

Cable Television Watching Habits of the Youth in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

With the expansion of Cable Television service to much of the nation over the past six years, concern has grown about the Cable TV watching habits of the youth in Pakistan. This study is aimed at collecting precise data to analyze the "opinion", preferences and requirements of the youth in Lahore regarding their Cable TV watching habits. The results can be generalized over the young population of Pakistan. For this purpose, students of both genders of different colleges and universities have been contacted so that people belonging to all sections of the society can be reached. From the 300 respondents in totality the results show that young people only acquire entertainment from the cable TV and not any productive motive is behind the reason of "liking" cable TV, yet they wish to have access to only those selected channels that do not promote immorality and untraditional indecency.

INTRODUCTION

Cable Television seems to have become an essential ingredient in the relationship between media and society. Although this relationship is yet confined to the viewership of the television screen, it has become quite a debatable and researchable issue in the media circles. This study, related to the effects of the cable system is nonetheless an effort on the same axis to determine what the young viewers of the cable TV (college and university students) opine about the prevailing system, services and channels.

Aimed at searching the mental set of the youngsters in Lahore, this research paper deals with various areas of concern regarding the cable TV viewership. This study has been carried out to explore the

extent of popularity and accessibility of cable television amongst youngsters with special reference to a comparison made between availability of foreign channels and Pakistani channels shown on cable television. To make this study related to the social conditions existing in the Pakistani society, this is an empirical effort to learn why cable television is popular. It also determines why it is preferable if so; due to what psychological reasons/needs do young people have such preferences and due to what kind of programmes do they define their preferences.

Most importantly though, it has also been carried out to mark the problems and opinions of the public. This shall also help organize in a proper way: "What does the youth want?" Since this seems to be the dilemma of the viewership issue of television in all circles of media studies, this study provides details about the actual preferences and demands of the public with reference to the cable television programmes. It also gives a descriptive study of what NOT the people want. This has been particularly determined via questions especially one asking the respondents to list their preferences on a scale of 1 to 6.

Background

Cable Television, also called CABLEVISION, according to Encyclopedia Britannica (1986), is "a system that distributes television signals by means of coaxial cables. Such systems originated in the United States in the early 1950's and were designed to improve reception of commercial network broadcasts in remote and hilly areas. (p. 706)

According to Vohra* in an interview, "In June 2000, when the government legalized the cable system, the aims that the PTA (Pakistan Telecommunications Authority) had in mind were as follows: to fully encourage smooth flow of information, knowledge, education and constructive entertainment programs for the general

* Naseem Vohra, Director, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, Punjab Region, Lahore.

public.” These are all productive and purposive elements that the cable system presently working seems to be devoid of.

Yet, being acceptable to the audiences in particular and the masses in general, the cable system has generated very confusing details about the requirements, needs and preferences of the people. (Zia; 2002: 4) Therefore, this research is aimed at finding answers to the questions arising due to these confusions as well as giving a detailed and scientific exploration of the reality existing in the minds of the youth in Pakistan with reference to cable watching.

In Pakistan, Cable Television (CTV) was initiated from Karachi in 1980 by small entrepreneurs who had setup a small control room in basement of an apartment block, wired to each apartment in the building. Although this system was designed to show English and Indian movies then, the fact remains that till now, it is the medium of films that is most attractive for the cable viewers. In light of this concern, it is very important to notice the viewership habits of the youngsters. This can help us to notify the problematic areas in this regard so that proper policies and limitations can be formulated for the cable viewing of youth.

This study also provides an insight to suggest what scope/future the cable TV has in Pakistan in light of the responses of the respondents. Lastly but effectively, it determines the services of the cable service providers and cable operators; about the service, the payments and system of payments. Last but not the least, this study can provide help to bodies like PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Authority) to formulate their policies accordingly.

Objectives

The objectives of carrying out this research can be listed out as follows:

1. To find out the accessibility and popularity of cable television amongst young people.

2. To identify the reasons of watching Cable Television.
3. To determine the needs and preferences of the Pakistani youth regarding cable channels and programmes.
4. To empirically solve the myth: "What is the public demand".
5. To analyze the services of the cable operators.
6. To provide helpful data to PEMRA in order to organize their policies

After going through the available literature, the researcher found that a number of researches have been conducted throughout the world regarding Cable Television. But in Pakistan, this is a relatively new topic. Aftab Association, a private research organization did a study three years ago (in 1999) regarding cable, for Pakistan Advertisers Association. The Universe of this study was only Karachi-based. Though, their findings were not available because they refused to disclose them publicly. (Zia; 2002: 37)

The related literature that the researcher has found appropriate to be mentioned in here is a paper written by Zia, (2003) and published in the Report of a seminar held on the topic, "Cable Television: A Vision for the Future," March 17, 2003 by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). The study shows, "The consumption pattern reveals a very alarming situation for the Pakistani society. Cable TV is ruining tradition, spreading vulgarity and wasting precious time of our youth while the main function of providing constructive entertainment is altogether missing. Awareness regarding potential of CTV in constructive role for society is totally over looked. Proper policy is required to be devised to utilize CTV for productive and positive role in society."

An M. Phil Thesis titled "Cable TV in Pakistan: Development, Usage, Prospects and Dilemmas in a time period of 1998-2001", completed at the Department of Mass Communication, University of the Punjab, Lahore, conducted by Zia in the year 2002 concludes that "...there are very confusing prospects in the society about cable TV." The researcher has written that since the services that cable TV can provide to the society go far beyond television

viewing. The cable can provide Telephoning facility; house Security system, Education, Interactive Television and Cable Internet to the society. But till 2003, no efforts had been made to carry out any of the above-mentioned functions. "PTA did not have proper system to perform activities of regularizing the rules and hence police force had to be involved." However in May 2003 Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) took the charge of Cable Television Operations and formulated its policy and code of conduct.

Sinichi Shimizu (1993) in a research report concludes that MTV programmes telecast on STAR TV are changing the entire music scene in Asia. Multinational rock music or world music is becoming the mainstream popular music among the youth in Asia, while the traditional style is becoming obscure and obsolete. Although on the other hand, Bukhari (2002: 67) concludes that the youth is getting liberated ideas regarding the placement and position of women in the society. Fatima (2000: 60) suggests through research that TV has a long-term effect on people's thinking. So instead of glamorization, portrayal of crime and commercialization, positive trends need to be introduced on the TV channels in order to save our values.

While Atkin and LaRose (1991) in a research concluded that general viewership of cable TV is higher among larger, younger, non-white families. Chaudhry A. W. has criticized that cable TV in Pakistan has already taken children in its grip. Beginning with the more innocuous looking Cartoon Network, they can choose from a wide selection of Indian movies on most of the channels like ZEE Cinema, Sony, Star Plus, and Star Movies. Parents are worried that at this rate, their children will become completely obsessed with watching TV instead of utilizing their time in studies or spending it in the playground.

Shariffadin (1995) in his research looks at some of the major economic, cultural and social issues faced by the developing countries arising from the new technology. He concludes in his study that the new communication era should not be perceived as

purely technological phenomenon. Its ultimate impact is social and cultural, although technological advancement is the key enabler. This new era invites a change in social and cultural patterns. While according to Zohoori (1988), children and adolescents are the ones that are mostly prone to get acculturated by the television messages as they lack in the ability to evaluate messages.

After mentioning all this existing literature, the researcher has reached this point that the youth is very vulnerable to change of attitudes through the media messages. Hence, it is important to mention that this study is going to measure the effects of the programmes viewed by the consumers as well as to determine the opinions of seasoned cable viewers about the preferences and choices that they have. For this purpose, the youth has been questioned and their responses have been critically analyzed.

Methodology

The method that has been used to carry out this research is Survey. This survey has been carried out in the general population of Lahore city. For this purpose, the Population size that has been determined is spread generally as the “Youth of Lahore.”

To further classify this population, the technique of Simple Random Sampling has been used. This is, to select students from a large body of population available to the researcher. Since the researcher is looking for respondents with Cable TV connections and a certain type therefore purposive sampling was followed. The total number of respondents for this research is 300. This number should be sufficient for calculations of percentages. These include both Male and Female students. The students are belonging only to the College and Universities. These are Lahore College for Women University, Kinnaird College for Girls, University of the Punjab, Government College University, APWA College for Women, Forman Christian College Lahore.

The Unit of Research that has been used for the research is questionnaire. The questionnaire has been formulated upon a technique of multiple-choice questions. Yet, keeping in mind the requirement of the study, options for “Other” have also been inserted in the questions so that the respondents can also list any other priority missing from the questionnaire.

Findings

In light of the survey conducted within the sample under study, the following results were gathered and chalked out as the findings:

The findings clearly indicate that a large majority (85%) of the college and university students have their own access to the cable TV. They watch programmes regularly on the cable network. It is also important to mention that most of the 15% of students who do not watch cable TV regularly are hostel-residents, thus not having access to the cable TV in their hostels. 90% of the sample selected has access to a personal cable connection. This shows the popularity of the cable television. A vast majority of the youngsters 62% spend 3-4 hours daily to watch Cable Television programmes and they preferably watch Cable TV from 8 pm to 2 am.

As is illustrated through the table no. 1, a large majority of respondents in Lahore have access to the cable television via the services of the World Call Cable Services Providers, hence, making it the most popular Service provider. The findings The largest portion of the sample under study (39%) only watches cable television for the sake of entertainment. After that, the second major reason for which the youngsters prefer to watch cable television is for Leisure (18%). Other productive reasons such as General information, Practical Information, Religion, Sports and Current Affairs Programmes did not receive a share more than 1%, 2% or at the greatest a mere 5% of responses. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the student sample under study has reported to watch foreign channels much more frequently and with interest than the Pakistani channels.

The findings revealed that a large part of the young population (76%) has a strong tilt towards watching foreign channels with more interest. There is a slight difference between the preferences for watching programmes in a linguistic way, while it has already been proven that students prefer to watch foreign channels instead of Pakistani channels. But if the language that the majority prefers is Urdu, the respondents mostly like to watch Indian channels instead of Pakistani channels. While the larger side of population regarding this question: the English language programmes are liked by a large majority of the population: 52.3%. The major reason for watching cable TV is Entertainment. And the second most voted option is that youngsters believe that they get their thoughts expressed via the Cable TV programmes. Somehow, the youngsters also appear interested in International Information (18%). The youngsters who seem to be dissatisfied with the programme of the cable TV have listed the reasons as, most importantly, the spreading of immoral values that can be damaging for the youth. This shows that the youth does have a realization and understanding of what is wrong and what is right.

Secondly, they seem concerned about the situation of Sub-Standard programmes that are shown on cable TV. The preference most opted for is Films (16%). This can be connected back to the Question No. 5 where mostly youngsters have shown preference for Foreign Channels. And this is also in connection with Question No. 6 where mostly they have opted for Urdu Language programmes, showing an absolute tilt towards watching films. All the 300 respondents listed only two preferences: Informative Programmes by 64% youngsters and Entertaining Programmes by 36% people.

The satisfaction rate both in regard to the Programmes and the System is not quite satisfactory. When 38.4% people say that they are satisfied, the same ratio of people says that they are only satisfied to some extent. That means that the Public Demand is for improvisation in the services and programmes that are being aired. Similarly, only 43.1% people are satisfied with the System that the Cable Service Providers offer to their clients. The last portion of this table, the suggestion that was asked from the respondents of the

research states that most of the people (73%) want cable TV to show only limited channels. This means, only such channels and programmes should be shown that are not offensive.

The questions aimed at finding out the transaction that takes place on a business level between the Cable Service Providers and the Clients show a two way balanced relationship. Thus, at a transaction level, the service of the cable operators is quite satisfying from the perspective of the youngsters that are educated.

Discussion and Analysis

In light of the findings given above it can be said that vast majority of youth has personal access to Cable Television and they spend almost 3-4 hours daily. Thus one can conclude that Cable Television is acceptable and popular among the youth. Cable viewing in Lahore, when generalized over the population of Pakistan, is for mere entertainment and non-productive purposes. In the first tabular presentation given, a majority of people had mentioned either entertainment or leisure for the reasons that they like to watch cable TV. Whereas News and Current affairs programmes, Practical information, International Information, Religious Programmes and General Information did not, sadly, receive enough response rates.

Although a majority of youngsters are interested in watching foreign channels instead of Pakistani channels on the cable TV, it is also important to notice that a majority of the respondents, who claim to be dissatisfied from the cable system, do not like it because of the “Immorality” that it is spreading. In the same regard, 5% of people had actually voted for cable TV to be Shutdown completely. This suggests that the viewers are not really interested in watching immoral, untraditional or obscene channels.

It should be noticed that a large majority of people were in the favour that only limited channels should be shown on the cable TV. This is pointing towards the “Demand of the Public” that needs to

be taken seriously. Yet this does not mean that through this research, a totally bleak picture has been drawn of the CTV. As Hayee[†] says, “Opponents of CTV say that it is a sin to watch Cable TV and it is destructive for the people. Wires are cut and maximum obstacles are put to stop its expansion. Strictness (in severe terms as in Afghanistan) can produce only results in short terms.

Proper policies should be made in order to erase those areas, which have been identified through research regarding the cable TV. Ali Jaffar, Deputy Director Manager (Legal) of the PEMRA has mentioned the following suggestions in this regard which the researcher finds mentionable for the better use of Cable Television:

1. Ensuring that the persons who enter the business have technical and financial resources.
2. Encouraging healthy competition in the market and ensuring that smaller businesses are not ousted from the market due to the anti-competitive behaviour and abuse of dominant position by the bigger players.
3. Elimination of content, which is obscene, pornographic, violent or sectarian as elaborated in the Programme and Advertisement Code.

Lastly, about the service of the Cable Operators, the survey has shown quite satisfying results. Yet, it is again important to mention that there are still a minuscule number of Cable Services Providers who do not make a receipt of the payment that the client makes. The PEMRA needs to look into the matter seriously.

[†] Faiqa Abdul Hayee, Report entitled “Cable Television, Prospects and Issues” published in Report by PEMRA – Cable Television: A Future Vision (2003).

Conclusion

Conclusively it can be said that large majority of young people in Lahore have access to the cable TV and most of these people have availability to the personal cable connection. Most of the youngsters have connection of the World Call Cable Providers. The youngsters are spending 3-4 hours daily against Cable Television and have only two reasons or list of preferences to watch cable TV: Entertainment and Leisure. And this Entertainment and Leisure is sought out from the foreign channels mostly instead of Pakistani channels (As per the tabular representation).

Yet, a lot of people are satisfied with the cable system. (A majority is satisfied only 'to some extent'.) While those who are not satisfied, are so because they believe that cable programmes are spreading vulgarity and immorality. The most popular kind of programmes on the cable TV are films and then International Information amongst the youngsters. The last three questions regarding the services of the cable operators show that the service related to the payments etc is somewhat satisfactory.

TABLE NO. 1

(PREFERENCES OF YOUTH)

This table gives the findings that are concerned with the preferences of the youth.

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
Access to Cable TV	85%
Regularly Watching	90%
Having Personal Cable Connection	89.8%
Maximum Time spend to watch Cable TV	3-4 hours a day (62%)

Preferred Hours to watch Cable TV	8 pm – 2 am (52.78%)
Most popular Cable TV Connection	World Call Cable Connection (46.29% responses)
Major reason to watch Cable TV	Entertainment reasons (39% responses)
Most Popular Channels	Foreign Channels (76.3% responses)
Most popular programmes linguistically	English Language Programmes (52.3% responses)
Reason of Popularity of Cable TV	Fulfilment of Entertaining Purposes (34% responses)
Reason of Unpopularity of Cable TV	Spreading of Immoral Ideas (45% responses)
Most popular Cable Programmes Content	Films (16% responses)
Preference for Cable TV Programmes	Informative Programmes (voted as First preference)

TABLE NO. 2
LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

This table shows the concepts of level of satisfaction about the Cable TV programmes and the Cable TV System.

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
Respondents Satisfied with Cable TV Programmes	38.4 % while those who are reported to be satisfied only 'to some extent' are also 38.4%
Respondents Satisfied with Cable TV System	43.1% respondents
Suggestion for further planning of Cable TV Programmes & System	Limited Channels should be shown (73%)

TABLE NO. 3
PAYMENT TO CABLE TELEVISION NETWORK

This table gives the information regarding the payment system of the cable TV.

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
Respondents making payments in time to Cable Service Provider	100%
Respondents receiving receipts upon making payment	98.5%

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