Television

Afreen Dewan in Dallas, Texas, after text messaging her own vote, calls up her friends and family in the US, Canada and Bangladesh to ask them to vote for her favourite candidate in Close Up 1 Tomakey Khujchhe Bangladesh. The talent hunt show started in 2005 on private television channel ntv and was an instant hit. It sought young singers from around the country, filtered from thousands to 16 finalists, then 10, five and three to the winner. It was a big success in its first year and even bigger in the second, which recently ended last December with Bangladeshis living in the UK and US also participating. Besides the jury panel, audience from home and abroad text messaged their votes by cell phone to help their favourite win.



"Tritiyo Matra" is one of the first and most watched political talk shows.

This is only one example of just how interactive television has become. Add to that all the talk shows, phone-in and question-answer programmes, and "idiot-box" seems hardly an appropriate name anymore! For, though dramas, films and other such entertainment programmes may still be the most popular on television, infotainment programmes are rapidly gaining wide popularity among the audience.

Kha Ma Harun, Chief of Programmes, Rtv, has been working in the television media since 1980. "At the time," says Harun, "we started an audience research cell at Bangladesh Television (BTV) and found that dramas were the most popular programmes." There were, however, very few dramas at the time, says Harun, only one a week. "Drama serials like 'Shokal Shondhya', 'Sukhtara', 'Dhaka-e Thaki' started later, in around 1981," he recalls. "They were long dramas, running for around 50 minutes per episode, not 20 or 25 like they do today. They were very popular."

But Bangladeshis are very knowledge-hungry, says Harun. "They are eager to know the latest news, information on contemporary lifestyle, etc. BTV's news was never credible," he says, "and was always criticised. The news was as unpopular as dramas were popular."

Indeed, research has shown that local content is the first preference of television audience. Only if it is not satisfying do they turn next to regional, and finally, to global content. Local appeal combined with quality are deciding factors in choosing television content. Due to BTV's fallen quality, those who had the choice obviously turned to other, foreign options.

But when private television channel Ekushey (ETV) was launched, things changed, says Harun. "ETV brought a new, modern style of news presentation, similar to some of the best news in the world such as BBC. They trained their reporters, presenters, etc., accordingly and soon the news became even more popular than dramas as people began to know what was happening everywhere instantly."