

# Viewers turning away from local TV channels

Lack of focus in programme planning, quality of content and presentation are to blame, not foreign channels



BISHAKHA DEVNATH

It is one of those intense moments when you immerse yourself in the television and follow every move of the actor; his grimace makes you frown and speculate what would happen next. Right then, the broadcaster fills half of the screen with an ad of what to use to be fair, if not fairer.

That seems unfair to the audience as companies and broadcasters alike are battling on the same space for the viewers' attention. And then the programme is stretched out in such a manner to accommodate frequent ads that the viewers lose track of what they were watching in the first place. So, they move to one of the nearly hundred channels available by pressing the buttons on a remote control.

Advertisement is a major player in the business model of any media house but it has a very complex relationship with what is being broadcast, its quality, how it is presented and the audience targeted, influencing viewership.

According to media insiders, ads are eating up most of our entertainment space in local channels for cheaper rates per minute negotiated based on viewership. With so many local and foreign TV channels, it has become already tricky to get a loyal audience regularly switching on their televisions to watch a particular programme in a particular channel. The situation gets worse for most of our 30-plus local channels when they don't have any

comprehensive policy in place to draw viewers.

The quality of any content matters, but only when it gets good presentation and promotion just like the packaging of a soap and its marketing campaign. Because, unless people know what a programme is about and feel like spending time watching it, who would decide on its quality?

Local TV channels don't have any constructive approach to marketing, according to popular TV actor Iresh Zaker, who has recently been elected as president of the Television and Digital Programme Producers Association of Bangladesh. "... whereas what we see globally... even a popular American TV series like Game of Thrones sees major spending on promotion," he said.

Except for one or two channels like Gaan Bangla and Duranta, local channels also don't seem to have set any target group that they should cater to. They have an all-in-one policy; we get news, talk shows, music videos, dance shows, drama... everything there. A channel may offer everything but cannot broadcast sports and talk shows or drama and news together. Director Ashfaq Nipun describes these channels as devoid of character.

Now what happens when someone is watching a drama or any other entertainment programme in one channel and it is interrupted with the seemingly good intention of keeping him updated? As if no one should miss the latest press conference at the Reporters' Unity of Bangladesh, or at a government office laying out anti-corruption measures. So, almost all channels, including those dedicated to only news, rush to go live, caring little about what their audience wants to watch.

The person sitting before his TV may be searching for something entertaining for a respite from his mundane daily routines. So, he flips through channels fast, hoping to get something worth watching, and comes across a long sequence of commercials.

Unfortunately, watching a local channel is like walking through a supermarket showcasing a handful of products again and again and not finding the way out. These cheap ads basically cater to the interests of no one. Iresh Zaker likens those to "billboards in the middle of a desert."



Against this backdrop, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud in the first week of April said that TV channels were losing advertisements worth Tk 500-1,000 crore a year because of the airing of Bangladeshi commercials on downlink foreign television channels. A downlink is communication or transmission from a satellite down to one or more ground stations or receivers.

The government has recently banned the airing of local ads on foreign channels. At the same time, it served notices instructing two companies, who

help distribute about 25 pay channels across the country, to stop airing those commercials. However, SM Anwar Parvez, founding president of Cable Operators' Association of Bangladesh, said the advertisers or any media agency, if involved, were answerable for airing of commercials on foreign channels, not the distributors. The announcement of the ban effective from April 1 prompted an abrupt shutdown of broadcasting of some Indian channels including Zee Bangla and Zee Cinema.

"About 80 percent of TV viewers in the country watch Bangla channels of West Bengal," said Iresh Zaker, referring to data of media monitors. That explains the reaction from people on social media and in individual circles when Zee Bangla and Zee Cinema were off air.

There has also been debate over what local channels offer for entertainment, since the reason believed to be behind Bangladeshi commercials being aired in Indian channels is the popularity of their content. So what is the problem with our content? In a word, they lack new ideas.

A research cell could help with finding new stories and new styles of presentation, as well as ideas for new programmes. Sometimes directors face resistance from programme planners of TV channels regarding new ideas while low budget is also a factor, which influences the quality/outcome of a production.

An official of Asiatic Mindshare, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, says that content is the key for negotiating minute rates for ads. The media buying company together with its two sister concerns hold sway over nearly 50 percent of the media market.

The entire advertisement market size is no more than Tk 1,200-1,400 crore which, minus a small share going to one or two Indian channels, is distributed among local TV channels. The ad rates go into decline from cricket to news, to drama, to cinema or movies, the Asiatic official said. Viewership goes up during any live cricket match or any emergency situation like the recent fire incident in the Old Dhaka. As these events end, ads that target content replacing them in some channels become one-fifteenth times cheaper.

The primary responsibility of changing the scenario lies with the TV channels. TV is a device mostly for entertainment. Everyone has his or her own choice of entertainment, and he or she has the remote control to compare one show to another. Quality has to be good, but at the same time, other relevant issues have to be dealt with innovative ideas.

Zaker said the channels have to go to advertisers with good content and convince them to make more investments.

"TV is a habit for its audience," said Mohammad Ali Haider, head of programme in Duranta TV, which is now one of the top channels in terms of viewership. The channel specifically targets children and designs programmes only for them—to be run for at least three months, thereby creating a loyal audience.

Meanwhile, more than 70 percent of local channels are not making profits, according to Asiatic Mindshare. It is now time for all the stakeholders to start thinking of ways to navigate through this small market to stand out for their audience.

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## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# The case for climate tariffs



SHANG-JIN WEI

Australia heads toward a federal election on May 18, the national debate on cutting carbon dioxide emissions is heating up. Yet the discussion highlights the limits of what Australia or any other individual country can do to combat global warming. Rather, the world must step up its collective efforts to tackle climate change. And, strange as it may sound, US President Donald Trump's aggressive trade policies could point to a way forward.

In Australia, the opposition Labor Party wants the country to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions by 45 percent relative to their 2005 level by 2030. But achieving this lofty goal would impose high costs on Australians in terms of foregone income and actual taxes—estimated by economist Brian Fischer to be AUD 10,000-20,000 (USD 7,000-14,000) per capita over a decade. Even if Australia manages to cut emissions by this amount, the overall impact would be small, because the country accounts for less than 2 percent of the global economy.

The Labor Party's claim that the benefit of the plan would be fewer floods, hurricanes, landslides, and other natural disasters is only half true, because Australian actions alone will not have much effect on the frequency and severity of such events. Enough other countries would have to cut their



US residents living in Japan and locals hold a rally near the US embassy in Tokyo. PHOTO: TOSHIFUMI KITAMURA/AFP

own greenhouse-gas emissions further to make a difference.

Until recently, the world's best hope for combating global warming was the 2015 Paris climate agreement, which has been signed by 197 parties, including the world's two largest cumulative emitters of greenhouse gases (the United States and the European Union) and the leading current emitter (China). All signatories have pledged to meet numerical targets to lower drastically their own emissions relative to a business-as-usual path.

At the time, many thought that the Paris agreement was the limit of what was politically feasible. Yet most climate-change models predict that

even if all countries fulfilled their pledges, their efforts would not keep the increase in global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels—the critical threshold beyond which catastrophic outcomes, including higher sea levels and more frequent natural disasters, would become inevitable.

Worse still, the US under Trump has taken a giant step backward by withdrawing from the Paris agreement and pushing for more coal production and coal-fired power plants without carbon-capture requirements. This is doubly damaging: in addition to increasing America's emissions, Trump has given other countries an excuse

to avoid meeting their own Paris commitments.

Leading US progressives such as Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have championed a "Green New Deal" based on publicly financed investment. This initiative faces a similar problem to the Australian Labor Party's proposal: it would impose costs on US firms and households, while the benefits of lower emissions would be diffused around the world.

True, a successful Green New Deal would have a bigger global effect, because the US accounts for about one-quarter of the world's economy. But even America cannot save the world if other countries fail to take equally aggressive steps to reduce emissions. In fact, others might even emit more, because US actions could reduce the cost of tradable emissions permits.

Ironically, Trump's own readiness to impose large import tariffs could provide the basis for a new collective approach. Because the US is the world's biggest economy and possesses enormous political and military power, most countries have to accommodate America's demands in some way. In that respect, Trump's tariff wars have "worked" (although whether they are good for the US economy is another matter).

A future US government could perhaps use tariffs, or the threat of them, to push other countries to reduce their emissions more aggressively—especially those countries that are, or will be, sizable contributors to global warming. This would be different from a border-

adjustment tax based on the carbon content of the imports, but a way to raise the cost of inaction for countries that are not making sufficient contributions to the global effort.

Such measures might run counter to existing global trade rules. But they could be justified on efficiency grounds, because avoiding the destruction of the planet is good for everyone. Moreover, this approach would be fair if it resulted in all countries sharing the costs of combating climate change more evenly (all of them would share the benefits of a healthier planet).

Ideally, such an initiative would also acquire a legal basis through future reforms of World Trade Organization rules. It would be even better if many countries committed to coordinating their tariff policies to help enforce any agreement on further emissions cuts.

Of course, tariffs are not—and should not be—the only tool for combating global warming. Nonetheless, given the lack of a powerful enforcement mechanism in the current climate agreement, they could be a useful and potentially effective complement to the next round of global climate negotiations. This, however, requires that America has a leader who understands the climate-change threat.

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### ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

**MAY 13, 1981**

Pope John Paul II is shot and critically wounded by Turkish gunman Mehmet Ali Agca in St Peter's Square, Vatican City.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

<b>ACROSS</b>	34 One of Santa's team	10 Shaggy ox
7 Order to Spot	37 Smell	16 Ranch workers
11 Small	39 Full-price payers	17 Girder material
12 Verdi piece	43 Weather map spots	18 Heart outlet
13 Hollywood workers	44 Do over	19 Wrestling show
14 Brown songbird	45 Auto ding	21 Enticed
15 Ominously gloomy	46 Comes in	22 Foils' kin
17 Pert talk		24 Consecrate
20 Low joint		25 Crew tool
23 Huck's friend	<b>DOWN</b>	30 Noted newspaperman
24 Studied intensely	1 Relaxing place	33 Blow one's top
26 Historic stretch	2 Coat rack part	35 Fast runner
27 Young fellow	3 Salt Lake City player	36 Genesis site
28 Galena, for one	4 Saturn feature	37 Archaic
29 Engravers	5 Director Preminger	38 Buck's mate
31 Tiny	6 High home	40 Director Spike
32 Albert and Victoria	7 Like tears	41 Sticky stuff
33 Cuts off	8 Locate	42 Ave. crossers
	9 Melody	

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### BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

SCRUB THAT FLOOR, IT LOOKS REAL SLIPPERY. IT DOESN'T LOOK SLIPPERY TO ME. OKAY, NOW I SEE IT.

### BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

DO YOU WANT TO LOOK FOR HIDDEN CHRISTMAS PRESENTS? I THOUGHT SANTA BROUGHT ALL OF OUR PRESENTS. HE DOES, BUT MOM AND DAD ALSO GET US SOME. THEY DO? THE LIST OF PEOPLE I WANT TO BE NICE TO JUST KEEPS GROWING! THE HOLIDAYS ARE NO HOLIDAY.