 1947 most of the basic industries were set up as public sectors. Since the country already had a flourishing print media that was working on the principle of “free speech and free expression for all,”⁴ no need was felt to develop broadcast media at the time. Therefore, it was almost by accident rather than through planning that television was introduced in India in September 1959. The multinational company — Philips — had been exhibiting some television equipment at an industrial expo in New Delhi. The company gifted the closed-circuit television equipment to the government at the end of the exhibition. This is when the Indian government decided to experiment with the new technology. From these beginnings the pattern was set for the growth of television in India, which was for almost two decades dependent on equipment gifted by either foreign governments or international agencies (Bhatt 1994 & Ninan 1995). Since AIR engineers were deeply involved with the development of the country’s first TV centre, television was perceived as an extension of radio until the 1970s when progress in space technology spurred the Indian government to experiment with television as a development communication tool.

In the 1970s and 1980s, although Doordarshan continued to expand its coverage across the country, the public service broadcaster remained torn between its role as a catalyst for social change and as a tool for government publicity. The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in development communication was

launched in 1975. Whereas on the political front, the imposition of a State of Emergency by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi placed Doordarshan at government's disposal. Indira Gandhi's government suspended many democratic rights and started using both AIR and Doordarshan to publicise government policies (Rajgopal 1993). As the print media largely decided to black out government propaganda, Doordarshan was used to churn out dozens of programs in support of the government's 20-point development program (Ninan 1995). Meanwhile, the SITE project which involved broadcast of development oriented programs to 2400 villages in six far-flung states, lasted for a year instead of 10 years as planned. Analysts are divided about the success of the project, some contending that the project was envisaged as an experiment in satellite broadcasting rather than educational or development communication (Rajgopal 1993).

However, realising the potential power of television as a communication tool, the government began to adopt policies to popularise television viewing in India. This skewed Doordarshan's focus from development to commercialisation. In 1976 Doordarshan started broadcasting imported programs and accepting advertisements to support the purchase of these programs (Ninan, 1995). Again, in 1982 — a significant year in the history of television in India — the government allowed thousands of colour TV sets to be imported into the country to coincide with the broadcast of Asian Games in New Delhi (Bhatt 1994). There were also sponsored entertainment programs such as *Hum Log* and *Buniyaad* that added to its efforts to attract viewers in mid-1980s. Later serials based on Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mababbarta* had a very successful run. But on the news front, viewers did not trust Doordarshan (Singhal & Rogers 1989).

To boost the state broadcaster's credibility, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry of India has over the past four decades appointed a number of committees to look into its status and perfor-

mance (Joshi 1998). But these committees' recommendations have never been effectively implemented. One such international body was the Media Foundation of the Non-Aligned (NAMEDIA). The Ministry appointed the specialist organisation to convoke the broad range of public opinion about television prevailing in the country at the time. In 1986 in its report, which was based on five "feedback" seminars and a national colloquium, NAMEDIA criticised Indian television (Doordarshan) for failing in its main objective of inducing development. A contributing factor was that television remained accessible only to urban, middle and high-income groups. The NAMEDIA report concluded:

The primary purpose of television in India is development through education, information and enlightenment, to improve the quality of life of the largest masses of the people; to bring communities and societies, regions and the states together as one nation through mutual awareness and sympathy while preserving, consolidating and enriching their unique ways of life, cultures, customs and traditions. The secondary purpose is entertainment per se or show-business. (NAMEDIA report 1986, p.13)

The report also stated that "news" could not be used to promote those in power. It urged a variety of programs based on issues and current affairs, rather than just half-hour news programs, to facilitate better understanding for those without formal education. On the issue of credibility the report advocated that television in India needed an "openness" to gain credibility:

Such openness, it was considered, would not put either the government, or the ruling party or the nation in jeopardy. Squarely and properly placed in intelligent and honest context it would promote understanding and confidence and lead to greater and discriminative appreciation of issues by the people. In the long run, it would strengthen the nation. (NAMEDIA report 1986, p.24)

The NAMEDIA report stated that Doordarshan needed to establish a separate autonomous operation for producing television news:

It should have freedom of appraising news values and judgement, news selection and content, emphasis in presentation, and freedom of choice

in summarising physical and human resources in making up a news programme. It should have a clear independent professional chain of command free from bureaucratic, political or other outside intervention and interference. (NAMEDIA report 1986, p.25)

One of the themes which came across very clearly from the public forums organised by NAMEDIA was that television (in this case Doordarshan) in India should be free of all government control. Over the years Doordarshan, though established with high social objectives, has failed to satisfy the intellectuals⁵ as well as the common people in India. Asok Mitra, former secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from 1966 to 1969, in his submission to NAMEDIA recalled that in the 1960s television was considered “essential for accelerating development, modernisation and social change” (Mitra 1986, p.96). He expressed his disappointment with the fact that India had followed a path similar to other Third World countries which first introduced television in the capital city and other metro cities, subserving the interests of the ruling class. In the process of making television more attractive to the audience, government allowed more and more commercially sponsored, privately produced programs to be aired; though always retaining the final say about what was suitable for the Indian audience. Critics examining the development of Indian television say that as television grew, developmentalist alternatives were steadily eschewed, and “over the years hardware expansion was undertaken with no evidence of planning for software” (Rajgopal 1993, p.93).

Television viewers, too, were not happy. Until 1990, most Indian viewers did not have a choice but to watch one national and one regional Doordarshan channel. In a survey in 1987, Singhal found that 90 per cent of the respondents preferred Hindi-film-based entertainment programs, whereas 60 per cent appreciated educational and development programs (Singhal & Rogers 1989). The survey of 1170 respondents showed that although 76 per cent were in favour of commercial advertising on television, 60 per cent of the low-income households, 75 per cent of viewers in

lower castes and 60 per cent of non-Hindi speaking viewers felt that the “problems and difficulties of their daily life were not adequately projected” by Doordarshan (Singhal & Rogers 1989, pp.81-82). Similarly, 92 per cent of them felt that political opposition’s views were not sufficiently represented, whereas 85 per cent said that Doordarshan adequately covered government policies and programs (Singhal & Rogers 1989).

The fact that Doordarshan’s performance did not receive many accolades was compounded by the reality that the people of India could not switch channels. Either due to its charter or due to political and bureaucratic interference, Doordarshan’s performance remained unsatisfactory and it was often referred to as “the government channel” and as being “dull and boring”.

Competition from the skies and cable network

The impact of foreign television in India has been two-fold: viewers — at least those living in urban areas — can watch more than 40 channels and the quality of television programs has improved. People subscribing to a cable service can now choose anywhere between 40 to 50 channels to watch. As an alternative to three half-hour news programs in three different languages, they can choose between the two 24-hour news channels (BBC & CNN) and up to 20 news and current affairs programs on various cable and foreign television channels everyday. Since the 1991-92 invasion from the skies by foreign television networks, Doordarshan too has expanded its service from 2 to 18 channels with a claimed viewership of 448 million at the end of 1997 (Doordarshan Handbook, 1997).

The first competition for Doordarshan came in the form of illegal distribution of television signal by cable and foreign television channels in late 1980s and early 1990s. With the introduction of VCRs in India, some dynamic entrepreneurs in Bombay in 1984

launched cable network. Instead of people watching programs on their VCRs at home by buying or borrowing videocassettes, the cable operator in the area/block connected their television set to a community network for a small fee. This way all those connected to the local cable network could watch one or two movies, sitcoms in a regional language and perhaps a pirated foreign program everyday. According to a survey cited by Rahim, there were about 3500 cable TV networks in India in May 1990. Another advertising group estimated that more than 330,000 households in four metros of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras had cable connections with a total audience of 1.6 million (Rahim 1994).

Legally, there is no prohibition on receiving a TV signal in India. Therefore, other television channels and networks owned by Indians or foreigners have been able to beam their programs into the country from the skies using satellite technology without violating any Indian law or regulation⁶. However, there is legal uncertainty over its distribution. Until 1995, the *Indian Telegraph Act 1885* governed the laying of cables on public property. It required the cable operator to apply for a licence to do so (Rahim, 1994).

The success of cable operation was due to a number of reasons: on one hand the urban middle class had spare time and resources to seek more entertainment; on the other, "the government channel" remained slow in satisfying that demand. Being hooked up to a cable network became fashionable among the hotels that catered to tourists' needs. In fact, cable networks spread across smaller Indian cities during and after the Persian Gulf crisis in February 1991, when everybody was nervous about the war. One of the US television networks did offer the Indian government broadcast rights to its service at the time. Doordarshan declined the offer. Nevertheless, dish antennas picking up CNN and other satellite broadcast service signals sprouted everywhere, defeating the Indian government's attempt to protect the politically stifled public service broadcaster (Ninan 1995).

In the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hamish McDonald wrote that Doordarshan's credibility was undermined by its Gulf War coverage which was noted for its "state news, lack of visuals, use of ancient library footage and poor audio quality" (McDonald 1991, p.16). Although the war ended within weeks, people's desire for foreign programs had been aroused and they wanted more. Entrepreneurs took advantage of this market opportunity and started installing their cable networks in every block of big cities where people were willing to pay between Rs 50 and Rs 150 (Aus\$2-6) a month for the connection.

In May 1991, the Satellite Television for the Asian Region (STAR) TV⁷ launched its operation from Hong Kong beaming multi-channel television over a South Asian footprint via Asiasat. The television scene in India or for that matter in Asia has not been the same again. By the end of 1991, experts in the communication field began speculating the effect satellite television, in this case STAR TV network which at the time included BBC news service, would have on television programming in Asian countries. Columnists Margaret Scott and Hamish McDonald in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* wrote that:

Social, political and commercial surprises of immense proportions are bound to follow. For starters, using satellite for transborder television defies the tradition that national sovereignty includes state control over television within a nation's borders . . . Nowhere will the impact be more profound than in news coverage, for most of the countries under Palapa's and AsiaSat-I's footprint have spawned heavily regulated television industries, often government-owned (Scott & McDonald 1991, p.33).

The small-time entrepreneurs who recognised the demand for more television in India spearheaded the massive, largely illegal proliferation of cable networks in India, rather than a single cultural imperialistic aggressor such as Rupert Murdoch. Cable operators began operating with two dishes — one pointed at Palapa for CNN and the other at AsiaSat for STAR TV (plus BBC) — and included

them both in their menu of channels for sale. The scene described by commentators at the time (1991 year-end) was something like this:

In crowded bazaars like Delhi's Lajpat Nagar or Bombay's Lemington Road, shops are busy taking orders for indigenously made satellite dishes. Rolls of cable are piled on pavements. All around Indian cities, private cable television operators are stringing coaxial cables along the road and up light poles (Scott & McDonald 1991, p.35).

For a small monthly fee, people could watch 24-hours a day the U.S. open (live), Prime Sports (the wrestlers of the WWF), MTV (music videos), American soap operas such as *Santa Barbara* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, morning cartoon shows and BBC's World News Service — all part of STAR TV network. Ninan says the impact of television in India in the 1990s has been accentuated by the rapid nuclearization of Indian middle class homes, the trend of the working mother, and the consequential rise in "latch-key children" (Ninan 1995, p.97).

Television viewing in India had been on the rise since the introduction of Hindi soap operas in the late 1980s. However, the television scene changed sensationally after the advent of STAR TV and subsequently the launch of other foreign and local channels. TV homes have more than doubled in the last seven years from about 30.8 million in 1991 to 65 million by 1998 (Handbook, 1998). At the same time, according to the Indian readership survey, cable and satellite homes have grown from 1.28 million in June 1992, 9.30 million in June 1995, to 11 million in December 1996. Doordarshan's Audience Research Unit puts the total number of cable and satellite homes at 14.2 million in December 1996 (Doordarshan Handbook 1997); and Joshi estimates that there are about 15 million homes with cable connection (Goonasekera and Lee 1998).

An overwhelming number of viewers (90 per cent) in Hyderabad — a city in south of India — in July 1992 were thoroughly dissatisfied with programs and cited that as the reason for

the switch-over to cable TV (Rahim 1994). Abdur Rahim, who measured the impact of cable on television and VCR viewership, interviewed 250 people including 200 cable and satellite TV subscribers about a year after the launch of STAR TV. Many (62 per cent) felt that Doordarshan was wasting public money on “unimaginative”, “absurd” and “silly” programs (Rahim 1994, p.17). The cable subscribers who participated in the study considered cable TV not as “more than television” but as “more of television” (Rahim 1994, p.20). Viewers preferred cable TV channels to Doordarshan for both entertainment and news programs. Rahim found that BBC was the most popular channel because of the quality of its news programs.

Research method

I carried out a survey in Bombay and New Delhi in January 1998 to explore people's response to the impact of foreign television and cable networks in the past five to seven years. The study was conducted in these two cities as the subscription to cable/foreign television channels remains an urban phenomenon. Self-administered questionnaires were delivered to 350 sample households and later collected in-person. In this way, the survey participants could seek clarification if they did not understand a question. This took into account the fact that English is a second or third language for Indians and even though they understand English, some of the complex questions can be confusing. This also prompted respondents to complete the questionnaire on time. A pilot survey was conducted in Bombay to fine-tune the questions, where 20 university students answered the questionnaire.

The stratified sampling method was used to ensure comparison between different groups of population. Three audience groups were chosen: 1. University students in Bombay, 2. Bombay residents and 3. New Delhi residents. The important variables included

age, education and income levels, as these can influence the consumption habits among audiences. An effort was made to select different suburbs in Bombay to have approximately equal representation of various income groups in the survey. Questionnaires were given out in areas with low, middle and high-income groups in Bombay, which was the main location for the survey. No such distinction was made in New Delhi or when asking university students to answer the questionnaire.

The questionnaire included a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Besides asking audiences to indicate their level of satisfaction with television programs, they were given an option to comment on the reason/s for their satisfaction/dissatisfaction. They were also asked of their perception of the quality of present day programs compared to those broadcast in 1991-92, and to name their favourite news programs and channels.

Results

In all, 350 questionnaires were given out to households. Of these, 291 were completed (51 by university students, 205 residents in Bombay and 35 residents in New Delhi). Overall, 3 to 6 per cent did not answer one or the other question. There was a higher number (40.7 per cent) of respondents in the age group of 18-24 years (Table 1.1, 1.2, 1.3). However, this group includes most of the university students. The over representation of younger people in the audience sampling was not planned, but can be explained by the fact that when a questionnaire was given to a household, it was generally answered by the younger member of the family. Reasons for this could be their better knowledge of English and interest in television programs.

As many as 99.3 per cent of the respondents watch television, whereas 97.9 per cent watch television at home, indicating a very high level of television adoption among the urban population in In-

dia. Most people (80.6 per cent) said they watched television every-day of the week. More than 82 per cent watch television from one to four hours a day (Table 2). It is significant to note that about 80 per cent of the cable subscribers watch television for one to four hours a day. Overall, about 68 per cent subscribe to one or more cable services. Those who do not subscribe to a cable service gave a range of reasons from “parents do not allow,” “it distracts from studies” to “not interested”.

Table 1.1: Distribution of respondents by age

Audience/age groups	Bombay residents %	University students %	New Delhi residents %	All groups %
Under 18 years	23.5	13.7	20.6	21.4
18-24 years	35	72.5	26.5	40.7
25-34 years	20.5	11.8	5.9	17.2
35-44 years	13	2	20.6	11.9
45-54 years	6	0	11.8	5.6
55 years & over	2	0	14.7	3.2

Table 1.2: Distribution of respondents by income

Annual household income in rupees	Bombay residents	University students	New Delhi residents	All groups
More than 110,000	23.3	18.6	59.4	26.9
109,999 - 80,000	13	30.2	25	17.2
79,999 - 51,000	32.1	23.3	9.4	28
50,999 - 26,000	20.7	16.3	6.3	18.3
25,999 or less	10.9	11.6	0	9.7

Table 1.3: Distribution of respondents by education

Education level	Bombay residents	University students	New Delhi residents	All groups
University graduate	55.6	77.6	61.8	60.1
Secondary	34.3	17.6	20.6	29.9
Primary School	6.1	2	8.8	5.7
None of the above	4	2	8.8	4.3

Table 2: Average number of television viewing hours per day

Audience	All areas (in %)	Cable Subscribers %
1 hour	20.8	21.2
2 hours	29.6	26.4
3 hours	18.3	18.1
4 hours	13.7	14
5 hours	6.3	8.3
6 hours	4.9	6.2
7 hours	1.8	1.6
8 hours	1.4	1
10 hours	1.8	2.1
12 hours	0.7	0.5
15 hours	0.4	0
19 hours	0.4	0.5
Total =	100	100

In response to the question about “how many Doordarshan channels and ‘channels other than Doordarshan’ can you watch daily?”, the response is so spread out that it is almost unquantifiable. Responses ranged between 1 to 100 channels. However, most of the television viewers watch either 1-3 channels (42.8 per cent) or 4-10 channels (47 per cent) regularly (Table 3).

An overwhelming number of respondents have one or more favourite television programs. The 10 most-favourite programs are Hindi soap operas (known as serials in India), viz., (in order of preference): *Amanat*, *Hum Paanch*, *Aabat*, *Just Mohabbat*, *Hasratein*, *Banegi Apni Baat*, *Boogie Woogie*, *Teacher*, *Thoda Hai Thode Ki Zaroorat Hai* and *Dastaan. The (English) News* and *Aaj Tak* (a Hindi news & current affairs program) on Doordarshan channels are the 12th and 13th most-favourite programs respectively. This indicates that the television audience in India still prefers Hindi-entertainment programs to other programs.

Similarly, the most favourite television channel is Zee TV — Star's Hindi channel⁸; then in order of popularity Sony TV, Star Plus, Discovery, Star Movie, ESPN, Star Sports, DD2, DD1 and BBC.

Table 3: Number of channels regularly watched

Audience	All areas %	Cable Subscribers %
1-3 channels	42.8	36.5
4-10 channels	47	51.8
11-20 channels	7.7	9.1
21-30 channels	1.1	1
More than 30	1.4	1.5

An impressive 78.7 per cent of the respondents regularly watch news and current affairs programs on television. The most viewed news and current affairs programs are: *Aaj Tak* (a Hindi news & current affairs program on Doordarshan channel DD2) followed by *The (English) News* (on Doordarshan channel DD1), *Zee News* (A mix of Hindi and English news and current affairs program on Zee TV), *Star News* and the English news channel — BBC World service. More than two-thirds of the respondents rely on television and newspaper for their daily news updates (Table 4.1). However, the newspaper still remains as the source of news on which most people depend, followed by television (Table 4.2).

Table 4.1: Source of news

Audience/Sources of news	Bombay Residents %	University students %	New Delhi residents %	All areas %
Television	74.1	86.3	85.7	77.7
Radio	9.3	17.6	5.7	10.3
Newspaper	80	86.3	94.3	82.8
Magazine	19	27.5	14.3	19.9
Internet	2.4	2	0	2.1

Table 4.2: Source of news on which people most depend

Sources of news/Age	Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	above 54	Overall %
Television	34.6	50	40	43.3	62.5	33.3	44.8
Radio	0	0	3.3	3.3	0	0	0.4
Newspaper	65.4	49.1	57.1	53.3	37.5	66.7	54
Magazine	0	0.9	2.9	0	0	0	0.8
Internet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Relatively higher numbers of respondents are satisfied with programs on “channels other than Doordarshan” for their technical quality, entertainment value, credibility of information and overall performance (Table 5). For overall performance, 91.1 per cent said they were satisfied with “channels other than Doordarshan”, whereas 67.6 per cent were satisfied with Doordarshan channels.

A striking majority (84-85 per cent) of the respondents said that Doordarshan programs had improved over the past five to seven years. A similar number of respondents wanted Doordarshan to improve further. Opinion varied about how Doordarshan programs should change from “needs to broadcast more entertainment programs” to “improve technical quality” and “show more educational and meaningful programs” (Table 6).

Table 5: Comparative ratings of programs on Doordarshan and other channels

Categories (in %)	TQ	TQ	TQ	TQ	TQ	EV	EV	EV	EV	EV	CI	CI	CI	CI	CI	OP	OP	OP	OP	OP
	VS				Vus	VS				Vus	VS				Vus	Vs				Vus
Doordarshan	5.8	23	32.8	22.3	16.1	10.2	19.6	30.2	25.8	14.2	11.4	30.4	37	16.5	4.8	7.7	19	40.9	21.2	11.3
Satisfaction level		61.6					60					78.8					67.6			
Disstisfaction level				71.2					70.2					58.3					73.4	
Other channels	36.7	42.7	15	4.9	0.7	47.4	31.9	13.7	5.6	1.5	34.9	39.4	17.1	6.7	1.9	37.5	39.7	13.9	7.5	1.5
Satisfaction level		94.4					93					91.4					91.1			
Disstisfaction level				20.6					20.8					25.7					22.9	

TQ = Technical Quality
 EV = Entertainment Value
 CI = Credibility of Information
 OP = Overall Performance

*Satisfaction levels between VS & VUS — Very satisfied, Satisfied, Average, Unsatisfied & Very Unsatisfied
 VS = Very Satisfactory
 Vus = Very Unsatisfactory

Table 6: How should Doordarshan programs be different?

How different should DD programs be?	% of response
More entertainment programs	24.4
Improve technical quality	20.3
Improve news and current affairs	11.6
More educational & meaningful	10.9
More variety, less repeats	7.2

Hindi entertainment channels such as Zee TV and Sony TV⁹ are among the most popular cable/foreign channels. However, BBC still gets the highest score for credibility of news and information. More than 70 per cent of the respondents feel that Doordarshan covers local, regional and national issues better than international issues; whereas an almost equal number feel that channels other than Doordarshan cover all these categories of issues well. About 90 per cent of the respondents state that channels other than Doordarshan cover national and international issues better than Doordarshan (Table 7). Once again, Zee TV is considered the best cable/foreign channel to cover local, regional and national issues, whereas BBC remains the best channel for covering international issues.

An impressive number of respondents feel that programs on Doordarshan channels represent Indian cultural values, whereas only about half of those feel that programs broadcast by “channels other than Doordarshan” represent Indian culture (Table 8). As can be observed from the responses, younger generation is more satisfied with Doordarshan for representing Indian cultural values in their programs. However, more than two-thirds of respondents also think that foreign programs are good for the country as they are “informative and cover global issues”.

Table 8: Representation of Indian cultural values in programs

Channels/age	Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	Above 54	Overall %
Doordarshan							
Yes	88.1	87.6	66	69.7	66.7	66.7	80.1
No	11.9	12.4	34	30.3	33.3	33.3	19.9
Other channels							
Yes	48.3	36	54.5	34.5	46.7	22.2	41.8
No	51.7	64	45.5	65.5	53.3	77.8	58.2

Opinion is divided over the question of government censorship of programs. Most people are concerned about the broadcast of “vulgar programs” and “the need to preserve Indian culture”; however they “do not want the government to censor programs for political reasons”. A majority of people said that programs are “not biased” on television. However, more viewers feel that programs are “not biased” on “channels other than Doordarshan”, compared with Doordarshan (Table 9). Most of the respondents commented that Doordarshan programs were still “government oriented”, whereas “other channels” provided “more variety and entertainment”.

Table 9: Are television programs biased?

Channels/ education level	University graduates	Secondary	Primary School	None of the above	Overall %
Doordarshan					
Yes	43.1	49.3	31.3	50	44.5
No	56.9	50.7	68.8	50	55.5
Other channels					
Yes	32.2	27	12.5	36.4	29.5
No	67.8	73	87.5	63.3	70.5

Significantly higher number of people are satisfied with the quality of news in January 1998 (93 per cent) than before cable and foreign television channels became popular in 1992 (64.1 per cent) (Table 10). Cable subscribers are marginally more satisfied with the quality of news today than before. However, an overwhelming majority of respondents feel that news program have improved in technical quality, entertainment value, credibility and coverage of current affair issues (Table 11).

Table 10: Satisfaction with quality of news in 1992 and in 1998

Quality of news	All Viewers		Cable subscribers	
	Before 1991	Early 1998	Before 1991	Early 1998
Very satisfied	15.2	27.1	11.8	22.5
Satisfied	19.2	44.3	18.7	46
Average	29.7	21.6	27.3	25.7
Unsatisfied	27.2	6.2	33.2	5.3
Very unsatisfied	8.7	0.7	9.1	0.5

Table 11: Changes in news programs in the past five to seven years

Sources of news/age	Technical quality	Entertainment value	Credibility of info.	Coverage of issues	Overall
Improved a lot	50	50	56.1	57.7	60.5
Improved a little	43.8	38.7	36.2	35	34.4
Same	5.1	8.4	7.4	6.9	4.3
Not improved at all	1.1	2.9	0.4	0.4	0.7

Discussion

The survey results support the research hypothesis that increased competition in the television industry in India has im-

mensely benefited the audience by providing them with better quality and quantity of programs and channels. Although the primary focus of programming provided by all channels has been entertainment, news and current affairs have not been far behind. Today, audiences have an option to switch between channels and watch a wide range of programs, and they do exercise this choice as is evident from the survey results. The profile of an Indian television viewer is one who watches one to three hours of television daily and three to four channels regularly. Although the typical Indian viewer still prefers Hindi-entertainment programs, he or she watches a number of news and current affairs programs on anywhere between two to 10 different channels every week.

The survey shows that respondents are very discerning in comparing the quality of programs offered by all channels. Although they are satisfied with the programs on offer as of today on all channels including Doordarshan, Indian viewers still want Doordarshan to further improve as they perceive that Indian cultural values are better represented by an Indian television network. This is one of the reasons why “other channels”, which began their broadcast by showing re-runs of Western soap operas from yesteryears, have been Indianising their menu of programs. Not surprisingly, Star network’s Hindi channel — Zee TV — which essentially broadcasts Hindi-entertainment programs is the most popular among Indian audiences. Other channels including Doordarshan have tried to adopt Zee’s success formula to achieve the same result.

One of the focus areas of the survey was to find out if viewers can rely on television as their source of news. With the addition of two 24-hour news channels and a vast range of news and in-depth current affairs programs, Indians are relishing the visual feast of watching live telecast of news events around the world. The respondents in Bombay and Delhi overwhelmingly indicate that they are keen to watch news and current affairs programs on television,

and choose a combination of Hindi and English news and current affairs programs from both Doordarshan and “other channels”.

A new language called Hinglish — a mixture of Hindi and English — is becoming popular in India. Joshi refers to this language as the Bombay Hindi language (Goonasekera & Lee 1998). Channels such as Zee TV present news programs in this new language where a news story is told in both Hindi and English: sometimes even a sentence can have both Hindi and English words so that everybody can understand it. This relaxing of standards to reach a mass audience is one of the surprising outcomes of the recent expansion of television industry in India. Yet Indian viewers still want to watch more of local or regional language news and current affairs programs. This is evident from the fact that channels covering local issues in local languages such as Sun TV in Tamil Nadu and Eenadu TV in Andhra Pradesh have achieved some degree of success against other more popular national channels such as Zee TV and Sony TV (Lahiri 1997). Indian viewers are beginning to trust television as a source of news along with newspapers, which still remains popular.

One of the areas of dissatisfaction with the television industry had always been the technical quality of the programs telecast by the public service broadcaster. Although India has not lagged behind in venturing into satellite technology, during the first three decades of development of television, a number of factors from the quality of equipment used to produce programs to the quality of television sets at the receiving end diminished the entertainment value of television programs. However, with the advent of Star TV channels in 1991 and falling prices of television sets, Indian audiences today enjoy technically superior programming. In the survey, the audience indicate that though they are satisfied with the improvements in Doordarshan’s technical and entertainment quality of programming, they still consider “other channels” to be better.

Overall, urban Indian viewers are more satisfied with television programming at present than five to seven years ago. However, a future potential study could be to gauge the impact of foreign television on the rural population of the country. Because of time and resource constraints, this audience survey had to be restricted to two cities. But the study does allude to the improvements in programming for all viewers as competition from foreign and other cable channels has caused Doordarshan to improve its reach and programming. It could be deduced that as a result, today the Indian rural population is better off than before as they can view better Doordarshan programs. Cable networking has already spread to smaller cities and towns of India, and will soon reach the rural population.

There is no doubt that Doordarshan has a significant role to play in India, particularly in providing information and entertainment to the masses and, representing Indian cultural values (NAMEIA report 1986). The network has to satisfy other social objectives such as disseminating the message of family planning and national integrity (Doordarshan Handbook 1997).

Television audiences across the world not only want to receive important information from their television sets, but also want to be entertained. Indian audiences in that respect are no different. They also want their television to be a window to the world via a variety of news and current affairs programs — local, regional, national and international. In the case of India, it is the other channels including both owned by foreign or Indian private businesses which have provided them with that opportunity. As a result, the national public service broadcaster has improved its performance. On the other hand, the presence of Doordarshan has made other channels Indianise their programs rather than feed the starving Indian audience old Western sitcoms.

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Endnotes

- 1 Doordarshan (roughly translated) means "vision from far".
- 2 All India Radio retains its monopoly as the sole radio network in the country. In 1997 it had 177 broadcasting centres, including 65 local radio stations, covering nearly cent-per-cent of the country's population.
- 3 "Other Channels" refer to all channels broadcasting their programs in India other than Doordarshan channels. Some of these "other channels" are owned by Indians and others by foreigners. However, the common feature among all these channels is that they broadcast their program from foreign soil. There are some local cable channels, covering one or two residential blocks, which telecast programs from within the Indian national boundaries.
- 4 *The Constitution of India* provides for freedom of expression as one of the fundamental rights to which a citizen is entitled — 19 (1) says: "All citizens shall have the right — (a) to freedom of speech and expression." The Supreme Court of India has interpreted this freedom of expression as being inclusive of the freedom of the press (Bhatt 1994).
- 5 The term "intellectual" is synonymous with "elite" in the Western world.
- 6 Apart from Doordarshan channels which largely utilise transponders on INSAT series of satellite, foreign television networks such as Star TV, Sony, Home TV, Sun TV, TNT, CNN, BBC World Service and others use transponders on Asiasat-1, Asiasat-2, PAS-4, IntelSat-703, IntelSat-4 and Gorizont-42 (Doordarshan Handbook, 1997).

- 7 A Hong Kong entrepreneur, Li Kashing, and a regional conglomerate, Hutchinson Whampoa, founded a pan-Asian satellite network STAR TV. STAR TV Services via its three footprints (or the geographic area of coverage) — AsiaSat 1, AsiaSat 2 and Palapa C2 — covers two thirds of Asia. Rupert Murdoch bought a controlling share (64 per cent) in STAR TV in 1993 from Li Kashing.
- 8 STAR TV owns 49.9 per cent of Zee TV network and the rest is owned by a number of non-resident Indians.
- 9 Sony TV does broadcast some English program. The channel is partly owned by a number of film personalities in India.

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