

Extensive, theatrical

What people thought of the Mumbai terror attacks coverage on TV

Shortly after it dawned on all and sundry that what was initially thought of as only a gang war, was in fact a concerted attack by terrorists on the night of November 26, 2008, all eyes of the nation, and the world, were trained on Mumbai. The coverage of the attacks was to become a watershed in India's television history. But hardly had the first night wore on, signs of criticism of the coverage began surfacing. Over Facebook status messages, through SMSs, and subsequently through blogs and other outlets. Even as National Security Guard (NSG) commandos fought a pitched battle with the terrorists, and television cameras and journalists kept viewers updated all through, coverage itself became news. For all the wrong reasons, one might argue.

Going by the outrage expressed by critics through newspaper columns and blogs, among others, **NewsWatch** decided to carry out a survey on what people thought of the reportage issue. The survey was conducted primarily over a web-based interface from December 3-6. The response was overwhelming. In all, 9,906 responses were selected for the analysis.

There are, nevertheless, limitations with this survey. Firstly, there was no sample identification or selection (see page 3 for the methodology). Secondly, since this was an online survey the results would also mean the opinion gathered was that of India's Internet users only, and not that of the people as a whole. The survey results, unfortunately, leave out rural India from its ambit. In that sense, this survey is as elitist as the coverage of the attacks was made out to be by most detractors.

This survey is based on people's perception of the television coverage—it is not a content analysis project, technically.

In all, 16 questions dealt with perceived negative aspects of the coverage of the Mumbai terror attacks by news and business channels. In all, 21 English and Hindi channels were shortlisted for assessment. Non-English/Hindi

channels had to be left out for logistical reasons. Respondents were asked to rate each of these 21 channels on a scale of 1 to 5, in an increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100. No demographic details were collected from the respondents. In other words, it is not possible, for instance, to say if 57 per cent men in the age group of 22-29 in North India believed that Sahara Samay was theatrical in its reportage/presentation.

This survey is also not about ranking channels. For example, the Table 1 results on page 2 do not mean that all respondents thought that Zee News was the most speculative in its reportage. It means that of those who watched Zee News, 86 per cent thought that the channel's coverage was speculative.

This report also carries excerpts from relevant critical articles that appeared in newspapers, opinions of some of the survey respondents, and the response of Barkha Dutt (Group Editor- English News, NDTV) to the criticism of the coverage.

READ ON...



Journalists take cover during a gunbattle at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, November 29, 2008. (Reuters / Desmond Boylan)

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Table 1: Were TV channels speculative — from number of terrorists involved to steps being taken to tackle them? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE
MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Reuters / Arko Datta

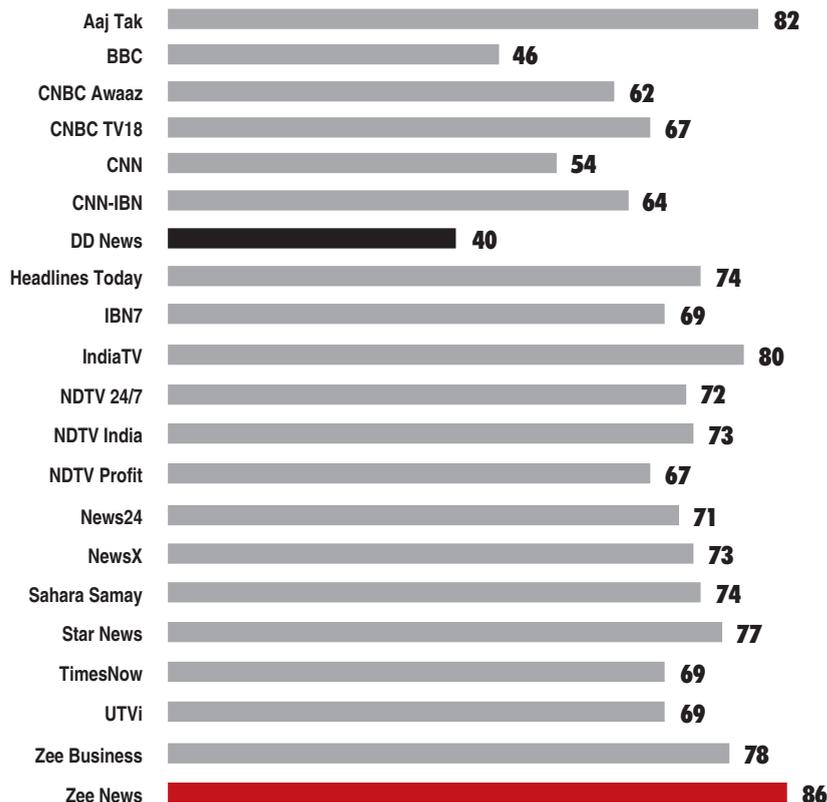
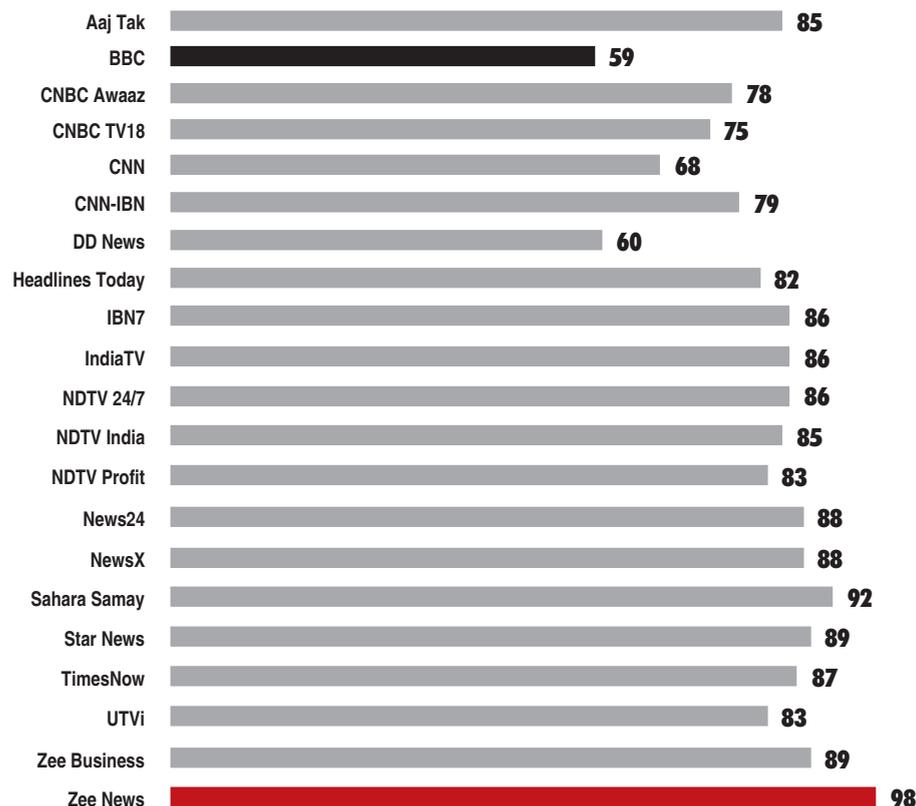


Table 2: Were TV channels unquestioning about information being given to them by various 'sources'? (% yes)



Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE
MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Associated Press / Manish Swarup

HIGH POINTS OF THE COVERAGE

- 1) Round-the clock, extensive, coverage 97%

LOW POINTS OF THE COVERAGE

- 1) Theatrical presentations 74%
2) Too many celebrities on TV 20%

Most cool/best reporters/anchors

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------|-----|
| 1) Arup Ghosh | NewsX | 14% |
| Shireen | NewsX | 14% |
| 3) Anubha Bhonsle | CNN-IBN | 9% |
| Vishnu Som | NDTV | 9% |
| 5) Srinivasan Jain | NDTV | 4% |
| Suhasini Haider | CNN-IBN | 4% |
| Mahrukh Inayet | TimesNow | 4% |
| Rajdeep Sardesai | CNN-IBN | 4% |
| Barkha Dutt | NDTV | 4% |

Most theatrical/worst reporters/anchors

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----|
| 1) Barkha Dutt | NDTV | 46% |
| 2) Arnab Goswami | TimesNow | 14% |
| 3) Deepak Chaurasia | Aaj Tak | 11% |
| 4) Rajdeep Sardesai | CNN-IBN | 10% |
| 5) Entire team | Star News | 9% |

Celebrities who didn't deserve to be there

- | | |
|--------------------|-----|
| 1) Shobhaa Dé | 56% |
| 2) Chetan Bhagat | 12% |
| 3) Alyque Padamsee | 9% |
| Ness Wadia | 9% |

Experts who made most sense

- | | |
|---------------------|-----|
| 1) C Uday Bhaskar | 44% |
| 2) Gerson da Cunha | 17% |
| 3) Maxwell Perreira | 16% |

NOTE: At hindsight, this set of questions may not have been the right one to ask non-journalists. Less than half the respondents could identify reporters/ anchors/ celebrities/ experts by name, and correctly at that. For instance, there were many who said that the anchor they thought to be the best/cool was one with a beard on an English news channel.

Are TV news channels goading the government to go to war with Pakistan?



Courtesy: Reuters / Amit Dave

THE METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted primarily over a web-based interface on the **NewsWatch** site based on a 34-aspect questionnaire. A few opted to respond through emails. The number of incomplete responses, which obviously had to be eliminated from the survey analysis, was 631. In all, there were 10,672 complete responses (including 23 over email). IP address / cookie tracking was done to exclude 766 responses which were found to be duplicates in terms of origin. Since there were no mandatory questions, none of the responses were rejected on that ground. The number of valid responses selected for the final analysis was 9,906.

Sixteen of the questions were based on perceived negative aspects of the coverage of the Mumbai terror attacks by news and business channels. In all, 21 English and Hindi channels were shortlisted for assessment by respondents. Non-English/Hindi channels had to be left out for logistical reasons. Respondents were asked to rate each of these 21 channels on a scale of 1 to 5, in an increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

No demographic details were collected from the respondents. In other words, it is not possible, for instance, to say if 70 per cent women in the age group of 18-21 in South India thought that Headlines Today was theatrical in reportage/presentation.

Email addresses were collected only from those respondents who wanted to be informed of the survey results, once published.



Courtesy: Associated Press / Saurabh Das

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Table 3: Were TV channels theatrical in terms of dramatisation of events / gesticulations by reporters/anchors? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE

MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Associated Press / David Guttenfelder

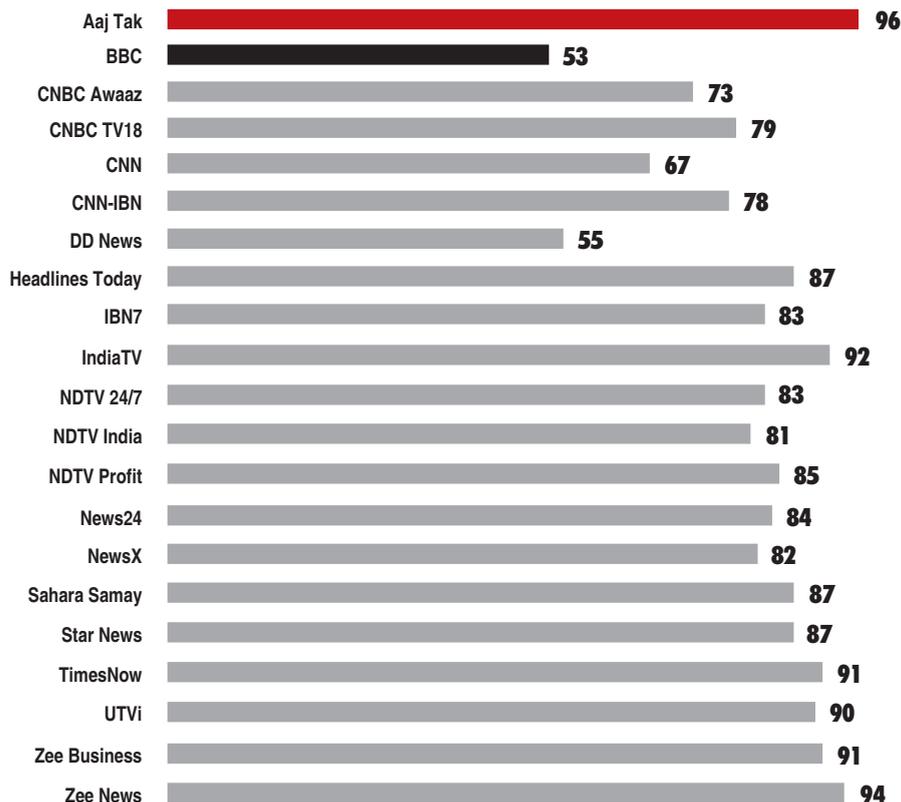
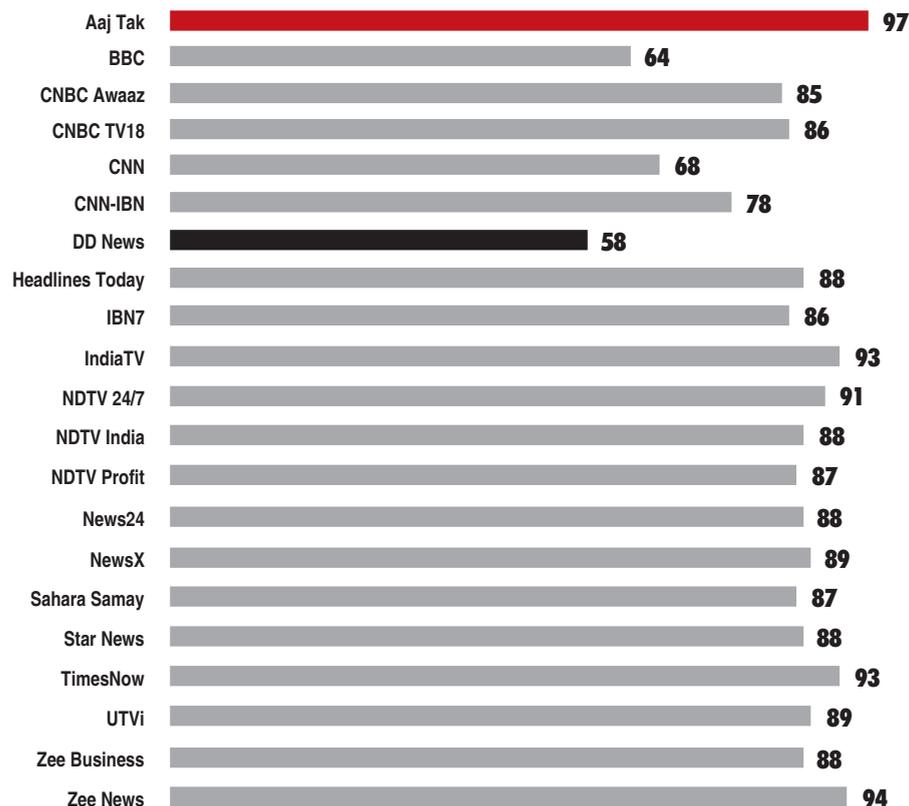


Table 4: Did TV channels go overboard with their colourful and loaded language? (% yes)



Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE

MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Associated Press

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Table 5: Were TV channels irresponsible in repeatedly giving away the locations of guests still hiding in the two hotels? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE
MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Reuters / Punit Paranjpe

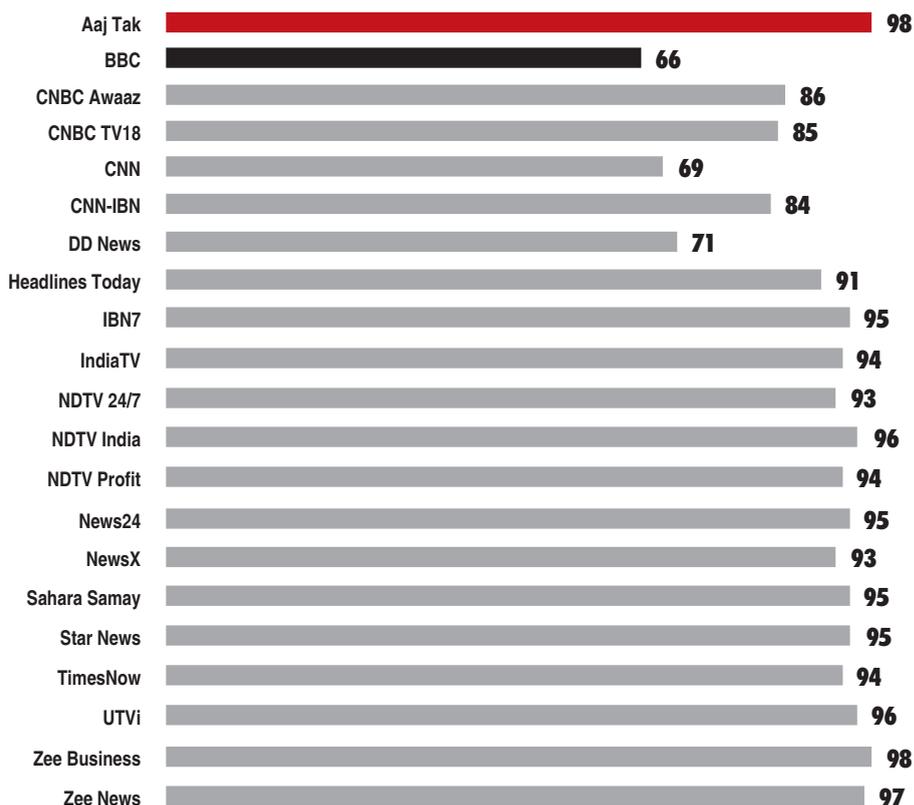
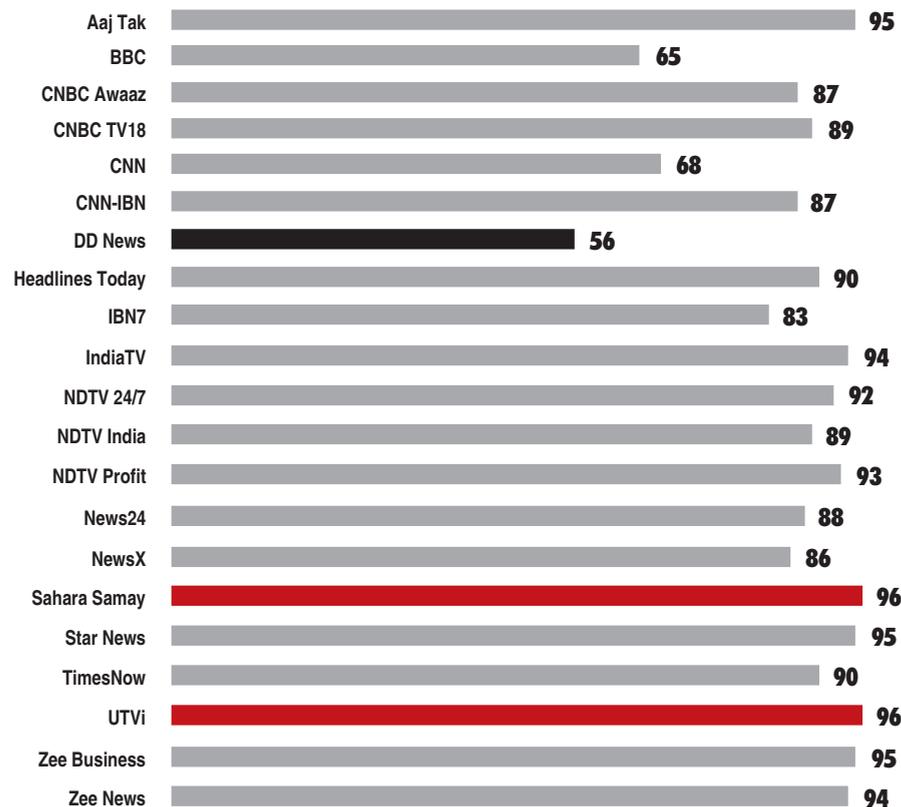


Table 6: Did many questions asked by TV reporters to guests/officials come across as 'daft'? (% yes)



Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE
MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Associated Press / Gurinder Osan

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Table 7: Were TV channels obsessed with Taj/Oberoi than with CST/Leopold Cafe? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE
MOST NEGATIVE

Courtesy: Agence France-Presse / Pedro Ugarte

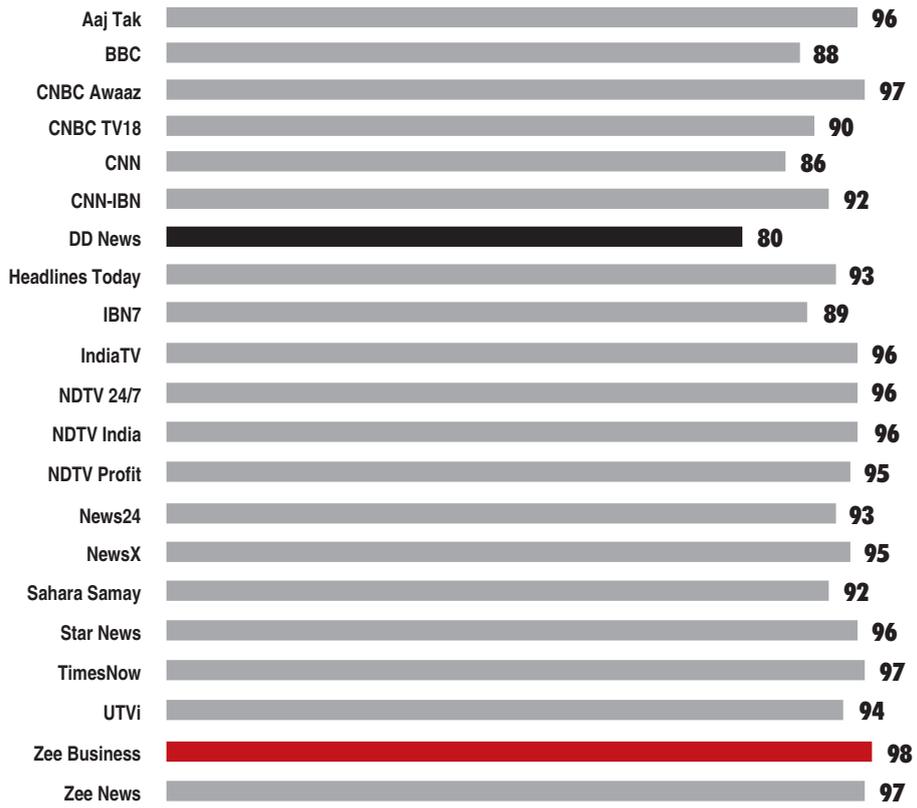
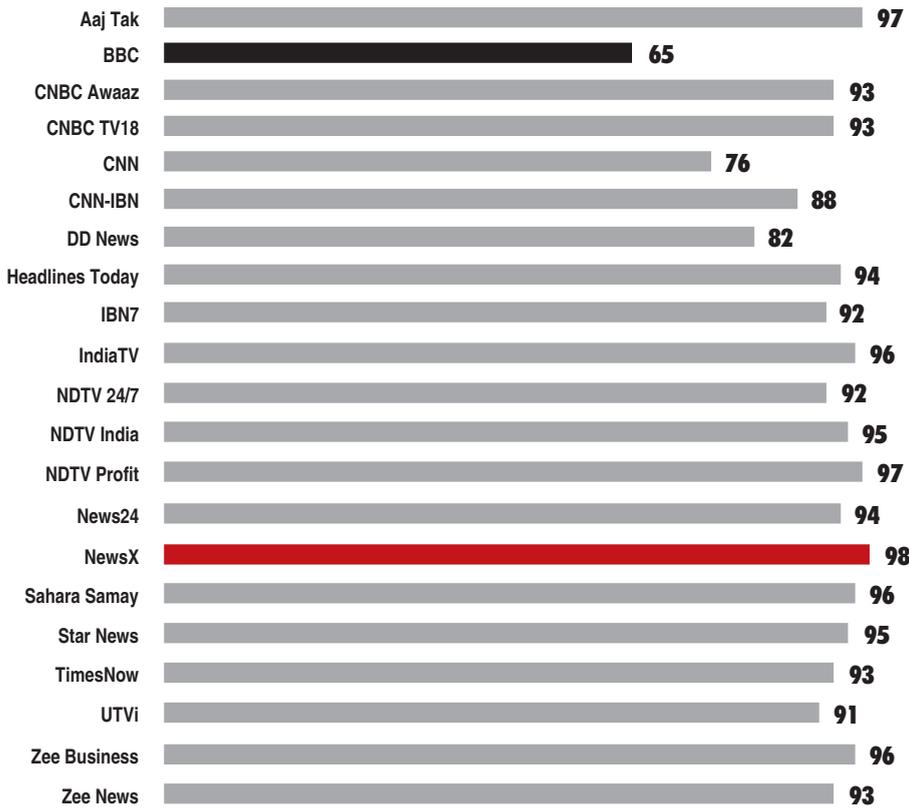


Table 8: Did TV channels come across as intrusive when interviewing rescued hostages? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE
MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Reuters / Stringer

■ What some of the respondents to the survey had to say about the TV coverage

Private television channels have brought tragedies and triumphs of our country to our living room. We can relate to each incident much better now than we did when Doordarshan ruled the skywaves. We must give private channels the credit for that. But they have fallen into the trap of competition to get the highest TRP ratings.

They should check themselves now before they lose their credibility. A few things channels should remember:

1. Do not bulldoze people into saying something the way you want them to. Do not put words in their mouth.
2. Stop speculating. Viewers don't expect you to know everything about everything. It's ok not to know.
3. Cut the bias and keep the passion to the minimum. Convey emotions in a subtle manner and leave it to the viewer to decide whether a person/incident was right or wrong.

4. Most importantly, do not come in the way of the law enforcement agencies. Like, do not show live coverage if it could be helping the bad elements or do not step into the wreckage of a bomb when the area has been cordoned off.

— **Panchalee**

I would say that the Indian television media has definitely come of age with the kind of coverage that they did. However, for any coming of age process, there are always initial excesses. An 18-year-old boy would be more prone to emotional outbursts than a 32-year-old man. But he will definitely be more energetic, enthusiastic and robust about his job.

I believe for the Indian television media, 26/11 was the opportunity a teenage actor will suddenly get if he is thrown on the stage to do a lead role. He will do it with gusto. There will be loopholes. But nobody will question the application and the sheer courage with which he will handle it, if he is successful. The case was the same with the Indian television media.

And somebody who emerged very impressive in this act was the Times Now team. NDTV's Barkha Dutt— despite her Kargil halo— actually failed to live up to her usual promise. Arnab and his team of young reporters emerged winners there.

— **Sudip Ghosh**

It was a tragedy of a huge magnitude and the reporters and anchors were doing it all 'live'; so we have to give it to them that they worked night and day fought fatigue and fear and did their job. However, it's these events which journalists live for. Their lack of depth about the relevant issues however did jar the senses.

An anchor at Star News spoke in such a funny tone, as if he was the voice over for some latest Bollywood thriller.

Asking inane questions, jumping to conclusions, mouthing cliches, over sentimentalisation of things; at least Barkha Dutt, very clearly said Pakistani nationals are involved but not the government. Also the choice of some celebrities baffled the mind.

— **Gulnaz Sheikh**

I think the reporters should have also focussed on shoot-outs at other places as well. We only saw pictures of those two terrorists taken at CST but no one covered those areas afterwards.

Secondly, no one bothered to verify the facts, even if it had meant the news to be delayed. No one bothered to get IB or other



intelligence agencies side of the story. They should have asked *aam junta* about what they felt, not film personalities or what they wrote on their blogs. No one questioned about Raj Thackeray and took his controversial sound-bite.

TV channels need to tone down their screaming and drama. Also the screen should not be cluttered but spaced out and reading matter more clear. They should have presented facts in a separate boxes, even if they were no visuals after every 15 minutes or so.

The TV camerapeople should have taken shots of controversial commando strategies and showed it as reporting only after all terrorists were dead. This way the viewers would have eventually seen it and the message of what's happening would not have reached those terrorists. The names of all those holed up should not have been mentioned or flashed or where the guests were hiding, it put their lives in danger. Also this is not an entertainment channel, so please be more respectful.

— **Dhara Kothari**

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Table 9: Did TV channels overemphasise the Pakistan angle while the operations were still on? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE

MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Agence France-Presse / Prakash Singh

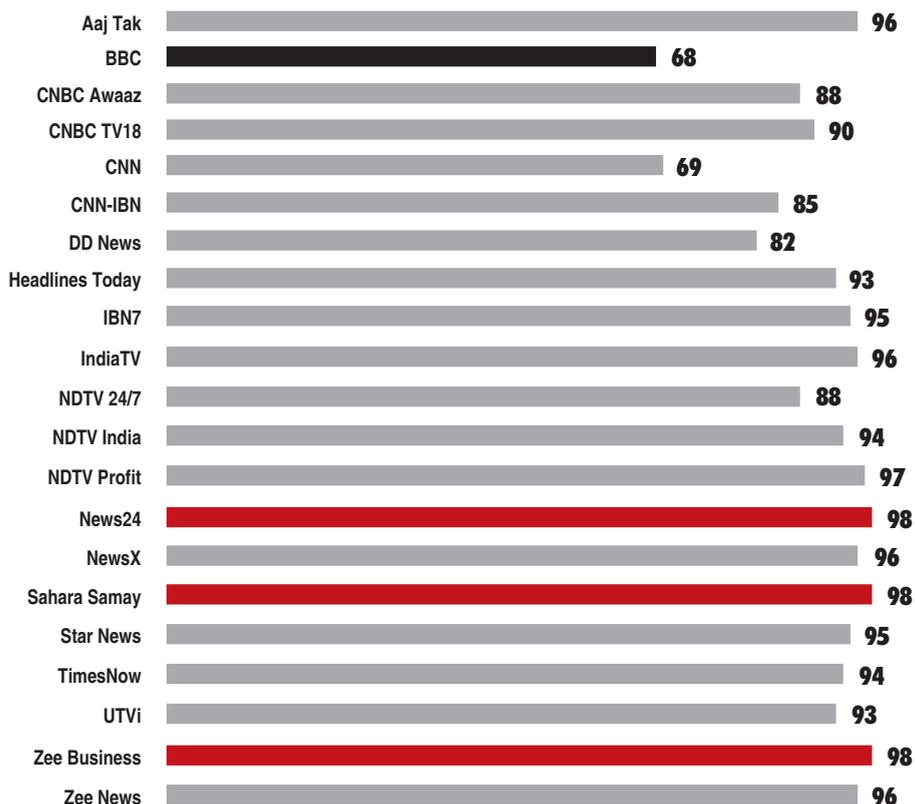
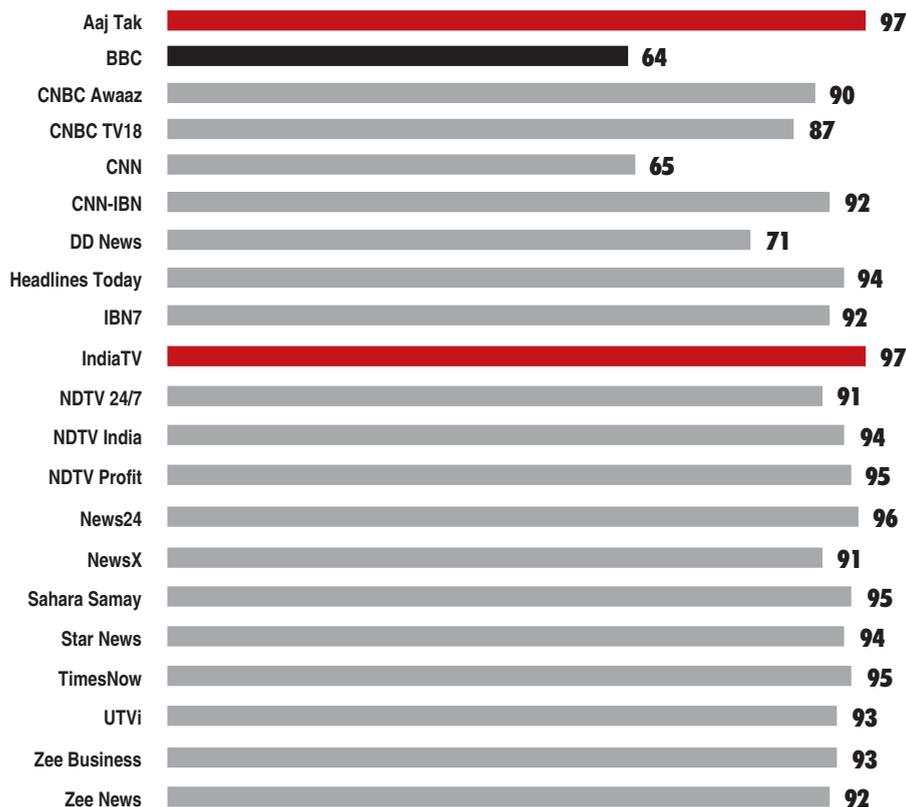


Table 10: Did TV channels come across as taking credit for their "exclusive" coverage? (% yes)



Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE

MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Associated Press / Gurinder Osan



Courtesy: Associated Press / Rajesh Kumar Singh

■ What they wrote about the coverage in the newspapers

Mohan Ramamoorthy, ExpressBuzz

The broadcast media's coverage of the recent terrorist attack in Mumbai seemed like a badly produced reality television show, at times aping soap queen Ekta Kapur's serials.

The 24-hour news channels tried to assume every possible role during those 72 hours: from counter-terrorism strategists dishing out tactics to policy advisors doling out prescriptions. Sadly, they abandoned their roles as reporters.

Time and again, television journalists were getting things wrong. With the military top brass being either as clueless as everyone else or pretending to be clueless for tactical reasons, the journalists were jumping the gun and misleading the viewers with their speculation about the number of terrorists, the number of people taken hostage, and the stage of assault. Things were so farcical that one would have expected the head of NSG saying on air: "I'm not sure how many terrorists are there and in which floor — but Barkha (Dutt of NDTV) tells me there are 6-7 terrorists lurking in the fourth floor." The question no channel head paused to think was — whether there was enough happening to warrant a minute-by-minute continuous coverage? From novice reporters used to covering Mumbai elite's shenanigans, 'experienced' senior journalists to studio-based news-readers and anchors — everyone was at loss when it came to filling up 72 hours of TV time when nothing was happening and whatever was happening was out of bounds to cameras. It was like the plight of a T-20 cricket commentator finding himself out of depth when forced to give commentary for a snail-paced Test match.

The first casualty of a terrorist attack was journalistic objectivity. Sober and dispassionate reporting was conspicuous by its absence. Reporters were visibly moved by the destruction of luxury hotels, which were dubbed as icons.

And obviously overawed were they by the heroism of soldiers that they glorifying their bravery and martyrdom.

All this without even being embedded with the NSG.

AK Bhattacharya, Business Standard

You might of course argue that the developments around the two hotels were far more significant and therefore the CST killings did not get the same coverage. The argument may have some merit. But compare the media's highly involved coverage of the killings last week with similar terrorist attacks in the past year or two, and it will become difficult not to conclude that the media's assessment of what deserves greater coverage is also influenced by the concerns of elite India. The seven bombs that exploded at seven locations in local trains in Mumbai in July 2006 killed almost as many people as last week's terrorist attacks. But the coverage of those blasts was quite muted compared with what happened now.

There were two key differences though. One, the train blasts in 2006 took place in a span of a couple of hours. The terrorist attacks last week lasted for about three days. Two, the nature of the two attacks was different. In 2006, it was a nameless and faceless terrorist who had got bombs planted in the trains to be exploded in a pre-determined sequence. Last week, terrorists with guns roamed around killing people at will. The two are not strictly comparable. And the media may have just responded to this unprecedented scale of the attack.

But then what about floods that a few months ago ravaged large parts of Bihar? What about the mindless killing of ordinary people by various extremist groups in different parts of the country? Clearly, the problem is not with the kind of coverage given to last week's terrorist attacks in Mumbai. The problem arises when

similar events affecting the common man do not get the same treatment. It is then that questions arise on whether the media's coverage is influenced by its consideration of reaching a larger number of viewers or readers and in the process gaining more mileage for its advertisers. For instance, won't floods in Bihar or Naxalite killings in some village get a much lower viewership rating than a terror attack on elite India?

Mukul Kesavan, *The Telegraph*

The Taj, we were told over and over again, is an 'iconic' building. I think we can say without controversy that Victoria Terminus is much the greater landmark both architecturally and in terms of the number of people who pass through it. It may not be 'home' to them, in the way that the Taj clearly was for the many fluent habitués of South Mumbai who filed past the cameras of the English news channels, but more Mumbaikars have taken trains to and from VT than have sampled the hospitality of the Taj. And yet we didn't have people on television reminiscing about the station and what it meant to them, that storied building that has been the beginning and the end of a billion journeys. Even the details of the killing, the alertness of the public address system operator who had platforms cleared and thus minimized the carnage, trickled out later, as the platform tragedy that had happened was eclipsed by the hotel tragedy that was still 'breaking news'.

I can't remember the last time that social class so clearly defined the coverage of a public event, or one in which people spoke so unselfconsciously from their class positions. The English news channels became mega-churches in which hotel-going Indians found catharsis and communion. Person after person claimed the Taj as home. Memories of courtship, marriage, celebration, friendship, the quick coffee, the saved-up-for snack, the sneaked lavatory visit, came together to frame the burning Taj in a halo of affection.



Courtesy: Agence France-Presse / Manpreet Romana

Saubhik Chakrabarti, *The Indian Express*

Times Now profiled some Pakistani TV channels talking up tension. It was a good montage — the discussion that followed was boilerplate TV news talk — made better by the fact that Times Now, CNN-IBN and NDTV weren't exactly being models of sobriety. In hindsight, 'Enough is Enough' should strike NDTV as being a particularly ill-chosen news slogan. It almost forced NDTV anchors to search for evidence of imminent belligerence on India's part. Two cheers to Prem Shankar Jha for pointing that out while on NDTV (one cheer subtracted because panellists must not look so impatient to get the mike back). On CNN-IBN anchors asked the channel's foreign editor whether Condoleezza Rice had said enough. Not enough, was the 'analysis'. 'Not enough', shall we say, is not enough for TV.

Raghuvir Srinivasan, *BusinessLine*

One can't help but feel that the electronic media is using the justified, spontaneous feeling of outrage of Mumbaikars to increase TRPs. The channels appear to be feeding off this expression of public outrage even while fanning it further. There was this programme on a prominent channel on Monday night that had Page 3 celebrities discussing the attack and expressing their disgust of the system and politicians.

One of the guests even suggested that we should all stop paying our taxes because the government failed to protect us and he was cheered by the others! Pray, how will this help us to stop terrorism? Are we trying to find solutions through live talk shows or are we adding to the problem?

It is but natural for hurt, outraged citizens to voice such views at a time like this but is it not the duty of the anchors or moderators, who are senior journalists, to moderate such views and put out a reasoned show to millions of viewers across the country?

Is journalism only all about attracting viewers and readers and not about reporting and analysing dispassionately?



Courtesy: Associated Press / Rajesh Kumar Singh

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Table 11: Did TV channels irritate viewers with their ad breaks? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE

MOST NEGATIVE

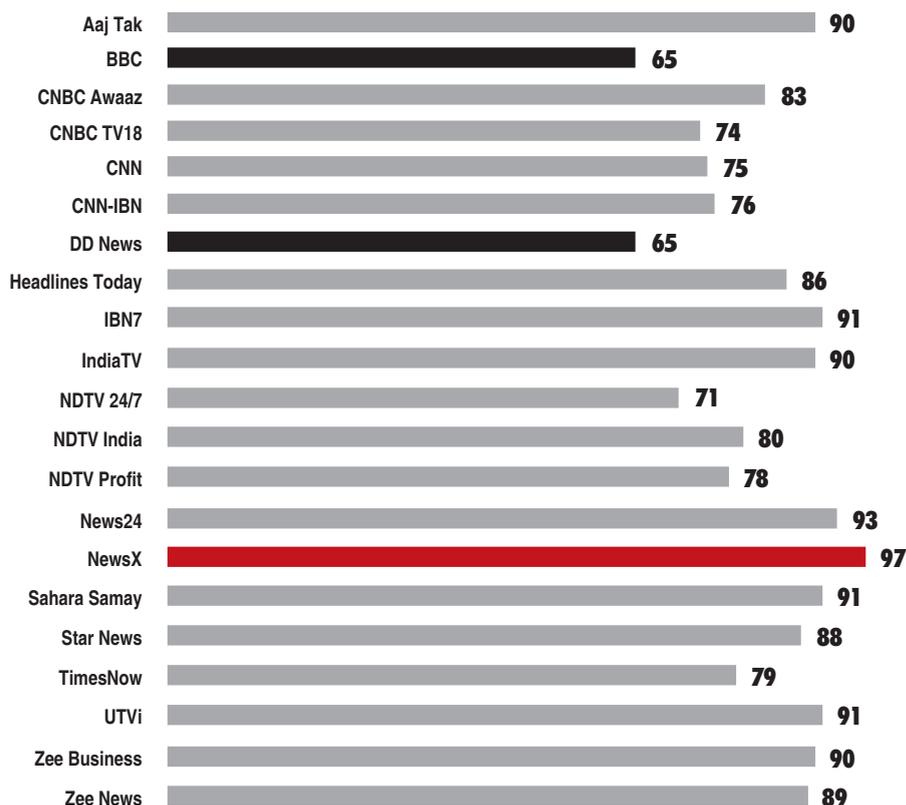
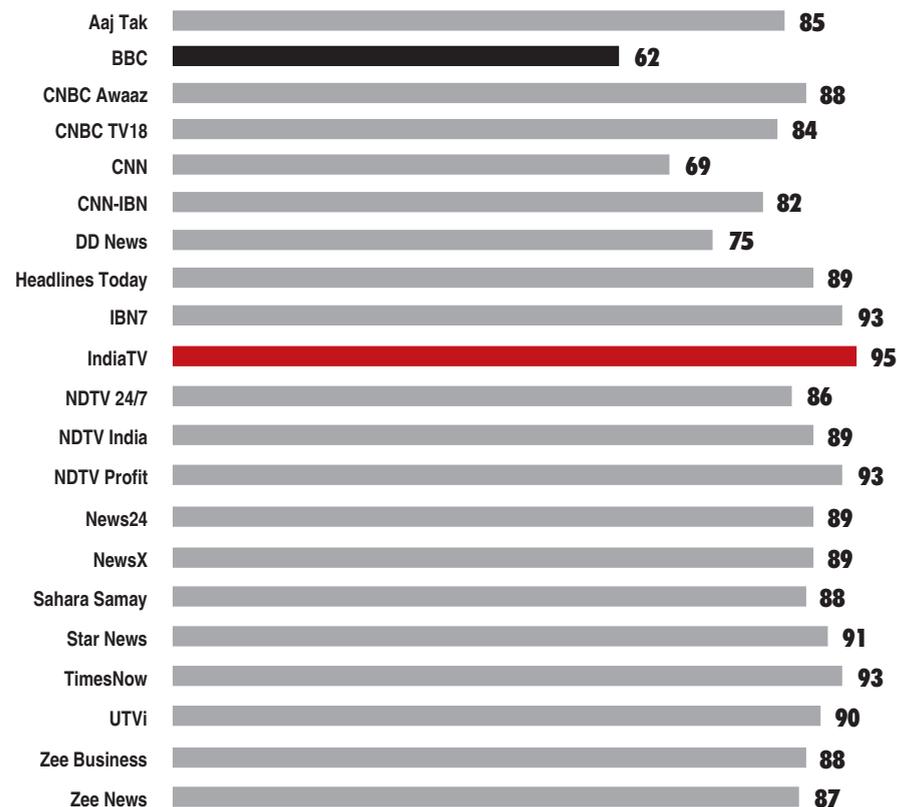


Table 12: Did TV channels trivialise the issue of terrorism during discussions by including more non-experts? (% yes)



Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE

MOST NEGATIVE



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Table 13: Did TV channels go overboard with constantly roping in celebrities to speak about the Mumbai attacks? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE
MOST NEGATIVE

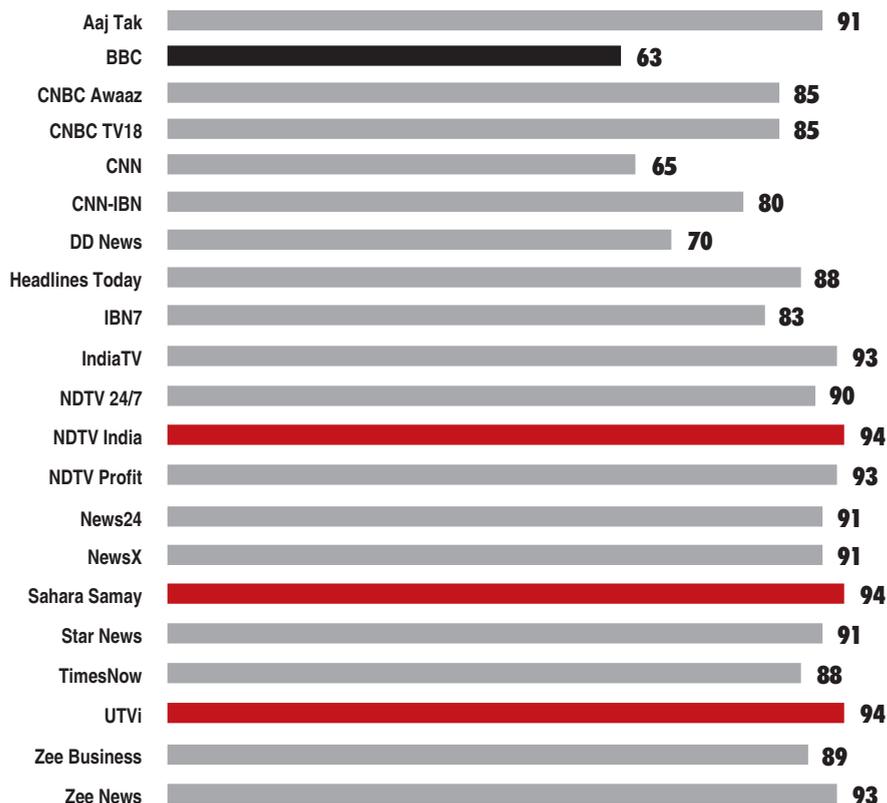
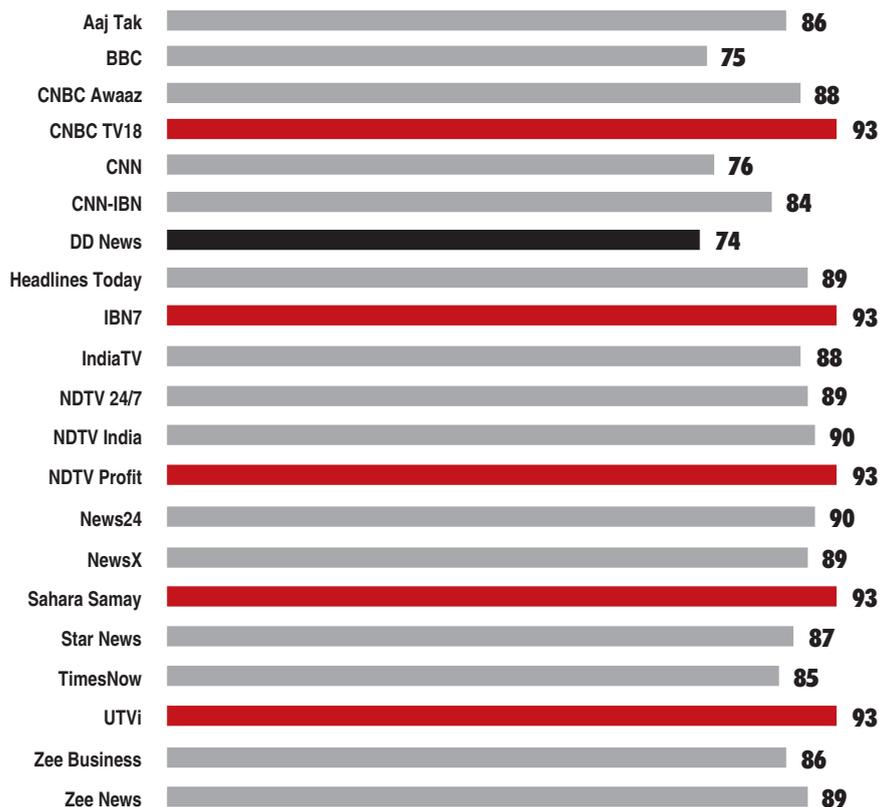


Table 14: Did TV channels give too much publicity to the corporate world? (% yes)



Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE
MOST NEGATIVE



■ On the record: Mumbai and media coverage – Barkha Dutt responds to criticism

Sixty hours of live television at the best of times is impossibly difficult. But when it involves an ongoing and precarious terrorist operation and a potential danger to the lives of hundreds of people, it throws up challenges of the kind that none of us have ever dealt with before.

Even those of us who have reported for years, on conflict, war and counter insurgency weren't prepared for what we encountered in Mumbai: an audacious attack on a city that was more in the nature of an invasion of India, than terrorism in any form, that we have known before.

As India debates where to go from here and whether a "war on terror" is the borrowed slogan that should define our response, I notice there is a different sort of civil war brewing; one that places us in the media on the other side of the enemy line.

For every Mumbaikar who believes we did the best we could in very trying circumstances- and we have received thousands and thousands of such messages- there are some others who are now questioning our ethics, our integrity and our professionalism. On the streets of Mumbai, I only met people who thanked us for providing a larger sense of community to a city seething with rage and grief. But as I fly back to Delhi, I'm told that "hate" groups are trying to compete with "fan" communities on social networking sites like Facebook and Orkut. The Internet apparently is buzzing with vitriol and we, in the media in general, and sometimes, me in particular, are being targeted with a venom that is startling. I understand that India is angry, nerves are frazzled and emotions heightened. Even so, many of the charges are not just offensive, malicious and entirely untrue; they are a convenient transference of responsibility. This is not to say, that we made no mistakes- I am sure we inadvertently made a few- as did every department of government, when faced with a situation that India has never dealt with before. But to park concocted and slanderous charges at our door is simply unacceptable, grossly unfair and saddening.

I would also like to stress though that this eruption of allegations is only one small part of a larger picture. In the past week, we have also received countless words of support and encouragement- from thousands of people - Indian citizens of every hue and ilk across the country, as well as some better known ones, like Narayan Murthy, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Sunil Khilnani and Suketu Mehta, to name just a few. When asked in an interview on NDTV, what struck him watching the events unfold on television, Narayan Murthy, said it was the "finest piece of TV journalism in a decade."

But in journalism, we know that, praise and criticism are twins that travel together. And we welcome both and try and listen to both carefully.

So, for those who wrote in to tell us that we got it right- Thank you so much. Your words encourage us.

But for those who charged us with crimes we absolutely assert we have not committed, here is our response. Some of it is answer to general questions about the media and some to specific charges made against our organization.

1. Please do note that at all times, the media respected the security cordon- a cordon that was determined by the police and officials on site- and NOT by the media. If, as is now being suggested, the assessment is that the media was allowed too close to the operations, here is what we say: we would have been happy to stand at a distance much further away from the encounter sites, had anyone, anyone at all, asked us to move. In the 72 hours that we stood on reporting duty, not once were we asked to move further away. We often delayed live telecasting of images that we thought were sensitive so as to not compromise the ongoing operation. Not once, were we asked by anyone in authority, to



switch our cameras off, or withhold images. When we did so, it was entirely our own assessment that perhaps it was safest to do so. Across the world, and as happened in the US after 9/11, there are daily, centralized briefings by officials to avoid any inadvertent confusion that media coverage may throw up. Not so in Mumbai. There was no central point of contact or information for journalists who were often left to their own devices to hunt down news that they felt had to be conveyed to their country. No do's and don'ts were provided by officials. While we understand that this situation was new for everyone involved, and so the government could not have been expected to have a full plan for media coverage, surely the same latitude should be shown to us? The NSG chief even thanked the media for our consistent co-operation. Later the NSG commandos personally thanked me for showcasing their need for a dedicated aircraft- which they shockingly did not have - they have now been given that after NDTV's special report was aired.

We have only the greatest respect and admiration for our armed forces, and throughout the coverage repeatedly underlined

how they are our greatest heroes. But we were taken aback to hear the Navy Chief, branding us as a "disabling force," for reporting on an ongoing operation. If that is the case, why were his own officers briefing us on camera, bang in the middle of an ongoing operation and that too when they only had a few rushed moments at the site of encounters? Before the encounter was over at either the Taj or the Oberoi, his marine commandos even held a hastily called press conference that was telecast live, with their permission, across channels. If we were indeed the obstacle, or the "disabling force" why did they have time for us in the middle of an operation? While shooting the messenger is convenient, the government also needs to introspect and determine whether it has an information dissemination system in place that is geared for such crises. Blanking out channels- as was done for a few hours- may not be the ideal solution. It only leads to more rumour mongering, panic and falsehoods spreading in already uncertain situation.

2. Why did we interview waiting relatives who staked out at the hotels as they waited for news on their families and friends? Quite simply, because they WANTED to talk. Allegations that I or any of my colleagues across the industry shoved a microphone in the faces of any waiting relative, are untrue in the extreme. Television, for many of these people, became a medium to express pain, grief, anger and hope. Sometimes, they expressed the desire to speak, because as they said, they just wanted to feel like they were doing something, instead of sitting by on the pavement for endless, countless hours. Many did not want to speak or be filmed, and they were neither pressured nor asked. Many personally asked me for my telephone number, and got in touch, requesting whether they could come on our shows and make their appeals. And besides, wasn't the issue at hand as much about their potential loss and anxieties, as it was about an ongoing gunbattle? Wasn't it important to touch upon the human dimension and not just the military one? I believe strongly that it was. Capturing suffering on live television is a delicate issue that needs the utmost sensitivity. We believed we showed that sensitivity, by not thrusting microphones in people's faces, by respecting privacy if people asked for identities or images to be withheld, by never showing a ghoulish close-up of a body, and by respecting the limits set by the people themselves. Those limits were different for different people and had to be adapted to subjectively. But every interview of a relative that was aired on any of my shows, was done so with the full consent and participation of the people speaking. If they wanted to share their story, vent, give an outlet for their grief or just make an appeal for peace- and the emotions varied- how can other people out there determine that they should not be speaking? But to say that we had no business talking to families is an entirely naive and misplaced criticism. They chose to talk. In every case, it was their choice to share and to speak. And their voices were in fact the real tragedy and needed to be heard and told.

Similarly, when the rescued hostages first emerged from the hotels many of them WANTED to speak because they wanted to let their families know they were safe. The unfortunate absence of a cordon created an avoidable crowding in of journalists. But every rescued hostage who appeared on any of our shows did so entirely voluntarily. Every participant on We the People, including Shameem, a man who lost six members of his family at the CST railway station was there because they wanted to share their tragedy or miraculous escape or trauma in a wider community. Shameem, who said he did not have money to bury his dead, has

since been offered help and rehabilitation by our viewers. In that moment, television provided a wider sense of community, when no one else had the time or wherewithal to talk to the waiting relatives.

3. Could we have been more aware of the suffering and tragedy of those killed in the first few hours at the CST railway station and not got singularly focused on the two hotels? On this one point, I would concede that perhaps, this was a balance we lost and needed to redress earlier on during the coverage. But, mostly our attention was on the hotels, because they were the sites of the live encounters, and not because of some deliberate socio-economic prejudice. Still, when many emails poured in on how important it was to correct this imbalance, most of us, stood up, took notice, and tried to make amends for an unwitting lack of balance in air time.

4. Should there be an emergency code of dos and don'ts for the coverage of such crises? We in the media would welcome a framework for sensitive events and are happy to contribute to its construction. But it is important to understand that in the absence of any instructions on site and in the absence of any such framework we broke NO rules. Both the NSG chief and the special secretary complimented us three days into the coverage. So why the sudden change in our politicians?

Finally, I would like to point out that the Navy Chief made a factually incorrect and wholly untrue comment on NDTV's coverage during the Kargil conflict of 1999, claiming that NDTV asked for a gun to be triggered for the benefit of the camera. I want to state for the record: no such incident ever took place and we have an official acknowledgment of that, including from then Army Chief, V.P Malik. I would urge Admiral Mehta to read General V.P Malik's book on Kargil for further clarity. General Malik was the Army Chief during the operations and puts to rest any such controversy in his book. In a formal letter, NDTV has also asked for an immediate retraction from the Navy and officially complained that the comments amount to defamation. Several writers have already pointed out how the Navy Chief has got his facts wrong. (*DNA*, *Indian Express*, Vir Sanghvi in the *Hindustan Times*, Sankarshan Thakur in *The Telegraph*). This, incidentally, was the same press conference where the Admiral threatened literally to "chop the heads off" of two other reporters who aired his interview ahead of schedule.

I believe that criticism is what helps us evolve and reinvent ourselves. But when malice and rumour are regarded as feedback, there can be no constructive dialogue. Viewing preferences are highly subjective and always deeply personal choices, and the most fitting rejection of someone who doesn't appeal to your aesthetics of intelligence, is simply to flick the channel and watch someone else. The viewer, to that extent, is king. But, when, comments begin targeting character, morality and integrity of individuals and the commentary becomes more about the individual, than the issue, then frankly, the anger is just destructive and little else. More than anything else, it is tragic that at this time, we are expressing ourselves in this fashion. Surely, India has bigger lessons to learn and larger points to mull over, than to expend energy over which television journalist tops the charts or falls to the bottom.

The viewer has his own way, of settling such matters. And the last word belongs to him.

[This clarification appeared on the website of NDTV.]

Extensive, theatrical What people thought of the Mumbai terror attacks coverage on TV

Table 15: Did TV channels overlook how the Mumbai attacks was affecting the lives of ordinary people? (% yes)

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE

MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Reuters / Desmond Boylan

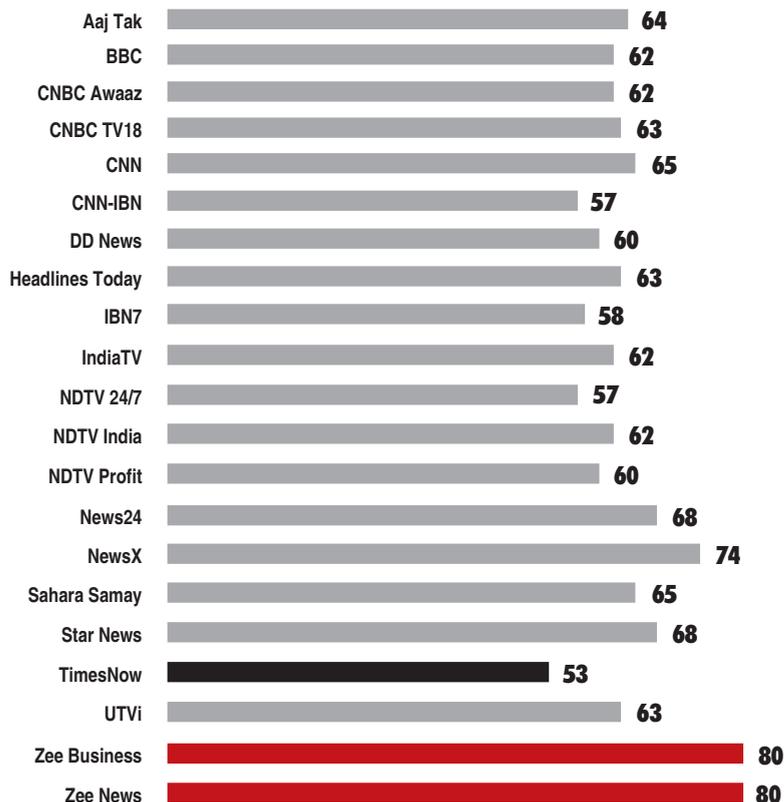
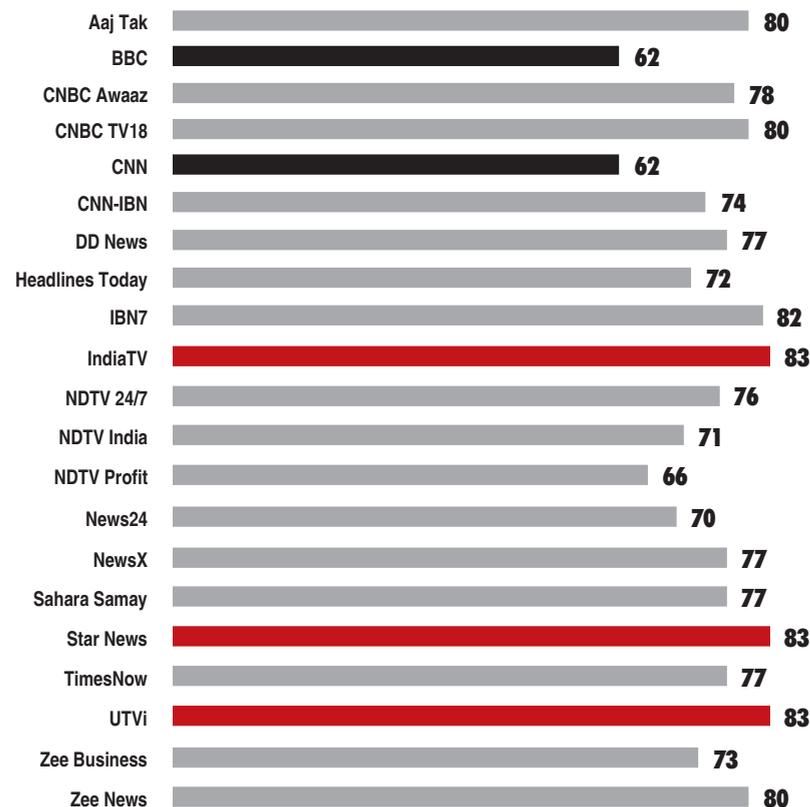


Table 16: Did TV channels communalise the situation by calling them Muslim/Islamic/Islamist terrorists? (% yes)



Note: Respondents were asked to rate each TV channel on a scale of 1 to 5, in increasing order of perceived negativity. These ratings were subsequently used to arrive at a weighted mean on a scale of 100.

LEAST NEGATIVE

MOST NEGATIVE



Courtesy: Reuters / Stringer

■ As the high voltage drama raged on in Mumbai, they were hooked to terror, 24/7

By Disha Gadhiya

Within minutes of the first shots being fired at the CST railway station, commenced a non-stop television coverage of the 62-hour high voltage drama in Mumbai that shocked the world. Reporters flooded the four conflict zones, and developments were telecast as they unfolded. As people stayed glued to television sets, the gunbattles, the deaths, the widespread public anger made the Mumbai attacks the biggest thing ever to have been witnessed in Indian television history. At least, in terms of numbers.

"I was glued to my TV set for nearly 50 out of those 60-odd hours of coverage," says Meesam Raza, an executive producer with Reliance Broadcasting in Mumbai.

Several channels went live. However, it were the Hindi news channels that saw a whopping 153 per cent increase in the time spent on November 27 alone. English news channels saw an increase in time spent of 24 per cent in comparison to that by viewers during earlier four Thursdays.

Viewers were tuned into their preferred channels for the manner in which they covered the attacks. "CNN-IBN had better field updates whereas TimesNow had more discussions and debates. So switching between these two channels provided a variety," recalls Sankalp Pradhan, an aspiring filmmaker. "It was sad and shocking news, and I was too concerned about it. I was up till odd hours watching NDTV to get the updates," shares Rahul Khurana, an entrepreneur from Nagpur.

The overwhelming tragedy of the event made the people restless enough to keep themselves from witnessing each and every visual that the active television media provided them with. "I was watching the news till almost 2 a.m. feeling anxious, frustrated and irritated at every moment thinking that such breach of security can happen. It was unimaginable," says Abhinav Nanda, a commodities stock broker from Delhi.

"The incident was particularly different because it lasted for over 60 hours. It wasn't something that happened and then was being covered by the channels. It was an active ongoing attack, which is far more

terrorising that a bomb blast. What might happen is unknown that jolts people out more than something that's already happened," contends Serena Menon, a journalism student from Mumbai.

"I was glued to NDTV 24/7 since that it's one of the few decent channels that showed everything that happened without the drama," says Nanda. Even Rashmi Kumar, a media student from Chennai agrees with Abhinav, "NDTV gave us the raw data unlike other channels which spent more time giving sound effects to a few of their videos which I felt was unnecessary considering the circumstances."

space it got. Every minute something was shown. The public was terrified about what was happening but at the same time we, in some other cities wanted to know what was exactly happening in Mumbai."

The concurrent reporting of Operation Tornado helped viewers get a sense of being present there and witnessing the events for themselves. "Even business channels like CNBC-TV18 and UTVi were featuring different updates on the attacks. So when I switched them on the next day to see how the markets were faring, I was able to see both at the same time," says Nanda.

Viewers had mixed feelings about the



However, Siddharth Chadha, a documentary filmmaker from Bengaluroo is not too happy with the drama the channels are said to have created. "I think it was ridiculous. The media was, and still is caught in a nationalistic frenzy. There was no argument presented, no one in the media even spoke of negotiations and they simply towed the line of the government." Chadha even goes to say that the sole focus was on elite hotels and the people held hostage there. No one went out of their way to report from CST or Cama Hospital or Metro Cinema where a large number of people were gunned down by the terrorists.

Kumar has no issues about the amount of exposure the attacks were given. "This was definitely an attack of a larger degree, which probably justifies the amount of air

content and the style. "Watching every channel gave a sense that they were only doing it to hike TRPs much like 'trying to stir when the tide is high'. They were not logically going anywhere or to anything and they were imposing opinions which according to my limited understanding is not that what they are supposed to do," argues Shweta Velkar from Mumbai. But based on her experiences, Kumar points out, "We wanted complete details and the media gave it to us. Maybe for a Mumbaikar, it must have felt like being blown out of proportion but for an outsider, like me from Chennai, we needed those visuals, better understand the extent of events taking place."

The writer is a Newswatch intern.