Television Rating Points

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Why in news

Recently, the Mumbai Police has claimed about a scam about the manipulation of **TRPs (Target Rating Points)** by some TV channels by rigging the devices used by the **Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India.**

Key Points

- **About:** The TRP is the metric used by the marketing and advertising agencies to evaluate viewership.
    - **Viewer:** Anyone who watches television for **more than a minute** is considered a viewer.
    - It represents how many people, from which **socio-economic categories,** watched which channels for how much time during a particular period. This period is **one minute** as per the international standards.
- **Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC)**
    - It is a company created in 2010 and jointly owned by advertisers, ad agencies, and broadcasting companies, represented by the Indian Society of Advertisers, the Indian Broadcasting Foundation and the Advertising Agencies Association of India.
    - The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting notified the **Policy Guidelines for Television Rating Agencies** in India on January 10, 2014, and registered BARC in July 2015 under these guidelines, to carry out television ratings in India.

- **Methodology of Calculation:**
  - **Bar-o-meters:** BARC has installed **Bar-O-meters** in over **45,000 empanelled households.** These record viewing details as well as audio watermarks of content.
    - Audio watermarks are embedded in video content prior to broadcast. These watermarks are not audible to the human ear, but can easily be detected and decoded using dedicated hardware and software.
  - **Selection of Households:** The households are chosen by an **annual Establishment Survey** which is a large-scale face-to-face survey of a sample of approximately 3 lakh households from the target population.
    - The panel chosen to capture TRPs must be representative of the country's population, and the methodology must be economically viable for the industry.
  - **Classification of Households:** These households are classified into 12 categories under the New Consumer Classification System (NCCS) adopted by BARC in 2015, based on the **education level of the main wage earner** and the **ownership of consumer durables** from a list of 11 items ranging from a power connection to a car.
  - **Data Collection:** While watching a show, members of the household register their presence by pressing their **separate viewer ID** button.
    - This captures the duration for which the channel was watched and by whom and provides data on viewership habits across age and socio-economic groups.
- **Precautions to Prevent Rigging:**
  - The viewing behaviour of panel homes is reported to BARC India **directly and daily.**
  - **Coincidental checks** either physically or telephonically are done regularly. Certain **suspicious outliers** are also checked directly by BARC India.
  - These households **rotate randomly** every year and they are kept confidential.
- **Significance of TRP:**
  - These **influence programmes produced** for the viewers. Better ratings would promote a programme while poor ratings will discourage a programme.
  - TRPs are the main **currency for advertisers** to decide which channel to advertise on by calculating the **cost-per-rating-point (CPRP).**

- **Limitations of TRP:**
    - The panel can be **infiltrated or tampered** by bribing viewers or cable operators or tampering with the selection of panel.
    - If the **sample size is very small,** e.g. for English News channels, the manipulation becomes easier as even manipulating a few homes will change the TRP.
    - There is an **absence of any specific law** through which the agents/suspects involved in panel tampering/infiltration could be penalised.
    - About 70% of the revenue for television channels comes from advertising and only 30% from the subscription. **Dependence on advertisements** for revenue is leading to broadcasting content which suits the advertisers.

Way forward

- **Increasing the sample size so that the results are more accurate, developing a legal framework for the regulation of TRP and chip-based activity logs through all set-top boxes** are some of the things that can be done by the government in conjunction with the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** to make the calculation of TRP fair and precise.
- The subscription rates, which are controlled by the TRAI, should be raised so that TV channels are not forced to serve the lowest common denominator.

Source: TH