Public Feedback as the key of Democratic Media Practice: An analytical study on the Present trend and Future Possibilities of Indian News and Current Affairs Channels

Alekha Sachidananda Nayak
Assistant Professor, BBD University, Lucknow, UP

Abstract: This study aims to find out the key by which media practice will be democratic. Without the participation of people, democracy is meaningless. Hence in the fourth pillar of democracy i.e. media, the participation of people is mandatory. Public participation can be called as the soul of democratic media practice. Journalists also advocate on the significance of ‘letter to the editor’. This is the way, by which people can participate in the mainstream of media by contributing their ideas or by pointing out unethical media practice. The method of public participation with media is feedback. Feedback is being widely practised and gaining importance by all forms of communication. Now-a-days these public feedbacks are not only confined within the letter to editor only. In this era of new media, people can react on social media, comment on an online article or they can give feedback by writing in an own blog. Feedback has an important place in communication but sometimes it is difficult to receive. Even in the mass medium like television, there are certain challenges to collect feedback from their viewers. Advancement in digital communication has widened the scope of collecting feedback for television. The television channels of our country also taking the advantages of the new medium for feedback, but at the operational level it is less understood. The feedback mechanism in Indian television is still insubstantial and unorganised. Also, there are few documented proofs of its practice in Indian television.

This study has undertaken four Odiya Indian media channels. This study has tried to answer how feedback collection mechanism is being adopted by Indian television as a tool to enhance their performance. The main objective of the study is to examine the adoption of digital feedback practices in the television news channels in India. The study put light on the impact of feedback mechanism in television.

1. Introduction

Feedback should be collected, processed and then, that information should be circulated among the members of a media organisation. Then that information will be a help to both individual member and the organisation to take a decision on the shape of next day’s media content. A reporter should have access to public feedback. That feedback will inform the reporter regarding public interest, need, opinion on both his/her published report or on complete newspaper. This will be helpful to design perfect mass communication content for their audience. Along with individual reporter, copy editor, this will helpful to all other media staff of media house. In addition, it will improve the credibility the media organisation. Here it is essential to understand how Indian mass media collect, process, and analyse the public feedback to adopt the public interest in their media output.

2. Conceptualization

“Democracy means total involvement of the people and their participation. Gandhi also wanted the power in free India should come from the people. They should be the head of the democratic institution.”(Dāsa, 2005) In the simple term, public participation is the backbone of democracy government. In the present day, the mass communication medium became a great tool to inform and to connect people. “Mass communication can be defined as the process of using a mass medium to send messages to large audience for the purpose of informing entertaining or pursuing.” (V., N. R. (2014)) Television one of the most popular mass communication medium, but people criticises for its one was the mode of communication. Here we have limited scope for public feedback. “Feedback is transmission of receiver’s reaction back to sender.” (Fiske 2011) To improve democratic public participation in mass communication, it is essential to thinks over feedback. “Communication can be done properly with proper feedback. Feedback fulfils
the aim of communication and improves future communication procedure.” (Rath, Nayak 2016)

To practice feedback mechanism in Indian television channel one should focus over how they collect, who collect and where they store, process and analyses the public reaction. Finally, how they adopt public suggestion opinion in their content.

3. Significance of the Study

One cannot ignore the importance of public participation in a democratic country like India. Also, cannot ignore wide reach and most popular mass media like Television. Specifically, news and infotainment channel. They not only inform people but also they can influence people in many ways. Therefore, if without public feedback these mass media become one medium it may become a serious threat to democracy. There for is significance to study present trend and the future possibility of feedback communication practice in Indian news and current affair channels.

4. Problem

In this light, the present study has undertaken to know the present trend and future possibility feedback mechanism in Indian news television channel reference to the selected national news and current affair channel of Odisha and some national channels.

5. Objectives

The main objective of the study is to know the trend feedback mechanism in Indian news channel. Within this broad objective, the study is specifically intended to:

- Know the trend of public feedback collection;
- Ascertain practice of public feedback interpretation in television channel;
- Identify the challenges media channel face to collect process and adopt the public feedback;

6. Research Design

The research was executed through a survey. A sample of 25 senior journalists of different news channel of Odisha and some National channel randomly selected for the survey. Participants were asked about the feedback practice in their news channel. The survey includes mostly multiple-choice or short-answer questions. Participants were informed that their response was voluntary, and their anonymity was guaranteed. An interview was conducted along with the in-depth survey. Both quantitative and qualitative method used to analysis the collected data. Hereafter analysis of the collected data, its outcome is discussed in this article.

The collection of public feedback is the first effort by the news channel to understand his audience. Most of the journalists consider the TRP is the real and authenticate feedback from their audience. They are depending upon industry body like BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) India for audience measurement. As advertisers get attracted for higher TRP so television industry also focuses on TRP. In these days of new media, more and more feedbacks are coming through new media. Young audiences like to comment on video content over the website. People prefer to write SMS or email rather than tradition postal letter.

Most of the channels appeal to the audience for public feedback only in a special program. They do not like to any appeal in other media to encourage an audience to give feedback. Some channel became a success to attract people to give feedback by giving gifts. Most of the channel do not have an exclusively dedicated program on the public reaction or public opening regarding their program.

Some popular channels receiving a huge number of letters, SMS and comment but they do not have a mechanism or dedicated person to look for these feedbacks. Time to time, some channel has a research team which conduct survey in all parts of the state. Event in national channel hardly five people dedicated to collect and process public feedback. The research team of only a few new channel have an own database, they collect feedbacks and show it in special session to the editorial team. Occasionally they are using a statistical tool to process quantitative feedback data.

7. Analysis of Public Feedback

It is also important to understand how they analyse the collected data. Here the collected data was public feedback. Once in a week or once in a month research team and editorial team, discuss public feedback. They are giving more priority over TRP rather than other public feedback.

Only key persons or the core team involves in the process of analysis of the collected feedback data. Then the core team conveys the message to the whole team. The practice of feedback analysis and communicate the result to other staffs is not followed by every Indian television channel. They are mostly focusing on the production of news content. Most of their human resources engage in production and transmission of the message to the public.

Adopt in output

Television channels are serious on low TRP program. Sometimes they close the low TRP program. However, they feel it was difficult to make any change in the popular program only for some negative feedback.
Some programs are also giving maximum priority to public responses. These programs allow people to speak through telephone, sending SMS, or leaving comments on official sites. But time is the measure of limitation for this type of program. News channels organise these programs on a bi-weekly basis or once in a month.

Public feedbacks to the mass communication channels are democratic in nature. “Feedback is a yardstick which measures the effectiveness of the communication and is used for evaluation and review and to amend the message in the light of response.” (Rayudu, 2010) In a democratic country like India, every citizen and all the television audiences should have scope to react to any program. Television channel allows audience phone, and comment on a various program but they have limited time to attend all the public feedback. There also an allegation that news channel allows only some selected feedback which is in the favour of the editor or the news organisation. During the research, most of the Journalists said that they don’t like control or prevent any type of public feedback but they have to adopt the selected public opinion to improve the quality of their program. They also say that it is not possible to provide space for all the public opinions in a television channel.

Let us discuss the challenges they face to collect process and adopt the public feedback. They face different challenges in every stage. They have to satisfy the different verity of audience. Some journalist said that in rural Odisha they get viewers who don’t see hard news, they only need some cheap programs only for entertainment. But in urban Odisha people are serious about news, the dislike cheap programs. Therefore, they can’t have both Prasad and chicken on a single plate. They also accept that, though they know the importance of feedback but most of their energy spends over quality content production. Journalist TRP is the real feedback of work because this gives us advertisement and recognition in the media market. During the study, it is seen that the most of the popular and fastest growing channel giving more important over public feedback. Dedicated people are there to collect and store the public feedback in their archive. From which all the employees can access the public opinion. They also discuss on important comments and suggestion. Also, get guidance for the design of future communication strategy from public feedback. They suggested that various new media platform can bridge the gap between the audience and the news desk. Around the clock and around the world people can give feedback to the television channel from personal mobile. These data are automatically stored and research team use these data to draw any conclusion out of it.

“The audience would like to express their point of view or thoughts in response to stimulation from the source; or the audience may like to have clarification of certain point put forth by the source or the source itself may encourage audience to provide feedback to its communication strategy so as to improve or modify ensuring communication strategy.” (Narula, 1994) Hence, public feedback can help the news channels to a great extent. It will improve the credibility of the channel among the viewer and help the producer to successful design the future program for them.

8. Conclusion

In a democratic media system, the public feedback is as important as the prime time news hour. So journalists and media organisations should recognise the important public recognition of their work. In addition, they should put a sincere effort to listen, read and watch what the people of a democratic nation talk about them. No doubt, there is a limitation to collect public feedback democratically for a television news channel. However, it is time to adopt ourselves with new possibility by go beyond the race of TRP. The advancement of communication technology like a smartphone, new media and chip internet connectivity prove a new hope for the democratic practice of mass medium.

9. References