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Audience Research In Bangladesh

By

Alimuzzaman Choudhury
The inherent tendency and motive of all communication effort is to reach a certain audience and to imprint an impression and impact on it. To inform, to educate and to entertain is the principal objective/purpose of any broadcasting organisation, as is universally acknowledged. No broadcasting organisation can carry out these major functions with effectiveness without adequate and proper knowledge and due understanding of its audiences.

The broadcasting organisation can really accomplish its purpose and fulfill its objective through continuously constant and intimate touch with its audiences. Money and effort may go in vain, if there is no adequate knowledge and understanding of the listeners or viewers.

A Broadcaster's prime concern in the effectiveness of the programme. But actually what constitutes the desired effectiveness, is something to ponder. The connotation differs from one to another. It carries different meaning and significance as per perceptive situation and environment. But whatever way we define, the effectiveness depends ultimately upon the objective we set for a particular programme. Audience Research can help determine the criteria for effectiveness and its measurement. The results of such studies can be useful and beneficial not only to the broadcasters but also to the planners and producers. Audience research plays a very important role to facilitate decision-making by providing necessary information to the planners and policy-makers. In certain cases, Audience Research can be of much help to obtain resources for broadcasting organisation.

Efficient research can assist Govt. in setting proper priorities, in using useful strategies, in reducing frustration by developing and employing its communication resources in optimally productive ways.

Not only this, Audience Research can provide a wide variety of information to programme producers to help them make their programme more effective and meaningful. Other than the background information about the audience, Audience research is apt to provide feedback about the programme.
Without a sound and strong Research establishment equipped with qualified, trained and experienced researchers; systematic, methodical and effective audience research is not possible. Audience Research is not an isolated activity but it is an integral part of programme production and transmission process. Its structural set up should therefore be viewed from such point of view. Unfortunately, like other many developing countries, in Bangladesh, audience research organisation has not been yet able to attain its due sphere and spirit.

The following organisations are at present mainly engaged in Bangladesh in audience research:

a. Radio Bangladesh
b. Bangladesh Television
c. National Broadcasting Academy
   (Now, named as National Institute of Mass Communication)

In addition to these organisations, other institutions which have some interest in audience research are: Press Institute of Bangladesh, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Dhaka University, National Institute of Population Research and Training and a few commercial agencies.

A comparative study of the structural set up both old and new will perhaps help understand the condition and status of the Audience Research in the country.

**RADIO BANGLADESH** (Old Set-up)
After 1976 - January 1985

**Head Quarter:**
- Director, Liaison, Research and Reference 1
- Assistant Director, Research 2
- Librarian 1
- Analyst 1
- Research Assistant 1
- Cataloguer 1
- Supporting staff 12

**Regional Stations:**
- Listeners' Research Officer 1
- Supporting staff 1
BANGLADESH TELEVISION

Editor, TV Cue 1
Research Assistant (Contract basis) 2
Regular 1

NATIONAL BROADCASTING ACADEMY (Now, NIMCO)

Director, Audience Research 1
Statistician 1
Radio Researcher 2
Television Researcher 2
Supporting Staff 4

PRESENT SET-UP
(After January 1985 - Reorganised service)

RADIO BANGLADESH:

Head Quarter:
Director, Liaison, Research 1
Assistant Director 1
Superintendent 1
Stenographer 1
Librarian 1
Analyst 1
Cataloguer 1
Supporting staff 5

Regional Stations:
No post retained

BANGLADESH TELEVISION: As before

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MASS COMMUNICATION (NIMCO)

Sr. Research Officer 1
Research Officer (Radio) 1
Research Officer (TV) 1
Librarian 1
Supporting staff 3

The present status and strength of personnel puts a clear evidence of inadequacy in the existing organisational structure. The situation demands naturally the increase of the qualified and trained personnel on the staff.
As to the audience research, admitting honestly and frankly, the activity or the process is yet to develop widely.

The research unit of Radio Bangladesh with a very delicate structural existence at the Headquarters, headed by a Director, and the previously existing small cell at the three major stations in the country have tried to undertake the responsibility of evaluation of the listeners' reaction to the programme, supervision of the research activities of all the three stations. The units have been of some help to collect information of the programme for other stations where no research cell exists. It also retains function to supervise the feedback system and process of External Services of Radio Bangladesh. The central unit analyses the fortnightly reports of the listeners' letters of all the stations and units.

Listeners Research Cells at the stations concededly, have remained almost inactive excepting that they scrutinise and prepare the fortnightly reports on the listeners' letters. The Cell does not possess any separate budgetary provision and is under the direct control of the Regional Director of the concerned stations.

For both Radio and Television, it seems, listeners' letters have perhaps been the only feedback of the programme.

Development Broadcast of Radio Bangladesh such as Farm Broadcast, population planning Control, adult education etc. offer some feedback from the field, mostly meant for the Headquarters, while the regional stations outside Dhaka are devoid of such reactions since they suffer from lack of transport facilities and trained manpower. There are a good number of listeners' letters containing multiple information on the Farm and Family Planning programme, broadcast on national Hook-up. The listeners' letters at the regional stations convey mostly the queries on regional broadcasts and hardly there flows any interest and enthusiasm for N.H. programme.

Notwithstanding, however, a few research work has been carried out by the Research Unit of Radio Bangladesh. The major research work was "Radio use in Rural Bangladesh" published in 1977 with the financial assistance of UNICEF. A survey was also conducted on Population Planning Control programme and the report was brought
out in 1978. The Population Planning Cell of Radio Bangladesh has brought out a report entitled “Evaluation of Shukhi Shangsar” in 1979, covering motivational programme on family planning. In the survey report namely “Radio use in Rural Bangladesh” a salient feature surfaced to the effect that about only nine percent of the villagers owned their own radio receivers while about 73 percent of the rural people were used to listen to occasionally—since they did not possess their own sets. They clustered round their neighbours and shops around. The revelation induced the researchers to organise community listening and ensure feedback from the field on development broadcast. Apart from the listeners letters, there also comes some response in telephone calls expressing or exposing reaction to the programme—sometimes of course, not happy or pleasant or soothing. These people are generally half-educated, sometimes highly educated too; they usually express their annoyance and displeasure to particular programme they had been listening to. Personal contacts also bring in sharp reaction from a section of listeners. But the type or form of reaction or feedback is neither systematic, sound nor all-pervasive. It is generally sporadic and sweeping.

In view of the unhappy condition of Radio ownership in the rural areas, a pilot project for organised Radio listening had been taken up by the Research Unit of Radio Bangladesh in 1977 in cooperation with UNICEF. The UNICEF donated 50 Radio sets for free distribution among the rural community with a view to conducting evaluation on development programme. Altogether 32 organised Radio listening clubs had been set up by the Research Units of Radio Bangladesh in collaboration with UNICEF, Social Welfare and the International Union for Child Welfare in different, remote villages with a three band Sony Radio set free of cost donated. These clubs had to fill in the questionnaire remitted to them from time to time and were required to submit a monthly report about audience participation and reaction with suggestion for the improvement of programme. But the system could not proceed a long way happily due to lack of proper supervision, control, regular contact and sustained setback due to shortage of trained manpower.

Audience research, in Bangladesh, in fact, is yet to get through.
Bangladesh Television does not in a real sense, possess any audience research system. As to the feed back, they tend to depend on some viewers' letters, mostly related to entertainment programme. An activity like screening the audience and answering their letters had been originated sometime back, but such effort can not produce the same result as the systematic evaluation process is apt to do. Bangladesh Television also prints and incorporates questionnaire in its quarterly programme journal - TV Cue but it seems, the system hardly fulfills the objective of evaluation of development broadcasting. Television programmes as have been evident, mostly tend to be urban-oriented.

5 percent of the people remain outside the scope of the sophisticated norm and form of the programme.

While we did take into account the vista of audience research, the feed-back, evaluation of programme, we should I think, bring in our view the instrument carrying the subject. Naturally the question creeps in. How many sets are there in the country? Radio? Television? The question is genuine and pertinent. The answer, of course, is not that much simple. We are to round up in a round-about process. Yes, although the number of Radio licence is not even one million officially; unofficially about six million Radio sets are in use. The sources of these finding are mainly based on:

a. different survey reports;
b. ports—both air and sea;
c. customs;
d. local producers and assemblers and

e. post .............

and telegraph department which is responsible for issuing, renewing and inspection of Radio licence. In regard to television, the official number of black and white sets rises to more than one million and a half, while the sets in colour go to less than one fourth of a million.

Now, as there has appeared a new and purposeful audience research unit at the NICCO, to undertake systematic research, one may legitimately hope that audience research will shape in properly. The unit has originated its work duly and has been going ahead with objective. The main purpose and functions do cover the following
a. Impart training of the programme people on the principle of audience research.
b. To perform research activities.
c. Evaluation of programme of TV and Radio programmes.

The research Unit has completed the following studies.

**LIST OF RESEARCH STUDIES**
*(AS OF SEPTEMBER 1984)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Area Covered</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
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<tr>
<td>Farm Broadcasts of Radio Bangladesh</td>
<td>30 villages from six unions of six districts one from each listening zone.</td>
<td>395 farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population programmes of Radio Bangladesh</td>
<td>16 villages and five urban communities of six districts - in five listening zones of Radio Bangladesh.</td>
<td>650 (345 Male 305 Female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Education programme of Bangladesh Television</td>
<td>30 community TV centers in six unions of six illiterate TV districts - one from each viewers, viewing zone of Bangladesh Television.</td>
<td>290 Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Coaching programme of Bangladesh Television</td>
<td>30 schools, from Dhaka, Chittagong,Khulna and Rajshahi.</td>
<td>1500 SSC students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Testing of Radio programmes on Rural Audiences.</td>
<td>12 villages from six listening zones.</td>
<td>373 listeners (176 Male and 197 Female)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation of morning Magazine programme of Radio Bangladesh</td>
<td>10 villages from five listening zones.</td>
<td>258 listeners (116 Male and 142 Female)</td>
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**Study on Group listening:**

- **a- Farmers' Radio Club** 10 villages from six districts - one in each listening zone. 10 case studies
- **b- Mahila Samity** 11 villages from six districts - one in each listening zone. 11 case studies
- **c- Mothers' Centres** 8 villages from four districts of four listening zones. 8 Case Studies.
- **d- School Broadcasts** 9 High Schools from six districts - one in each listening zone. 9 Case studies.
- **e- Family planning** 3 Thana Health Complexes of 3 Case studies.
- **3**
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<td>Six villages of five districts in five listening zones.</td>
<td>12 listening sessions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation of educational Broadcasts of Radio Bangladesh</td>
<td>8 Secondary School of five districts in five listening zones.</td>
<td>188 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a- Programme for secondary schools</td>
<td>8 Primary Schools of six 176 students districts - one in each listening zone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b- Programme for primary schools</td>
<td>5 Primary Schools of six 176 students districts - one in each listening zone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c- Programme for illiterate adults.</td>
<td>Five villages - one in each listening zones.</td>
<td>10 Case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of N3A Training programme.</td>
<td>In all the six Regional 1st Trainees, Station of Radio Bangladesh.</td>
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Now, while I come to the close of my presentation, I think, I should take this opportunity to bring out explicitly that the concept of audience research, as yet has not been able to move many at the policy-making and planners level. The spirit should be imbued in such a way that the idea of audience research is received in all earnestness and enthusiasm by each and everybody concerned. The significance, importance, and its bearing should be made creeping in the minds of the masses. So long it remains in-house activities, it remains singular and confirmed. It stands all-pervasive, all comprehensive, while it crosses the barriers, reaches universalism.