



Pakistan Television Network – Falling from the Grace

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November 26, 1964, holds a great importance in the history of Pakistani television. On this day, Pakistan's state-owned broadcaster Pakistan Television Corporation, famously known as PTV, began its broadcast from the pilot television station established in Lahore.

PTV started its operations under a private management, however, majority of its shares remained owned by the ministry of information and broadcasting. After the 1971 war, PTV was brought completely under the control of government of Pakistan. The government then funded the infrastructural and other required developments of PTV under the banner of Communication network expansion.

The initiation of media and broadcasting industry in Pakistan was a huge landmark. Despite being the only player in the field, PTV did not take this up lightly. Instead, it became breeding ground for countless actors, writers, performers, and intellectuals. PTV set really high standards of broadcasting, with its content range including entertainment, news, sports, children cartoons and other forms of infotainment.

PTV programs had quite an intellectual appeal to them, as focus was put on infotainment programs. Gradually, it also developed into a credible source of news and analysis on the current affairs as well as a reliable and realistic commentator on socio-political issues in the country and globally.

This was, unfortunately, the PTV of only the 20th century. The dawn of the 21st century also became the beginning of the downfall of this state-owned broadcaster. Indus TV, the first private owned broadcasting network in Pakistan started broadcasting in the year 2000. The next one decade saw many entrants into the electronic media industry. Seeing competition rise, PTV shifted its focus from an academic approach of its programs to a more commercial one. As a state-owned broadcaster there was always going to be a certain limitation to the

extent of commercial aspect in PTV's approach. This resulted in PTV flirting with its traditional approach as well as trying to adapt to rising competition, but it failed at both. The content quality dropped, and as cable networks grew in the country, viewership numbers staggered.

Moreover, as political interference in PTV's operations grew, the downfall quickened. From political appointments at the top management to staff level, merit was compromised at the behest of government members. With the advent of private news media, the governments became more cautious about their image through electronic media. As a result, PTV was turned into a government mouthpiece than a state-own broadcaster. Biased reporting, deliberate misinformation, and other methods to curb the truth and report only government favorable news meant the general populous sought other sources for fact-based reporting. Consequently, not only the viewership kept going down, but the broadcaster also lost its long-built repute among the masses.

People today still recall the golden era of PTV. This is because the standards of quality content that the corporation set in its early decades can still not be matched by the commercially motivated private media, but PTV also seems no way near trying to redeem itself. From being a breeding ground for world class performers, PTV is now famous for its lack of work ethics and lack of respect towards senior members of the industry. Once a source of reliable news and realistic analysis, PTV is considered as nothing more than a government spokesperson nowadays.

PTV's fall from grace has been nothing short of a heartbreak for those who saw its golden era. This, though, is not the first time we have seen any such thing. The story of all state-owned enterprises in Pakistan has been quite similar, and unfortunately this termite continues eating up all SOEs in Pakistan.