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## Research Article

## A Study in The Field of Service Providers in Indian Broadcast Industry: Cable TV V/S DTH Services

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### Abstract

The Indian broadcasting sector is, without doubt, passing through one of its most defining phases of change. The most visible sign of this transformation is the rapid and somewhat unexpected growth in the Direct-to-Home (DTH) subscriber base across the country. It may be noted here that this shift has not happened in isolation — it is closely linked to evolving viewer preferences and a genuine desire for better quality audio-visual experience, something that DTH has been particularly effective in delivering. Cable television, for all its reach, has certain inherent limitations in terms of signal quality and geographical coverage. DTH, being a wireless technology, largely overcomes these limitations. The present study endeavours to examine, in an exploratory manner, how Indian television viewers — particularly those in the Indore region — weigh their preferences between conventional satellite cable TV and DTH services. The study also attempts to understand the factors that are gradually tilting consumer choice in favour of DTH, even as cable television continues to hold its ground in certain segments.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the story of Indian television is, in many ways, a story of India's own development. The first experimental telecast took place in Delhi on 15 September 1959, a modest beginning, with a small transmitter and a makeshift studio that gave very little indication of the massive industry that would eventually emerge from it. Regular daily broadcasting began in 1965, operating at the time as part of All India Radio. The reach expanded gradually — Bombay (now Mumbai) and Amritsar were added to the television network in 1972, and four years later, in 1976, television services were formally separated from radio. National telecasts were introduced in 1982. For much of this initial period, Doordarshan was the only channel available to Indian viewers, and it was entirely under government ownership.

By the late 1980s, things had begun to change, and change quickly. Television sets were becoming more common in Indian homes, and the appetite for content had grown well beyond what a single government channel could satisfy. A second channel was introduced, carrying a mix of national and regional programming — first known as DD 2, later rechristened DD Metro. Both channels relied on terrestrial broadcast infrastructure. The real turning point, however, came with the liberalisation of the broadcast sector and the entry of private players. According to the Annual Universe Update of 2010, India had crossed 134 million television-owning households out of a total of 223 million. Of these, more than 103 million had access to Cable TV or Satellite TV, and approximately 20 million were DTH subscribers. These are not small numbers. Cable and satellite homes were growing at over 15 percent per year, while DTH subscribers recorded growth of 28 percent — significantly higher than the overall market. India was, by this time, home to over 500 television channels.

More recent estimates place the total television-owning population at close to 135 million, with around 80 percent — approximately 108 million households — having access to cable or satellite services. DTH, with close to 22 million subscribers, accounts for roughly 20 percent of this total. To put this in perspective, the DTH subscriber count in 2006 was barely one million. The jump to 22 million in five years is, by any standard, a remarkable achievement for a sector still in its early years. Direct-to-Home, as the name suggests, is a system that delivers satellite television signals directly to individual homes through a small dish antenna and a set-top box — without the need for any cable network. This makes it particularly attractive in areas where cable infrastructure is poor or non-existent.

The DTH industry in India is dominated by private players and operates on a capital-intensive model. The government has played a limited role in this space, leaving the competitive dynamics largely to be determined by market forces. This competition, intense as it is, has ultimately worked in the consumer's favour — packages have become more affordable, and viewers now have considerably more flexibility in customising their subscriptions. The prominent names in Indian DTH Dish TV, Tata Sky, Airtel Digital TV, Reliance BIG TV, Sun Direct, and Videocon D2H — all have their origins in the

broader communications and media industry. Each of these players is continuously working to attract and retain subscribers through differentiated offerings, improved service quality, and competitive pricing.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The academic literature on DTH and cable television in India, while not very extensive, does offer some useful insights into the evolving competitive landscape and consumer behaviour patterns in this sector.

Shubra Jyoti Perida (2020), in his research project titled Industry Analysis on Direct to Home (DTH), made an important observation about the nature of DTH as a service. According to him, the prepaid model on which DTH operates is one of its biggest strengths — it suits both regular viewers and those with irregular viewing habits, giving consumers clear control over their expenditure. There are no billing disputes, no pending dues, and no dependence on a local cable operator for monthly reconciliation. This makes it a cleaner and more predictable service experience for the subscriber.

Dr. Sachin Rai (2018) examined the advertising strategies of the DTH industry in his work titled *Advertising Strategies on Electronic Industry (DTH)*. His findings were striking — at the time of the study, DTH had already captured close to 47 percent of the relevant market. More interestingly, Dr. Rai argued that the trajectory was pointing clearly towards full replacement of cable television connections in the near future, a claim that, while bold, is not without basis given the trends observed since then.

Gagan Uppal (2015) took a somewhat broader view in his paper DTH Analysis of Indian Market. He drew attention to the fact that DTH adoption was no longer confined to urban India — it was spreading steadily into rural areas as well. The key drivers, in his analysis, were the growing size of the Indian middle class and the concurrent rise in household disposable incomes. As more families gained the economic capacity to invest in quality entertainment, DTH — with its one-time installation cost and predictable monthly fees — emerged as an increasingly attractive proposition.

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Television, it is well known, is one of the most powerful mass media in India today. It reaches millions of homes across states, languages, and income groups. The small screen has produced its own kind of celebrity culture, and television serials remain among the most consumed content categories in the country — particularly among homemakers and working women. Roughly half of all Indian households own at least one television set. As of 2010, India had over 515 channels, including approximately 150 pay channels. Given this scale and reach, the present study was designed with the primary objective of understanding the reasons behind the growing popularity of DTH services among Indian television viewers. The secondary objectives of the study are outlined below

- To analyse and compare the picture quality and sound quality delivered by Satellite TV and DTH services respectively.

- To evaluate the overall service experience — including pricing, continuity of telecast, and customer support — offered by both platforms.

#### 4. Data Collection

The study, being exploratory in character, drew upon both primary and secondary sources of information. For primary data, a structured questionnaire was prepared and distributed among 100 respondents residing in the Naulakha locality of Indore city. The choice of Naulakha as the survey area was deliberate — it represents a fairly diverse cross-section of urban consumers in terms of income levels and viewing habits. Secondary data was gathered from previously published research papers, academic journals, books, magazines, and relevant web-based sources. The combination of these two data streams allowed the researchers to situate the primary findings within a broader context of existing knowledge on the subject.

#### 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary data gathered through the questionnaire survey was subjected to percentage analysis and graphical representation, both of which were considered well-suited to the exploratory design of the study. No advanced statistical modelling was attempted at this stage, as the primary aim was to document and interpret broad patterns of consumer preference rather than to establish causal relationships. The findings have been discussed in the analysis section below, with appropriate reference to the stated objectives of the study.

#### 6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of the survey data yielded a number of findings that are worth examining in some detail. To begin with, income distribution among respondents showed that 66 percent of those surveyed belonged to the income category of more than Rs. 10,000 per month. The remaining 34 percent fell in the lower income bracket. This skew towards the higher income group is relevant because it helps explain, at least partly, the relatively greater preference for DTH among the respondents — a service that, despite its competitive pricing, does involve an initial installation cost that lower-income households may find difficult to absorb. Among those who were currently using satellite cable television, the overall picture was one of mixed satisfaction. Most of them expressed dissatisfaction — sometimes mild, sometimes more pointed — with the picture quality, the pricing structure, and the frequency of interruptions in the telecast. And yet, there was one aspect of cable television that these respondents genuinely valued: the personal relationship with the local cable operator. This may seem like a small thing, but in practice it translated into concrete benefits rebates on monthly bills, flexibility in payment timelines, and the option of multi-connection facilities within the same household. These are not trivial advantages, especially for middle-class families managing tight household budgets.

DTH subscribers, by contrast, were largely satisfied with the technical aspects of the service. Picture quality, in particular, received consistently positive feedback. Pricing was also viewed favourably, and the uninterrupted continuity of telecast

a persistent complaint among cable TV users — was mentioned by many DTH subscribers as a significant improvement in their viewing experience. The downside, as several respondents pointed out, was the absence of any personal connect with the service provider. Unlike cable operators who are locally present and accessible, DTH companies are distant corporate entities with whom subscribers interact primarily through call centres or online portals. This means that flexible payment arrangements or personalised discounts — benefits that cable subscribers often take for granted — are simply not available to DTH users. Beyond basic viewing quality, DTH services were found to offer a range of additional features that clearly appealed to the more technology-oriented respondents. On-demand movies, interactive games, FM radio integration, Dolby Digital sound, and High-Definition viewing options were among the facilities cited most frequently. These value-added services align well with the preferences of a younger, more tech-savvy urban consumer demographic, and they appear to be playing an increasingly important role in shaping the overall DTH preference among surveyed respondents.

It would, however, be a mistake to read these findings as a wholesale rejection of cable television. A notable segment of respondents expressed a clear preference for retaining their local cable connection — not for technical reasons, but because it provided them with access to local and city-specific news content. Hyperlocal information about neighbourhood events, local government announcements, or regional entertainment programming is something that national DTH platforms are generally not equipped to offer. This finding is a reminder that technology alone does not drive consumer choice — context, community, and local relevance continue to matter.

#### 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the whole, the findings of this study suggest that DTH services have made a strong and lasting impression on the Indian television viewer. The penetration of DTH into urban Indian homes has been swift, and the quality of the viewing experience it offers has clearly set a new benchmark that cable television finds difficult to match on purely technical grounds. The viewers surveyed in this study were, by and large, better satisfied with DTH across most parameters — picture quality, pricing, and continuity of service.

At the same time, the study makes it clear that cable television is far from finished. Its strength lies not in technology but in relationships — the personal bond between the cable operator and the subscriber, and the ability to serve hyperlocal content needs that DTH simply cannot address. As long as these factors remain relevant to a significant section of the population, cable TV will retain a loyal, if gradually shrinking, user base.

For DTH service providers, the message from this study is fairly straightforward. Technological superiority, while important, is not the only battleground. Consumer retention requires ongoing investment in content variety, pricing flexibility, and — wherever possible — more responsive customer service. The Indian DTH market is still evolving, and there is considerable room for innovation in both product offerings and service delivery. Those providers who are able to

combine the best of technology with a genuine understanding of consumer needs will be the ones best positioned to lead the next phase of growth in this sector.

It is recommended that future research in this area extend the survey to a larger and more geographically diverse sample, and also examine the growing impact of OTT (Over-the-Top) streaming platforms on both DTH and cable television subscriber behavior — a dimension that was beyond the scope of the present study but is increasingly relevant to the Indian broadcasting ecosystem.

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