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Audience Research In The Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation

By

R Nimalsiri
Introduction:

Evolution of Broadcasting.

Broadcasting on an experimental basis was started in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) by the Telegraph Department in 1923, just three years after the inauguration of Broadcasting in Europe. The official broadcasting was inaugurated on the 16th of December 1925, from a small studio at the then Ceylon Telegraph Office. In October 1949, Broadcasting which was then the responsibility of the General Post Office was given departmental status. In 1950, with the organisation of a separate Government Department to carry out the function of Broadcasting, simultaneous transmissions in three languages commenced and separate language services were established with organisers in charge of each language division. The Hulugalle Commission advocated the establishment of an autonomous Corporation on the lines of the New Zealand Broadcasting Act of 1961 with the enactment of the Act 37 of 1966, the Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) Broadcasting Corporation was established. Today about 2,900 employees ensure that the Corporation fulfils its obligation towards achieving the national aspirations. As has been often said the Corporation should harmonise its loyalties to the people, to the Government and to the medium of broadcasting.

Emergence of Audience Research.

On the recommendation of the N.E. Weerasooriya Commission appointed in 1953, the Listener Research Unit was established in 1956. One Listener Research Officer was appointed on 2nd July 1956. He was a B.Sc graduate in Statistics, conducted a good number of useful studies until his retirement in 1980. The Board of Directors and the Director General took action in 1982 to expand the Listener Research Unit. Thus the unit was re-designated the Audience Research Division and a separate Director was appointed in April 1982.
Today there are four Research Officers in the Division who are graduates in Mass Communication and Social Sciences.

**Importance of Audience Research.**

Audience Research is the systematic study of the Public for broadcasting. Its major function is to supply information. The Corporation is concerned with the impact of its programmes and services or those sections of the public at whom they are directed. Thus informed, it is expected, the Corporation is better able to make judgements on the extent to which the various services it is providing have achieved their objectives, served the purposes for which they were intended, or failed to do so. Research may also be required specifically to investigate the need for new types of services, for changes in existing services, or to indicate how, if changes are to be made these can best be effected. Or again programme planning or development may benefit from the provision of more comprehensive or detailed information than the planner normally has available to him.

**Areas of interest.**

- Background information about the population
- Population composition in terms of sex, age, occupation, education etc.
- Linguistic composition
- Ethnic composition
- Cultural practices
- Exposure to mass media and type of Radio and Television receivers in use
- People's availability to listen or views
- Listening habits and tastes
- Expectation from Radio
- Information needs.
- How effective is Radio as a medium of entertainment, information and education - vis-a-vis other media of Communication
- How is the credibility of SLBC vis-a-vis other media of communication in Sri Lanka.

(Contd...)
Preferred programmes: Sinhala, English, and Tamil

Reactions of listeners to commercials and sponsored programmes

What suggestions and recommendations can listeners make to maintain two-way communication between them and the Corporation.

Functions of the Audience Research Division.

1. To identify areas of enquiry and submit memoranda in that connection to the Director General, the Chairman and Board of Directors with such details as objectives of the study, sampling design, tools of data collection, venue of study and the estimated cost.

2. To organise and undertake field surveys which involve -
   a. Selection and recasting of sample.
   b. Recruitment, training and development of the interviewers on a purely casual basis.
   c. Scrutinising of filled-in questionnaires and quality control.

3. To carry out panel surveys and mail surveys on selected broadcasts, after forming panels for different types of programmes and prepare reports.

4. To develop research designs, tools for data collection and guide points for organising field work.

5. To scrutinise Audience Research needs received from the respective language directors at the beginning of the year and evolve priorities in consultation with the Director General and the Deputy Director General (Programmes).

6. To maintain statistics and vital information relating to socio-demographic and ethno-linguistic-cultural characteristics of the potential audiences served by the Corporation including that of regional station.

7. To undertake studies to evaluate functioning of various projects such as farm broadcasts and educational broadcasts.

8. To assess the programme composition and complexion of regional stations vis-a-vis socio-demographic characteristics, needs

(Contd...4)
and aspirations of the potential audience.

9. To prepare special reports, documents, profiles etc., as and when called upon to do so.

10. To undertake and accomplish any other functions as and when directed by the Director General or the Chairman and the Members of Board of Directors.

R. MINALSIRI
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