

Private TV channels have gained commendable importance in our society. Cut through competition for rating has been observed. In view of that, describe its social role.

Introduction

The media landscape in Pakistan has been changed dramatically after the liberalization of electronic media 2002, when private TV channels were allowed to operate. Currently in 2025, total 139 private Television channels are licensed by PEMRA. These channels have become powerful actors in shaping social consciousness, political debates and cultural identity. However ratings-driven competition has also created sensationalism, political polarization and ethical challenges. Thus it is crucial to evaluate the social role of private Television channels with a balanced perspective.

1- Role in Information and Political Awareness

Private Television channels have transformed Pakistan into an informative society. Despite the increasing usage of social media, 38% Pakistani people rely on Television channels for information gathering. There is a stronger reliance of rural population as 45% still depends on Television

for sake of information. Political awareness is also being spreading through electronic media. There are many political shows like "Capital Talk" on (Geo News), Naya Pakistan (Geo), Off the Record (ARY News) has increased the political engagement.

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According to the report of Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT),

70% urban Pakistanis report being influenced in their political choices by talk shows. These programs allow opposition voices and analysts to present alternative perspectives strengthening democratic culture.

Besides that, in coverage of elections, Private Television channels provided live debates, candidates interviews and polling updates. This increased voter turnout as people became more politically aware.

So in this perspective, Private Television channels has shifted citizens from passive spectators to active participants in national politics.

2. Role of Media as a watchdog:-

Media is considered as the "Fourth pillar" of society. TV channels acts as the forth estate of democracy, holding governments, political leaders and institutions accountable. To Being with the role of media as a watchdog in exposure to corruption and mismanagement, TV channels revealed corruption scandals such as Panama papers, the

Fake degree scandals of politicians and the irregularities in mega projects. This forced accountability and judicial actions against many powerful elites. In 2007, when the Musharraf sacked the chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary, private television channels highlighted lawyer's protests to nationwide and mobilized public opinion eventually restoring the judiciary. So according to the Freedom House (2014), private channels of Pakistan are the most politically vibrant in South Asia.

Although, some positive role of media has been discussed but its uncontrolled growth has brought as many problems. Instead of serving as a social institution of responsibility, it often act as a commercial enterprise chasing Television Rating Points (TRPs). In the race of rating, private channels indulge in sensationalism, propaganda, cultural invasion and political polarization.

Concept of Rating Over Responsibility

The TRP race drives private channels to prioritize scandalous and shocking content over credible news. In Research Survey Report of 2017 by PEW Research 55% of Pakistani believe private TV channels are sensationalised and unreliable. A minor event is exaggerated into breaking news and create panic and misinformation. The recent example is of Peshawar Attack, and War of Pakistan and India

Media of both countries exaggerated the events. as Pakistani media nevertheless reported some events ethically ~~but~~ although it has been reported by some media channels as the Karachi port was attacked which created the panic situation. But Indian media on the other side went totally on misunderstanding creating and sensationalism promoting, which created panic situation. This was done only to win the race of TRPs.

Sensationalism and Fear Mongering

There are many crime shows like "Shabir to darkhy" and "Sav-E-Aam" or live "crime scene reporting" glorify violence and criminals. The Private Television channels thrive on "Blood sells" logic instead of educating society. They only sensationalized the tragedies to attract the viewers. But Psychology says showing the constant exposure to crime news increases public fear even when crime rates are not rising.

Political Polarization and Propaganda:-

many Television channels acts as the mouth-piece of the political parties or business interests fuelling divisions. The Geo vs ARY clash during in Musharraf emergency

2007, showed how TV channels pushed partisan agendas. So this undermines the role of media as a watch dog and creates public confusion where truth is lost in propaganda battles.

→ Media and Cultural Degradation

To boost ratings, channels often promote Indian soaps, operas, vulgar content and westernized talk shows. Morning shows have turned into circuses of wedding dances, gossip and glamour instead of constructive discussion. Council of Islamic Ideology (2016) also reported that many entertainment programs on TV channels promote obscenity and erode Islamic values.

→ Commercialization and Consumerism:-

Social responsibility's concept dimmed in Private TV channels and prioritize advertising revenue. Audiences are bombarded with glamorous ad promoting luxury life styles, creating social inequality and materialistic aspirations. In 2018, PEMRA reported that 65% of advertising content came for private TV airtime that left less space for educational content.

→ Mismanagement of Disasters & National Crises

The mismanagement of news channels reporting causing

Psychological destruction of Audiences. In the TRP competition, media reporting promotes myths instead of realities and creates panic attacks within public. For example, in India Pakistan war, media reported casualties & pictures for the rating rather than empathy.

→ Erosion of Journalistic Ethics

Private TV Channels for news are often accused of yellow journalism that spreads the biased, confrontational and self promoting news. Paid content media trials and defamation campaigns against rivals are common. For example 'An act fake degree' scandal damaged Pakistan's international image.

→ Weak accountability

The check and balance for such doings of media especially Private Television channels is very weak. The monitoring body of electronic media, Pakistan Electronic Media and Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is failed to curb biased and un-ethical reporting, due to political pressure and weak enforcement. Channels exploit this loop hole and continuing unchecked sensationalism.

Conclusions

Private Television channels in Pakistan were seen as a symbol of media freedom in an era, but gradually turned into commercial enterprises that are driven by the TRP rate. These channels played undeniable role in creating political awareness and information, exposed corruption and mobilized society during crises. Shifted now a days in obsession with sensationalism, political partisanship and cultural commercialization instead of acting as a 4th Pillar of society. The result is media Landscape where truth is compromised values are eroded and public trust declined.

Thus the social role of Private TV channels is less commendable and more condemnable. They have amplified noise rather than knowledge, division rather than unity and consumerism rather than ~~knowledge~~ consciousness. Unless media ethics, PEMRA regulation and professional accountability are enforced, private televisions will continue to remain a double edge sword as powerful enough to influence the society but irresponsible enough to damage it.