

Commercialization of Television in Bangladesh

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Abstract: This study explores the phenomena of commercialization of Television in Bangladesh, discusses the reason behind commercialization, finds the consequences and makes the recommendation for developing an effective public serving media system. This research employs a qualitative approach where in-depth interviews are taken and discourse analysis of policy documents which are relevant to the process of commercialization of television are used to collect data. Television, in our country, was commercialized in the time of its establishment in 1964. During the Pakistan period, it was an autonomous organization and was appreciated for making a profit as much as it could. After independence in 1971, in spite of being a state-owned organization, it continued the legacy and in the late 90s the commercialization, privatization and liberalization led the private businessman to take over the television market. This study provides a complete understanding of the beginning and progression of commercialization of television in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Commercialization, Television, Bangladesh, Bangladeshi TV Industry, BTV

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I. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a south Asian country with a large population of 158.9 million (BBS 2015). According to BTRC (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission), 28 (twenty-eight) privately owned satellite television channels have been assigned spectrum from BTRC for broadcasting. But not only 28 private television channels but also the state-owned BTB are accused of being commercialized in the early twenty-first century. All the Television channels of the country are highly dependent on the revenue from the corporate advertisers and have commoditized their news and audiences however BTB is a state-owned channel. So television channels in our country have an intention to make a profit as much as they can where scholars argue that “Commercialization produces a shift from being managed with the primary goal of serving the public (as defined by the state) toward being managed primarily for profit” (Stockmann, 2013, p.7). These days we face the upshot of the commercialization of television in our country. But the history and the progression of commercialization of our television has not been studied so far. The aim of this study is to find out when did the television in our country begin to commercialize? Why and how the commercialization happened and what was the result of it. So the study focuses on the commercialization of Television in Bangladesh.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

While everyone acknowledges that “a „free“ press is essential for a „free“ society, there is considerable ambiguity about precisely what the word “free” means. The standard view is that the “free” in the free press means a press that is free from the control of both the corporate and from the government” (Wright & Rogers, 2009, p.2). Bangladesh television industry is rapidly expanding and has become a popular and powerful institution. Both for commercialization and liberalization of the television industry, it has disengaged itself from serving the interest of the public (Rahman, 2009; Rahman, Reza, & Huq, 2017). Commercialization of television results in the tendency of maximizing profit in the Television Industry, various political and corporate elite to be involved in the media market. Rahman et al., (2017) argue that the responsibility for television is completely overseen and overwhelmed by a coalition of a bunch of conservative political pioneers and their partner business elites which we have depicted as an authoritative politico business nexus. Many of the owners of our television industry are political leaders and all of them are business elite. They hardly care about the

responsibility of a television or the interest of the public rather they are interested in making a profit and using their channel for their personal interest. So this study is significant as it will explore the process of the commercialization of the television in our country and it will help to understand the present commercially influenced scenario of the television industry and may provide recommendations for developing an effective and free media system.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

No study attempted to work on the commercialization of our Television Industry. In this field of study, scholars critically analyzed the commercial influence on the media industry. To be more particular, television faces severe influence from the owners on their television content for the sake of their business and political interest. Besides advertisers do influence news for their business purpose and the TV stations do not go against the advertiser's interest in confirming the regular flow of advertisement and for making the profit. Because of the commercialization of television industry, big business groups have taken over the television market and started to influence the news content of the television for their personal interest.

Bhuiyan (2002) critically analyzed the political economy of mass communication in Bangladesh and argues that privatization and liberalization allowed the private sector to take over the media industry. The study also claims that both the political leaders and the business groups try to maximize control over the media and produce ideological commodities. Khan (2013) came up with an analysis of the owners of our private television. Analyzing 22 channels of our country, he found almost all of the TV stations belong to big business groups of our country (p. 55).

Rahman (2007) & Rahman et al, (2017) argues that commercialization and liberalization detached television from serving the public interest. After the commercialization and liberalization, private businessman and political came to media market and made television channels and they wanted to make money and wanted to use it as their propaganda tool.

Rahman (2009) worked on the rapid expansion of private television sectors of our country, licensing systems and the influence of the political owners and business over the content and found that TV is being used broadly as a tool of corporate branding and creating an ideology of the owner class.

Here in our country, we see that big business groups captured almost all of the print and electronic media space, and decorated the fact that journalism in Bangladesh had become ominously tangled with other economic and business interests.

Ali (2006) found in a study that, there are four different kinds of media outlets: a) Those created purely to promote and protect business interests; b) Those created to advance political ideologies; c) Those created as a means of currying political favor by means of financial gains and influence and d) Those created for journalistic purposes and to provide information (p. 24). This study claims that in our country and those in the last category (d) are very few, while those in the other three (a, b, c) categories are the majority of the media landscape.

In the industry which is driven by corporate interests, most media owners face conflicting interests: they need to promote their interest as they have several business products. On the other hand, there are advertisers and the channels most importantly want them at the favor of their channel to get advertisements. "There are pressures from big corporate organizations and we are obliged to them for keeping the constant flow of advertisement" (Khatun, Abir, M. Rahman & M. G. Rahman, 2017, pp. 98-99). It is often reported that the owners advise the newsroom not to publish certain types of news stories. If any news runs against the business interest of the media house and its policy, then certainly the news won't be telecasted (Khatun et al, 2017, pp. 98-99). In this scenario, it is often far more profitable and convenient for media owners not to upset the government, political camps, and business interests by aggressively reporting on governance failures.

Another study of Ali (2006) found that electronic media is far too motivated by profit and willing to ignore its social responsibilities. He argues that media owners are inextricably linked to the corporate and political worlds so that we cannot expect media products that are independent and free from undue influence (Ali, 2006, p.24).

On the other hand, Khatun et al, (2017) argues that TV journalists asked the private TV channel owners to provide funding for the training of upcoming journalists to be equipped with state-of-the-art technology and techniques for writing freely where the owners are not interested in increasing quality or bringing any change to the existing situation (p. 99). Besides Khatun et al, (2017) found in the study that journalists and members of civil society highlight the self-interest of journalists which makes them self-censor (p. 100).

All these studies tried to know ownership nature and the characteristics of Bangladeshi television industry after the initiation of the private television era in Bangladesh in the late 90s. Television in our country established in 1964 but no study attempted to find out the characteristics of television at that time.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Objectives of this study are to explore when the commercialization of television in Bangladesh began, why commercialization happened, how the commercialization happened and what were the consequences of the

commercialization? To be more specific, the objectives of this study is to know whether the television of our country was dependent on the revenue from the advertisers from the very beginning or not. If it was, how they took the advertisement and how were the policies regarding this. Lastly, this study will find the consequences of the commercialization and come up with recommendations for developing an effective media system in our country.

V. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Overview

This chapter focuses on the structure of the whole study and initiates the design of the study. The chapter has discussed on research design, sampling, sample, design of the interview, processing of the data and data analysis procedure.

5.2. Research Design

The study employs a qualitative approach and used a mixed method. It uses in-depth interviews to collect information about the beginning of the commercialization of Bangladeshi Television Industry. Secondly, policy documents related to Bangladesh Television and the Ministry of Information are analyzed to acquire necessary Data to come to the result of this study.

5.3. Area and Population of the Study

As the study is on the beginning of the commercialization of television in Bangladesh, it requires interviews of the persons who had worked in Pakistan Television or in Bangladesh television in its initial period from 1964 to early 70s. To know the begging of the commercialization of television and procedure of it, the study requires discussing with persons related to the sales and marketing section and in the programs section as well.

5.4. Sampling

In this study, samples were chosen in a deliberate manner. Interviewees were selected intentionally who worked for Bangladesh Television. Persons who worked for Bangladesh Television in the early stage are aged. 9 in-depth interviews were selected randomly who are fit to give interviews. 4 persons from the sales and marketing department and 5 from the program department are selected randomly for the study.

Table 1: Sample Frame

Serial	Category	Number
1	Sales and Marketing Officers	4
2	Producers	5
3	Total	9

5.5. Design of the Interview

In-depth interview was taken from with open-ended questions and they were encouraged to answer in detail. They were asked about the commercialization, its impact and outcome of the commercialization and were also requested to give suggestion to establish an effective, public-friendly Television industry. Few Follow-up questions were also asked based on the reply of the respondents. With the consent of the respondents, all the interviews were recorded and a voice recorder was used to record it.

5.6. Processing and Analyzing Data

After getting these interviews, it was transcribed into words. Inductive thematic analysis was taken to analyze the in-depth interviews. Transcribed interviews were coded and arranged into four themes under four research questions. This study involves Discourse analysis of the policy documents and collected data from the documents.

VI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

The data, gathered from the in-depth interviews of four sales officers and five producers are divided into four themes and analyzed to get the findings.

6.1. Commercialization Process of Television in Bangladesh

Television in this land area established at Dhaka on 25 December 1964 as a project between Pakistan and Japan named NEC (Nippon Electric Company). In 1964 Pakistan launched two television stations at Dhaka and Lahore. It became Pakistan Television Promoters Company Limited at 1967 having shares of both NEC and Pakistan government. In the same year, the Pakistan Government took over it and named Pakistan Television

Corporation which was completely autonomous. After independence in 1971, it became Bangladesh Television Corporation. 1972 Father of Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made an ordinance to make it a state-owned organization and by 1975 it became a state-owned government organization. For understanding the commercialization of television in Bangladesh, the commercialization process has been divided into three phases; **a.** The Pre-Independent Period of Television (1964 to 1971) **b.** Post-Independent Period of Television until the privatization in the late 90s (1972 to 1997) **c.** Initiation of the Private Television Era (1997 and onward)

a. The Pre-Independent Period of Television (1964 to 1971)

From the very beginning of establishing the Television station in our country, it was highly interested in making a profit from the advertisements. For the first two years, advertisements were sent from Karachi which was the central sales office of Television. The whole sales section of the television station was controlled from Karachi. The officer joined in the sales section in West Pakistan used to train them in Karachi for taking advertisement from the client and then they were sent to Dhaka. After that, they had to take over the responsibilities of earning advertisements revenues as much as possible. So after establishing, television hardly got any advertisement as there were no big advertising agencies and big business groups in Dhaka but the sales and marketing section was encouraged to get advertisements. The employees started to go to various clients and requested advertisements. The agencies and clients didn't know how to make advertisements at that time so BTV, itself made advertisements for the clients free of cost and telecast it. The rate of the advertisements was fixed from Karachi. Almost all the programs were sponsored from the beginning of the television. Jewelry, garments, garages in Dhaka were the advertisers who gave advertisements in the early television. All the advertisement's reports about earning had to be sent to Karachi.

In late 60s financial institution started investing in the television program and began to influence the television content. Sales and marketing department of television got utmost priority at that time. Employees of the department used to get increments for achieving the target amount of revenue in a fiscal year. Even they got special care from the authority for their contribution in making a profit. Policies regarding advertisements were controlled from Karachi while the other sections of the television were controlled from Islamabad. But there was hardly any policy of advertisements except "TV Code of Advertising Standards and Practices". This code used to guide the nature and characteristics of the advertisements. There were no policies regarding the number of advertisements. There were just nine unacceptable products and services including women's sanitary product in the policy (TV Code of Advertising Standards and Practices 11, 1998, p.6)

So they could telecast advertisements whenever they want as long as they need. But they fixed their own rules. People from the program department didn't encourage advertisements in the middle of the program. The advertisement could not hamper the programs of the television.

b. Post-Independent Period of Television until the privatization (1972 to 1997)

Bangladesh became independent through a war against Pakistan in 1971. After that Pakistan Television Corporation became Bangladesh Television Corporation. For the first one year, BTV was run by the money it made in the war period as in the time of the liberation war, the sales section didn't collect any money from the clients because they did not want to send the revenue to Pakistan. So they collected the money after the war and ran the television with that money until 1972. Then the President Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made an ordinance to make it state-owned. From that time BTV started to get an allocation from the annual budget of the government. But in spite of being a state-owned organization, it continued the commercial attitude. They were highly interested to get advertisements for the programs. Most of the programs were sponsored. Even the speech of the president Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Indira Gandhi (Former Prime Minister of India) was telecast in BTV in 1972 with the sponsorship of Islam Group. Immediately after 1971, though the financial condition of the country was not that good to find a sponsor for a television program, BTV always intended to take advertisements as much as it can. Gradually, with the increase of BTV's broadcasting range along with the country's economic growth and rapid industrialization, companies felt interested in giving advertisement and BTV always accepted it without any objection. Until 1975 BTV could be only seen in Dhaka and few nearby towns. Within 1984, ten transmitters were set in major cities (MOI, 2008). After that advertisers were more interested in giving advertisements to BTV. In the early 80s, BTV started to sell air time in the middle of programs. Especially to make drama for BTV, the makers had to give an amount of money. Then BTV allotted a specific air time for the makers. Then makers were told to sell their allotted time to the advertisers or to the agencies to make a profit. From that time, advertisers gained control over the television industry. Policy documents made the way easier as it did not fix the quantity of the advertisement rather talked about the quality and nature of the advertisements, besides making big revenue was not a tough work as the rate of the advertisements was pretty high (BTV, 1997, 2011; MOI, 2001, 2008). So the government didn't use to BTV to make revenue from advertisements but the employees working from the East Pakistan period set their own target and continued the legacy of making maximum revenue. In fact, till the initiation of Private television

era of Bangladesh, BTV had a business monopoly. Even till the year 2000, BTV used to earn approximately up to nine hundred million BDT per year from advertisements.

c. Initiation of the Private Television Era (1997 and onward)

In the late 90s, privatization, liberalization and all these commercialization led the private businessman to come in the television industry. BTV lost its business monopoly. Mainly after watching the monopoly business of BTV as being the only television channel in the country, private business elite came to the market. Bangladesh Television used to get an allocation in the budget for every fiscal year since 1972. So it didn't adopt the actual characteristics of a state-owned channel rather behaved like a commercial television and in 80s advertisers gained the influence over the content of the program of BTV. Besides, BTV started giving advertisements in the middle of the program and drama. Today every television stations of our country telecast advertisements as much as they can. As they are no more ways of earning revenue, the private TV stations are in a competition to make revenue and to take advertisements from corporate clients. BTV first exposed the way of being commercialized which led to an absolute commercial television industry operated by the private sectors in the late 90s.

6.2. The Reasons behind the Commercialization of Television

Pakistan Government wanted to make a profit from television. So the sales department had a high intention of making a profit. It was an autonomous organization by government always had a great influence on it. Authority used to fix a target and the Television had to reach the target. There was a threat of firing if anyone is not fit for the post or the responsibilities. Officers from the sales and marketing department got incentives, increments, and facilities. So they wanted to earn for the organization. The rate of the advertisements was fixed. Even BTV was so interested to take advertisements that television itself used to make the advertisements for the clients. There was just a guideline for taking and telecasting advertisements named, 'TV Code of Advertising Standards and Practices'. This guideline was followed until 2001 until the Bangladesh Television Authority Act came. 'TV Code of Advertising Standards and Practices' was made in 1964. This had been amended several times from 1964 to 2001. That document was the only guide to the BTV which didn't restrict BTV from being commercial. "Bangladesh Television endeavors to project programs in keeping with the best traditions with which we, as a nation, are identified. These include the social, aesthetic and moral values to which we subscribe" (TV Code of Advertising Standards and Practices 1, 1998, p.1). But it didn't elaborate the specific means of good taste, social, moral and aesthetic values what they mentioned to be followed. There were just unacceptable services and products which indicate there pro advertisement attitude. All these appreciated commercial tendencies of the television. After independence, BTV became a state-owned organization. It started receiving budgets from the governments. The recruitment policy of the television was changed. But the employees from the previous system stayed there in sales and marketing section and continued the same activities as before. Set of Laws and regulations published by the Ministry of Information in 2008 talked about the organizational structure of BTV, the responsibilities of the employees and officers of the organization. It talks about the regulations of the program, censorship of a native and foreign film which will telecast in BTV, rules of telecasting privately made programs. Here for a single program, one has to give 5000 Taka by a bank draft for review by the authority (MOI, 2008). That Policy from Ministry of Information talks about telecasting various programs for the welfare of the society and then talk about the advertisements policy. It restricts 15 products and services to be telecasted in BTV (MOI, 2008). But the advertisements section in national broadcast policy 2014 canceled the restrictions on the advertisement about the business controversy. No restriction or even nothing talking about the quantity of the advertisement. So policy documents didn't limit the commercialization tendency rather encouraged it by setting the maximum rates of advertisements even comparing with the present rates of other television. BTV takes Ninety Thousand Taka per minute in the middle of News Telecast at prime time at night (BTV, 1997; 2011). Then lastly after independence, a class of business elite grew up in the society. Business and the advertisement increased in BTV. And following footsteps of revenue earning private television started doing the same. And at present 28 private television channels are running after the advertisers to survive.

6.3. Consequences of Commercialization

BTV tried to maintain the quality of the program and tried to serve people at the beginning. A branch of quality people was recruited in Pakistan Television in 1964. People like Mustafa Monowar, Kalim Sarafi, and Jamil Chowdhury from the Art College joined in BTV. They tried to cultivate Bengali culture in the Television playing Bengali Drama, Classical Bengali songs, etc. They had control over the advertisements and it didn't hamper their program. Every program, studios and other things were started in Bengali. In spite of extreme cultural repression of Pakistan, officers of here telecasted Bengali Drama, songs, and traditions, etc. The female performer could not wear heavy ornaments. Telecasting songs of Rabindranath Tagore was prohibited. But they

work hard established all these trends day by day. But after independence when business increased, advertisement increased, programs and everything went under the control of a businessman. BTV started to serve the interest of the businessman. They started to make programs which are easy to sponsor and draw the attention of the businessman. The duty of National television is to promote the high culture which will not primarily be appreciated by the majority of people but the responsibility of a state-owned Television is to create a taste of people not to serve the business elite reaching the maximum numbers of consumers of their product. So observing all these private sectors interested to come into the media market. Privatization takes this a step further by turning these units into private businesses. Liberalization gives the state's approval of opening markets to widespread competition (Mosco, p.15). In the late 90s, when Awami League Government came in power, they first gave license to a private terrestrial TV channel name Ekushey television, two private television channels named ATN, Channel I. This privatization, liberalization made the way to the Business elite who have good relations with the ruling government got license as private television (Rahman, 2009; Khan, 2013). Private Television only had the intention to make a profit from the beginning. They came to the make with a very commercial purpose. They did not have their own policy and did not follow any rules and regulation or policies regarding advertisements. After the establishment of ATN Bangla, it telecasted advertisements of cigarettes in the late 90s. After that, so many private television channels came to market with a full commercial attitude. They had the intention to make a high profit. And today we have 28 private television channels in the country (BTRC, 2018) influenced by the corporate owners and the commercial advertisers.

6.4. Recommendation for Developing an Effective Media System

There must have some strong policies regarding the BTV and private television channels. There are policies about the nature of programs and advertisements but there should be a guideline about the number of advertisements. Allocation of Advertisement time before, after and in the middle of the program should be fixed. In the national broadcast policy, the time limit of telecasting advertisements should be added.

According to chapter 6 of the National Broadcast Policy, there should be a broad commission in the country which will give a license, ensure the quality of the programs and the quantity of the advertisements broadcasted in the channels. It will monitor the channels and will have the power to suggest necessary steps to the ministry against any channel.

Channels except BTV earn their revenue only from the advertisers. But major income should be from the subscription fees of the viewers. So government should take necessary actions to take subscriptions from the viewers of the channels following India. People have to subscribe to a channel monthly to watch the channels. Then everyone has to pay to watch any channel.

Skilled and technical persons are needed in our television industry who will understand the responsibilities and the duties of state-owned television and private television. There is an act about it but this should be strictly maintained. There can be a registration or licensing system of the journalist to become a journalist in the country.

High duties and taxes should be there in importing foreign programs and showing foreign channels. While competing with the foreign channels mainly with the channels from West Bengal, India our channels are making programs copying them to attract the audience and the advertisers. Even Big corporate group are investing India as their channels have easy access to Bangladesh. There should be policies importing foreign channels and giving advertisements to the channels.

VII. CONCLUSION

Television in Bangladesh was commercialized in the time its establishment in 1964 under Pakistan authority. So the state made it commercialized. At that time television was autonomous and run by the profit I could make. The employees of the sales and marketing section were trained to earn from the clients and advertisers. They were fired if they could not earn and got bonus and incentives if they could earn. After independence, it became a state-owned government organization but the employees were the same which could not free BTV from a commercial attitude. On the other hand, there are no policies regarding this. So it was a time of a business monopoly for BTV as they had no competitor and earned maximum revenue at that time. In late 90s private sectors and businessman took the control of private media and since then using it in a very commercial way which is hardly serving the public interest. Skilled, professional persons in the television authority, specific policies and secondary earning source for the channels like subscription fees may develop an effective public serving media in Bangladesh.

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