



The Infamous TRPs

Saddam Hussein, Research Economist PIDE

Today, television is considered a major source of entertainment and learning for many people, especially the youth. All television programs such as commercials, news, documentaries and cartoon, affects people of all ages in different ways. This is why television occupies an important place in our life and has become an essential household item. Since mass communication has become an essential ingredient in the modern and dynamic society, modernization in the technology sector has allowed man to make tremendous progress in this field. The Television industry became more important in the wake of COVID-19, when the whole world was stuck at homes, TV was one of the main sources of news and information dissemination along with infotainment. One of the methods used by the television industry to gauge the audience's interest in the aired content is analyzing the Target Rating Point (TRP).

Television Rating Program/Target Rating Program (TRP) is a tool used by advertising industries to determine the viewership of a content portrayed on Television, which helps in evaluating the audience's interest and preference of channels and the content they broadcast on the basis of the number of views of the shows.

Different countries use different systems of assessing rating on the basis of their local priorities. A same show can have different ratings for different episodes based on viewership, network, and re-run. TRPs are critically important for advertisers, as this analysis helps them in choosing the right slots to display their advertisement on the basis of the popularity and fame of the show. TRP also helps broadcasters to determine whether their content is getting maximum views or not. If the TRP rating is bad the broadcasters can always modify their content according to the need of advertisers. If the TRP rating is excellent, it gives broadcasters an upper hand in deciding the advertisement charges and generate massive profit out of the content.

Ratings are usually recorded and analyzed by Television Audience Measurement (TAM). In Pakistan, the widely used method for gauging rating is called "Peoples Meter", which helps in interpreting the viewing patterns of the viewers.

Such a meter is connected to the television screens of users and facilitates the broadcaster in collect data through in-built GSM technology. Around Pakistan it has been estimated that roughly According to estimates, around 713 meters are installed in and around Pakistan, which help in monitoring viewership. TAM provides a detailed break-down of the views on the basis of gender, age, occupation, and programs watched. Moreover, program and duration preferences of kids and adults are taken into account. Advertisers form their decisions on the basis of these TRP scales. Higher TRP means more people are watching a specific channel and hence gives an incentive to advertisers to spend more on that specific channel.

However, the methods of determining TRP varies across different countries. In India, the preferred system of ratings is provided by an Indian agency called "Broadcast Audience Research Council" (BARC), which uses a meter called BARO-meter for measuring the ratings. Unfortunately, in India there is a culture of agencies bribing channels in order to get improved ratings hence the overall system is inherently flawed. Though media in India plays a substantial role in shaping the perception of people regarding many important issues, such structural flaws lead to the broadcast of irrelevant and objectionable narratives on the TV, which leads to a failure in supplying legitimate information to the public. Since content is created on the basis of its rating, false ratings provided by the channels leads to airing of bizarre content, which raises questions on the credibility of Indian media. Similarly, US uses a system of ratings called the Nielson Rating System, which follows the same mechanism as BARC in terms of its functioning. Whereas UK uses Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) as the system of ratings, which measure data through Big Data Integration. After proper consultation and statistics obtained from ratings, programs are aired on television. Different advertisement agencies and broadcasters use data obtained from BARB to plan and buy different adverts. Different programs are aired on the basis of these ratings.

With the rise of TRP factors across Pakistan, many questions regarding the type and quality of content aired have been raised. News channels display news that is based on scandal and has

no capability of keeping people informed, due to their lust for higher ratings. PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) has been held responsible for not stopping the spread of fake news. Media is generally focused on spreading fast and controversial news which is not useful in the long-term. News bulletins and talk shows are mostly focused on criticizing the ineffectiveness of the government rather than policy-based discussions and solutions to problems. It is important that an unbiased news coverage is supported, and meaningful conversations are highlighted that are focused on solving the challenges instead of only caring about the ratings.

As far the Entertainment industry in Pakistan is concerned, a somewhat similar problem regarding the quality of content is observed. The quality of the content has deteriorated as the focus has shifted towards ratings only. Pakistani dramas and soaps which are supposed to be a source of family entertainment show scenes depicting violence, suppression of women's rights and much more scandalous content, because the audience buys such shows hence, they have better ratings. Ratings drive the content rather than imagination and need, with time it has become more important to generate revenue so that more advertisers can invest in it. Like every analysis framework, TRP has its own set of positive and negative aspects. Though the rating system help companies in targeting the audience based on the popularity of the content and evaluating their return on investment. It enables broadcasting companies to charge higher values from advertisers when there are

shows with higher ratings. The ratings help two major industries; the marketing industry and television production companies. Marketing companies can use the information generated from TRPs to produce ads that are relevant and can generate more revenue.

The biggest drawback of the TRP system in Pakistan is the decline in the quality of content being produced. Only scandalous and controversial content is highlighted just to increase ratings and generate revenue, which leads to portrayal of false news which is not based on proper facts and figures. Pakistani media industry is facing multifarious crises due to this issue. There is a culture of elitism in the media industry as well, where the media channels are controlled by elites and politicians and any news that questions them is not open for public discourse.

TRP is an important and an innovative concept. Though it has both adverse and positive impacts on the media industry, it can be of huge significance if we build upon the positives and stop exploiting the negatives. Its important that ratings are not considered the only important aspect of media and information shared must be factual, with verifiable evidence where necessary. It is high time that the media industry should adopt an unbiased approach and broadcast evidence-based information, to enhance the public's knowledge base rather than gaining ratings. Media shouldn't be seen as a revenue generating business only, it is a huge responsibility, as it can shape the national discourse and character.