

Television in Odisha

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Television made a soft launch in Odisha in mid 1970s with Doordarshan. The entry of Doordarshan in Odisha was through the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE)¹ conducted in 1975-76, the first experiment with satellite technology in India. It was also the first attempt anywhere in the world of using this sophisticated technology for social education.

SITE in Odisha covered the districts of Dhenkanal, Sambalpur, and Phulbani. Odiya programmes were produced at the base production centre at Cuttack. In 1978, the district of Sambalpur was selected under the SITE continuity programme and a terrestrial transmitter of 1 kw was set up there. During the ASIAD in 1982, Bhubaneswar was provided with a LPT. Subsequently a HPT was set up in Cuttack in 1985. In 1987, Odia programmes for a limited time span were started. In the following year a daily Odia news bulletin was started. In 1991, the regional up linking facility was made available to network in Odisha. A new studio complex in Bhubaneswar saw the production work shifted to the state capital in 1992. In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of Low Power Transmitters were established in different parts of the state. At present besides Bhubaneswar, studio facilities are available in DD Sambalpur and DD Bhawanipatna.

¹ The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment or SITE was an experimental satellite communications project launched in India in 1975, designed jointly by NASA and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). The project made available informational television programmes to rural India. The main objectives of the experiment were to educate the poor people of India on various issues via satellite broadcasting, and also to help India gain technical experience in the field of satellite communications.

The experiment ran for one year from 1 August 1975 to 31 July 1976, covering more than 2400 villages in 20 districts of six Indian states and territories. (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan) The television programmes were produced by All India Radio and broadcast by NASA's ATS-6 satellite stationed above India for the duration of the project. The project was supported by various international agencies such as the UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and ITU. The experiment was successful, as it played a major role in helping develop India's own satellite program, INSAT. The project showed that India could use advanced technology to fulfill the socio-economic needs of the country. SITE was followed by similar experiments in various countries, which showed the important role satellite TV could play in providing education.

The launching of multiple channels including the regional channel led to a spurt in the production of privately produced features and news magazines. The first successful Odia news magazine *Aajira Odisha*² (1995) continued for three years and was highly successful.

Odisha Television (OTV)³ claims to be the first private electronic media in the state of Odisha. It was launched on 17 April 1997 in the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. Its daily news programme titled '*Pratidin*', launched in 1998 was known for its refreshing format, strong local coverage and in-depth analysis of unfolding events. In January 2007, O-TV started beaming through satellite, expanding its reach. From being a variety channel, it became an exclusively 24x7 news channel. Three more content-specific channels were subsequently launched by O-TV: Taranga (entertainment), Prarthana (religion) and a music channel.

Enadu Television (E-TV), Hyderabad-based media conglomerate of Ramoji Rao launched its Odia channel in 2002. This was the first Odia private satellite channel (O-TV was on cable mode then). It quickly became popular. Although E-TV Odia was a variety channel with strong entertainment content, it telecast news round the clock, besides having other event-driven and occasion-oriented news-based programmes. It pioneered many news-based programmes in Odia. In fact it set a bench mark in election coverage.

Four more satellite channels with Odia programming was launched in 2009: Naxatra, Kamyab TV, Josh TV and Kanak TV. While Naxatra and Kanak were news channels, the other two were channels with both news and fiction programming. Kanak TV came from the stable of Eastern Media Ltd, the media conglomerate, which owns the Odia daily *Sambad* and FM Radio station Radio Choklate. Kanak TV went on air on October 4, 2009, the day *Sambad* was launched 25 years back. Sarthak Group, which also produces films and music albums, launched two entertainment-focused channels Sarthak TV and Ollywood TV on September 1, 2010 and September 18, 2010 respectively. STV, a 24x7 Odia satellite news channel was launched on March 18, 2011 by Seashore Group of companies. MBC TV, another Odia television channel

² *Ajira Odisha* (Today's Odisha) was produced by Biren Das (born 1955), an independent film maker and television programme producer. He has made several developmental films and television programmes. He happens to be the younger brother of noted painter Jatin Das.

³ Retrieved on July 14, 2006. www.Odishatv.com.

with variety programme including a strong news component was launched on May 2011. Mentored by Durga Prasad Mishra, it had Ashok Kumar Mahapatra, an experienced journalist as Editor-in-Chief.

Kamyab TV and S-TV closed shop subsequently. Zee Kalinga from Zee group made an entry in 2014. In April-May 2015 two more news channels Kalinga TV and Prameya News 7 entered the already crowded Odia television mediascape.

Here is a table showing major channels and their genre:

Channel Name	Vision	Year of Inception
ETV	Infotainment	2001
OTV	Infotainment	2006
OTV	Becomes 24x7 NCA	2008
OTV launches Tarang (GEC)	Entertainment	2008
Kamyab	Infotainment	2009
Naxatra launched (24x7 NCA)	News	2009
OTV	Tarang (music)	2009
OTV launches Prathana	Devotional	2010
Sarthak TV (GEC)	Entertainment	2010
Kanak TV (24x7 NCA)	News	2010
STV launched (24x7 NCA)	News	2012
MBC	Infotainment	2012
Zee Kalinga	Infotainment	2014

*source: TAM India week 1-6, 2014.

A crowded space!

With over a dozen 24x7 channels the Odia television market is overcrowded considering the market size and advertisement revenue that it generates. There are two views regarding the impact of more players entering into the television media in Odisha. One view says it is good as it raises overall programme quality by competition. The other view says it is not good for media especially the news media as competition tends to make the programme more sensational, as all try to grab limited eye balls and advertisement pie. Both are happening simultaneously in television media in Odisha.

DTH gradually edging Cable Operators out

Another development in visual media in India has been the growth of local cable operators providing local news. Cable operators, also called LMO- Last Mile Operators, started functioning in Odisha from mid-1990s. By the new millennium, almost every town has had local

cable operators. Most of them along with other satellite channels provide one channel for local programme distribution, in which they provide local news. They either collect and package the news on their own or outsource this job to small news production outfit, which would shoot, edit and package the news. The periodicity of such news depends on its demand from the viewers and capacity of the cable operator. It usually ranges between once or twice a day to once or twice a week. The news production outfits make do with local advertisement and sponsorship. Their recording and editing equipment is low cost. Lot of improvisations has been made in its presentation. Nevertheless, it provides local news fast and with details, other channels can hardly provide. That is the USP of local cable news. Most of these journalists are self-trained. Some of them also work as stringers for other state level channels.

Watching local news almost on real time is no novel thing in many towns and even villages in Odisha. Many local cable operators telecast sports events or cultural programmes live. In some cities and towns like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Rourkela and Paradeep large cable operators like Skyview (an arm of Ortel Communication, which owns O-TV network) had a monopoly hold on cable business.

However as DTH (Direct to Home) system was becoming popular because of its superior picture and sound quality, flexible tariff structure and other value added services, the operators started charging hefty carriage fee, which the local channel operators found difficult to pay. As a result only a couple of Odia television channels could be carried on the DTH platforms. That provided an opportunity to the local cable operators to entice more customers, by providing access to more local channels than the DTH platform.

But with more players entering into DTH arena and competition heating up, DTH operators in order to attract more customers lowered carriage fee from early 2014. That provided the local television channels some respite and much needed eyeballs. It also gradually pushed the cable operators out of the market. By end 2016 though cable operators were still functioning in some towns of Odisha, but their heydays were definitely over. It was just matter of time, they would fade into history.

Television News in Odia

The first Television news in Odia was presented on Doordarshan in 1988. From the first daily 10 minute bulletin in lone DD channel to about half a dozen 24x7 news channels with live telecast of major events, by end-2016 news on television in Odisha has made a significant progress. The fierce competition among the channels has ensured that no news gets unreported even from the remotest part of the State. It has also encouraged exaggeration and sensationalism.

Human Resources

About the journalists working in television, initially it was the print media journalists who made a foray into television. Many of the established television journalists and producers of Odisha⁴ had started their career in print and then switched to Television. In the absence of opportunity for proper training many of them made programmes in the trial and error method. They made several mistakes. The programmes were speech-heavy. But they learnt from their mistakes and improved. Innovative programmes were introduced and people liked them. As competition became intense, all the channels tried to beef up their coverage. It created opportunity for more young men and women to join television. District and Sub-division level journalists learnt rudimentary camera works and became reporters or stringers for TV channels. It accorded them more visibility and in turn social recognition.

With time and growing opportunities of training in television, the media has begun to mature. Till 1993, when Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) opened its Eastern Regional Campus in Dhenkanal, a district HQ town in Central Odisha, there was just one place for journalism and mass communication teaching: Berhampur University. By 2016, there were more than three dozen places-from University Departments to private Institutes teaching mass communication. There is a State Govt. run Film and Television Institute which teaches photography and editing for television.

More and more young men and women are joining television industry; many of them with some kind of training or academic initiation. This augurs well for the industry.

⁴ For example, Sampad Mahapatra, Ashok Mahapatra, Dayanidhi Dash, Nilambar Rath, Sisir Bhatta Mishra, Basudeva Mahapatra, Bharat Majhi, Purusottam Thakur, Prasanna Subudhi and many others began their career in print media and then switched over to television.

Gender Issues in Television Industry in Odisha

Another interesting feature of the television industry in Odisha has been the growing number of women in its workforce. Women are more visible now, not only as anchor persons, but as reporters, camera persons and also at the desk as visual editors, online editors and in different other capacities.

Challenges before the Television Industry in Odisha

In Odisha, there are multiple challenges and issues that face the Television industry. Besides overcrowding of channels in a limited space, poor distribution, low penetration point, limited marketing spends, and a low TSV (time spent per viewer) on channels, are some of the major challenges.

Here is a table (Table 3) showing the viewership and time spent on particular channel by the viewers.

Channels	In Million	In Minutes
OTV	1.7	75
Tarang	1.7	162
Sarthak TV	1.1	128
Tarang Music	1.0	41
Kanak TV	0.9	23
MBCTV	0.9	75
PRARTHANA	0.8	73
Naxatra News	0.7	22
ETV Oriya	0.6	188
ODIA NEWS	1.9	117

*source: Odisha Channels: Viewership and Time Spent (Jan-Feb 2014), TAM India.

Here is another table which shows the weekly (Week- 5) data about the top 5 channels from Saturday, 28th January 2017 to Friday, 3rd February 2017.

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Channel Name</u>	<u>Weekly Impressions (000s) sum</u> Week 5
1	Sarthak TV	76551
2	Tarang TV	47007
3	Odisha TV	16049
4	Colors Oriya	10687

5	News7	6318
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*source: BARC India.

This shows how the channels need to improve their content quality to keep the audience glued to their TV sets. As the market is limited and there are more players than the market can sustain- almost all channels suffer financially. It pushes the channels into a catch 22 situation. As they try to economise and cut corners, the human resource and programme content generation cost is compromised. Therefore Odisha has probably the least average salary and remuneration package for persons working in Television industry in India. This has started impacting the quality of human resource, and that in turn impacts the content quality.

Television news in Odisha, suffers from the same ailments which have affected television news of other region and languages well: more gloss than substance, reductionist treatment of issues and events, trying to find a villain in every issue and trivialization. Some of these, of course, have to do with television as a visual communication medium- which constantly needs something to *happen* on the screen. It impedes serious and in depth treatment of any issue. With more television channels crowding the mediascape, the ailments are getting accentuated. This is ironical. Usually competition improves quality. But in case of television, it is giving rise to competitive screeching and rise of the trivia at the cost of serious issues. Television journalism across the country has to address these issues.

As Television enters its 40th year in Odisha in 2017, the industry insiders and managers must look into the way it is shaping up. It has come a long way from the SITE days. In a digital and networked era, Television needs to integrate itself with the contemporary and emerging tech-sphere and keep its contents rooted into the ground.
