UNIT 9: NEWS CHANNELS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- explain the growth of privates news channels in India
- explain the basic differences of news presentation in Doordarshan and private channels
- describe the new trends of news presentation in private channels

9.2 INTRODUCTION

News in India, until a few years back was the sole domain of Doordarshan. Infact, it was only in the mid 1990's that private channels started producing and presenting news. After that things progressed in quick succession and soon we had a large number of news channels churning out news round the clock.

In this unit we will discuss about the news production in Doordarshan and in private channels. We will also discuss about the growth of private channels in India and the evolution and changing trends of news production and presentation, particularly how the advent of private news channels has changed the entire face of news in our country.

We hope this unit will serve to deepen your understanding the scenario of Television news in our country.

9.3 NEWS IN DD WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAMESE NEWS

In Doordarshan, news is produced both at the National level and at the regional level. Doordarshan has a 24 hour dedicated news channel known as DD News. It produces news in two languages – English and Hindi. Initially news used to be part of DD-1, Doordarshan's national network only. But in view of the growth of a large number of private news channels, in a meeting held on 3 October 2003, the Union cabinet approved the proposal to convert the DD Metro to DD news. Consequent to these decisions, DD-News channel was launched on 3 November 2003. This channel contains round the clock news bulletins in Hindi/ English. These bulletins are also telecast twice a day on the National Network of DD National.

The regional language news bulletins are produced by the Regional News Units (RNUs) which are attached to the Regional Kendras. The Regional Language Satellite Services and Regional State Networks broadcast wide spectrum of news and current affairs programmes to communicate with the people in their own language. News in regional languages are available in the respective states, terrestrially during the regional window of DD National and round the clock on the Regional Language Satellite Channels across the country, namely DD Bengali, DD Oriya, DD Podhigai, DD Chandana, DD Gujarati, DD Punjabi , DD Sahyadri, DD Kashmir, DD Saptagiri, DD Malayalam, and DD North East.

DD North East Channel is a composite satellite television service for the North Eastern states broadcasting programmes in Assamese, English and other languages and dialects of the North East. The channel broadcasts news in regional languages in addition to entertainment serials, informative programmes, social programmes, current affairs, art and culture. The programmes are produced at Doordarshan studios in Guwahati, Agartala, Kohima, Imphal, Silchar, Dibrugarh, Tura, Aizawl, Itanagar and Shillong.

There are 12 programme production Centres of Doordarshan in the North-East. Television studios have been established in the capital cities of all the seven states of Meghalaya, Manipur. Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. There are additional TV centres at Tura in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya and also at Dibrugarh and Silchar in Assam.

All the transmitters in the North East relay a composite programme originated from Guwahati which includes a news bulletin in English and a composite programme of interest to the people of all the North Eastern states. Satelite uplinking facilities have also been established in all the capital stations of the North East to facilitate feeding of news and other topical programmes to Guwahati and Delhi. A dedicated Digital Satellite News Gathering System (DSNG), including hi-tech gadgets like Satellite Phones and Video Phones is available for DD Kendras in Shillong, Imphal, Kohima, Itanagar, Agartala, and Aizwal.

In addition to their regional bulletins, the Regional News Units (RNUs) of Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Lucknow, Jaipur and Patna produce news bulletins for the DD News channel for insertion in Metro Scan and State Scan and Rajyon Se Samachar.

DD Kendra Guwahati broadcasts Assamese news twice a day- once in the morning at 9 AM for five minutes on North East Channel and again in the evening at 7 PM for 15 minutes each on DD 1 and North East Channel. These bulletins give extensive coverage to all important news events that taking place in the state and the region.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. Which channel of Doordarshan was converted to DD news in 2003?

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Q.2. Fill in the blanks :-

a. The regional language news bulletins are produced by the

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b. .....is a composite satellite television service for the North Eastern states broadcasting programmes in Assamese, English and other languages and dialects of the North East.

c. DSNG stands for .....

9.4 GROWTH OF PRIVATE TV NEWS CHANNELS

News has become the new entertainment in the present times and there is stiff competition between the different television channels to attract the attention of the viewers. So popular is news now that all major television broadcasters are including at least one news channel to their bouquet. But producing programmes for telecast round the clock is not easy. Therefore, 24hrs news channels often cover all the incidents irrespective of position, location and time. This has resulted not only in changing the concept of news on Indian television but has also changed the news formats. As already mentioned, before 1990s, Doordarshan had monopolized newscast on Indian television and often turned the news programs into a drab exercise. But the private news channels have brought in a welcome change. The strong point of all today's news bulletins is their topicality, objectivity, glossy editing and high-quality visuals. This has of course, not come without its share of criticisms, particularly for reducing news into entertainment and for violating ethical issues. But all said and done, news has traveled a long way from the DD era. From Local events to International events, breaking news to news analysis, television soap to page3 news, every happening comes under purview of news. As a public broadcaster, Doordarshan had presented and still presents news in a naturalized manner. Controversial issues are mostly concealed. These however, are not matters of concern for Private channels.

The first ever news programme to be produced by a private channel was 'The World This Week' produced by New Delhi Television (NDTV) in 1988. At that time this was the only programme made in India, which looked out at the rest of the world. The World This Week became instantly popular. It succeeded in providing the kind of news content which regular DD news failed to do. Then in 1989, NDTV produced India's first live televised coverage of the country's general elections. The critical and commercial success of the coverage set a new standard for Indian television.

From the 1990s, things started taking a dramatic turn. Doordarshan news started facing stiff competition from international channels like BBC and CNN. To counter that, it even sold some slots for news programme under

sponsored category. And in February 1995, NDTV became the country's first private producer of the national news, which was aired on Doordarshan. The programme which was named 'News Tonight' set completely new trends for Indian television because of its on-the-spot reporting with pertinent visuals which has now become very common for any news channel. Then came the 20 minute Hindi current affairs programme 'Aaj tak' which was produced by TV Today Network for DD Metro channel. The sign-up message "Ye Thi Khabar Aaj Tak, Intizar. Kijiye Kal Tak" arrested the audience's attention immediately and the programme became popular for its comprehensive coverage and unique style of presentation by Late S. P. Singh. Inspired by this success, in 2000, TV Today group launched the 24-hr Hindi news channel by the same name 'Aaj Tak'. Also very popular were Nalini Singh's five-minute fast paced, condensed daily news capsule Ankhon Dekhi, TV Today Network's Business Aaj Tak and Newstrack which were aired on the Metro channel of Doordarshan.

During this time satellite channels concentrated on entertainment programmes for their respective channels. Doordarshan still ruled the most wanted area 'news'. For televised news, viewers had only a few options to choose from like Dordarshan, BBC or CNN. But slowly things began to change. Zee TV then emerged as a major player in this scenario in 1995 by launching the exclusive news channel Zee news. This News and current affairs channel revolutionized the way news was delivered to the viewers. Next came the Murdoch-owned Star News in 1998. Star made a contract of five year with Prannoy Roy-owned NDTV (New Delhi Television) to provide news content for this news channel. Star News and Zee New's untiring and exhaustive coverage of the Kargil war took news coverage to completely new heights and redefined the concept of wartime journalism. Witnessing war live was completely unheard of earlier in our country and an unprecedented wave of patriotism swept across the country. On expiry of NDTV's five years contract with Star Group, NDTV launched its own news channels NDTV 24x7 in English and NDTV India in Hindi. These news channels made news available to the viewers whenever and wherever they wanted. Then came the 24-hour national Hindi news channel, Sahara Samay, launched by 'Sahara India Parivar' in 2003. It was the first ever city-centric satellite news channels covering 31 cities in India with their own city

news bulletins. Jagran TV Pvt Limited's news channel, Channel 7 then up-linked to the air on 27 March 2005. The channel has been set up to cater to the vast Hindi-speaking audiences. A lot of other news channels followed in quick succession. Today there are a number of exclusive news channels, prominent among them are Timesnow (Times of India group), CNN-IBN, INX news, Focus TV etc.

The first and foremost point of difference between news in these private channels and news on Doordarshan is that news in Doordarshan is basically information and news in private channels is news + entertainment. This is because profit making is the main motive of the private channels and therefore have to constantly look to woo audiences by the presenting attractive programme content. This is done by presenting news in a more glamourous way – smart, attractive news readers, impressive studios, glossy editing and hi-tech graphics and often by resorting to sensationalism. Doordarshan on the other hand does not use these tactics much, basically for two reasons. First, because it does not need to. Doordarshan in terms of reach is much more widespread than any other channel, and therefore enjoys a definite monopoly. Second, being the public broadcaster, it is expected to maintain certain standards of ethics. Therefore, news on Doordarshan is more sober and mainly seeks to inform. Entertainment comes later.

News is no more confined to news bulletins of the traditional type. It is supplemented with panel discussions, debates and analysis by experts. Important events are covered live and round the clock. Perhaps there can be no better example than the coverage of the terror attack in Mumbai in December 2008. News channels covered the event live round the clock continuously for _____hours, without break. The newest trend in private TV news channels today is that of citizen journalism. Ordinary people are encouraged to bring to notice, issues that they feel should be taken up by the media and report on them. This is indeed bringing the audiences closer to the channel by increasing scope for feedback and direct audience participation.

One important change in todays TV News reporting is the advent of convergent technology and backpack journalism. The basic premise of

journalism of any kind is exclusivity. This exclusivity is getting lost in the race for breaking news.

The backpack journalist, without depending on an elaborate set-up can single-handedly shoot, write the narrative, edit the footage, add a music track, encode the video on a laptop and send the edited footage to the satellite. This can now be done without using an OB Van. A simple good quality USB Modem or Data card can do the job. Many reporters are known to do it regularly.

The second problem in today's TV Reportage could be that of 'herding' mentality of the reporters. The sharing of footage at the end of a long night between reporters and camera persons of various channels are the reason why we see the same 'breaking news' with the same footage across several channels while surfing to find an exclusive story.

To understand this phenomenon, one will have to dig deeper into the functioning of the TV Channels and also delve deeper into the field of the commerce of Television. It is not enough to blatantly criticize the TV Channels for shoddy coverage of news. The business of media should be understood to grasp the reasons for these changes that are taking place.

The changes in the TV industry are not just functional, but also technological and structural too. A media student should further read literature on the business of media, media economics and electronic media criticism to enhance the knowledge of the industry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3. Name the first programme to be produced by a private production house. Name the production house and the year of production.

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Q.4. Name the first private producer of the national news, which was aired on Doordarshan.

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Q.5. Nalini Singh is very well known for her five-minute fast paced, condensed daily news capsule. What is the name of this news capsule?

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Q.6. What is the main difference between news in Doordarshan and in private channels?

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Q.7. Star News and Zee New's untiring and exhaustive coverage of a war took news coverage to completely new heights and redefined the concept of wartime journalism. Name the war.

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9.5 LET US SUM UP

1. In Doordarshan, news is produced both at the National level and at the regional level. Doordarshan has a 24 dedicated news channel known as DD News. It produces news in two languages – English and Hindi.
2. The regional language news bulletins are produced by the Regional News Units (RNUs) which are attached to the Regional Kendras. The Regional Language Satellite Services and Regional State Networks broadcast wide spectrum of news and current affairs programmes to communicate with the people in their own language.
3. In addition to their regional bulletins, the Regional News Units (RNUs) of Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Lucknow, Jaipur and Patna produce news bulletins for the DD News channel for insertion in Metro Scan and State Scan and Rajyon Se Samachar.
4. From the 1990s, things started taking a dramatic turn. Doordarshan news started facing stiff competition from international channels

like BBC and CNN. To counter that, it even sold some slots for news programme under sponsored category.

5. News is no more confined to news bulletins of the traditional type. It is supplemented with panel discussions, debates and analysis by experts. Important events are covered live and round the clock.

9.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q. No. 1 : DD Metro

Ans. to Q. No. 2 : a. Regional News Units
b. DD North East Channel
c. Digital News Gathering System

Ans. to Q. No.3 : The first ever news programme to be produced by a private production house was 'The World This Week'. It was produced by New Delhi Television (NDTV) in 1988.

Ans. to Q. No. 4 : NDTV was the country's first private producer of the national news, which was aired on Doordarshan.

Ans. to Q. No. 5 : Ankhon Dekhi

Ans. to Q. No.6 : The most important point of difference between news in these private channels and news on Doordarshan is that news in Doordarshan is information and news in private channels is information + entertainment.

Ans. to Q. No.7 : Kargil war

9.7 FURTHER READING

1. Kumar, Keval J (2012) Mass Communication in India. Mumbai : Jaico Publishing House.
2. Ninan, Sevanti (1995) Through the Magic Window : television and change in India. Penguin Books.
3. Luthra, H.R (1986) Indian Broadcasting, New Delhi : Publications Division.
4. Orlik, Peter B. (2009) Electronic Media Criticism. New York : Routledge

9.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What factors came together to promote the development of news channels in India?
2. What is the scope of television news in India?
3. Private channels have reduced the audience share of Doordarshan news. Do you agree? If so why?
4. News is no more information only. It has become infotainment. Explain.