



BBC Bangla Vs Deutsche Welle Bangla: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: This study is a Comparative study of the BBC Bangla and Deutsche Welle Bangla. The study will try to find out what lead to the closure of the BBC Bangla and how changing media landscape has shaped the Public Broadcaster with particular reference of the two leading Bengali services of the two leading public broadcasters. The study is with reference to Bangladesh as both the services are very popular in this country and entwined with its history.

Keywords: BBC Bangle, Deutsche Welle, Mass media, Bangladesh

Introduction

BBC Bangla Radio services started on October 11th, 1941, and they started with a newsletter that was translated into Bengali and broadcast from London. Dr. Sudhin Das, who was the Professor of the Department of Bengali, was the first radio announcer who used to read out the translated script in Bengali. The English copy was written by famous historian, story writer, and journalist Erik Blair, also known as George Orwell in the cultural field. It was the time of World War II, and thus the weekly content of BBC Bangla was packaged with war-related information along with the culture and situation in other colonial areas. However, if we look at the history of Bangla Radio, we can see that it began with the idea of informing the people of the Indian subcontinent about the affairs of friendly nations during World War II, when lakhs of soldiers were fighting in support of friendly forces. The idea, besides broadcasting such programs, was to thwart the propaganda done by the axis forces of Japan, Germany, and Italy so that people in the subcontinent would not get confused. From 1944 on, it added one more talk show, making two in a week. After Komol Bose and Rekha Ali joined the BBC from India on December 31, 1944, a 30-minute magazine program called "Bichitra" was broadcast. The program had a title track of what we know today as the national song of India.

After India's independence in 1947 and the bifurcation of India, a special 30-minute program was started just to cater to the audiences of East Pakistan with the title "Anjuman." Apart from other issues in the program, a special segment was given for the women, which was hosted by Sarifa Alam alias Piyari Apa. Since the main target was the audience from East Pakistan, the use of Urdu was mixed with Bengali. Bichitra and Anjuman remained as two separate programs, with Bichitra catering to the audiences in India and Anjuman catering to East Pakistan. During India's 1965 war with Pakistan, however, both units merged into one and began a 15-minute Bengali program called "Prabhati," in which the first world news and news reel were broadcast. In 1969 both the units of west and East Bengal were merged into one what we know today as BBC Bangla. The jointly formed Bangla unit started functioning on June 15, 1969, with a 15-minute program called "Prabaha." During Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971, people's trust in the BBC increased many times over. People were dependent on the news from BBC Bangla for accurate news on the war front. Pakistan censored BBC Bangla and pressured and threatened the organization's reporters, but the BBC never lost credibility among Bangladeshis while reporting



on the liberation war. Though different genres of programs were introduced, the daily news was only the world news and the news reel, and the topics were mostly social and cultural. But real change came in the early 1990s, when the mainstay of BBC Bangla was news and news-based programs and discussions. Dr. Said Mahmud Ali was heading the BBC Bangla during the 1990s, and according to him, research has shown that the audiences switched off their radio sets after listening to the news and news-based discussions. But with changing times and the advent of digital technology in media, BBC Bangla, after 81 years of service, finally stopped its radio broadcast on December 31, 2022. (Barua, 2023)

The meaning of "Deutsche Welle" is "German wave," and it started broadcasting on May 3, 1953. It was from Cologne that the first broadcast of the Deutsche Welle started, and it was a single broadcast in German. The idea behind starting Deutsche Welle is to change the perception of Germany's image in the background of World War II's ending. From then to now, Deutsche Welle has evolved into one of the most important and influential international broadcasters. Deutsche Welle, in order to reach its dedicated listeners, has increased its language services every year since its inception. Deutsche Welle now operates from Bonn. Now coming to Deutsche Welle Bangla, it has a buffet of vivid Bangla programs like Sangbad, Dristi kon Aikhane Siakhane, Europer Jaanala, Ai Projjonmo, and hosts of other programs. The mesmerizing trip of the Deutsche Welle bangla began in the year 1975, in the month of April. The idea behind starting the Deutsche Welle Bangla is to present to the world the unique culture of the Bengali from an unbiased angle. The reality of the Bangla unit of Deutsche Welle was possible because of the then Ambassador of Bangladesh to West Germany, Humayun Rashid Choudhury, while the other notable person behind the journey of this unit is Abdul Al Farooq, who was an established name from Swadhin Bangla Betar.

Mizanur rahman Khan, correspondent of Deutsche Welle bangle from Dhaka said that "On the basis of mother tongue Bangla is the Fourth largest community but it is often overlooked by the Bangladeshis." Almost as per estimate 23 crore people speak Bengali and the Deutsche Welle Bangla service unfastened a large prospect for the Bangalees to savour the essence of the German traditions, literature, Science and other features as well as unbiased local news free of Political and Social pressure added Mizanur.

Though Mizanur also admits that it may sound impractical that DW Bangla can give genuine news free of political and social pressure but it is practically possible as because no one is there to exert pressure and thus becomes reasonably easy for the unit to to serve unbiased programmes far away from ones country. The broadcasting technique of the service is based on two pillars one is the transmission of the Radio in Bangladesh, Tripura, Assam and West Bengal and the other is the website with Unicode facilities where people can read news in bangla and can also listen to news and also watch video clips. (Ahmed, 2005)

The Deutsche Welle also got a shot in the arm with the signing of the agreement between the Bangladesh Betar(BB) and DW. Both the parties signed an agreement in this regard on march 9, 2010 and practically from than the FM broadcast of the Deutsche Welle Bangla commenced in Bangladesh. As per the agreement reached Bangladesh Betar will broadcast DW bangla programme from 8:00 to 8:30 in the morning and same time in the evening and can be heard in six cities of Bangladesh for which satellite equipment's were set up in all the cities. (Thomas, 2010)

Objective

1. To find out what lead to the closure of BBC Bangla.
2. To find out whether the closure of the BBC Bangle service sounds death bell for the Public Broadcasting service.
3. To find out the whether advent of digital media has led to the closure of BBC Bangla.



Research Design

Research design here used is the Explanatory Research Design whereby available Literature was studied to bring out a conclusion. The Literature studied is news based items.

Why BBC Bangla closed its services

The decision to close BBC World Service, which broadcasts in ten languages, was made primarily due to financial constraints at the BBC, as the closure would save the broadcaster 28.5 pounds per year. The closure will also result in the elimination of 382 jobs, but in order to be in contact with the audiences, many languages would be available on the online platform, according to a statement from the BBC, and this is how the BBC will be able to save 500 million pounds annually. Nadine Dorries, cultural secretary, declared that the yearly fee will be 159 pounds for two years. This means that the BBC's annual fees will not be increased for another two years, until the current charter expires. The reason for such a harsh decision is due to rising inflation and costs, and the decision to close the World Service is to make it a modern, digital-led, and slick organization. Apart from BBC Bangla, the axe will fall on Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Hindi, Indonesian, Tamil, and Urdu radio services. The others that will be available in the online mode are Chinese, Gujrati, Igbo, Indonesian, Pidgin, Urdu, and Yoruba. Further some of the language services like Gujrati Yoruba, Pidgin, Urdu Igbo Chinese, and Indonesian will be available only in the online mode. Though world service will still be active and will serve audiences during moments of risk and thus will be available to people of Russia, Ukraine and Afghanistan whose services were not closed. The world service which has a large number of languages is broadcasting its content through Radio, TV and digital. The World service is a worldwide multimedia broadcaster which reaches around 364 million people per week of which half entrée digitally. In order to "serve audiences during moments of jeopardy" and to make sure that BBC's news services reach the masses, the BBC decided to continue with its Ukrainian, Russian and Afghan language services. Similarly, the International Broadcast Service A wing of the BBC will be available non-stop worldwide, and the new programs, timeline, and podcasts will be announced by the corporation. Director Liliane Landor of the International Broadcast Service said that the BBC news is a symbol of trust for hundreds of millions of people globally for its non-biased and independent news, particularly in those countries that have it in short supply, thus making the role of the BBC more crucial in the present circumstances. They further added that, as is the motto of the BBC, it will bring the best journalism in times of crisis, and it will continue with the endeavor for its audiences in English and 40 other languages. They also elaborated on the undeniable grounds for the expansion of online services and had plans to merge the TV news channel while axing the local TV news channel and the decision to shift BBC and CBBC Four online are all part of the new digital plan undertaken by the organization. The BBC has also planned to attract younger audiences by tailoring programming to their preferences and incorporating such programs into their new podcast services. The new podcast program will be tailored for world-wide audiences and will be an hour-long program with a science thread along with live news and sports programming to be podcasted from the latest science unit in Cardiff.

Additional Proposals

It was decided to move closer to the audiences and that is why Thai services is set to start operation from Bangkok, Korean services from seoul, bangla from Dhaka and African services from Nairobi.

Investing in Arabic and Persian language Programmes with investment more into audio and digital platforms.



Making of London based China Unit

The suggestions are at the consultation stage among the staff and trade unions.

Though the broadcasting unit is not happy with the changes as is stated in statement by Philippa Childs, broadcasting union head 'Bectu,' he believed that union is disenchanted to see the proposed changes".

The statement read as: While we recognize the BBC must adapt to meet the challenges of a changing media landscape, once again it is workers who are hit by the government's poorly-judged political decisions - its freezing of the license fee and the resulting funding challenges has necessitated these proposals," (Desk, 2022).

Funding of BBC Bangla and Deutsche Welle

It all started by the Parliament grant-in-aid for the BBC world service which is administered by Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office (FCDO). But from April 2014 this funding arrangement was changed and the funding of the BBC world service was given to BBC. The change technically means that FCDO would stop paying for the BBC world service and the funding would come from the License fee which the BBC is getting.

The cessation of funding by the FCDO has not gone too well to with many critic said that the funding change will have an impact on the future of the BBC International Broadcast service. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in 2011 published a report which stated that the decision to give funding responsibility to BBC will have major long-time ramification for the future of the world service. They also mentioned that the change of the Funding procedure will lead long term pressure on the funding of the World service and thus it will have insecure funding future which will eventually lead to steady diversion of resources from World service to fund the BBC activities, but in response to the Foreign Affairs Committee report, the government said in its reply that the transfer of funding to the license fee would increase the BBC's ability to amplify the scale for sensible efficiencies and economies and to shun repetition across the whole of the BBC family. Thus, it will directly help to sustain the future of the world service, and with the addition of license fee funding for the world service, it will benefit license fee payers who will have access to the world service. The government has also clarified that it is still going to work with the World Service in specific areas. Willaim Hague, the then-foreign minister, announced in 2011 that he had asked the FCDO to look into whether they could reinstate World Service funding through other means.

The government has announced in November 2015 it is going to give 289 million pound funding to the BBC world service from 2016-17 to 2019-20 and it will be in addition to the funding from License fees. In May 2016 Government also pledged 254 million pound for 5 years from 2017/18 and it will be given to the BBC World Service from the License fee of the BBC. Thus BBC world Service is coming from two strands with almost 75% coming from the License fees. The decision to freeze the License fee will not have an impact on the BBCWS as is noted from the Correspondence of the then cultural secretary; Nadine Dorries recognized the contribution of the world service and said that over the rest of the Charter Period BBC will be making substantive investment in the BBCWS from the license fee. As set out in the framework agreement the BBC should continue to agree to continue to prioritize, set the goal and achieve the objectives, as set for the World Service.

In November 2022, the government reaffirmed the long-term contribution of the FCDO in funding of the BBC World service and in the statement it said "The government greatly values the work of the BBC World Service, as recognized in the integrated review."

Over the course of the three-year of the expenditure evaluation period, the FCDO will provide



the World Service with stable cash funding totaling £283 million, or £94.4 million each year.

The FCDO will provide an additional £1.44 million this year to fighting disinformation coming from the Kremlin with reliable and unbiased content. The BBC announced its purpose to progress its digital service and widen its appeal to viewers around the world on September 29, 2022. Seven more language services would switch-over to digital-only deliverance as a result of the modification, bringing the total to approximately half of all language services. Additionally, the suggestions would result in the loss of 382 employments.

The BBC stated that it would make an annual savings of £28.5 million for its overseas services due to "high inflation, mounting costs, and a cash-flat license fee settlement." The modifications, it was emphasized, would follow the successful models of other language services that had made the transfer to digital and were "doing well with audiences," adding that "no language services will close." (Evennett, 2022)

Deutsche Welle Funding

Since the public broadcasting system was reformed after German unification, Deutsche Welle is the sole broadcaster covered by federal law. It does not receive money from broadcasting fees, like Deutschland radio and ZDF of the ARD, but rather from tax receipts. The budget is overseen by the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media. Furthermore, DW can only offer a certain amount of advertising time. In a multi-year plan that is revised annually, DW makes its plans and initiatives known to the public. (dw.com, 2011)

Conclusion

We can very well conclude that the funding model of the BBC based on license fees and a new regulation by the British ruling government freezing the license fees will lead to the closure of BBC Bangla. But in the case of Deutche Welle, the funding model is different and not dependent on the consumers, as it is funded by tax revenues. Thus, the BBC funding model, which is followed by many public service broadcasters, has failed to achieve its goal because the media boom has flooded consumers with choices and they are not dependable or follow a single pattern when it comes to viewing. The economic recession and high inflation rate caused the license fees to be frozen for two years, and at a time when the entire world economy was in recession, public broadcasters already appeared to be suffering. Though the House of Commons and other imminent members repeatedly warned that the BBC's funding burden would eventually lead to the diversion of resources from the BBC World Service, the warnings fell on deaf ears, and the closure of the BBC Bangla radio service has become true to the warning bells.

The second cause is the advent of the digital platform. Both the BBC Bangle Service and Deutche Welle are available on the digital platform. The closure of the BBC Bangla Radio tells us about the slow death of the radio with the advent of the digital platform. Other world services may not be far behind, as evidenced by the closure of the BBC Bangla service.

Thus, we can conclude two things from here.

1. The funding model of the BBC through its license fees and the freezing of the license fees have sent a signal that all is not well in the public service broadcasting system.
2. The closure of BBC Bangla, as well as other language channels, has demonstrated that even the most trusted brand, BBC, is losing its luster, and it may be the beginning of the end of the public broadcasting service.
3. The advent of digital media is posing challenges to the traditional media (radio), and the move of public sector broadcasting from such traditional media to digital platforms is just a matter of time.



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