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HINDI NEWS AROUND THE ELECTION JUGGERNAUT

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Introduction

Elections in India are no less talked about or celebrated than a mega-blockbuster movie. Our politicians, whether revered or not revered become superstars of the moment, heroes or villains depending upon personal political affiliations. Everyone has a view on elections, even though a significant chunk of voters elude the ballot box on Election Day, preferring the comfort of armchairs to the heat.

Like the big Diwali sale, election time marks a bonanza for the diverse news outfits, many of whom have mushroomed over the last few years. The hot favourites are of course news channels with live coverage, breaking news and an array of experts – representing every side of the political spectrum. Arguments fly thick and fast, adding not just perspective, but also excitement to the already intense setting.

From opinion polls to exit polls, from ground reports to predictions, the journalist fraternity gets cracking before elections are even announced. It all culminates of course with the declaration of results. From early morning, hours before the votes are even counted; experts crowd the newsroom, trying to assess who is going to win and who is not. Predictions and speculation run rife as almost every channel tries to get to the viewer first with accurate information. Given that counting day throws up multiple swings, analysts, reporters, and editors try to make sense of the situations that keep changing in real-time.

On the sidelines and in front of their TVs, the *aam aadmi* watches the election juggernaut with great interest and the ratings of news channels go through the roof.

On the day of counting, election results dominate all discussions including those at the workplace. For political parties, the results mean victory, defeat or many a times compromise due to a hung house. News channels capitalizing on mass frenzy though always win on the results day. High TRPs equal sack full of dollars, and news channels leave no stone unturned in making sure their hard work pays off.

The assembly elections, particularly in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh have already raised political temperatures. This report examines the role of the Hindi News channels, the most popular voice of the Hindi speaking masses, in covering elections. It also throws light upon which of these channels is likely to dominate the election discourse.

Why the focus on Hindi News?

As per the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), the news genre with 163 channels is the third biggest genre in the country in terms of television viewership - contributing to eight per cent of the total TV viewership. News channels also contribute to 11 per cent of the TV revenue pie at about Rs. 2200-2500 crore in annual revenue.

The number of Hindi News channels in 2017 was 58 versus 47 in 2016 according to BARC. Clearly, it's a space that teeming with competition. According to the 2011 census, 528.3 million Indians speak Hindi accounting for about 43.63 per cent of the 1.2 billion overall population.

Even though the Hindi speaking Indians are dispersed and widespread, they are a sizeable chunk who want to keep themselves updated on developments and stay glued to their sets. BARC data reveals that the Hindi news channels clock between 850-900 million impressions in any given week. Hardcore news bulletins accounted for 5.6% of overall coverage. While news-related interviews and studio debates took up about 9.2 per cent of the time, special telecasts such as Yoga Day or Prime Minister Narendra Modi's *Mann Ki Baat* accounted for 16 per cent, according to a report in The Economic Times.

There were also 93 regional news channels spread across multiple regional languages as well as 12 English channels.

While Hindi News in terms of the number of channels contributes 36 per cent in terms of viewership contribution, they have a higher share of 47 per cent.

The large consumption of Hindi language news can be attributed to a large number of channels catering to the Hindi Speaking Markets (HSM) in the country. (Note that HSM comprises the All India market minus the markets of the four southern languages – Telugu from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana market; Tamil from Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry market, Kannada from Karnataka market and Malayalam from Kerala market.) North India is a key contributor to Hindi News viewership with the markets of UP/Uttarakhand and Delhi having the highest preference of news in the country.

Local language consumption of news has peaked in the recent elections (Kannada for Karnataka elections and Bengali for WB elections). In this context, for the upcoming elections are expected to bring a huge bonanza for the Hindi News channels in terms of viewership, and thus money.

Importance of the Election Day

News viewership is event-driven – either scheduled or unscheduled. Elections are certainly the most important of all special or scheduled events. Being scheduled additionally helps news channels plan better. Discussions, flashes, events - before, during, and after the polls and election results day - drive the news genre's viewership through the roof. Some of the channels even have a countdown clock to the D-Day to heighten the anxiety and interest among viewer about who will come to occupy 7, Lok Kalyan Marg.

According to BARC, it is the Elections Results day which draws the largest spike in ratings, followed by Election Day, followed by pre-election days.

As per BARC, on an election result day, the break duration on the channels goes down, with programming increasing. This is due to channels covering the results from multiple perspectives and angles to keep the viewers hooked, and taking lesser breaks.

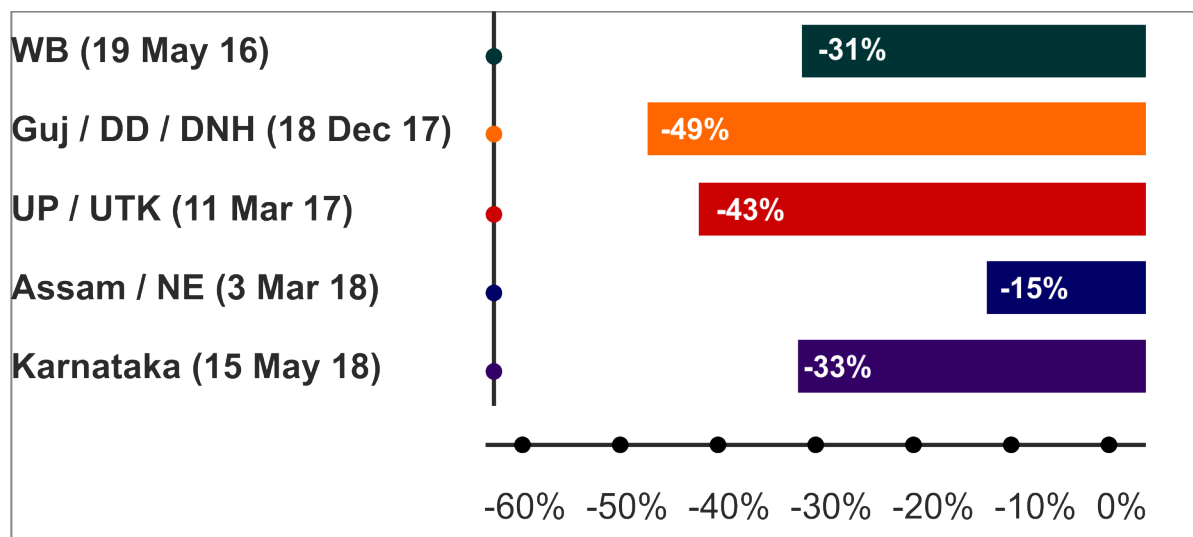
Election programming plays a key role in helping channels garner big viewership numbers and attracting advertisers. The race for reporting numbers as they trickle in is fierce as viewers switch channels in their hunger for the fastest updates.

Some of the biggest brands in the country also get into the heightened frenzy and spend top dollars on leading Hindi news channels during election season. That's because sponsorship and native advertising rates are jacked up, keeping in mind the hordes of viewers who will lead to a spurt in ratings.

Across years and markets, we can see a visible drop in some ad insertions on Hindi news on Election Day, as channels take lesser breaks and focus more on the live coverage to increase viewership. Hence, the brands that chose to put their money during this busy time end up paying a premium for the ad inventory.

Data below as compared to the average of previous 4 weekdays

Change in No. of ad insertions



Leadership in the Hindi news genre

With so many Hindi TV news channels clamouring for the viewer's engagement, are their shares equal? Or are all scrambling for the scraps they get from viewers and advertisers? Or are there any clear leaders?

As per BARC data (15+ All individuals), AajTak emerges as the undisputed leader in the Hindi News genre in HSM. The channel is also the clear leader in both HSM urban and rural markets. In a sense, it has maintained its stranglehold on the Hindi news channel sweepstakes since inception; a period that stretches over 17 long years.

AajTak was ranked first for 51 of the 52 weeks of 2017 and was ranked second just once in week 2 of 2017. In 2018, the channel was ranked first in the genre for 39 of the first 41 weeks of 2017 in the combined urban and rural HSM at the time of writing this report.

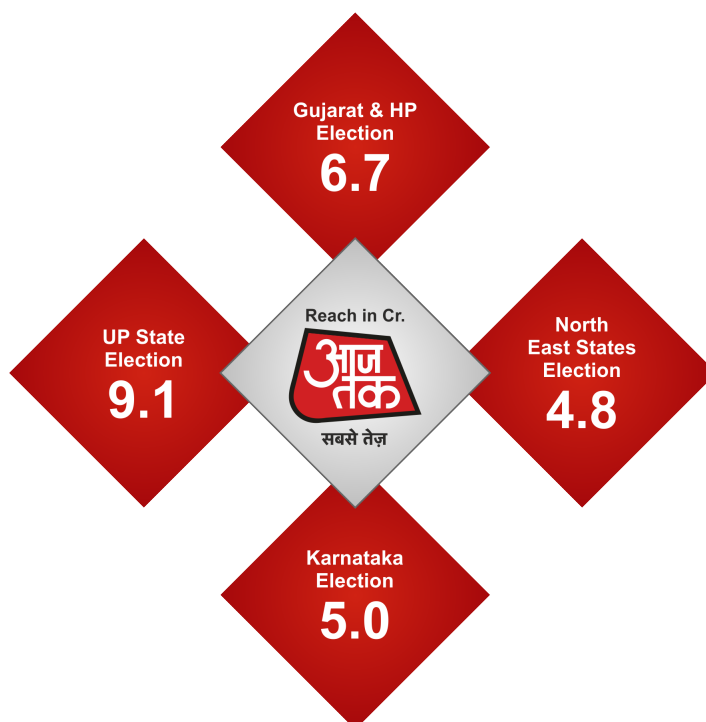
In rural HSM, AajTak was ranked first for all the 52 weeks of 2017. It was ranked first for 40 of the first 41 weeks of 2018. In the HSM urban market, AajTak was ranked first for 45 of the 52 weeks of 2017, while it was ranked first for 33 of the first 41 weeks of 2018. In 2017 and during the first 41 weeks of 2018, the ratio between AajTak's average viewership or weekly impressions in HSM Rural and HSM Urban was about 45:55.

Election coverage leadership

Nothing gets the Indian public going like the rough and tumble of Indian politics. More so when election season well and truly kicks off with high-voltage campaigns and rallies by political stalwarts in the run up to polling and eventually counting of votes. The political drama that plays out in all the news studios makes for engagement almost equal to what can be seen on TV soaps and dramas on general entertainment channels.

Hindi news channels put their best foot forward to capture the public mood to not just drive up ratings but also their revenues. In a bid to do so, most channels spruce up their programming with leading experts and political watchers.

Below are the reach numbers achieved by the Hindi News genre leader AajTak in the recent elections.



Source: BARC, TG: 2+, HSM

Below is the stack-up of weekly impressions of the recent elections. The genre leader AajTak emerges as the clear leader here as well. It leads second-placed India TV by a goodly measure of about 24 per cent. The second, third and fourth slots are hotly contested with the second, third and fourth placed news channels is around five per cent.

Gujarat & HP election (Dec'17), North East state election (Mar'18) & Karnataka election (May'18) result weeks. Source: BARC, TG: 15+, HSM

Channel	2017W51	2018W10	2018W20
Hindi News Group	8,81,658	6,98,423	6,73,240
AajTak	1,45,915	1,12,008	1,13,144
India TV	1,17,180	91,749	88,643
ABP News	1,10,106	82,517	81,414
Zee News	1,04,645	78,471	98,795
NDTV India	15,590	12,925	16,533
News18 India	98,694	85,826	77,903
Tez	20,875	19,135	15,276
News 24	74,155	45,161	47,411
News Nation	78,962	70,974	64,578
India News	65,653	58,505	33,703
DD News	16,600	11,871	10,358
Zee Hindustan	33,280	29,280	25,482

Below is the stack-up of Election Day impressions of the recent elections.

Gujarat & HP election (Dec'17), North east state election (Mar'18) & Karnataka election (May'18) result days **Source: BARC, TG: 15+, HSM**

Channel	2017W51	2018W10	2018W20
AajTak	45,146	20,996	27,703
India TV	30,681	19,588	17,718
ABP News	44,308	19,532	20,549
Zee News	30,292	14,195	22,509
NDTV India	4,011	1,727	4,006
News18 India	22,369	14,331	13,177
Tez	3,546	3,058	2,464
News 24	16,059	8,036	10,228
News Nation	19,028	12,386	12,243
India News	15,107	8,999	6,509
DD News	4,632	1,453	2,503
Zee Hindustan	7,660	4,026	4,722

The below table shows Hindi News Group and leader AajTak have clocked increased impressions on election result days.

Gujarat & HP election (Dec'17), North east state election (Mar'18) & Karnataka Election (May'18) result days **Source: BARC, TG: 15+, HSM**

Impressions	Hindi News Group	AajTak
Previous 4 Monday Avg.	1,04,498	15,914
2017W51	2,42,840	45,146
Change	132%	184%
Previous 4 Saturday Avg.	98,251	16,266
2018W10	1,28,328	20,996
Change	31%	29%
Previous 4 Tuesday Avg.	80,070	11,497
2018W20	1,44,333	27,703
Change	80%	141%

Understanding the impact of elections on TV ad spends

Election time is fairly interesting because we get to see so many new ads during this time. The ruling party ads are all about their achievement, gushing about themselves whereas the opposition party ads are all about how bad the current regime is and what changes “they are going to bring” once they get into power.

Brands, however, often come up with some tongue in cheek advertisements that talk about the importance of voting and so on. Today, with digitisation, availability of low-cost smartphones and low data costs, digital and social media has become the front leader of all marketing mix. Brands and political parties are sure to leverage the medium to reach a large set of audiences where traditional media kind of seems to fail.

India’s 2014 election was the world’s biggest exercise in democracy, with a price tag to match. Indian politicians spent around \$12 billion on their campaigns, which, in terms of cost, makes these polls the most expensive seconding the U.S. presidential elections which hit the \$7 billion mark.

The next General Elections will take place in 2019 and promises to be a game changer in the way political parties spend during elections. If we’ve learnt anything from the 2014 elections where BJP spent Rs 714 crore and Congress spent Rs 516 crore, 2019 election is set to break all major records. MediaCom national director for buying K Srinivas Rao thinks that advertising on elections, especially state elections is majorly driven by local retail advertisers or semi-corporate advertisers with a B2B advertising goal.

“Local/retail advertisers majorly depend on news channels for their advertising and hence are most likely to go big during elections. Retail players do long-term deals keeping in mind the election time which gives them a leverage to get the best value from the channels. Election time is generally seen as the time when news channels expect an upside in revenues on the back of specific programming and its sponsorships. We have typically seen around 10-15 per cent upside in revenues for the National channels during elections. However, this number grows many times on local news channels in which the elections are being conducted,” he says.

Dentsu Aegis Network chairman & CEO South Asia Ashish Bhasin feels election ad spends are not that significant because the total size of the market is Rs 65000 crore whereas election ad spends contribute to only Rs 2000 crore.

“The government/political ad spend goes up during elections, especially before election silence starts. Digital and mobile play a vital role during this time as all of them wants to reach the younger user/generation. The 2014 general election was

the first one where digital was used in a big way and it will be pertinent in the next elections as well. News channels become more active and advertise the most during this time because advertising follows eyeballs and people who follow elections, tend to switch on those news channels for election coverage. Other than the government and political parties, there is no significant change in the advertising spends because brands advertise according to their consumer cycle and the need of their category,” he says.

Havas Media Group CEO - India and South East Asia Anita Nayyar is of the opinion that automobile, FMCG, E-commerce brands and e-wallet sectors are expected to advertise the most during elections along with digital and mobile which will play a major role in political advertising.

“According to the PTI report, the government spent nearly Rs 1,286 crore in 2016-2017 on ads about government policies, schemes, projects and events, through various media. The amount spent by the advertising agency for 2016-17 was 8.15 per cent higher than Rs 1,188.85 crore spent in 2015-16. The decibel level of marketing by government and brands will only go up in the coming months. While political advertising is an important arm of the Indian adex, it is very sentiment-driven and dynamic. If the government is stable, there is positive sentiment leading to brands spending more on advertising,” she adds.

Chairman Madison World and industry veteran Sam Balsara believes brands that advertise on the news genre are excited by the prospect of election season, as it helps them reach out to a wider audience.

“Most political parties especially regional parties do not use large agencies but use small full service agencies that they are familiar with. So the mood of the media agencies does not change. Political parties have in the last few years started using advertising in a much bigger way than they had in the past. Most parties now use outdoor, print and radio and larger parties also use television and digital. The same categories that normally advertise on news channels, advertise during election times. Brands that target women generally do not use news channels during election time. Brands that advertise on the news genre definitely want to be on during election time because there is a perception that viewership of news channels goes up,” he says.

Mood of the marketers

Marketing community and advertisers regard an election among other key marquee events as one of the key elements of campaign strategy depending on their respective goals.

SVP national head - investments and enterprise Omnicom Media Group Yatin Balyan believes content regionalisation is gaining prominence and the impact of regional politics towards the verdict at the national level will engage the audience across regional markets.

“News genre irrespective of election caters to audience relevant to most of the categories and election is being considered as an integral part of their media strategy. An election is definitely a proposition with the news channels to build impact and reach and advertisers are looking to leverage the scale of the event. News channels during non-election time are predominantly used to add frequency among the engaged audience of the genre,” he feels.

He also makes an interesting analogy with two other great passions of the Indian public – cricket and cinema.

“Just like cricket and cinema, the election has an appeal at all India level. News genre is usually dominated by retail advertisers, however, the election has the potential to draw more corporate advertisers because of its appeal to audiences of different age and economy strata across markets,” he adds.

Kansai Nerolac Paints Ltd GM Marketing Peeyush Bachlaus highlights the excitement not just among the public but also the marketing community at large.

“Just like normal citizens, even the marketing community gets excited around elections. However, with the growing choice of mediums available to consumers to access information, news consumption habits are also transforming and the trend will continue in the foreseeable future. We are excited about the possibilities this throws up for marketers and how the seamless integration across media will happen. Also, having 3-4 counting days on the same day increases the excitement of the viewers,” he adds.

Upcoming Elections

Over the next few months, the country will be gearing up for the general elections in 2019.

News channels will gear up for the same with beefed up programming, each channel wanting to gather the greatest number of eyeballs. Undoubtedly an explosion of viewership is going to take place on the counting day, with all eyes on what the country has in store in terms of its political future.

It will be interesting to see which channel wins the battle of eyeballs and if AajTak will be able to retain its supremacy.