

میدیا ہمارا چہرہ

Media & Image Building

Hall-III (Revive)

1:30 PM to 2:30 PM

QAMAR ZAMAN KAIRA

Former Federal Minister/MNA, Government of Pakistan

FASEEH MANGI

Pakistan Press Chief, Bloomberg LP

ABRE NAYAB

(Research), PIDE

REVAMPING PTV: A BLUEPRINT FOR GLOBAL SUCCESS

Abbas Murtaza Maken

In our current zeitgeist, media plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and projecting a nation's soft power. State or publicly funded broadcasters like Turkey's Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), the UK's British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and Qatar's Al Jazeera are globally renowned for their top-notch entertainment, cultural exports, and global news coverage. Unfortunately, unlike its regional and global counterparts, the state-owned Pakistan Television (PTV) in Pakistan, has struggled to attain similar success. While TRT, BBC, and Al Jazeera have set benchmarks for quality and influence, PTV's influence has been relegated to an ever-decreasing domestic audience with negligible international influence.

Established in 1964, PTV was conceived as a platform to promote Pakistan's culture along with providing rich informative content to the populace. Indeed, in the initial period following PTV's creation, it did play a significant role in entertaining and educating the nation. During the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, the dramas and teleplays on PTV were considered to be the best across the Indian subcontinent, with classics like "Khuda Ki Basti" (1969–74), "Sona Chandi" (1983), and "Ainak Wala Jin" (1993).

These dramas along with the widely watched news show "Khabarnama" were emblematic of PTV's integrity and professionalism in its early days. Nevertheless, the channel never managed to expand beyond national borders, and within the country itself, PTV started experiencing a serious decline in its prestige starting from the 1990s.

The lackluster performance of PTV – evidenced by the consistently declining net profits from PKR 1,226 million in 2019 to PKR. 398 million in 2022¹ – vis-a-vis its counterparts deserves scrutiny. From constant government meddling to failure to cumbersome regulations to a flawed business model, the issues that have stymied PTV's growth and profitability are multi-faceted and entrenched in the channel's past.

While government influence and censorship had impacted PTV since its inception, it reached its zenith, during the 1990s when intense political rivalries, led to PTV being used to demonize their opponents. This period marked the start of the downward spiral of PTV, as political rather merit-based appointments were made at various levels that entrenched corrupt practices and led to deterioration

of human resources.² The downfall of PTV was further accelerated by the proliferation of dish antennas and access to other channels. Given insufficient financial support, PTV couldn't invest in modern technology and content production and was left unable to compete.

The public broadcaster has also been considerably impacted by bureaucratic inefficiencies and excessive regulations. Bureaucratic hurdles have led to a slow decision-making process and impeded PTV's ability to quickly adapt to changes in viewer preferences and technological advancements. For instance, the continued use of outdated technical equipment like Digital Video (DV) cameras³, isn't conducive to modern production. Furthermore, stringent regulatory controls on content and broadcasting imposed by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) have further stifled creativity and limited the diversity of programming.

Moreover, the channel's business model further exacerbates its struggles. PTV operates on a mixed funding model, relying on commercial advertisements as well as government grants. This model has turned out to be quite inefficient as the PTV has struggled to cover its operational costs, facing intense competition from commercial channels which are more attractive advertiser. Furthermore, overreliance on government funding comes with political strings attached, curtailing editorial independence. This political entanglement undermines PTV's credibility and prevents it from covering and reporting news fairly and impartially.

While PTV continues to grapple with these formidable challenges, the success stories of broadcasters like TRT, BBC, and Al Jazeera offer valuable insights into what can propel a state or publicly funded media outlet to global prominence. Foremost among them is the considerable financial support, which has allowed for heavy investment in human resources, technology, and content production. Immense financial support from the Qatari government has helped Al Jazeera expand beyond the Middle East into the Balkans, Turkey, and America. For its part, the BBC is funded by a television license fee, which has enabled it to maintain new bureaus across the globe and allowed the production of high-quality programs like *HardTalk* and *Head 2 Head*.

The wide-ranging content produced is a key element in the success of these broadcasters. Diverse content, from hard-hitting news and documentaries to dramas depicting cultural and historical heritage, helps cater to different interests and demographics. This then helps broadcasters in attracting and sustaining a loyal audience across the globe.

Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of such strategic content creation is the stellar success of TRT's historical drama series "*Diriliş: Ertuğrul*". Not only did the show gain immense popularity within Türkiye but it became a hit across the globe. In Pakistan alone, the dubbed version shown on PTV garnered more than 130 million views within the first 20 days of its release.⁴ Due to its engaging storytelling and top-notch production, it became

a significant export, amplifying Türkiye's soft power and cultural influence. "*Ertuğrul*" has generated substantial revenue, earning around \$1 billion by 2023 from international sales, including licensing fees and merchandise.⁵ In fact, *Ertuğrul* and shows like it have catapulted Turkey to the position of the third biggest exporter of scripted series in the world, behind only the US and the UK.

Similarly, Al Jazeera and BBC have built their reputations as globally renowned sources of news. The conducive environment created by their respective regulatory bodies, Office of Communication (Ofcom) and the Qatar Media Regulatory Authority (QMRA) has enabled an enduring commitment to editorial independence and journalistic integrity, building trust and credibility among the viewers. While Al Jazeera English alone is available in more than 310 million households across 150 countries⁶, the BBC World Service reaches almost 468 million people weekly⁷, considered to be one of the UK's most important cultural exports.

Ultimately, in order to tackle the various problems and improve its standing, and compete with global media giants, PTV needs to undergo a radical overhaul. As recently pointed out in the session on "Media and Image Building" at PIDE's Econfest, successful state-owned or publicly funded media across the globe leverage content and news to export their culture and cultivate a positive image internationally while earning a sizable amount of revenue.

Strategic investments in content quality and technological advancements are critical for media entities like PTV to thrive on the global stage. PTV needs to diversify its content and seek to create programs that resonate not only with domestic but also international audiences. Ensuring editorial independence is crucial for building credibility and trust. PTV needs to establish a clear framework that protects its editorial processes from political influence and excessive regulations, allowing for unbiased and high-quality journalism. Lastly, improving the quality of their human resources can enable PTV to hire, train and retain top-notch journalists, producers and editors, dramatically improving the delivery, format and quality of their content.

The need for strategic reforms is evident, and emulating the best practices from the success TRT, BBC, and Al Jazeera, PTV can emerge and transform into a significant player on the global media stage, showcasing Pakistan's culture, values, and perspectives to the world.

¹<https://www.dawn.com/news/1804055>

²<https://thefridaytimes.com/30-Jul-2023/this-is-ptv-a-tale-of-woe-and-misery>

³<https://thefridaytimes.com/03-Aug-2023/this-is-ptv-the-lights-have-gone-out>

⁴<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/culture/turkish-ertugrul-tv-series-takes-pakistan-by-storm/1843726>

⁵<https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/ertugrul-a-turkish-delight-forpakistan/>

⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Jazeera_English

⁷<https://www.mediaweek.com.au/bbc-reveals-its-biggest-global-audience-ever-468m-a-week/>

The author is a Research Associate at Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.