

MEDIA COVERAGE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE SECTOR: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF TELEVISION CHANNELS IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture sector is considered to be the bedrock of Pakistan's economy as it plays an important role, directly as well as indirectly, in generating economic and industrial growth. In spite of such a great significance, the speed of agricultural development in Pakistan is very low. Agricultural production can be increased considerably if available modern production technologies are adopted by the farming community. Media is considered to be one of the best tools to create awareness about the effectiveness and application of new technologies. So the present study was conducted in the Department of Mass Communication, Lahore College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan during the year 2011 to determine extent of television coverage for development of agriculture sector in Pakistan for the period 2006-2010. Data were collected from media practitioners of private and public television channels by applying intensive interview technique. The study concludes that there is only one dedicated television channel (Sohni Dharti) for agriculture sector out of 82 channels. Indeed, a single agricultural channel is inadequate for an agrarian country having 67 percent of total population living in rural areas and 44.7 percent of them connected to farming. The data further indicate that no other television channel was giving due coverage to third largest sector of the economy. However, these television channels were found occasionally accommodating agricultural news items/news packages in their current affair programmes and news bulletins. Frequency and duration of targeted programmes are also not feasible to create an impact on farming community. The findings endorse that maximum weekly time (14 hours out of 168 hours) is afforded by Apna channel for agricultural broadcasts i.e. only 8.3 percent of total time. Major reasons for neglecting this sector by television channels include non-availability of sponsorship, revenue, lack of viewership and demand from farmers, along with lack of frequent arrangement of agricultural events by the government and other related organizations.

KEYWORDS: Agriculture sector; television channels; media coverage; information flow; Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan being an agricultural country has a rich and vast natural resources base, covering various ecological and climatic zones. So the agriculture sector has potential for accelerating economic and industrial growth in country like Pakistan. The importance of agriculture for Pakistan's economy can be gauged in three ways: first, it provides food to consumers and raw material for domestic industries; secondly, it is a source of foreign exchange earnings; and third, it provides a market for industrial goods.

At the time of Independence, agriculture sector had the largest contribution to GDP of Pakistan. Although over the years service sector has become the largest contributor but agriculture sector still remains the third largest contributor to its GDP with 20 percent share. This sector is also a major source of employment in Pakistan, sharing 43.61 percent of total employment.

Despite paramount importance of agriculture, in Pakistan, its pace of development is very slow. The agricultural production of the country is lower as compared to other countries of the world, even within the country there is an ample gap between per hectare yield of crops between progressive and conventional farmers. This is only because of indifference towards acquiring and adopting latest production technologies for enhancing crop yields and achieving sustainability in agriculture.

Mosher (9) suggested to increase agricultural production through the use of new methods and technologies brought from other regions of the world. Otsuka and Kalirajan (3) mentioned that agriculture sector has always been receiving high priority in nations' development due to its significant role in economy and GDP. Both developing and developed countries are directly or indirectly related to the agriculture for progress. Increase in agricultural production is essential for poverty reduction and improve the livelihood of rural people. They further argued that extension services can play a critical role in agricultural development while media can play vital role in extension teaching methods. Television is one of them which can be used to create awareness and impart training in adopting modern technologies for farming community spread over wide geographical areas. Another study (6) revealed that majority of farmers give first preference to television.

Media especially electronic is a major source of information about latest happenings and innovations taking place. Rogers and Shoemaker (12) and Lingamneni (8) concluded that television plays an important role in

agricultural development. Its effects at the knowledge and awareness stage are more evident but its importance at other stages of adoption of innovation is also very high.

Carpenter (4) argues that television is one of the most effective media, which can be used for agricultural technology transfer among farmers. It has been acclaimed to be one of the most important communication tools available today. Much of its success in teaching lies in the unique combination of sight, sound and motion. The combination of audio and visual stimuli has proven that it can change human behavior and ultimately improve farmers' learning.

Ani and Baba (2) stated that information and communication are essential ingredients needed for effective transfer of technologies that are designed to boost agricultural production. To benefit from such technologies, farmers must have access to them and learn how to effectively utilize them in their farming systems and practices. This should be the function of agricultural extension agencies all over the world. These extension agencies make use of different approaches, means and media in transferring improved agricultural technologies to the end users.

In Pakistan, use of electronic media in agricultural sector was introduced for the first time in 1955 when USAID gifted 38 cinema vans to the Department of Agriculture. These vans were deployed in all important districts of Pakistan. However, these vans did not make significant impact on farming community because only foreign films were shown to the farmers (5). However, electronic media in the form of radio and television remained in use by the department as one of the important teaching tools. How far these media have been effective in achieving desired results seems to be an important area to be investigated. Saeed (13) argues that communication plays an important role in the development of a country. If means of communication are economical, fast and well-developed they can produce favorable impact on attitude, modernization and widening of market.

Generally, television is considered to be a powerful medium that performs active role in informing and educating at larger scale. For the past more than two decades, television has become the part and parcel of our lives having visible direct and indirect impact on rural and urban population. During the recent past, Pakistani media, particularly electronic, has witnessed unprecedented growth and more than 100 private satellite television and FM radio channels are operational in almost all parts of the country present. The present study is based on the concept of Modernization Theory, which comes

under the umbrella of Development Theory. New and latest technologies are the best source and main reason of social change in any society. The concept of modernization deals with the move of an agricultural country to the industrial one. Novel and most recent advancements do not amend societies itself. Rather it is reaction of the machinery that modifies the nations. Innovation in technologies is an ongoing process.

In view of immense significance and popularity of television, the present study accomplished to discover role of television in agricultural development by analyzing the coverage of private and state channels. Specific objectives of the study are to;

1. Find out the time devoted to agriculture-based programmes by television channels during the last 5 years (2006-2010).
2. Compare agricultural broadcasts of state-owned television (PTV) and private television channels.
3. Discuss format and effectiveness of agricultural programs on television channels.
4. Suggest recommendations for media practitioners regarding dissemination of information for farmers community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in the Department of Mass Communication, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan during the year 2011. It was confined to Lahore because most of the television channels have their head offices or bureaus there. For an intensive interview a qualitative research technique, was used to gather detailed information from a group of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme or situation targeted by the study. Inhabitants of the study comprise those media practitioners who are associated and involved in their channels' policy formation, production and transmission of agriculture programmes. Therefore, television channels and respondents were selected on the basis of purposive sampling. Geo TV, Duniya News, Express News, Samaa TV, Punjab TV, Apna TV, PTV, Channel 5, Aaj TV, ATV, Sohni Dharti and Royal TV were selected on the basis of viewership or broadcast of programmes related to agriculture sector.

The present study took more than 10 percent of total population (82) and selected the above mentioned 12 television channels to have an appropriate

sample size. The selected television channels included top five news channels in Pakistan while the rest were selected on the basis of broadcasts of agriculture and related programmes. News channels were included in the sample as these channels are required to cover the agricultural news and information in their programmes. A check list was prepared and data were collected from target audience through face-to-face interview and analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data (Fig.) showed that about 82 Pakistani satellite channels including news, entertainment, music, business, movie, agriculture, cooking, etc. are operational and available on cable television not only in urban but also in rural and far flung areas of the country.

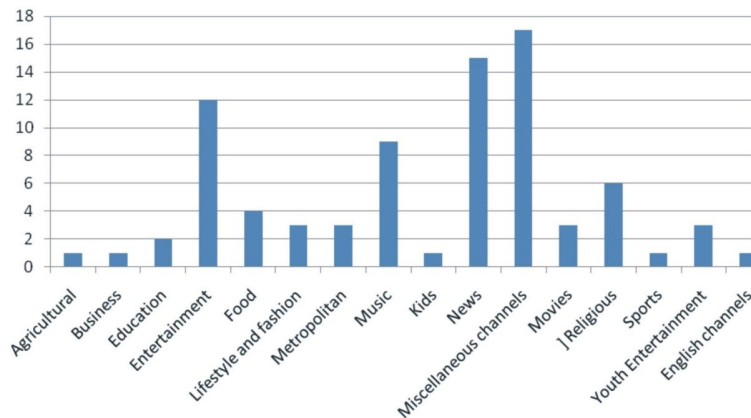


Fig. Categories of private television channels in Pakistan.

Out of total 82 private television, news channels have the highest number i.e. 17 followed by entertainment (12), music (9) and so on (Fig). It is evident that there is only one dedicated channel for agriculture (Sohni Dharti), which certainly is insufficient for an agricultural country having 67 percent of total population living in rural areas and 44.7 percent of it is connected to agriculture. Thus it does not fulfill the purpose at desired level.

The data (Table 1) indicate that only 7 (nearly 10%) channels i.e. Apna TV, Channel 5, Punjab TV, PTV, Royal TV, ATV and Aaj TV broadcast agriculture based programmes during the target period (2005-2010), However, Aaj TV and ATV have stopped airing of farming programmes while others still broadcast agriculture programs. It also indicates that all channels focused on discussion programmes only and did not broadcast other types of

Table 1. Television channels broadcasting agricultural programmes.

TV Channel	Programmes title	Years of broadcasting	Type of programmes
Apna Channel	Apna Kissan Apni Zrat	(2004-10) 7 years	Discussion programmes
Punjab TV	Khaet Punjab Day	(2004-10) 6-7 years	Discussion programmes
Channel 5	Kissan Time	(2005-07) 2 years	Discussion programmes
PTV	Haryali	(2000-10) 10 years	Discussion programmes
Aaj TV	Zarkhaez	(2005-10) 5 years	Discussion programmes
Royal TV	Zarai Pindal	(2008-10) 2 years	Discussion programmes
ATV	Sarsabz Pakistan	(2005-08) 4 years	Discussion programmes

programmes. i.e features, documentary, etc. Discussion programmes are significant for dissemination of latest information but these are not attractive all the time. Therefore, these remain ineffective in educating and guiding the farming community. From these results it can be determined that these programmes may not perform an important role in educating the farmers on the use of latest technologies to boost agricultural production in the country. The data (Table 2) further showed that television channels have 24 hours transmission, which makes 168 hours per week. The data indicated that

Table 2. Duration and frequencies of agricultural programmes.

TV channel	Programmes Title	Programmes duration (in minutes)	Frequency	Total hours/ week (regular and repeat transmission)
Apna Channel	Apna Kissan Apni Zarat	1 hour	Daily	14 hours
Punjab TV	Khaet Punjab Day	45 minutes	Daily	12 hours & 15 min
Channel 5	Kissan Time	45 minutes	4 prog./week	8 hours
PTV	Haryali	1 hour	Weekly	2 hours
Aaj TV	Zarkhaez	40 minutes	Weekly	1 hours & 20 min
Royal TV	Zarai Pindal	50 minutes	Daily	12 hours & 50 min
ATV	Sarsabz Pakistan	30 minutes	Weekly	1 hour

maximum weekly time (14 hours) for agricultural broadcasts is afforded by Apna Channel followed by Royal TV (12.5 hours) and Punjab TV (12.15 hours), against minimum by ATV (1 hour). It is evident that 14 hours per week time cannot be justified for third largest sector of economy and profession of 46 percent of population of the country. The data disclosed another important fact that the state-owned Pakistan television (PTV) is also not giving priority to agriculture-based programmes for education and training of farmers. It offered only 2 hours transmission per week for this cause. The data revealed that private television channels allocate more time to agricultural broadcasts as compared to state-owned PTV.

In collaboration with Agriculture Department-Punjab and Ministry of Information, Apna TV is conducting research on agriculture sector. Programmes of all these channels introduce advanced technology, latest machinery for farming and latest information on improved seed, quantity of seed required, balanced crop nutrition, fertilizer and harmful chemicals. Programmes are solution oriented and their main target is to provide experts opinion and solve farmers' problems to increase crops production. New technologies/techniques are disseminated with demonstration for training of farmers, efficient use of all agricultural inputs in the field and also record testimonials of farmers. These programmes also introduce agricultural loan schemes, procedure of loans approval and return. Farmers sometime give feedback and also share their experiences.

The first agricultural television channel of Pakistan, Sohni Dharti, not included in Table 2, started its regular round the clock transmission in 2010. Its basic objective is to provide "right information to the right person(s) at the right time and place(s) in the right context" dynamically using advanced technology. It guides farmers to get higher quality, crop yields, increase farm incomes through application of advanced methods of land preparation, soil nutrition, mechanisation and water management. It also guides in livestock breeding.

Main focus of Sohni Dharti channel is to increase overall production by highlighting major agriculture issues such as livestock expansion, water quality and technology-based farming, which is the future of agriculture sector. It also educates people about environmental issues, creates awareness about health and hygiene and projects success stories and measures being taken by the Government and NGOs towards reduction of poverty.

Sohni Dharti television channel is helping the farmers by providing know-how on freehand nutritious local produce. The channel broadcasts talk shows, discussions programmes, in-depth interviews, documentaries, field reports, agri-news bulletins, weather reports, cultural events, folk shows, thematic dramas, infotainment, festivals and rural games. It is a good step for a greener and prosperous Pakistan.

Respondents from highly viewed television news channels (Geo News, Duniya News, Aaj News, Express News and Samaa TV) were also interviewed. The results showed that for the last five years, coverage of agriculture sector was not included in the policy of these channels. They occasionally included agricultural news items/news packages in current affair

programmes that cover the crises with experts' opinion. However, primetime slot is not allotted to this sector like entertainment, sports, etc. during 24 hours transmission of these television channels. It was found that only Aaj News is broadcasting agricultural programmes. The respondents admitted that agriculture sector is being neglected altogether and major reasons are non-availability of sponsorship/marketing, absence of revenue, lack of viewership and lack of demand from farmers. However, they agreed that for development of agricultural sector, news channels should broadcast regular programmes regarding new technologies and advancements in farming to educate and guide the farmers.

The respondents further expressed that news channels always cover events but agricultural events are not arranged frequently by the government and other related organizations. Hence, there is no direct interaction between farmers and media, resultantly less coverage is given to the sector. Occasionally, proposals of agricultural programmes are discussed in the channels but they are hardly materialized.

Aaj News was the only news channel that broadcast weekly 35-40 minutes discussion programme namely "Zarkhaez," which started in 2005 and closed in 2010. It was a seasonal programmes, which educated farmers at the time of wheat and rice harvesting. It was a research-based and well-planned programme with the purpose to highlight farmers' problems like water supply, fertilizers, etc. Farmers also shared their experiences regarding applications of advance technologies in this programme.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study accomplishes that regardless of rapid growth of electronic media in Pakistan, particularly television, there is only one dedicated channel for agriculture sector (Sohni Dharti) out of 82 TV channels. Indeed, a single agricultural channel is inadequate for an agricultural country having 67 percent of total population living in rural areas and 44.7 percent of it connected to farming. All the channels were focusing on discussion programmes, which are significant for dissemination of latest information but these never remain interesting and attractive for viewers all the time. Therefore, farmers skip to entertainment or news channels. So such programmes remain ineffective in educating and providing guidance to them.

Frequency and duration of agricultural programs on television channels is also not desirable. The data endorse that maximum weekly time (14 hours out of 168 hours) for agricultural broadcast is afforded by Apna channel, only

8.3 per cent of total time while ATV devoted just one hour weekly. In comparison to private channels, the state-owned PTV's transmission time assigned for the target sector is 2 hours weekly only. This designates that development of agriculture sector through television is neither a priority of the government nor of the owners of private television channels.

The study also concludes that due coverage has not been given to the agriculture sector during the period 2005-2010 by highly viewed television news channels (Geo News, Duniya News, Aaj News, Express News and Samaa TV) because it is not included in their policy. Thus, special time slot is not allotted to this sector like entertainment, sports, etc. during 24 hours transmission.

All news channels should broadcast regular programmes regarding new technologies and advancements in farming for education and guidance of the farmers to contribute to agriculture sector development. Television channels should also focus on a variety of interesting programmes for the education and training of targeted viewers.

There is a dire need to use mass media extensively to create awareness among the farming community about new technologies and increased their adoption level.

PTV a state television has the highest viewership in rural areas but it telecasts only one programme in a week. So it is recommended that PTV should revise its schedule and spare more time for this cause.

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