

Lecture- 37



Timeline of ATT Phase out and Resource rationalisation:

DD FreeDish

DD FreeDish becomes largest DTH platform – Registering unparalleled growth in the TV distribution industry, Doordarshan FreeDish has become the largest DTH platform with reach to more than 43 Million households. With improved auction processes leading to addition of better quality & quantity of channels in various genres, between 2017 and 2022 alone, the Free DTH service of Doordarshan clocked a stellar growth of almost 100% from 22 Million in 2017 to 43 Million in 2022. Recently released FICCI-EY Report 2022 corroborates why and how DD FreeDish continues its strong growth trajectory, “Free Television continued to grow its base to reach an estimated 43 Million subscribers on the back of less expensive television sets, economic issues, and addition of new channels to the platform.” The report quotes FreeDish distributors mentioning year on year growth in sales of DD FreeDish set-top boxes. In stark comparison to 22 Million subscribers in 13 years between 2004 and 2017, DD FreeDish's growth over the last 5 years stands out. In just five years between 2017 and 2022, FreeDish has added another 21 Million subscribers, taking the total to 43 Million. Initiated by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government in early 2000s, DD FreeDish, then known as DD Direct Plus, was subsequently launched in 2004. After being revamped during the Narendra Modi-led NDA government era, the platform saw rapid growth in recent years. Over the past seven years, since 2015, the subscription base of DD FreeDish has expanded significantly by more than 100%. Prasar Bharati CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati claims that such growth of DD FreeDish[47] is a result of a 2019 change in policy, “Changes were made to how FreeDish DTH slot was being auctioned. From an earlier system where auctions were held randomly throughout the year, we have switched to an annual e-Auction system. Further, from just two categories of slots, we have moved to five categories of slots based on genre and language. This helped bring differential pricing to these slots. Lastly, the e-Auction methodology was also changed to ensure competition and prevent cartelisation with a progressive increase in the reserve price. The cumulative impact of these policy changes has resulted in the growth of FreeDish revenues.”

DD FreeDish as a platform for national outreach – Public and National Outreach to the masses across India through television has received a tremendous boost with the DD FreeDish Platform. Staying true to its public service mandate, Prasar Bharati's DD FreeDish had stood out in serving

the people during the pandemic by enabling massive public outreach and dissemination through its platform. While the traditional education system struggled due to the pandemic, DD FreeDish had then come to the rescue by providing a platform for multiple educational channels, thus ensuring continuing education to students across India. Recent viewership data has further revealed the central role being played by DD FreeDish as a platform for public and national outreach through television across India. Of the universe of TV Viewership for Pariksha Pe Charcha 2022, 33% of the viewers watched the event on various TV channels available on the DD FreeDish platform. It is to be noted that several industry estimates have pegged the install base of DD FreeDish at around 20% of the total TV households in India. Further underlining the importance of DD FreeDish for national outreach is the fact that 26% of the viewers of the Republic Day Parade 2022 viewed it on various channels available on DD FreeDish. In an interview with an English daily, Prasar Bharati CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati elaborated upon the expansion plan of DD FreeDish,[49] "FreeDish is largely concentrated in the Hindi speaking states, apart from Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa. We are working to expand FreeDish footprint in non-Hindi states and this will be a focus area in the coming years."

Indicating that the growth of DD FreeDish is impacting the pay TV market in India, an article published by the Mint says that the Public service broadcaster Prasar Bharati's free-to-air direct-to-home (DTH) service – DD FreeDish – is on a roll.[50] In the last two years of the pandemic, millions of viewers have migrated to the platform that offers entertainment without any monthly charges unlike the cable or DTH operators that they subscribed to. Even private satellite TV broadcasters admit to the phenomenal growth of DD FreeDish in recent years, especially during covid when economic stress pushed low-income groups, rural and semi-rural consumers to cut their cable bills and opt for a free service.

In collaboration with Prasar Bharati, renowned Chef Sanjeev Kapoor has launched two new Dishes in the name of India's largest DTH platform DD FreeDish – 'DD FreeDish Hing ka Achar' and 'DD FreeDish Aam ki Launji'. This is with the advent of Chef Sanjeev Kapoor's dedicated food channel 'Food Food' on DD FreeDish. This is first time that a dedicated food channel has come on board DD FreeDish.

On the occasion of silver jubilee celebrations of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, MoS I&B Dr L Murugan elaborated upon the reforms undertaken at Doordarshan. He talked about how phase-out of Analog Terrestrial[52] Transmitters has resulted in availability of valuable spectrum. He also spoke about the role of DD FreeDish DTH as the largest platform coming to the aid of students during COVID.

Transformation of DD India as an English news channel

Prasar Bharati's English News channel DD India has seen phenomenal growth both on TV and Digital. It has more than two lakh subscribers on YouTube. In terms of TV reach, DD India is number one English News channel in the country. As per BARC data, DD India reaches more than 8 Million viewers, highest in the English News genre. Its closest competitors are able to manage only around half the reach of DD India. Even the viewership for DD India has been witnessing a consistent upward weekly growth, registering a whopping total growth of almost 150%.

Highest viewer reach in the country (Based on BARC data)

Living up to its mandate with which it was launched by Prasar Bharati in January 2019, DD India has now become India's window to the world with reach to more than 190 countries through Satellite, OTT platforms and NewsOnAir App. As envisaged, DD India has established itself as a global influencer on India related issues through its sharp analysis & commentary, thought provoking views/opinions and cutting edge visual presentation.

Transformation of All India Radio (2017 onwards)

From 413 in 2017, the number of All India Radio stations has gone up to 485 in 2021. All India Radio's FM stations are now reaching 70 percent of the Indian population.[12] As part of Prasar Bharati's drive to phase out obsolete technologies, the number of Short Wave and Medium Wave stations has come down from 48 to 12 and 148 to 128 respectively between 2017 and 2021.

Digital Growth since 2017

Since 2017, Prasar Bharati has shifted its focus to digital first which has rendered promising results with a digital network spread across more than 300 Twitter handles, 190 YouTube channels, multiple news websites and NewsOnAir App with more than two million downloads. The digital network viewership growth has witnessed a 66% rise since 2017.[53] Now Digital has become integral to all Prasar Bharati activities with daily 800+ digital uploads happening across the network, so that all in-house produced news and non-news content is available for on-demand consumption on digital platforms. NewsOnAir App has been a game-changer with 270+ radio and TV live-streams.

Between 2017 and 2022, Prasar Bharati's digital platforms across the country have together written a brilliant growth story with many of its YouTube channels already in the Million club and multiple others inching closer to the milestone, together taking the current total YouTube subscription base to more than two crores. In 2021, more than 185 YouTube channels of Doordarshan and All India Radio together registered more than a billion views. Their 'watch time' for the entire duration of 2021 summed up to a figure of 94 Million Hours.[54] YouTube channels of both DD News and DD National crossed 4 Million Subscribers in 2021. Prasar Bharati's App NewsOnAir clocked a listenership of 214 Million+ in 2021. Prasar Bharati's digital platforms in the remotest areas of Northeast registered significant milestones in 2021, by together clocking more than 220 Million Views and 1 Million+ Subscribers on YouTube.