

Cultural Impacts of Indian Satellite Channels' Broadcasted Programs: A Study on Bangladesh

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Abstract

Indian satellite television channels broadcast many programs in Bangladesh amidst the dispute whether Indian satellite channels are more popular with Bangladeshi mass people than our local channels. Motivated by this debate, this study aims at understanding public perception about the impacts of Indian satellite television channels on Bangladeshi culture and portraying the differences between Indian television channels' and Bangladeshi television channels' programs. Using exploratory qualitative research method, it is shown that Indian satellite channels are more professional than Bangladeshi satellite channels. Still, there are people in Bangladesh who think Indian satellite channels' programs contain programs that conflict with our local culture and values, such as extra-marital relationship, family disputes, etc. So, it is recommended that we should take different initiatives, such as imposing censorship on unacceptable programs, making better television programs, overseeing children's activities concerning television programs, raising awareness about the bad effects of many Indian television programs, etc. if we want to save our culture and values.

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Background to the Study

The rapid pace of technological development has increased the number of satellite television channels in every country of the world. The increased number of channels has propelled the growth of a diverse set of programs as well (Mehta, 2008). Bangladesh, as an emerging economy in the South Asian region, is no different than observing the similar growth in the sector of satellite television channels. Because of the recent speedy growth of the satellite television channels, Bangladesh has found the market price of the television sets revolving around an affordable range of people from the not well-off class. As a result, the viewership is not limited to the upper or middle class only (Zia, 2007). In these days, viewers have easy access to a plethora of channels both from local and foreign providers. Interestingly, easy access to different satellite television programs affects people's behavior and attitudes (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2004; Olken, 2009). Importantly, the effect on people's behavior and attitudes are responsible for influencing the overall culture of the society (Zahid, 2007). It is argued that developing countries are being exposed to western culture through satellite television channel programs (Bezabih, 2018). Hence, Bangladesh as a neighbor of India and the government allowing Indian satellite television to broadcast through the local providers make a situation in which the Indian culture can have an impact on people's behavior and attitude in our country.

People are so engrossed in watching programs telecasted on Indian Satellite television channels that they feel encouraged to follow them in real life. These channels and their broadcasted programs are so impactful that the viewers eagerly wait for them and accordingly plan their daily activities (Helal, 2014). Thus, they severely affect their time which they are supposed to offer to their friends and family and to do essential activities. They also affect their relationships with their beloved ones as the viewers of these programs sometimes try to implement the things they watch in them. Moreover, behavioral changes are seen in some people who follow these programs rigorously. This situation is quite alarming for our traditional culture and values. We can say that the cultural impacts of Indian satellite channels' broadcasted programs intrude into our lifestyle, personality, professional life, thought process, etc. A significant cultural shift has already been observed due to the impact of Indian satellite television channels like Zee TV, Sony TV, Star Plus, Zee Bangla, Star Jalsa, etc. Viewers of these channels are regularly exposed to the vulnerabilities in relationships inside and outside of the family involving divorce, arousal of sexual instincts, obscenity, nudity, pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationship (Page & Crawley, 2001). Due to such exposure, people's beliefs and values are being destroyed at an alarming pace (Shamsher & Abdullah, 2012).

The type of satellite television channels depends on the sorts of programs they broadcast, such as dramas, reality shows, talk shows, news, music, sports, movies, cartoons, etc. There are thousands of satellite television channels in the world. However, in Bangladesh, the satellite television market is mainly dominated by Bangladeshi and Indian channels. However, there is a dispute whether Indian satellite channels are more popular with Bangladeshi mass people than our local channels. Motivated by this debate, the paper aims at understanding the public perception of Indian satellite television channels.

Moreover, in the age of globalization and competitive business, Bangladesh's local satellite channels are competing with the Indian satellite television channels. There is a gap in the existing body of research which has not made us aware of the satellite television viewership pattern and nature in Bangladesh. Hence, a study is required to understand the influence of Indian satellite channels on our culture by acknowledging the role of Bangladeshi satellite television channels as well. Thus, this study focuses on making a comparison between programs telecasted on Bangladeshi and Indian satellite television channels to know what people think about Indian satellite television channels' broadcasted programs and their impact. A comparative lens of understanding the problem of Indian satellite channels' cultural impact would help us to come up with some recommendations for a possible solution. The paper is divided into two major sections. After analyzing the existing research on the satellite television channels' cultural impact, the findings of the study is presented. A comparison between Indian satellite channels' and Bangladeshi satellite channels' broadcasted programs are discussed in the findings section. This paper concludes with some recommendations based on the analysis of the interviews and findings.

Literature Review

Mass media is regarded as a powerful tool of communication. Through different satellite television channels, it can communicate a culture across the countries. it can navigate people in an ocean full of storm or roads without any road sign (Winett & Wallack, 1996). Satellite television channels, being the most potent form of mass media, help the people of a country in reaching out to others in different countries (Kreps & Thornton, 1992). Webster and Lichty (1991) show that subcontinental women pay intense attention to various soap operas telecasted on different satellite TV channels. They follow these operas forming a group which is one of the attributes of South Asian women. These programs have won the heart of many homemakers of this region as the story has some similarities with the real-life issues. Because of the similarity, initially, women see these programs as a source of entertainment. However, gradually, it influences the cultural mechanism and threatens the existence of indigenous culture (Juni et al., 2014). Additionally, it is also highlighted that the Indian operas – either directly or indirectly – often give unnecessary coverage to a religion. Though the projection of religion is sometimes required, often the religious projection of that religion is not required for the scene in the drama (Mitra, 1994; see also Knott, Poole, & Taira, 2013).

These Indian drama serials control their viewers' sexual behavior as well. They provoke pre-marital and extra-marital affair, nudity, criminal activity, etc. Many familial conflicts are seen due to these serials as one of the subject matters of these serials is family disputes. These lead to the extinction of the culture and values of Bangladesh (Islam, 2013; Shamsher and Abdullah, 2012). Helal (2014) states that the viewers of Indian satellite television channels spend much time watching their programs. As a result, their daily activities are hampered. Their inter-personal communication has substantially decreased. The danger of watching too many Indian serials is also described by Dato (2010). He demonstrates that Indian drama serials sometimes depict the woman as

having several relationships. According to him, the way they are represented in these serials often conflicts with our native gender-based social structures.

On a similar tone, Zadeh and Mozaffari (2014) find that any culture that is presented brilliantly on the satellite TV channel programs often has a high chance to be adopted and admired by viewers. Children are prone to try dangerous stunts at home without any protection. Many women are attracted toward hairstyle and dress telecasted on Indian satellite channels. Society is gradually becoming more attracted to new ways, trends, and lifestyle due to various programs shown on satellite televisions (Yousaf, Arshad, & Ammarah, 2014). Relevantly, Ruwandeepa (2011) claims that women tend to follow the same fashion, and they keep in mind what they see in these serials while shopping.

Additionally, there is a political economy of allowing Indian satellite television channels in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi satellite television channels are not being allowed by the Indian government to broadcast their programs in Indian territory, though recently, BTW World is seen in India. Interestingly, Bangladesh is paying local agents of the Indian channels BDT 2000 crore as tax for the subscription (Islam, 2013). Indian satellite TV channels are very skilled in broadcasting their products, such as advertisements, serials, films, and air them in their style (Ruwandeepa, 2011). Such domination of Indian media encourages us to understand the role of Bangladesh's satellite channel in our culture as well.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's satellite television channels have not had achieved credibility among the public to foster a democratic public sphere (Rahman, 2012). The failure of Bangladesh's local satellite channels in maintaining the traditional culture is eminent due to a critical linkage between the media and politics (Andaleeb & Rahman, 2015). Andaleeb and Rahman (2015) also suggest that Bangladeshi satellite television channels' news programs suffer from credibility crisis due to the orientation of journalism. According to the previous studies, it seems that the nature and pattern of professionalism showed by the Indian television channel in producing and broadcasting their programs are helping them keep their nose ahead of their counterparts in Bangladesh. In terms of viewers' desire, the difference between Indian and Bangladeshi satellite television channels signify that Indian channels are chosen by the public as the first alternative to fill out the hollow space created by the local channels.

Bangladesh' satellite television channel viewers are exposed to a lot of both Bangladeshi and Indian channels. Interestingly, there is no significant research showing the influence of foreign satellite television channel on the program content and style in Bangladeshi channel. A study on Turkish TV channels' soap operas shows that American style of TV programs had a significant impact on Turkish domestic channels' programs and resulted in the growth of a population demanding Hollywood like programs from the local Channels (Yanardağoğlu & Karam, 2013). It signifies that in the age of globalization and westernization of the culture, there remains a possibility that local TV channels in Bangladesh can be influenced by the foreign channels to be more competitive. Moreover,

due to the rise of globalization and other cross-border factors, Iranian satellite television channels design their programs seeking lifestyle change in Iranian women (Zadeh & Mozaffari, 2014). It implies that the local channels can influence the lifestyle of the people. Importantly, Bangladeshi satellite television channels preferring to show more advertisement of different commercial products than Indian channels and subsequently lose a significant amount of viewership (Nekmahmud & Rahman, 2016). Viewers prefer to watch Bollywood movies on Indian channels when Bangladeshi channels are broadcasting too many advertisements of the commercial products (Nekmahmud & Rahman, 2016). It underscores that impact of foreign satellite television channels cannot be entirely understood without analyzing the people's perception about Bangladeshi channels as well. Hence, a comparison between Indian and Bangladesh channels would provide us with the information to understand the growing influence of Indian channels in traditional culture. Having realized the existing body of research, this study seeks to answer two research questions.

Research questions

The following are the two research questions that the study seeks to answer:

- a) What are the main contents of Indian and Bangladeshi satellite television's programs?
- b) How do Indian satellite television channels' programs affect the culture of Bangladesh?

Research methodology

The study is conducted using an exploratory qualitative research method. A phenomenological research design was applied to understand the phenomenon of Indian satellite television channels' impact on Bangladeshi culture (Creswell, 2013; Bryman, 2012). The design is phenomenological because the study examines the details of the personal experience and interpretations of the participants (Smith, 2004). Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interview of a selected population. A total of 25 participants were recruited from five major police jurisdictions of Dhaka city. The police jurisdictions are Dhanmondi, New Market, Lalbagh, Ramna, and Tejgaon areas. The minimum age of the participants was 18.

I applied a snowball sampling and participant recruitment method. Five (three males and two females or two males and three females) participants were selected from each police jurisdiction. To start the snowball process, I first approached one of my close friends for an interview. I asked my friend to refer to a people who could be interested to participate in the study. I repeated the process according to the snowball recruitment procedure. I approached a total of 45 people, but 20 people either are not interested in the interview or are not fascinated by Indian television programs. The people who were not interested to take part in the study were asked to refer to someone else so that I can get the next participant. I kept the process rolling and found 25 people as intended. The interviews were audio-recorded based on their consent. The analysis of the data was conducted based on interpretative hermeneutic approach (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The statements I

incorporate in this article are presented with the utmost sincerity and honesty. This paper doesn't reveal the identity of any of the participants other than their residential areas and ages. However, the interview was taken in Bengali, and later on, I translated their statements necessary for this paper.

Findings of the Interview

Comparison between Indian and Bangladeshi Satellite Channels' Broadcasted Programs Program schedule. One of the most important things Indian satellite channels do to draw the attention of viewers is that they are very professional about the program schedule and timing. Their programs are always on time. In contrast, one of the biggest problems Bangladeshi channels have is that they are not very strict about the timing of the program for which they lose viewers' attention despite many people show great interest in local television programs. In this connection, a participant who lives in Tejgaon area and is aged 25 years said,

“Though I always love to watch Bangladeshi drama on local TV channels, I frequently switch to Indian TV programs because Bangladeshi channels show advertisements for so long. I lose interest in watching the drama because of the advertisement. Bangladeshi TV channels also do not start programs other than the news on time.”

Excessive advertisements. Advertisements on television are important to run a channel because it is one of the major sources of income for a channel. But television channels should be aware of the fact that because of excessive advertisements, they may lose viewers. Relevantly, a participant who is a resident of Lalbagh area and aged 31 years said, “Often I find no local channels that I can watch because of excessive advertisements. For excessive advertisements, I become often compelled to change channels and try to watch another program on a different local channel. Unfortunately, most of the time I switch to another local channel and find that advertisements are being broadcasted there as well. As a viewer, this is very frustrating to me. I become more frustrated during the Eid holidays when many local channels broadcast good programs including drama. But I hardly could watch any of them completely. I had no choice but switching to foreign channels. Nowadays, I prefer YouTube to TV channels to watch these Eid programs though, for this, I have to wait a few days until the programs are uploaded on YouTube.”

Viewers lose their attention from a particular program if more than the needed number of advertisements are shown during break time. One of the most prominent objections against Bangladeshi television channels for a long time is that they show an excessive number of advertisements. From this objection, Indian channels are somewhat free being one of the prime reasons for the less popularity of the programs telecasted on Bangladeshi channels. In this regard, a participant living in New Market area and is aged 40 years said,

“I prefer to watch programs broadcasted on Bangladeshi channels. But, nowadays, I feel like I am gradually becoming a fan of Indian channels. It doesn't mean that I have become a fan of their soap operas. I still hate

them. But I love their professionalism in broadcasting a program. I have got this sense about their professionalism when I watch reality shows, sports, and news on Indian channels."

Makeup and Makeover. Makeup and makeover are another important but less ignored aspects of any satellite channel's broadcasted programs. Indian actors and actresses spend a lot of time on makeup and makeover to be compatible with the characters. In doing so, they take help from expert makeup artists. On the other hand, though the picture has recently improved to some extent, the local models, actors, and actress of Bangladesh are not up to the mark both in makeover and makeup. The makeup artists of Bangladesh often use the method of making the artists so unnaturally beautiful that doesn't sometimes seem compatible with the roles they are playing in the program. As a participant who is from Mirpur area and aged 35 years ironically said,

"I have been following Bengali movies since my childhood that BTV broadcasts on the afternoons of Friday. I am also an ardent follower of Bangladeshi dramas. But it is not the case that I like these programs. I watch these programs to get amusement seeing unnatural and incompatible makeup and makeover of actors and actresses. This makes me laugh. At the same time, I have to admit that I have seen some improvement in this regard in recent time though we are still far behind than Indian television and film industries."

Cultures and values. Indian Satellite channels portray Indian cultures and values via different types of entertainment programs, such as drama serials, reality shows, etc. through apt execution and presentation. But Bangladeshi local channels often televise some storylines without appropriate execution and presentation that forces the audience to use the TV remote to change the channel. On this subject, a participant who lives in Mirpur area and is of 29 years old said,

"I don't think Bangladeshi TV programs have more variations than Indian TV programs. We may not like Indian programs, but we should acknowledge the fact that Indian Television program-makers try to portray their culture and values. People who are involved with making Bangladeshi programs should learn from this."

Impact of Indian satellite channels on Bangladeshi culture

The discussion about the impact of Indian satellite channels on Bangladeshi traditional culture needs to be realized from the four major themes as the analytical outcome of the interviews. The themes are, cultural aggression, family disputes, extra-marital relationship, and dangerous and criminal activities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Important Claims about Indian Satellite Channels' Broadcasted Programs

| Important Claims | Agree | Disagree |
|--|-------|----------|
| Increasing Cultural Aggression | 23 | 02 |
| Rising Family Disputes | 13 | 12 |
| Influencing Extra-Marital Relationship | 20 | 05 |
| Persuading Dangerous and Criminal activities | 14 | 11 |

Source: Semi-structured Interviews

Cultural aggression. A participant who lives in Ramna area and is aged 35 years said, *“Indian drama serials are so popular with Bangladeshi crowd because of various reasons. These programs show numerous juicy and modern things in comparison with which our local culture is seen outmoded. So, Bangladeshi people start giving up to follow our native culture which itself is very rich. In this way, slowly but surely, following Indian television programs becomes an issue related to our identity.”*

Like this participant, 92% of participants report that Indian programs intrude into our local culture. That is to say that cultural aggression by Indian TV channels is a major issue which does not go unnoticed by the majority of the respondents. One of these evil impacts of cultural intrusion is related to our children as reported by one of the participants living in Dhanmondi area and is aged 45 years,

“Splitzvilla, a very popular program of MTV, badly influences the teenagers by encouraging them to engage in a physical relationship. Also, many TV serials are gradually changing even our thought process.”

Family disputes. In the study, 52% of viewers mention that they watch at least an Indian TV serial that contains family disputes as its subject matter. However, many of them report that a common form of these conflicts takes place between a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law. These serials portray them as each other's enemy. Another familiar family dispute shown in these serials include the siblings' conflicts regarding property or power. Concerning this issue, one of the participants from Ramna area who is of 35 years old, said,

“Drama serials broadcasted on Indian Channels are devoid of the traditional Bangladeshi value that teaches us that mother-in-law is like mother and daughter-in-law is like daughter. But I am not sure why they don't portray these relationships positively as our culture and their culture have much affinity. I really don't have any clue.”

Extra-marital Relationship. A respondent of 47 years old who lives in New Market area said, *“There is hardly any Indian drama serials that do not show extra-marital affair. This illicit affair is presented in a way so that it seems that no worldly relationship is better than this infidelity.”* Interestingly, our study echoes this respondent's voice. 80% of them

report that Indian drama serials encourage the extra-marital relationship. About this problem, another respondent who lives in Dhanmondi and is aged 52 years said,

“The portrayal of the extra-marital relationship as pure love is nowadays responsible for any misunderstandings between husband and wife. Indian satellite television programs gradually ruin the existing trust between husband and wife which is the most important value to have to form a family.”

Dangerous and Criminal Activities. Usually, Indian TV programs, especially their reality shows, are familiar for showing many dangerous activities performed purposively by people coming from all around India. Referring to this important issue, one of our participants who lives in Lalbagh area and is aged 45 years said,

“Indian TV channels show many activities that seem impossible. For example, India's Got Challenge is a kind of program that its participants perceive as a platform to showcase their talents of doing very dangerous stunts. Moreover, there are programs like CID and Crime Patrol that show various criminal activities. If our children continue to watch these programs, then our future generation may learn various criminal activities.”

Our study reveals this truth. 56% of the participants claim that they know at least a child who tries to imitate various dangerous activities at home that they watch on Indian television channels.

Conclusion

This study is not to persuade the government to extensively monitor Indian television channels in Bangladesh. Neither it is to dissuade the public to stop watching Indian drama serials, reality shows, etc. The study is rather to understand what the mass people think about the programs telecasted on Indian channels. From the interview, we are informed that Indian satellite television programs often show things that conflict with our local culture and values, such as extra-marital relationship, family disputes, etc. Some programs that contain dangerous and criminal activities which children should not be given to watch if we want our future generation to behave appropriately. Overall, Indian satellite television programs heinously intrude into our home to destroy our culture. We need to be extra careful if we want to save our culture and values.

The discussion so far has underscored that many Indian satellite channels' broadcasted programs should be considered a catalyst for social conflict in Bangladesh instead of a source of entertainment. So, to prevent our traditional culture by stopping the cultural intrusion, a few potential initiatives can be considered. The initiatives would include, not allowing any program harmful for the traditional culture, encouraging the local producers to be more creative and innovative in attracting a larger viewership, a

ensorship from the older family members on the younger members' choice of programs, producers in local channels need to portray traditional culture more than the present extent. Apart from these measures, one can think about considering educating the people about the difference between Bangladesh and Indian culture.

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