



## An Analysis of Audience Choices and Preferences of Satellite Urdu Channels: A Case Study of Viewership in Hyderabad

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper is the result of a field research conducted in Hyderabad city during the period 2012. The primary data includes survey research related to programmes aired by Urdu channels. This paper attempts to answer some of the basic questions; the country which initially had no satellite Urdu channel till year 2001, has now access to over seven satellite channels including one from Pakistan through cable system along with DTH platform. The content of these channels in different genres caters for the needs of the Urdu specific viewers. In view of the growing numbers of Urdu channels, the author has attempted to analyze the viewers response in terms of knowing the people's choices and their preferences of Urdu channels programme; preferred viewing time slot, reasons of watching Urdu channels and age group of viewers who watch Urdu channels. Moreover, some of the Urdu channels have established their image as niche TV channels for fulfilling the cultural aspiration of the viewers. The result of the study suggests that the Urdu TV channels get positive response from the viewers as their presentation provide the viewer with something that constitutes their cultural identity.*

**KEYWORDS:** Niche channel, Genres, Ethnic, DTH, Cable and Satellite Households.

### Introduction

A full-fledged entertainment – centered television programming in India was commenced in the early 1980s. Initially it was only Doordarshan, the official broadcaster that served as the sole source of information and entertainment. The coverage of 1982 Asian Games, held in New Delhi, provided much-needed impetus to television viewing as it inspired more and more people to glue to TV sets. This also saw a remarkable spurt in the sale of colour television sets. Sensing the need to harmonize its social obligations with the growing commercial-entertainment tastes of a burgeoning urban population, Doordarshan introduced another channel, DD-2 which was later renamed as DD-metro. Doordarshan has also launched DD regional channels of ten different languages in ten states. (Gopal Saxena. Television in India: Changes and Challenges. Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1996).

The beginning of the last decade of 20th century ushered in a new era of liberalization, thereby, throwing open the Indian skies to private players. The entry of satellite channels altered the television scenario. With the exception of Asianet, the earliest satellite channels were Hindi channels such as Zee, Star and Sony. Logical follow-up to entertainment channels was the emergence of some dedicated and exclusive news channels. If states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala continue to thrive on film industries, it was only a matter of time before regional satellite channels braced for fulfilling cultural aspiration of people sharing same linguistic affinity made their presence felt. Niche channel came into being. Slowly but surely the concept of a satellite TV 'network' was born. The idea was for one player to have multiple channels to cater to the diversified populace. Thus, there was Sun network, with channels in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, followed by ETV-network with not one, two or three, but 10 channels to address the cultural needs of 10 different states – Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. Zee-network also consisted of a bouquet of channels. The regional channels with customized programming known as niche channels tried to suit the needs and aspirations of the local people in their own local languages and they found ready audiences that embraced them. In a multiethnic nation made up of diverse regions, castes, language and heterogeneous cultural plurality, ethnic identification is a contributing cultural variable in the media. Individuals buy media content that portray characters with whom they identify with or find similarities with. Identification theory maintains that individuals who find particular shared traits with media characters (such as ethnicity or certain values) tend to identify with those characters.

Even as we say that India is so diversified that each state of it has a language of its own – Assamese in Assam; Bengali in West Bengal; Odiya in Odisha; Telugu in Andhra Pradesh; Tamil in Tamil Nadu; Malayalam in Kerala; Kannada in Karnataka; Marathi in Maharashtra; Gujarati in Gujarat – there are two constitutionally-scheduled languages that have no state base – Urdu and Sindhi. As per 2001 census, 51.5 million people who consider Urdu as their mother-tongue are spread over several states (as compared to 41.6 million people, 37.9 million people and

33.1 million people considering their mother-tongue to be Gujarati, Kannada and Malayalam respectively, largely confined to one state of Gujarat, Karnataka and Kerala).

There have been sporadic efforts in the past to cater to this diversified and heterogeneous community of Urdu-speakers within the already diversified and heterogeneous television-viewing populace of India. Serials on social themes such as Phir Wohi Talaash, Farmaan, Gul Gulshan Gulfaam, Heena, Sarhadein etc with Muslim protagonist characters as also historical and costume dramas such as Akbar The Great, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Tipu Sultan, Mirza Ghalib, Mulla Nasruddin, Alif Laila and Hatimtai enjoyed a very high viewership on the national broadcaster Doordarshan as well as on satellite channels like Zee and Sony.

Urdu is one of the 22 Scheduled languages of India. It is one of the official languages of six states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) and in one union territory Delhi. In Jammu and Kashmir it is the primary official language. (Durga Das Basu. Introduction to the Constitution of India. Publisher: Lexisnexis Butterworths Wadhwa Nagpur). Urdu has a rich tradition which has been further enriched and popularized by the ever-increasing entertainment industry spearheaded by Bollywood. Non-Muslim film personalities of the yore, such as Sohrab Modi, BR Chopra, Yash Chopra, Dev Anand, Raj Kumar, Dharmendra, Gulzar, and the like could fluently speak, read and write Urdu. The dialogues of epic films like Mughal-e-Azam and Pakeezah etc remain evergreen. Mirza Ghalib, nearly 150 years after his death, is still the most quoted poet in India. Urdu has a treasure-trove of quotable couplets that find resonance even in the hallowed precincts of the Parliament. Over the years there have been instances where presenters of budgets, have liberally laced their speeches with Urdu couplets. In the context of the above, it seems tempting to assume that there is a great potential for a dedicated Urdu channel in India.

### An Overview of Regional Channels in India

Keeping in view the growth of regional tv channels in India, it has been proved that people like to view content in their own language and culture. The programming content represents the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Indian television audiences to promote new discourse in multiple languages. The regional language occupies a pioneering place in the media. Mostly, regional languages programmes cover literature, classical music, dialects, news, political debates, talk-shows, celebrities, regional movies, along with the usual serials and film based programmes, reality shows etc. In India, the regional channels, find it very easy to identify the taste of the viewers for their target audiences. In a country with numerous languages, programmes have so far been televised in a few languages only. The regional TV channels have increased in Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, Punjabi, Malayalam, Oriya, Gujarati and Telugu languages. The total number of regional TV channels is 269 out of the total number of 572 TV channels in India in Year 2010. (Source TAM, PwC's India Entertainment and Outlook 2011). Moreover the percentage of viewership of regional televisions amounted to 33.4

% in year 2011.(Source Exchange 4 media.com, HT, Edelweiss research ).During 2010, regional channels exceeded national channels in terms of advertisement volume. National and regional channels shared TV advertisement volumes in the ratio of 47:53 (Source TAM AdEx, PwC's India Entertainment and Outlook 2011).

Numerous studies on television viewing clearly indicate that adults and children prefer to watch television programmes in their mother tongue and sometimes in another language taught in the school. This is also because as parents watch television in their mother tongue so do the children, as the entire family watches television together. Appiah (2002) points out that past research have found "ethnic identification (is a) contributing cultural variable in media use,". Further, he also refers to past study in support of source similarity and states that individual are influenced by media content that portray characters with whom they identify with or find similarities with. Appiah (2004) further contends that ethnic minorities are much more aware of their ethnicities than are ethnic majorities, and thus more responsive to media content that target or portray their specific group, as explained by distinctiveness theory (McGuire 1984).

At present the total number of Cable and Satellite television households in India is 130 million. (Source: PwC Analysis and Industry Estimates, India Entertainment and Media Outlook 2011). Out of this, 23.5 million Cable and Satellite households are Urdu speaking population consisting of Muslims and Hindus. (Source: Q-4-IRS-2010), which constitutes a sizable population to target Urdu speaking viewers.

First of all, a separate Urdu channel exclusively devoted to Urdu viewers is long overdue. Urdu TV by definition may be niche or ethnic media that covers local, regional and even national aspirations.

#### Growth of Urdu TV Channels in India

The year 2001, saw the emergence of the first private satellite Urdu channel, called ETV-Urdu, which went on air on 15th August, 2001 from Hyderabad, owned by media mogul Mr Ramoji Rao, owner of the ETV network. After that DD-URDU was launched on August 15, 2006 from New Delhi. Zee Salam was launched in February 2010, launched by ZEE network from Delhi and then Aalami Sahara was launched on December 27, 2010 by Sahara News Network. Munsif TV was launched on January 26, 2011. Peace TV, a full-fledged english devotional channel was launched by Global Satellite Television Network broadcasting globally 24x7 on January 21, 2006 from Dubai, UAE, which is free to air. Later, in June 2009, Peace TV has launched another channel "Peace TV Urdu" which is dedicated especially to the Urdu-speaking viewers around the world. However for this study, the preferences and choices of Peace TV Urdu has been taken from the viewers.

Another fully devotional channel QTV from Pakistan owned by ARY Digital Network was launched in 2003 .This channel is banned by Indian government, as it does not have a license to be beamed in India . This channel perceptibly has a tremendous viewership among Indian Muslim for its religious content, which is being down-linked by cable operators illegally.

Moreover, in a decade, the number of Urdu channels has increased the challenge to sustain a 24x7 programming and that too with a niche approach became centric. After analyzing the contents of ETV-Urdu , DD Urdu, ZEE SALAM and Munsif TV Channels (except two religious channels – QTV and Peace TV Urdu and news based channel Aalami Sahara ) , it is found that most of these channels programmes consist of religion, talk-shows, features/ magazines, cookery shows ,news and current affairs, Mushairas and Ghazals, Songs, Health shows, educational programmes, serials, movies , comedy shows ,travel shows etc .

Since there is no thorough research on the choices and preferences of the viewers, an attempt is made to analyze the content of different Urdu channels. This study was conducted to gain a better insight into the factors that cause viewers to prefer one Urdu channel to another. This will help the content developers, broadcasters and media organizations to produce more audience specific programmes in future.

#### Methodology

In this study, survey method has been applied to obtain the data that is qualitative in nature from Hyderabad. The survey has aided the researcher in collecting information directly from the cable and satellite homes and DTH television viewers who have access to Urdu channels

so that a proper analysis could be made by comparing viewership of different channel. Since no authentic and systematic list of viewers was available to the researcher, it was decided to select respondents from different localities by applying non-probability sampling. The survey was conducted in April 2012.

The table -1 given below indicates accessibility of the various Urdu channels at their homes among 100 respondents. (Multiple choices)

**Table-1**

Channels	Accessibility of Urdu channels							Total
	ETV Urdu	DD Urdu	Aalami Sahara	Peace TV	Zee Salam	Munsif TV	QTV	
Frequency	99	36	24	37	31	13	74	314
Percent	(31.52%)	(11.46%)	(7.64%)	(11.78%)	(9.87%)	(4.14%)	(23.56%)	(100%)

#### Population

A total no of 100 Urdu viewers in Hyderabad city were selected from different localities belonging to different income groups and age groups. The respondents of the study are students, teachers, businessman, lawyers, housewives, and doctors etc, who are watching Urdu channels regularly. Out of 100 respondents, 10 were selected from non-Muslims Urdu speaking population, also. Respondents were asked various questions to assess the viewer's response regarding Urdu channels. The data collected were analyzed through SPSS. The demographic characteristics of respondents are given below in table 2.

**Table-2: Gender of the Respondents**

Demographic characteristics of respondents	
Gender	Frequencies
Male	59
Female	41
Total	100
Religion	
Muslim	90
Hindu	9
Sikh	1
Total	100
Occupation	
Govt. Employee	28
Businessman	15
Self-employed	5
Student	9
House-wife	12
Others	31
Total	100
Monthly income	
<Rs25000	30
Rs25000-Rs40000	31
>Rs40000	39
Total	100
Age Group	
18to35	33
36 to 50	26
above 50	41
Total	100

#### Objective of the Study

The objectives formulated for the investigation are outlined below:

1. To know the most watched Urdu channels among the viewers
2. To assess the preferred viewing time to watch Urdu channels
3. To assess the reasons of watching Urdu channels
4. To determine the viewers age group who watch Urdu channels
5. To know the viewers preferences of programme genre on Urdu channels

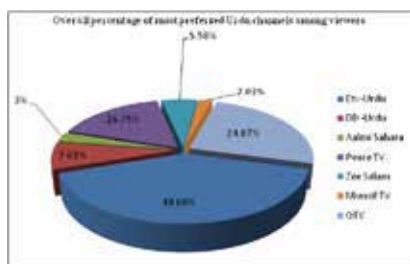
#### Findings

**Table 3: Viewer's most preferred Urdu channels (Multiple choices)**

URDU CHANNELS	ETV-Urdu	DD-Urdu	Aalami Sahara	Peace TV	Zee Salam	Munsif TV	QTV	Total
Frequency	80	15	5	33	11	4	49	197
Percent	40.60%	7.61%	2.53%	16.75%	5.58%	2.03%	24.87%	100%

The percentage values in above figure indicates that ETV -Urdu is most preferred channel among viewers which constitutes (40.60 percent) ,followed by QTV (24.87 percent), Peace TV (16.75 percent), DD-Urdu (7.61 percent), Zee Salam (5.58 percent), Aalami Sahara (2.53

percent), and Munsif TV (2.03 percent) among the multiple response of the viewers.



**Table 4: Preferred time slot among viewers to watch Urdu Channels**

Time Slot	Percentage
Morning to 2 PM	12%
2 PM to 7 PM	19%
7 PM to 10.30 PM	48%
10.30 PM onwards	10%
Any time in day	7%
Occasionally	4%
Total	100

The preferred time slot of Urdu speaking viewers to watch Urdu channel is from 7 pm to 10.30 pm., which is preferred by 48 % viewers, followed by 2pm to 7 pm slot preferred by 19%, and then 10.30 pm slot preferred by 10 % viewers.

The above table 4, shows that Urdu channels are viewed by majority of viewers which constitutes 50 percent of the total respondents surveyed. Thereby making it the most popular channels viewed among Hindi and satellite regional channels of their state, which was preferred by 36 percent and 14percent respectively.

**Table 5: Reasons of watching Urdu channels (Multiple choices)**

The reasons of viewing Urdu channels	Not available on other channels	Language consciousness	Cultural affinity	Total
Frequency	57	54	73	184
Percent	30.97%	29.34%	39.67%	100%

The table shows that a majority of viewers 39.67 percent cite the reason to watch Urdu channels due to cultural affinity, followed by the reasons; content not available on other channels and language consciousness which constitutes 30.97 and 29.34 percents of the viewers watch.

**Table 5: Frequency and percentage about the viewer's age groups who watch Urdu channels (Multiple choices)**

	Different age groups who watch Urdu Channels							Total
	Viewer's till age of 18 years	Men aged between 18 to 40 years	Men aged between 41 to 60 years	Men above 60 years	Women aged between 18 to 40 years	Women aged between 41 to 60 years	Women above 60 years	
Frequency	13	33	55	31	35	63	11	241
Percent	5.39%	13.69%	22.82%	12.86%	14.52%	26.14%	4.56%	100%

The percentage values in table 5 shows that the Urdu channels are being most watched among the age group of women aged between 41 to 60 years which constitutes 26.14 percent and 22.82 percent men in age group of 41 to 60 years, followed by 14.52 percent women in aged group of 18 to 40 years and 13.69 percent men aged in age group of 18 to 40 years. Moreover, Urdu channel is least watched by the children, viewers upto 18 years of age and women aged above 60 years, which constitutes 5.39 and 4.56 percents.

**Table 6: Frequency and percentage of Programme Genres' watched by Urdu channel viewers**

Programme Genres'	ETV-Urdu	DD Urdu	Aalami Sahara	Zee Salam	Munsif TV	Peace TV	QTV	Total
Religious	69(43.12%)	-	-	6(3.75%)	1(0.625%)	30(18.75%)	54(33.75%)	160(30.71%)
Drama	3(33.33%)	6(66.66%)	-	-	-	-	-	9(17.27%)
Talk show	29(80.55%)	5(13.88%)	1(2.77%)	-	1(2.77%)	-	-	36(6.90%)
Songs	21(72.41%)	5(17.24%)	-	3(10.34%)	-	-	-	29(5.56%)
Films	2(13.33%)	13(86.66%)	-	0	-	-	-	15(2.87%)
News and Current affairs	58(87.87%)	6(9.09%)	-	1(1.51%)	-	-	-	66(12.66%)
Urdu Enrichment programme	59(83.09%)	10(14.08%)	-	3(4.22%)	-	-	-	71(13.62%)
Documentary/Fe-ature	6(37.5)	6(37.5%)	-	3(18.75%)	1(6.25%)	-	-	16(3.07%)
Cookery Show	40(85.10%)	2(4.25%)	-	5(10.63%)	-	-	-	47(9.02%)
Health Show	5(55.55%)	-	-	4(44.44%)	-	-	-	9(1.72%)
Crime	1(100%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1(0.19%)
Children Prog.	-	4(100%)	-	-	-	-	-	4(0.76%)
Programmes on special occasions	28(48.27%)	2(3.44%)	-	6(10.34%)	-	9(15.51%)	13(22.41%)	58(11.13%)
TotalPercent	321(61.61%)	59(11.32%)	1(0.19%)	31 (5.95%)	3(0.57%)	39(7.48%)	67(12.85%)	521(100%)

The frequency and percentage values in table 5 shows that among the religious programmes available at Urdu channels, the majority of the viewers watch the devotional programmes at ETV-Urdu which constitutes 43.12 percent, followed by QTV, Peace TV, Zee Salam, and Munsif TV which constitutes 33.75, 18.75, 3.75 and 0.625 percents, respectively. Moreover while comparing the viewers most preferred choice of all programme genres available on Urdu channels, the percentage values in figure 6 shows that the viewer's first preference is to watch religious content, which constitutes 30.71 percent.

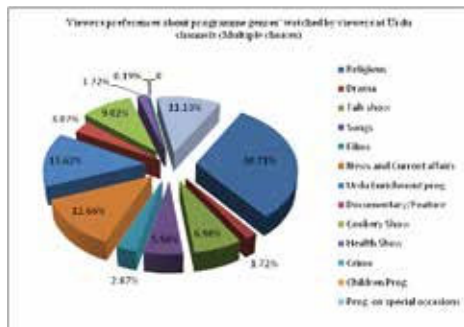
The frequency and percentage values in table 5 shows that , among the genre of Urdu enrichment programmes, majority of the viewers which constitutes 83.09 percent preferred to watch this genre programme at ETV-Urdu, followed by DD-Urdu and Zee Salam which constitutes 14.08 and 4.22 percents respectively. Moreover figure 6 shows that

the second preference of the viewers which constitutes 13.62 percent, preferred Urdu enrichment programmes available on all Urdu channels.

The frequency and percentage values in table 6 also shows that after religious programmes, most of the Urdu viewers watch news and current affairs programmes. The majority of the viewers preferred to see these programmes at ETV-Urdu which constitutes 87.87 percent, followed by DD-Urdu, and Munsif TV which constitutes 9.09 and 1.51 percents, respectively. The figure 6 indicates that the viewer's third preferred choice is to watch news and current affairs programmes which constitutes 12.66 percent, among all the programmes of Urdu channel.

The frequency and percentage values in table 6 shows that , majority of the viewers which constitutes 48.27 percent watch special programmes during special occasions like ramazan and muharram at ETV-Urdu, fol-

lowed by QTV, Peace TV, Zee Salam, and DD-Urdu, which constitutes 22.41, 15.51, 10.34 and 3.44 percents respectively. Figure 6 also indicates that the fourth preferred genre of the viewers is to watch special programmes during ramazan and muharram , which constitutes 11.13 percent.



**Figure-6: Viewers preferences about programme genres'**

The frequency and percentage values in table 6 shows that programmes like cookery show on Etv-Urdu is quite well received among the viewers which constitute a percentage of 85.10 percent, followed by Zee Salam and DD-Urdu which constitutes 10.63 and 4.25 percents. DD-Urdu has been successful to attract viewers for films which form a viewing percentage of 86.66.

The frequency and percentage values in table 6 shows that the majority of the viewers watch Etv-Urdu which constitutes 61.66 percent, followed by QTV, DD-Urdu and Peace TV which constitutes 12.85, 11.32, and 7.48 percents viewership among all the viewers. Zee TV, which came into the market two years back, has good percentage of viewers which constitutes 5.95 percent. On the other hand, only few respondents have responded about programmes of Aalami Sahara and Munsif

TV channels, which may not be judged by this sample. Moreover, the study indicates that Etv-Urdu, Zee Salam, Peace TV and QTV are popular for its religious contents among the respondents.

**CONCLUSION**

As evident in the programming trend in Urdu channel, the dominance of religious content (exception for religious channel), still looms large. However, Urdu enrichment programme like mushairas and news based programmes are popular among Urdu viewers. Still, there are no programme on Urdu channels, which can be said to be content driven for the channel. Except mushairas, it is found that the theme and content of television programming on Urdu channels are not very aggressive in terms of the viewers' perception about the Urdu specific general entertainment programmes on Urdu channels. There is a strong need for catering to the different and varied interest of the Urdu speaking television viewers who watches Urdu channels. Therefore, it is to be filled with ideas, speed, and segmentation. If the number of the Urdu channels increases, this may dilute content in their programmes. Increasing number of Urdu channels may have fragmentation of Urdu audiences. These Urdu channels should provide diversity in their content which is almost same in the content as most of Urdu channels except DD-Urdu, which has programmes for Muslim community only. The response of viewers in table number 3 indicates that a majority of viewers cite the reason to view Urdu channels due to their cultural affinity. This indicates that the need for their religious affiliations have been full-filled by these religious Urdu channels. Like Hindi religious channels other religious channel is a necessity for any community. On the other hand some of these Urdu channels make their presence felt by providing them niche content for niche audiences which are not available on so called main stream channels. But as evident in table number 4, another reason of the viewers to view Urdu channel is due to their language consciousness. Therefore, those Urdu channels which are not religious in nature should not dish out religious programmes, but try to focus on innovative ideas and limit themselves to quality programmes in Urdu languages which have not been explored like, Urdu family dramas and Urdu historical fiction, Urdu plays, and Urdu comedies etc.

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