

TRP's LEAD OR MISLEAD

Television Rating Points (TRPs) drive the broadcasting and advertising industry. The advertisers because they decide what will be the right time, right channel to broadcast their ads in order to reach the product's actual audience and in a way broadcasters and TV channels because these ratings decide the revenue they should charge from the advertising companies. Are the TRPs and viewership figures evaluated true, fair and free of any tampering? A conference was organized by the Center for Media Studies, a Delhi-based think tank on 7th March '07 which called for scrutinizing the television and channel ratings. Ratings are the sole benchmarks today for any advertising or public relation company and therefore the sanctity of the method of measuring these is needed to be looked into. Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao, Chairman, CMS introducing the topic of the CMS meet remarked, such researches help maximize the potential of TV, improve level playing opportunities, encourage citizen's participative role and go beyond whether the TV set is on or not and who is around the TV.

Flip Side of TRPs

Various problems about the TV viewership ratings aroused the need for this conference. Little amount being spent for researching viewership despite the tremendous influence of these ratings on the content priorities and schedules of channels is one of those problems. No independent assessment of the methodology followed for assessing viewership rating is its another drawback. The viewership rating method needs to be reliable. The exercise should be transparent and representative in a way that all channels get a fair chance in rating. Furthermore without covering and reflecting the rural India, yardsticks cannot be fixed. Confusion is also on the point that by getting the cooperation of a few active households belonging to certain sections can these ratings be generalized to a large section of passive viewers? Some people feel that the TV channels are not able to get out of the trap of false TRPs. The agencies that rate the channels should be independent from the interests of the advertisers, advertising agencies and individual channels.

Issues that popped up

Which agency should conduct TRP-related surveys? What is their origin and identity? Should there be only one measurement or should there be competition between rating agencies? What will be effect of CAS/DTH on TRPs? Do we need TRAI to tackle the TRP system?

The need for independent regulation is vital as ratings these days are an outcome of "aggressive marketing" by big channels. The TRPs phenomenon needs to be addressed by the regulator, TRAI. It is believed that with the recent explosion in the number of television channels the percentage of people still out of reach in the country has decreased. This is a misconception. This entails that the viewership basically seeks deep pockets. Implications and challenges that can be posed by the new technologies like CAS, DTH and IPTV on TRPs is also a matter to be thought about. All these emerging issues were discussed at the CMS meet. Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao appreciated TAM's efforts over the last two decades which was attended by Bhaskar Ghose of Lok Sabha TV, MP Brinda Karat, Subhash Chandra of Zee TV and Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee. The conference was attended by many eminent personalities from the world of television, advertising and other media experts, academicians and rating agencies like TAM and aMap.

Apart from TAM's CEO Mr. L.V. Krishnan and aMap's Ravi Arora, I&B Secretary SK Arora and Mr. Choubey of TRAI also took active participation at the conference. Off late the TV ratings are used more by channels than by advertising agencies thus the debate was opened up in interest of everyone especially the public apart from channels, market researchers, advertising agencies and PR agencies.

Suggestions

I&B secretary, SK Arora felt the need for more organizations in the rating business as competition is required. He also expressed grievance on the fact that electronic media and internet have today become more business oriented. Bhaskar Ghose stressed the need for refinement of the methods followed by rating agencies. To the broadcasters, Ghose said that it was important to improve the quality of content but also suggested that there should be a key to check that the content is not totally in the hands of the rating agencies. BG Verghese of Centre for Policy Research and Mahesh Prasad, President, Sahara TV both believed that the ratings should not be manipulated by the government or by private channels. Prasad also felt that the number of people meters (60 million cable homes have 7,000 people meters) were inadequate.

Both the rating agencies showed educative presentations dealing with TRPs. TAM's LV Krishnan sensed the requirement for broadcasters to understand their audiences in a better way. Hence, it was concluded that TRAI must sincerely look into the system of TV viewership rating along with which it must take care that the viewing households should know more about these ratings so that they can participate actively in the process.

