

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present study, “Viewer ship of DD Direct DTH Platform in North Eastern State” assesses the performance of DTH based Doordarshan service and its programmes in North Eastern States. Doordarshan has given a high priority for the development of TV services in the North East. Doordarshan, the national broadcaster in India, at present has a network of more than 1400 transmitters spread throughout the country and its signals are available to about 90% (DD1) and 43% (DD-News) population of country. It was estimated that the coverage of remaining 10 % population with terrestrial (single channel) broadcast would cost enormously, take long time (10 to 15 years) and require deployment of huge manpower for operation of terrestrial transmission. To provide an access to television programming to the remaining population, Doordarshan came up with an alternative plan of using Ku-Band broadcasting” technology which was much cheaper and economical option as compared to the coverage through terrestrial transmitters and had the capacity to provide quality transmission in all uncovered areas including remote, border, tribal, hilly and inaccessible areas.

As part of this initiative Government of India launched the Direct To Home (DTH) service in North-Eastern states in 2004. The service DD DIRECT+ is a free to air Direct-to-Home service with no subscription fee. The service today offers about 50 channels which comprise of DD as well as private channels programmes but all of which are free to air (FTA). A survey was conducted by Indian Institute of mass Communication on behalf of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in Mizoram, to assess the performance of DTH based DD service in the North-Eastern region. Mizoram is one of the ‘Seven Sister’ states in north-eastern India bordering Myanmar and Bangladesh. DD Direct (DTH) service was started in Mizoram in January 2008. In past one year the government distributed a total of 826 DD DTH sets in different parts of the state.

The advent of DTH technology has opened up possibilities of making available a number of quality programmes and variety of channels directly as per the choice of the viewers. The use of DTH technology by Doordarshan to reach out to television audiences in the north-eastern states is an effort to provide quality television transmission directly along with other multiple services like radio, email and Internet etc. Competition from

other DTH platforms and proximity to border areas in the region required an assessment of the DD Direct Plus' as a television programme service with access to quality and choice of programmes in the north eastern region. Hence, the present study explored factors which would determine the expansion of digital technology based television services in the region and fulfill expectations of the viewers in terms of choice of channels, preference for types of programme and the choice of language. The present study was taken up with the following objectives:

- To identify the scope of DD Direct Plus television service in the north eastern region.
- To describe issues relating to installation, transmission and viewing of the DD Direct plus programmes in comparison to other such services for television programmes in the region.
- To discuss preference for channels, specific programmes and choice of language by the viewers of DD Direct plus in comparison to other television subscribers (Cable and private DTH Television services).
- To suggest measures for improving the DD Direct + viewer ship in the region.

The survey was conducted in Aizwal, the capital and the main district of the state of Mizoram, where highest number of DD Direct + set-up boxes with facilities free of cost was given. A purposive sampling method was used to draw a total sample of respondents from the site where DD Direct sets were installed in last one year. At the second level, the respondents thus selected were television viewers consisting of those who were DD Direct + users and an equal number of samples were drawn from those who were subscribers of other TV platforms like private DTH users, Cable users/antenna or mix of these from the population (302) in the selected district. Research instruments, comprising of questionnaire and in-depth interview, specially designed to meet the objectives of the study, were administered. Questionnaire was used for the television viewers across all the three categories of television subscribers and in-depth interviews of cable providers and distributors of DTH were conducted to assess their perception regarding the preferences of the viewers in the local areas. The descriptive and inferential statistics were used to assess the performance of DD DTH service, opinion of the users and their satisfaction with the services by using correlation and analysis of variance.

Major Findings of the Study

Viewers' Opinion and Satisfaction with DD Direct Plus DTH Service:

Television viewers of DTH services (users of DTH (Pvt.) & DD Direct Plus) had positive opinion about the DTH services as well as about the content of the programmes provided by the private DTH service. Though for the services the differences were minimal.

DD Direct Plus had an edge over the private DTH service mainly related to the provision of installation since its users were highly satisfied in terms of the cost issue. Users who were using more than one platform were the most satisfied users with the content as well as with the installation and other service related terms and conditions. In terms of content the users of cable were the second most satisfied users, but they were least satisfied with the aspects related to installation and other services as part of the offer to the customer.

Viewers of DD Direct Plus had positive opinion about installation services as well as about the programmes offered by private DTH service, though the differences were minimal between DD Direct and DTH (Pvt) with regard to issues related to setting up the operative system facility. The picture quality and sound reception was good and more effective than the cable. For the DD Direct viewers availability of a free DTH set, free installation and no monthly charges were important reasons for making it a good option for television viewing. To establish the primacy of DD Direct on the basis of this parameter would be an incomplete assessment and prevent from establishing that discerning viewers had certain preferences and they were satisfied with the services and distribution of channels but significantly they were not highly satisfied thereby leaving scope for working on making it highly making DTH as an acceptable television service. An important consideration with viewers was the choice of channels and variety of programmes formats.

Programme channels

The respondents had a positive opinion about private DTH service in terms of providing access to channels of their choice, availability of local language programmes, Variance of services like good signal quality, uninterrupted viewing provision either by private DTH platform or through DD Direct platform. The technology used by private

DTH and DD direct DTH service was nearly the same, since both provided digital quality. It is important here to recognize that DD Direct DTH platform provided only FTA (Free to Air) channels, with one time investment. Opinion regarding access to channels is low for DD Direct since DD Direct offers limited (free to air) channels with most of channels in Hindi or major regional languages of the country thereby blocking an opportunity to access paid channels and local channels in their own language other than English or Hindi.

TV viewers had more favorable opinion regarding content of private DTH, but on the criteria of satisfaction with services they were more satisfied with DD direct DTH transmission quality and installation services. The cost factor did not matter with those.

Cost was the major contributing factor for the satisfaction among the DD Direct DTH community viewers. Overall users, who were using more than one platform, were the most satisfied users since they had access to large variety of local regional and national programmes and in their own local language. Cable TV services may have provided the content as per the choice of viewer's, but with poor installation service, picture and sound quality, after sales service were the major reasons for the dissatisfaction amongst their users. The opinion of respondents was favorable regarding content of private DTH, but in terms of satisfaction with the installation and service related issues they were more satisfied with the DD Direct DTH service.

Time Spent and Content:

Majority of the people during week days spent three hours in a day and more than 4 hours during weekends watching programmes. No significant gender differences in terms of time spent was found. News was the most watched programme and had highest number of regular viewers (69.5%) among all types of TV subscribers followed by movies with 44.4% viewers.

DD regional service was most viewed by users across all types of TV subscribers. Doordarshan programmes were viewed by 84% of the total population surveyed, either regularly or occasionally.

Language:

English is the official language in Mizoram and hence was the most preferred language for programmes by the viewers. Majority of the respondents (98.3%) watched programmes in English language and preferred English language programmes. The trend was similar across all the platforms. In the reported list of channels by respondents for English language, Doordarshan did not find any place in all the categories: news, or movies, or music or sports. Not Doordarshan but other private channels offered by cable or Private DTH were preferred since these were in the English language. The preponderance of English in the state instead of Hindi; requires a shift to local language with a regional focus as well along with national.

Table 1: Preference for English Language Programme among all TV Users

Preference for Programmes in English Language	Cable Users N=101	Private DTH N=81	DD Direct DTH N=76	More than one Platforms N=44	Total N=302
Yes	100 (99.0%)	80 (98.8%)	74 (97.4%)	43 (97.7%)	297 (98.3%)
No	1 (1.0%)	1 (1.2%)	2 (2.6%)	1 (2.3%)	5 (1.7%)

* Figures given in parenthesis are column percentages.

English was the most preferred language for programme since majority of the respondents (98.3%) were viewing English language programmes. Programmes in the regional language (78.5%) were the second most viewed programmes, whereas only one third of the respondents were viewing programmes in Hindi language and 16.6% viewed programmes from the neighboring country, and these were primarily the users of cable TV.

DD Direct Plus:

DD Direct Plus service offers programme primarily in major regional languages, Hindi and some limited programmes in English language, but it does not offer any channels in the local language. DD Direct service (DD DTH) has certain advantages as well as disadvantages. Cost was the major factor, which provided an edge over other service providers, with no contenders since DD Direct Plus is installed free of cost by the government in government run/supported institutions and community centers, mostly in

difficult and rural areas. Secondly, programmes in the regional language was the second advantage, DD Direct Plus has, but at this front there is a strong competitor i.e. cable services, which were offering local channels, and own production houses. 98.3% of respondents were viewing programmes in English language, but DD Direct Plus does not have any package in English language to attract its viewers to the services of DD Direct Plus, neither has had any channels to woo the viewers of neighboring country as a tough competition. In terms of content, majority of the respondents viewed news regularly. At this front DD Direct Plus has an advantage due to preference for its news services, which is coming out due to local news.

Regional/ Local Language Programmes

Programmes in the regional language (Mizo) were the second most viewed programmes. 78.5% of the respondents viewed programmes in the local/regional language. Private DTH service was in a disadvantageous position. Respondents were using cable along with DTH service. As it was reported during the case study: “we have a wider access to more channels as compared to local cable service both in English and Hindi, but we are still look up to cable since we have an access to our local language channels.” Due to the fact that private DTH did not offer any channels in regional language (except those available through Free to Air Channels); the need was fulfilled by cable operators and DD Direct DTH service. 90% of cable users and 97.7% of users of combination of more than one platform were viewing programme in the regional language. Three DD channels were in the reported list of channels for regional language, while accesses to other local channels were provided by the cable operators. Regional/local language has a potential audience in large numbers, which is captured by local channels. Doordarshan can design their programmes in regional/local language to attract more viewers since programmes in regional language can provide avenues to Doordarshan to increase its penetration in the region. The same opinion was shared by station director of Doordarshan Kendra during the interview. “Unless the local content is not provided people will not go for the DD Direct DTH programmes”.

Table 2
Preference of Users of Various Platforms for Regional Language Programmes

Viewing Programmes in Regional Language	Cable Users N=101	Private DTH N=81	DD Direct DTH N=76	More than one Platforms N=44	Total N=302
Yes	91 (90.1%)	46 (56.8%)	57 (75.0%)	43 (97.7%)	237 (78.5%)
No	10 (9.9%)	35 (43.2%)	19 (25.0%)	1 (2.3%)	65 (21.5%)

* Figures given in parenthesis are column percentages.

Programmes of Neighboring Country

There were only few takers of programmes of neighboring country in the region. Only 16.6% of total respondents viewed programmes of neighboring country, and they were primarily the users of cable (23 out of 50), or combination of more than one platform (8 out of 50). There were three channels: Arirang, KBS and Nepal, which were watched by the respondents. KBS World is a television channel provided by the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) in English language. It is a free to air channel, which is available on DD Direct DTH platform as well. Arirang is also a Korean channel available in English language, but it is not a free to air channel. It is available through cable service only. Channel Nepal is Nepal's first satellite TV channel.

Suggestions

To capture demand of programmes in local language DD can offer/produce programmes in the local language or have a tie-up with the local cable for uplinking locally produced programmes. Doordarshan can design their programmes to capture the needs of programmes in regional language. Programmes in regional language can provide avenues to Doordarshan to increase its penetration in the region. Beside this Doordarshan can think of adding some English channels to its bouquet of programmes. For the promotion of Hindi Language programmes, Doordarshan can offer Hindi programmes with sub title in English to deal with the problem of lack of language based programmes. This will also ensure that viewers in North-east. Are exposed to the mainland and oriented to the other states' cultural activities. Majority of programmes offered by DD Direct Plus are either in Hindi or regional languages which have limited audience appeal.

