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## **Fw: TRP TRAP FOR NEWS CHANNELS**

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Tue, May 14, 2013 at 3:28 PM

--- On **Fri, 26/4/13**, **ashish kaul** <[aashishkaul@hotmail.com](mailto:aashishkaul@hotmail.com)> wrote:

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Date: Friday, 26 April, 2013, 4:10 PM

Respected Rajkumar Ji,

It is a tragedy that television news is measured on the popularity index and not on an impact index. The television news industry has managed to cross Rs 1,500 crore in revenue in under five years, a majority of which has come in the last 36 months. Still, I am not impressed. Some might call me cynical, but after 20 years in the broadcast industry, I am bitterly disappointed to see this most powerful medium reduced to no more than a TRP trap.

News channels have been commoditised just like consumer durables. New news channels are born every week. The recent launches are good examples that "news channels" are not merely precursors of social change but harbingers of fortune (or misfortune?). The real issue is not the endless list of brutal rapes and daylight murders, and neither is it the debate over Delhi being the National Crime Region and Mumbai the bastion of the underworld. Haven't we always known this? Haven't we heard of rapes and murders in the days of yore? Haven't common and beautiful sex workers existed before? Haven't we known about the existence of corruption in power corridors? And of the casting couch?

The real issue is something else; it is sustenance of business in the absence of a competent authority and the means to judge the growth and quality of television news. It is a great tragedy that television news is measured on the popularity index and not on an impact index. This is compounded by a paucity of people who understand the difference between television news channel and a newspaper. Unfortunately, television news today is managed by people who were print journalists, or our friends who came in from advertising or FMCG. The problem is not their lack of talent but their inability to understand the nature of the medium.

Television by nature is a medium of visual contact; it is about things that appeal to the eye and the human mind. The print media is about stimulating the mind. It is the primary instinct of the human eye to stop at something that is not routine. This explains the presence of some mediocre news channels at the top of the TRP ladder while some top-end channels languish at the bottom. General entertainment is stress-free viewing targeted at viewers seeking "entertainment" and not "social change". TRPs measured through a system counting and measuring visual contact and connect may serve the purpose for them. But news is not entertainment and, therefore, must be measured on an index of "impact".

Our mind commands the eye to stop at anything unusual. This does not mean that the mind is assimilating the visual data and initiating a "change". News as content is a catalyst for change that comes about by understanding, analysis and, finally, action. For the desired action to take place, the mind must be focused and in the environment to facilitate this phenomenon.

An entertainment-seeking viewer, whose number is large, tunes in for just that and not, say, "we the people" — a fact resonated by the current measurement index. This propels news managers to package news in the entertainment format. The onslaught of comedy, reality shows and sadhu babas betrays how hapless news managers are. Having said this, can our news managers not package meaningful news in a popular format? No one is willing to do that, since they live their lives in front of a

huge video wall tracking competition, and screaming their lungs out on input and output editors. So, Billo Rani Chhat Par becomes the top story, but no one looks through it at the mismanagement of housing societies, or the lack of infrastructure management in an aspiring superpower where babies keep falling into open manholes.

No one has the time (or competence) to see through the flawed and corrupt recruitment process in police and para-military forces and the falling (or should I say failing education stands) behind every Arushi, Priyadarshini and Jesica Lall killed in cold blood. I can say with conviction that it is a fallacy that news channels are controlled by editors. In fact, they are controlled by news managers and we have no one but ourselves to blame. Our industry has not realised that we need to be judged on the impact that our news makes and not by an index of visual contact. News has to be unshackled from the parameters of reach, distribution and other tenets of the soap opera index. It is any way not fair to measure news on the parameters of a handful of cities in a country where 70 per cent of the population lives in small towns and villages, and it is these small towns and villages that vote a government to power. These small towns and villages are where news channels make more impact than in the metros where people have come to refer to news channels as entertainment channels.

News perhaps should be measured by a separate measurement system based on grades and not on integrals. I am sure media planners will have a problem in victimising the channels based on a common grade system having weights based on the population of television households, a parallel voting system based on a combination of telephones, internet, SMS and surface mail. Data must be collected and evaluated over a month and touch every city that has a television set. Every planner will get enough time to evaluate channels' performance, news editors will get time to implement strategies and marketing professionals more time to connect with viewers. So what is the hurry of having a daily or weekly rating?

Importantly, why does it have to be one private agency to dictate what a constitutionally-mandated organ has to follow? The dilemma of new-age television

news is that all of it is common. Let us accept the fact that there are no new issues anywhere on this planet, unless one explores them.

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