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Competition and television news in India: a content analysis

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Abstract

In India, not unlike some other developing countries, ruling parties have used public service broadcasters to propagate their virtues, adversely affecting the broadcasters' image as a credible news media. The Indian public service broadcaster, Doordarshan, which has been besieged by increased competition and government-imposed demand for self-sufficiency in recent years, continues to struggle to shed its image as a government mouthpiece despite being run by an independent corporation. This article presents a content analysis of news programs broadcast by Doordarshan and a foreign television network, Star News. The study examines the differences and similarities between Doordarshan and Star TV's prime time news programs broadcast at the turn of the century, almost a decade after the advent of commercial television in India broke the public service broadcaster's monopoly in the country.

Contextual background

Indian public service broadcaster Doordarshan had a virtual monopoly in the television market for more than three decades between 1959 and 1990 due to the determination of successive Indian governments to keep the airwaves out of commercial hands. However, advances in satellite technology and its use for mass communication by commercial interests finally reached the Indian sub-continent during the first Gulf war in 1991, when CNN and BBC coverage of the war whet people's appetite for more television. As a result, since 1991 Doordarshan has had to cope with a lack of adequate funding and competition from commercial networks, not unlike its counterparts in the Western world. But Doordarshan has had an additional burden to bear – the perception of lack of credibility, particularly in its news programming, due to government interference in its day-to-day operation.

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Before the advent of cable and satellite television in India in the early 1990s (barring some privately produced news and current affairs programs), the public service broadcaster was dismissed as a government mouthpiece, as “inefficient, amateurish and hegemonic (in) character” (Wildermuth, 2001, p. 149). The lack of credibility was particularly notable because the print media in the country had long established itself as the Fourth Estate. In 1986, an international body, Media Foundation of the Non-Aligned (NAMEIA), appointed by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, criticised Doordarshan for not meeting its “primary purpose” of “development through education, information and enlightenment, to improve the quality of life of the largest masses of the people ...” (NAMEIA, 1986, p. 13). The report stated that “news” could not be used to promote those in power and that Doordarshan or television in India needed “openness” to gain credibility. It advocated 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. (NAMEIA, 1986, p. 25)

An audience survey in a city in India’s south in July 1992 indicated that 90 per cent of television viewers were thoroughly dissatisfied with Doordarshan programming and had switched over to cable TV (Rahim, 1994). The general perception was that Doordarshan was funded by the central government and therefore controlled by it, particularly in news programming (Jayasankar & Monteiro, 1998; Manchanda, 1998; McDonald & Scott, 1991; NAMEIA, 1986; Ninan, 1995; Pendakur & Kapur, 1997; Singhal & Rogers, 1989).

With the expansion of satellite technology in the early 1990s, enterprising Indian cable operators took advantage of the prevailing atmosphere of economic liberalisation in the country and started hooking up homes to their satellite receivers by providing cable television to urban populations. Following the success of a few channels at first, many entrepreneurs from India and abroad launched their own satellite channels, illegally broadcasting programs into Indian homes from foreign soil. By the mid-1990s, the cable and satellite channel market had become crowded with 40-50 channels, most of them focused on the entertainment genre for their programming strategy. Star TV, in which Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation bought a controlling share (64 per cent) in 1993 from Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing, was one of them.

This competition forced Doordarshan to expand its reach quantitatively and qualitatively. It added 17-18 channels to its bouquet of offerings (including regional channels catering to local needs), expanded its terrestrial and satellite

reach to nearly 90 per cent of the country's population and modified its programming structure to include more entertainment. One of the significant changes was in its news and current affairs coverage. The news program format was changed to include extended weather reports, live studio interviews, new newsreaders, on-location reports and use of visuals wherever possible. However, the question remained whether Doordarshan's news had improved sufficiently to satisfy viewers' needs. In a study based on audience interviews, Jayasankar and Monteiro in 1993 noted that the audience saw Doordarshan as state controlled and perceived that it represented the interest of the ruling party. On the other hand, the audience in the same study said news on foreign channels was mostly irrelevant to India (Jayasankar & Monteiro, 1998). In another study that examined the impact of global television on local cultures in 1994, it was found that global (foreign) television's news and information programs were rated better by three-quarters of the audience (Hagiwara, Joshi et al, 1999). Later, in another audience survey, 93 per cent of the respondents said the quality of news programs broadcast by Doordarshan in 1998 had improved compared with 1992, before the spread of cable and satellite channels (Manchanda, 1998).

History

Television came to India thanks to the donation of broadcasting equipment by a multinational company in 1959 (Ninan, 1995). The Indian Government finally caved in to allow television broadcasting in the country in the 1960s, hoping it would have a multiplier effect in educating the masses and lifting them out of illiteracy and poverty. Indian theorists and government officials were attracted to the new concept of "development communication"¹, where a powerful mass communication tool such as television facilitates development by disseminating information, changing attitudes and encouraging national unity. Later, experiments with satellite technology and the ruling party's need to use the medium as a propaganda tool led to its expansion in the country.

The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), implemented by the Indian Space Research Organisation in 1975, offered two satellite supported transmissions a day to 2400 villages in six far-flung states, where community television sets were organised to broadcast programs based on agriculture, news, health and family planning. Analysts differed in their opinions about the success of this project in "development communication". While there was no difference in the knowledge level of people in "television villages" and "control villages", there was evidence that those who viewed the television programs more regularly learnt the most (Chu, Schramm & Schramm, 1991; Ninan, 1995; Rajgopal, 1993).

Critics of development communication theory say that although the emphasis on cultural and psychological factors is important, a low level of develop-

ment can usually be traced to economic and social structural constraints (Chu, Schramm & Schramm, 1991). Within India, too, there was criticism of the way television had developed since its inception in 1959. Asok Mitra, former secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (1966 to 1969), recalled in 1986 how television was considered “essential for accelerating development, modernisation and social change” in the late '60s, and how in reality India had followed the same path as other Third World countries by introducing television in the capital cities, subserving the interest of the ruling elite (NAMEDIA, 1986, p. 96). Mitra, in a submission to NAMEDIA, pointed out that television could help India if policy-makers used it for the benefit of the majority of people by broadcasting instructional-cum-educational programs rather than entertaining the elite (NAMEDIA, 1986).

However, the official view was that the SITE program was a success, and the ruling Congress party soon realised the potential of television as a powerful mass medium. In mid-1975, when the country was placed under a State of Emergency by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the central government in New Delhi used All India Radio and Doordarshan to spread its message and counter bad publicity from the private print media. In this way, post-SITE Doordarshan became a mouthpiece for the government of the day. In 1976, in a bid to popularise television viewing, Doordarshan started broadcasting imported programs such as *I Love Lucy* by accepting advertisements to pay for these programs. In subsequent years, despite accepting the idea of raising revenue from sponsorship and advertising, the Government retained tight control over the information side of programming by producing highly censored and cautious news programs. For more than three decades of its existence, television in India was caught between fulfilling its developmental and educational objectives, and the forces of commercial entertainment. Further, due to government ownership and interference in its programming, it never held much credibility. In a survey in 1987, Singhal found 92 per cent of respondents believed that the political opposition's views were not sufficiently represented on Doordarshan, whereas 85 per cent said it adequately covered government policy news (Singhal & Rogers, 1989).

Competition – news programming as a marketing strategy

There is no doubt India is a huge market for corporations and advertisers, and television provides an excellent opportunity to reach this market. By the mid-1990s, new players in the television industry began to look for an edge over their competitors. News seemed as if it would sell, attracting sufficient viewers to lure advertisers for some of the fledgling nascent players. Doordarshan news coverage lacked credibility, so appeared to be easy to defeat in the viewership numbers game. In addition, television has a special attraction at the time of crisis and in the 1990s Indian politics was going through a tumul-

tuous phase. Third, some commentators point to Indian citizens' "invasive" curiosity about news and information affecting them and their obsession with politics (Mann Singh, 1998; Roy, 1998; Thapar, 1998). Finally, news programming provided new television networks with a chance to get close to India's decision-makers.

Murdoch's Star Plus network also realised the currency of localised news and entertainment programming and launched Zee News – a 24-hour Hindi news channel – in 1995 with Zee Telefilms Limited. However, in 1999 Zee Telefilms Ltd bought out News Corporation's 50 per cent share. In 1998, Star Plus launched another 24-hour news channel – Star News – with the help of NDTV. Star contracted one of the local private producers in New Delhi, NDTV, to produce its news programs in Hindi and English. NDTV, headed by Prannoy Roy, had nearly 10 years of experience in producing news and current affairs programs for Doordarshan. The success of this strategy can be gauged from the fact that Star prime time national news started earning up to 40 per cent of the channel's revenue within the first year (Roy, 1998).

The entry of new players also influenced the nature of news coverage. As *The Economist* noted, competition in television news not only improved the quality of news programming in India, but also had an impact on Indian politics. "The biggest impact is in countries such as India, where news used to be ribbon-cutting exercises by politicians. Competition has made news watchable – even on Doordarshan, the state-owned broadcaster ..." (Stop press, 1998, p. 17). The 1998 election was considered the first "television election" in India, where voters in cities and villages found common ground. In fact, *The Economist* claimed "television pictures of ballot papers strewn around voting booths in constituencies in Bihar led to several repolls" (Stop press, 1998, p. 7). Even the budget coverage in 1998 was a little more "adventurous" (Ninan, 1998). According to Ninan (1998), all existing news channels at the time (Doordarshan, Star, Zee and TVi) experimented with sets, studio colour schemes, graphics, interview styles and line-up of ministers and experts interviewed. Doordarshan joined the race to score with viewers for its election and budget coverage. For the budget: "Doordarshan outdid itself in its range of guests, starting with its overseas hook-up. It naturally got the finance minister first, and it also got the most comprehensive line-up of former finance ministers." (Ninan, 1998)

During the early 1990s, Doordarshan had primarily contracted out special occasion and magazine-style current affairs programs to private producers. Among the more popular programs were India Today's *Newstrack*, Hindustan Times Vision Ltd's *Eyewitness* and NDTV's election analysis and *The World This Week*. In mid-1995, TV Today group produced highly successful Hindi and English news *Aaj Tak* for Doordarshan. However, there were difficulties with Doordarshan's in-house produced news programs. It was expected to produce an increasing number of news bulletins a day to compete with commercial television (Churchill, 1998).

Doordarshan's management also underwent a major change when in 1997 the left-wing government in New Delhi decided to keep its election promise and activated the long-pending Prasar Bharati Act, which facilitated the formation of Prasar Bharati Board. Doordarshan and All India Radio both then became part of this supposedly autonomous board. This in turn raised expectations about the autonomy of Doordarshan and its editorial freedom in covering news and current affairs. Early in 1998, when the researcher spoke to a number of media analysts and media personalities, opinion was still divided about the level of credibility Doordarshan had gained under Prasar Bharati. Viewers in an audience survey in 1998 believed Doordarshan's coverage of news had improved, but many said they wanted further improvements (Manchanda, 1998).

The changes instituted by Doordarshan in the 1990s and the entry of foreign and private television networks to news programming meant the Indian television audience had access to an increased number of news programs by 1999-2000, compared with 1990 when only Doordarshan covered news. But did this increase in the number of news programs mean the audience received unrestricted television news, or was it still censored by the respective television channels? By studying the similarities and differences between news programs broadcast by a public service broadcaster (Doordarshan) and a foreign-owned broadcaster (Star TV)², the content analysis reported here aimed to understand the relationship between television news and the broadcasters' funding source and objectives. The study also looked at the impact of competition and global media on local content in television news.

Method

A content analysis was carried out to investigate the similarities and differences between the news programs broadcast by the national channel DD1 (part of the Doordarshan network) and Star News (which is part of Star Plus network, launched as a 24-hour news channel in 1998). Star News, although not the most popular among the cable and satellite channels for news, was the face of a channel owned by a foreign entity, broadcasting its programs into India since mid-1991. Over the 1990s, it became the benchmark for programming. As TVi senior executive Mahesh Narayan noted, Star Plus had an impact on programming in terms of identifying a need for different kinds of programming: "Software that was better produced; software that didn't look like government hand-out; and software that certainly had better production value and better entertainment value." (Narayan, 1998) Star Plus, along with Zee TV (the Hindi channel on the network), was sensitive to local needs and proved to be the most successful in raising advertising dollars in India. "In 1993, Star TV and Zee TV together had 20 per cent of the total advertising pie of roughly US\$184 million." (Pathania, 1994, p. 2) Although the BBC was the most popular news channel (Rahim, 1994), it was also sometimes criticised for carrying

insensitive news reports due to its foreign base. Star TV tried to overcome this criticism by engaging a prominent private news producer. Pathania notes Star made a concerted effort to be "culturally inoffensive to the host countries in its foot-print" in Asia (Pathania, 1994, p. 4).

Both DD1 and Star News channels broadcast their news programs in the evening between 7pm and 9.30pm. The news programs' length ranged between 20 and 30 minutes. Generally, Hindi and English coverage by each channel was identical, so only English programs were used for the content analysis. Krippendorff defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their context" (1980, p. 21). The content analysis conducted here was aimed at examining the way news was covered by the public service broadcaster in India compared with a foreign channel, although an Indian company in India produced its news program. The foreign ownership factor in the case of Star was expected to be nullified due to its contract with NDTV which retained editorial rights on its production (Bamzai, 1998). Similarly, the issue of government ownership was supposed to have been negated by the formation in late 1997 of the autonomous Prasar Bharati Board, which was expected to manage Doordarshan without government interference.

A constructed week sampling method was used to record 18 days of prime time news programs on DD1 and Star News during a period of one year between December 1999 and November 2000, creating three constructed weeks (except Sundays). The days in the constructed weeks were selected at random from the 12-month period and no two days in a week came from the same month. There were no transcripts available for the newscasts because it is not a common practice in India for television channels to provide data to academic researchers. The unit of analysis for the comparison of the news programs was the news story³. In total 516 news stories, broadcast by Doordarshan and Star News in these three constructed weeks, were recorded and coded for the content analysis. All stories were coded and analysed according to story type, topic, focus, location, length, use of visuals, sources quoted, and whether the story included contextual background and opposition points of view. Holsti Formula was used to measure inter-coder reliability (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). Two days' newscasts were randomly selected and reviewed by two coders including this researcher. In total, the two coders reviewed 55 stories (a little over 10 per cent of total stories coded and analysed). The inter-coder reliability was high and acceptable at 0.9430.

Results: some basic findings

Of the 516 news stories, 255 were from DD1 and 261 from Star News, with an average of 92.36 seconds and 87.40 seconds devoted to each story respec-

tively. Star had more stories read by the “anchor”, whereas Doordarshan had a higher number of stories lasting more than four minutes. For example, in the case of international relations, stories such as Clinton’s visit to India and Vajpayee’s visit to the United States, Doordarshan’s coverage was much longer than average. Some stories lasted as long as seven to eight minutes, including long excerpts of speeches by Vajpayee and Clinton. Nearly 42 per cent of the stories on both channels were packaged, where a reporter prepared the story package. Star had 54 per cent of its stories packaged, while Doordarshan had 29 per cent of its stories packaged. Doordarshan, on the other hand, had 49 per cent of its stories presented as “anchor + vision”, while Star had only about 12.3 per cent of its stories as “anchor + vision”. Being prime-time news programs, both DD1 and Star News had a majority of their coverage as spot news⁴. In all, 89 per cent (459 out of 516) of the stories were spot news items. Both channels on average broadcast one or two news features daily. There were a handful of commentary/analysis pieces (seven on Doordarshan and two on Star News) in the sample newscasts.

In the case of parliament and state assembly coverage, Doordarshan used the footage comparatively more than Star (16 stories to five). Star often had the parliament or state assembly proceedings story read by the anchor, and in this way let viewers know what the minister said. The same was the case with news items such as seminars, rallies and on-location reports. Doordarshan usually sent its camera crew to cover the event, but just did an “anchor + vision” story. Star, on the other hand, had its reporters on location, asking questions. A higher number of news stories on Star (nearly 35 per cent) were primarily sourced through interviews, compared with 15 per cent on Doordarshan. On the other hand, Star had 28 per cent of its news stories taken from news agency reports, whereas 19 per cent of Doordarshan stories came from agencies. Doordarshan had more stories (73.3 per cent) with current footage than Star (63.3 per cent), although the public service broadcaster used it as “wallpaper” with the anchor’s narration rather than converting them into news packages.

Specific research questions

Was there a difference in the way local, regional, national and international news⁵ events were covered by each? DD1 and Star news programs are produced in New Delhi; thus in the content analysis “local” news stories meant stories about New Delhi. The percentage of “local” news stories on both channels was insignificant. However, Star covered more “regional” stories (28.3 per cent) than Doordarshan (23.1 per cent). It should be noted that Doordarshan does produce separate regional news bulletins for its regional channels, although this fragmentation of news into national and regional bulletins reduces the amount of information available to Doordarshan viewers across the country about other Indians living in different regions/states⁶.

Coverage of “national” news events was comparable in terms of the percentage of news stories of national importance covered by both channels. However, Doordarshan had relatively more “international” stories (39.2 per cent) than Star (34.1 per cent). The nature of this coverage differed, as is evident in the way the Israel and Palestine peace agreement on October 17, 2000, was covered. Doordarshan decided to do several lead reports on the issue. The “spot” news about the peace agreement was followed by a statement by Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, stating that both sides were keen to have India mediate in the peace process. This followed a live studio interview with an Indian academic about the implications of the broad agreement to end violence. These detailed reports lasted for more than seven minutes. On the other hand, Star led with domestic news stories and covered the Middle East peace agreement at number four, a story lasting for a little over two minutes including the “spot news” story and an analysis of the situation on the ground by the reporter. The main difference between these two channels was the way studio interviews were carried out by the respective anchors: the Star TV anchor/reporter reacted to what was being said in response and asked questions more rapidly, whereas the Doordarshan anchor seemed to allow the interviewee to give uninterrupted and rather long-winded answers.

What was the mix of topics covered by each channel? Overall, nearly 40 per cent of the stories were devoted to “politics”. Doordarshan covered more political stories (45.5 per cent) than Star (34.9 per cent), whereas Star covered more sports stories (19.5 per cent) than Doordarshan (10.6 per cent). Doordarshan’s and Star’s coverage of Indian social and cultural issues was comparable. Each bulletin on both channels on average included two stories about Indian society, its achievements and shortcomings. About 14-15 per cent of stories were based on social and cultural issues. The difference in the nature of stories was that on May 11, 2000, Star covered two social issues – a bogus employment agency operating in New Delhi and a dowry death court verdict after 21 years, whereas Doordarshan, as the public service broadcaster, covered India’s first nuclear test anniversary along with a live studio interview with an expert.

As expected, Doordarshan relied more on government sources for its news stories (46.7 per cent of the stories) than Star (31.4 per cent), which gave a little more prominence to non-political groups such as unions, business entities and community groups (for 36.4 per cent of the stories). It is interesting to note that both Doordarshan and Star ignored the main opposition party and to a lesser extent other political parties⁷. Similarly, more than 44.7 per cent of stories on Doordarshan led with information provided by official sources, as against Star, which had about 28 per cent of stories leading with official information.

Star preferred to lead with stories generated by non-political parties or groups for nearly 40 per cent of the stories compared with about 25 per cent of the stories on Doordarshan. Again, this shows a clear distinction between

Doordarshan's and Star's news coverage. For example, on January 24, 2000, Doordarshan and Star both led with a story about a UP state electricity board employees' strike against privatisation and other state electricity board employees joining the strike in "sympathy" (solidarity) on the day. Doordarshan restricted itself to the "spot news" event of the strike, including one on-camera interview with the Power Minister where he was quoted as saying that the "sympathy" strike did not have an impact. Star interviewed a representative from the regional power engineers' association and the Power Minister. The story carried contradictory views from the minister and the on-location reporters about the impact of the "sympathy" strike.

There does not appear to be any particular political bias in the way Doordarshan and Star covered political stories. In most cases Doordarshan was meticulous about including the opposition's point of view, although for the overwhelming majority of stories neither channel sought any opposite view or counter-argument. Star included non-political groups or associations' point of view more often than those of opposition political parties.

Discussion: differences and similarities

The basic research question was to determine if there was a difference in the way a public service broadcaster and a foreign channel in India covered news. This study detected a number of differences in news coverage on DD1 and Star News, including:

- ♦ The kinds of stories covered (Star had more variety of stories, including sports stories);
- ♦ Duration of specific stories of national importance (on occasion Doordarshan devoted nearly half the newscast to one "national interest" topic);
- ♦ Sources quoted in the stories (Doordarshan relied on and led with government/official sources more often than Star, which generally sought non-political groups' views);
- ♦ Presentation of stories (Doordarshan had fewer packaged stories presented by its field reporters, and it also had fewer feature stories).

The content analysis found that although Doordarshan had plenty of current footage, it did not use this for reporter-presented story packages as Star did. This may have been due to a lack of understanding of the power of visuals and their appropriate presentation in television news (pointing to a lack of professional training) and a culture of "playing it safe" as Wildermuth suggests. In another study of news programs broadcast on Doordarshan and Star News (in January 1999 and February 2000), Wildermuth attributes the imageless news portrayal on Doordarshan was due to the state broadcaster's news department being left without "an elaborated, journalistic and audiovisual strategy" and "its

staff, instead of being encouraged to explore the medium's intrinsic qualities – to challenge and transcend an established frame of orientation – was socialised to a working culture where 'playing it safe' seems to be the foremost guiding principle" (Wildermuth, 2001, p. 168).

Surprisingly, the current news analysis also found that both Star and Doordarshan ignored the main opposition party, Congress, in their news coverage. There were few stories which included the opposition party or other political or non-political parties' views on issues affecting the population in general. In most cases, policy announcements or press briefings were covered as just that. Neither channel made an effort to seek other points of view on most subjects. In all, less than 11.4 per cent in the case of Doordarshan and less than 21.1 per cent in the case of Star had any counter/other point of view in a news story. Only 14 stories in the entire sample of 516 news stories had more than one source appearing on camera.

In contrast, whenever Doordarshan covered a news story affecting other political parties, it gave all parties a say on camera – for example, the general strike against anti-poor policies on May 11, 2000. But such stories were few and far between. Nearly 89 per cent of the stories on Doordarshan did not have opposite or counter views. Star had a handful of stories covering both sides of politics, mainly regional politics where it included both the central government and regional parties' points of views. However, in stories to do with social issues or affecting a particular segment of the population such as bank employees, it quoted and led with the union or employee association's views. This lack of air-time for the main opposition political party or parties could again be due to a culture of covering news as "spot" news and "playing it safe" – without asking the opposition to respond to a situation or blaming a minister or upsetting the party in power. Star News did appear to cover news stories in a more balanced way by asking the questions Doordarshan reporters did not ask and by leading with non-political groups' views. Overall, it appears that a further "cultural" shift is required for television news journalists to ask more "direct" questions of those in power and provide better representation to all political and non-political parties.

Conclusion

The key differences between the prime-time news programs broadcast by Doordarshan and Star over the period of a year between December 1999 and November 2000 can be traced back to differences in each channel's ownership, funding sources and objectives. Star News, which needed to be successful and deliver audiences to its advertisers, was more entertaining and varied in its coverage, and included on-location reporters, features on social and economic issues, and sports stories. Doordarshan, on the other hand, struggled to maintain credibility, oscillating between professional news coverage and being a

mouthpiece for government. On the issue of perceived national importance, Doordarshan covered some events at great length (nearly half the newscast devoted to one news event). It ignored the opportunity to convert current footage of events into packaged stories where a reporter presented the news, unlike Star. But, neither Doordarshan nor Star seemed to want to upset the ruling party, steering clear of the main opposition party's point of view. Both channels resisted the temptation to name or accuse any minister or top bureaucrat of poor policies or their implementation; instead the broadcasters focused on the problem of what was wrong in society. However, by the end of 2000 Doordarshan had moved on from being "official" and "amateurish" to showing some signs of professionalism. Its newscasts included some in-depth reports; on-location reports and live studio interviews. On the other hand, Star focused on what non-political groups or individuals had to say.

Competition from private channels has made Doordarshan more sensitive to audience needs and demands. First, by employing private companies to produce alternative news programs for its Metro channel, then later by changing its in-house news anchors, presentation style and bold experiments with a handful of political events such as covering the union budget in 1998 or Indo-US relations during the respective heads of states visits in 2000. But it was no match for the commercially sponsored, professionally delivered news programs on Star. NDTV, which retained editorial control of its programs broadcast on Star News, perhaps employed the best of Indian television journalists in the country who were maturing with time and experience, and setting new standards in television journalism in India. They were groomed to present a Westernised look of intelligent, knowledgeable and courageous journalists asking the right questions.

Debate about effectiveness of television as a mass communication and development tool has moved on to the impact of global media on local content. There is no doubt Rupert Murdoch understands that television programming is a cultural product which has to be localised for local audiences. The mix-and-match between cheap imported programs and locally produced programs is a fine balance for a foreign television channel trying to get a foothold in a new market. Over the 1990s, Star learnt its lessons and kept moving towards more localised programming to stay popular among Indian cable and satellite homes and brand advertisers. Robertson describes this process of corporations producing products for global markets by adapting to local conditions as universalisation and particularisation. "To a considerable extent micro-marketing – or in the more comprehensive phrase, glocalisation, involves the construction of increasingly differentiated consumers ..." (Robertson, 1995, p. 29) Star's strategy of contracting out news to a local producer prevented the nationalist movement from accusing it of misrepresenting India to itself. NDTV's proprietors and its Indian journalists, although westernised in their presentation techniques, could not be accused of being insensitive to local issues and culture.

Competition from global media players has forced the central government to loosen its grip on Doordarshan programming. Over the past few years, the Prasar Bharati Board has been making attempts to professionalise the news department and its production. This change has taken the public service broadcaster closer to its objective of “safeguarding the citizen’s right to be informed freely, truthfully and objectively on all matters of public interest, national or international, and presenting a fair and balanced flow of information including contrasting views without advocating any opinion or ideology of its own” (Prasar Bharati Act 1990, 2000, p. 12). This change has also taken Doordarshan closer to one of its social objectives – “to act as a catalyst for social change” and fulfil its role as the development tool to educate and inform the masses (Doordarshan, 1997, p. 23).

Broadly, this freeing-up of television news from the clutches of a monopoly, in this case a public service broadcaster, is part of the economic liberalisation process launched in the early '90s. Doordarshan has taken up the challenge of being but one player in a crowded television market. Though it has embraced the devil of commercialisation, it now has a new vigour as an increasingly modern organisation. This is good news for a significant number of Indian television viewers who do not have access to cable service and are restricted to Doordarshan channels for their view of the nation and the world.

Notes

1. Development communication refers to the use of communication in order to further development. Here, “development” is described as the process which induces both social and material advancement for the majority of the people (Singhal & Rogers, 1989).
2. Doordarshan, essentially a terrestrial network, has an advantage over cable and satellite channels. It reaches nearly 90 per cent of the Indian population, whereas foreign channels such as Star Plus and local satellite channels such as Sony and Zee TV reach approximately 40 per cent of the population, who pay a nominal subscription fee for cable connection every month. According to a Web portal providing news and views about the Indian television industry, by the end of 1999 there were approximately 70 million television homes in India, which translated to about 400 million individuals with access to television. The website also stated that by October 1999 there were approximately 24 million cable and satellite homes, which translated to around 150 million viewers

(<http://www.indiantelevision.com>). According to Doordarshan's annual report, it had about 362 million viewers as opposed to 100 million viewers for cable and satellite channels in 2000 (<http://www.ddindia.com>).

3. A news story was defined as a topic introduced by the anchor and the report or vision that followed, along with the anchor's concluding remarks on the topic. However, if the location of the story changed or the anchor introduced the topic with a different angle, it was considered to be a separate story.

4. In the content analysis: (a) a spot news story is defined as a story which is current, taking place now, today or something that happened yesterday; (b) a feature is defined as a story covering more than spot news, providing a broader picture on an issue; (c) a commentary/news analysis story is one where the correspondent or an expert provides her/his opinion about the implications of an event. This includes a live or recorded interview with one or more experts.

5. In the content analysis: (a) a local story means pertaining to New Delhi only, as the two news bulletins compared in this study were produced in New Delhi; (b) a regional story is about any other Indian state or territory. A regional news story could cover more than one state or territory; (c) a national story is on an issue affecting the nation as a whole. This includes an issue being covered in any Indian state or territory. The categorisation of "national" topic is to do with the nature of the story rather than location; (d) an international story pertains to one or more international communities or countries. This also includes stories where one party is India as a nation. Therefore, a Test match between India and Australia is an international sports story, similar to a story related to foreign affairs where the relationship between India and Pakistan would be an "international" story.

6. In 2000, Indian political territory was divided into 28 states and 7 union territories.

7. India has a multi-party democracy system. In the 1990s, generally the central government in New Delhi has had to be formed by an alliance between two or more parties.

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