

## Anchorperson as Symbol of Identity: A Perceptual View of Audiences

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### Abstract

This study examines the public's perception about the importance of anchorpersons in electronic media. It is hypothesized that anchorpersons have become an identity for TV news channel and none of the TV channel could survive without them. Moreover, TV channels having famous anchorpersons are more popular in the viewers than other entrants. Stratified random sampling technique is used to select the target sample. Gender and level of education is used as strata for selection of appropriate sample. Closed ended questionnaires are used to inquire the public's perception about the importance of anchorpersons for TV news channels. The empirical indicator of the study confirmed that anchorpersons have become a symbol of identity for their respective TV news channel. They have become indispensable for TV news channels. They liked those news channels more which have famous anchorpersons than the other news channels.

**Keywords:** Anchorpersons; TV news channels; Public's perception; Symbol of Identity; Indispensable

### Introduction

The globalization of media has changed the perception and behavior of the modern society. Today, media is not only the source of information and entertainment for the society as in the past but also source of inspiration and guidance for the viewers. The emergence of news media in Pakistan has not only changed the media landscape but also improve the quality and accessibility of information to the public. Pakistan is a developing country where the literacy rate is very low (43.92%). Majority of the population (67%) in the country are living in the rural areas of the country where the literacy rate is alarmingly low (33.64%) (Census, 1998). So majority of the people in Pakistan seek information and guidance from electronic media (Radio and Television) to grab the current socio-political scenario of the country. So the role of anchorperson hosting different informative/political talk shows on radio and television has attained immense importance in the social circle. The communication experts believe on a key role of anchorpersons in developing the mood of society to bring change in socio-political ambiance. Cheema [1] has noted that the level of awareness about the socio-political scenario has increased enormously due to political talk shows. News and current affair channels have promoted the democratic norms and openness in the society. Today, people are more interactive in their approach regarding participation in national debates on important issues. Talk shows have provided platform to the audience to play their role in national issues. Anchorpersons have become focus of attention for the audience. People are more likely watch the analysis of these anchorpersons and acknowledge their point of view on the important issues. The illiterate audiences are always looking for anchorpersons for guidance on the important issues. The influence of anchorperson has been increased so that they can influence the political behavior of the audiences. Anchorpersons are becoming a new face of the media. They have created social and political awareness among the people of Pakistan [1].

Anchorperson has a key role in developing the mood of society to bring change in socio-political ambiance. In fact, he/she is one who developed and proliferate an opinion in society. So anchorperson has a key importance in electronic media. Cheema [1] also illustrated that TV talk shows hosted by different TV anchorpersons have important role in changing the political priorities of the audiences. Anchorpersons are free to select any important critical issue for their talk shows. This means

that they can prioritize some issues in audience perception by focusing on these issues. They can manipulate the public perception regarding important issues by giving undue hype and creating sensationalism in the audiences. They can present the one side of facts and try to dictate the audience opinion on important issues. In other words, they can set an agenda for the audience to follow on critical issues. Anti-government, pro-government anchorpersons and mediator are being liked and disliked by different segments of society. However some are being liked by their style of rhetorical speeches, some by their logical presentation of facts, some by their antigovernment stance and some by their partisan role.

### State of electronic media in Pakistan

History of electronic media in Pakistan is not encouraging as other nation of the world. Since the inception of medium, it is fully controlled and run by the state. Unfortunately, this most important medium was not given chance to play it influential role in the progress and development of the society both by the military and democratic governments. Military and democratic government always tried to keep this important instrument in their hands to use it against their opponents. None of the government tried to develop such policy to diversify the scope and impact of the medium in society. Medium was used to propagate only one sided message of the government. Diversity in media was strictly ban till 1989. Only government was privileged to use this important medium to propagate his point of view on the important issues. In 1990, first ever private sector was given a chance to become the part of this rapid growing industry. Network Television Marketing (NTM) has launched first entertainment private channel in Pakistan with the help of Shalimar Recording & Broadcasting Company (STN). This development in field of electronic media

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brought pleasant change in the society. NTM has got popularity among the audience in very short spin of time due to it high quality dramas. This positive change in medium promotes the government to change its stance and open the media industry for the private sector to cope the needs of society. In 1996, Government issued license to FM-100 radio station which brought revolutionary change in the radio broadcast and introduce new trend in music. Shaheen TV was also allowed to start its telecast in country in the same year. However, government retains its strong control on the media till the Musharaf's regime. Zia [2] believed that the introduction of Shalimar Television Network (STN) in media system was a milestone in changing the media landscape in the country although the channel was partially state-owned and was introduced as an alternative to PTV in 1989.

The new chapter of electronic media was introduced by the General Pervaiz Musharaf. Pakistan electronic media regulatory authority (PEMRA) was established in 2002. Private sector was promoted to launch new TV channel in the country. Experts believed that this liberation policy was the result of two major incidents (i.e. Kargil War and hijacking of the Indian Airliner by the Pakistani militants) when strong Indian media launched full fledged media war against Pakistan and weak Pakistani state-owned media was failed to respond precisely to encounter the Indian propaganda. Today Pakistan has strong and vibrant electronic media. More than 80 national and regional TV channel are working in the country. This positive change in media developed openness in the society and provide greater choice of entertainment and information. Especially news and current affairs channel has brought revolutionary change in political perception of the audience regarding political affairs of the state. Geo News, Express News, Duniya News, ARY News, Saama News and Aaj News are regarded most influential news and current affair channels in the country. Cheema [1] noted the most of the people regarded Geo News is the most popular news and current affair channel. He further argued that the new change in media has developed political awareness in the society. Today media has got the immense power to change the perception of audience regarding any political issue. The movement of restoration of supreme judiciary was the prominent example where media has developed consensus in the society regarding restoration of supreme judiciary in the country. Most of the experts believed that this movement cannot be successful without the effective media support.

### Political talk shows: a new change in Pakistani media

Political talk shows always remained the focus of discussion among the audiences. The inauguration of private news and current affair channel in Pakistan has brought innovative change in landscape of Pakistani media and revised the concepts of political talk shows. Today, hot political talk shows have become the part and parcel of news and current affair channels where critical socio-political issues are being discussed and analyzed by the different anchorpersons.

Cheema [1] noted that political talk shows have created sense of political awareness in the society. He believed that today people are better inform and aware about the political scenario of the country. He further argued that private channels through talk shows are not only providing political information but also have power to change the political opinion of the people. Media is moving the political mood of its audience toward particular direction. Today people are more critical and choosy in their choices regarding political parties. Following political talks shows hosted by famous anchorpersons are regarded the most influential talk shows among the audiences:-

	Program Name & TV Channel		Host of the Program
a.	Aaj Kamran Khan Kay Saath (Geo)	-	Kamran Khan
b.	Hasb-e-Haal (Dunya)	-	Junaid Saleem
c.	Capital Talk (Geo)	-	Hamid Mir
d.	Aapas Ki Baat (Najam Sethi Kay Sath) (Geo)	-	Najam Sethi
e.	Lekin (Doosri Taraf) (Geo)	-	Sana Bucha
f.	Choraha (Geo)	-	Hassan Nisar
g.	Kal Tak (Express)	-	Javed Chaudary
h.	Faisla Aapka (Samaa)	-	Asma Shirazi
i.	Aaj Ki Khabar (Aaj)	-	Absar Alam
j.	50 Minute (Geo)	-	Abdul Rauf
k.	The Final Round (Aaj)	-	Orya Maqbool Jan
l.	In-Session (Dunya)	-	Asma Chaudary
m.	Cross Fire (Dunya)	-	Mehar Bukhari
n.	Off The Record (ARY)	-	Kasif Abbasi
o.	Policy Matters (Dunya)	-	Naseem Zehra
p.	Live With Talat (Dawn)	-	Talat Hussain
q.	Islamabad Tonight (Dunya)	-	Nadeem Malik
r.	Siyaasi Log (Express)	-	Katrina Hussain
s.	Jirga (Geo)	-	Saleem Safi
t.	Kari Baath Mubashir Lucman ka saath (Dunya)	-	Mubashir Luman
u.	Awaz Kamran Shahid Kay Saath (Saama)	-	Kamran Shahid

### Role of an anchorperson

The role of anchorperson has become controversial in Pakistan. Different communication experts/media practitioners view the role of anchorperson differently. Some of powerful voices are as under.

### Anchorperson as mediator

According to American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language (2009), "anchorperson is a person who narrates or coordinates a newscast in which several correspondents give reports." Today, no doubt anchorperson has become the face of news media and possessing the most important place in new electronic media. He/She is playing the role of blacksmith who can mold the iron the way he/she wants. Similarly an anchorperson has again power through his/her charismatic personality to mold the public opinion the way he/she presents the facts. Therefore his/her role should be like a mediator. He/She should facilitate the discussion between the participants in way to help and facilitate the audience to reach on the opinion of their choice. He/She should analyze the facts in impartial way and should put forward the both side of the opinion rather to impose his/her own opinion and thought on the audience. Ahmed [3] suggests that anchorperson job is to conduct the discussion between the participants in way to facilitate the audience to reach on the conclusion. He/She should not accentuate on what he/she think is the right opinion to support.

### Anchorperson as Opinion Maker/Analyst

Javed Choudary, a famous TV anchorperson and columnist in Pakistan claims (personal communication, July 12, 2010) that anchorperson is an opinion maker. He/She has his/her own opinion about an issue. So anchorperson can never become impartial. He/She always has his/her own personal opinion and people likes or dislikes him/her on basis of his/her position on critical issues.

Shahid Masood, a renowned TV anchorperson also asserted (personal communication, July 12, 2010) the same point of views in the TV talk show “Views on News” that anchorperson has his/her own opinion. He believes that anchorperson should analyze the critical issue and give his/her opinion about the issue. Moeed Pirzada, a renowned journalist argues (personal communication, July 12, 2010) that every anchorperson has his/her own line on the issue and nobody is neutral, anchorperson run a program, organized a program and also gives a sense of direction to that particular program.

Mubashir Lucman affirms (personal communication, January 13, 2011) in his own TV talk show “Point Blank” that anchorperson is nothing himself/herself but has a quality of professional team behind him/her. An anchorperson personality drives the direction of talk show. When an anchorperson is in front of camera, he/she looks very independent. But this is not the case; his/her production team controls him/her, often stop him/her and also give him/her new lines etc. Katrina Hussain, a well-known TV anchorperson asserts (personal communication, January 13, 2011) his point of views in the same TV talk show that anchorperson is not a solo flight. There is a complete team work behind him/her. However the final call is from the anchorperson. Work of an anchorperson is different from a reporter who task is to report the facts only but anchorperson has to discuss the issue whether it is right or wrong according to his/her own perspective. The job of anchorperson is to probe behind the news and also analyze the pros and cons of the issue. She further elaborate that anchorperson task is to create understanding and awareness in the people about an issue and educate them how this issue will affect their lives. Anchorperson must criticize government because his/her role is like a watchdog.

### Anchorperson: A controversial entity

A well known TV anchorperson told “*Daily Jinnah*” that in Pakistan some big private TV channels claims that they could overthrow the government from the powers. He asserted that “The anchorpersons of Pakistan are camels without bridle (Shutr-e-bemahar).”

A famous TV anchorperson and columnist, Saleem Safi [4] has asserted the same point view in his column in daily “Jang” that TV anchorpersons become aql-e-kul (know-all) and starts striking the pose of a mufti. Instead of taking and giving news they start creating news. Instead of analyzing the news they start giving dictation.

Some of the communication experts believe that anchorpersons have their own agenda and some time they even follow the agenda of their owner who always look into their financial benefits. They believe anchorpersons come up with preplanned agenda to in line the public opinion with their own opinion about different cultural, religious and critical socio-political issues. Some of the anchorpersons openly declare that they have personal opinion about an issue to disseminate in the public. They believe people like or dislike them due to their diverse opinion on different crucial social and political issues.

Ahmed [3] believes that the anchorpersons have been given intensified coverage in news media and some of the TV anchorpersons have also articulated their opinion in print media. This dual coverage makes these anchorpersons more powerful that they dare care to rebound the guest opinion and often put forward their own opinion and thoughts. They even present something that is accusatory without any solid proof. He argues that anchorpersons become agent provocateur. They put the rival discussant together and expected them to quarrel each other. They often hype up the situation rather trying to calm down the situation between the rival discussants. They provoke the participants and make them to fight each other on different critical

issues. Sometime they ignite the situation so that the rival participants physically trying to threaten each other and make the discussion into a verbal wrestling match. TV anchorperson admits that some time it become difficult to stop these rival participants when they start verbal fight.

Rizvi [5] asserts that mostly anchorpersons in their talk shows trying to create controversies on the issues of public interest which they perceive the way to get better rating for their program. He suggests that information should be disseminated only when it passes through strong professional editorial judgment and its societal impact must be ensured. Dr. Mehdi Hasan, Chairman, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRC), by saying “Anchorpersons have every right to criticize the government, but many time they do it without proper research or evidence and without realizing how their ‘declarations’ will be received by the general public.”

### Anchorperson and News media

With the convergence of new electronic media in Pakistan has brought revolutionary change in perception of the society on different issues. Media is not only imparting information but guide the society in particular perspective. It provides a line on different issues. Today anchorpersons have become focus of attention for the audience due to their exceptional qualities. They have an important role in changing the public perception about the issues. Cartwright [6] was right to say that one persuasive person can change the direction of the whole world according to his own will through use of mass media.

Anchorperson develops and maintains parasocial relationships with viewers due to his eye-catching personality. These parasocial relationships then help them to influence loyalty of viewers and also influencing the selection of the content of media [7].

Clausen [8] has also pointed out that anchorperson personality has been given strong focus in the news station and his association with the program strongly influence the decision making structure in news preparation and arrangement.

However, Anchorpersons bureaucratic attitude to dictate the audiences mind yields a negative aspect in the media. They are not only imparting the facts about issues but also trying to inculcate their own opinion on the issues. So the role of anchorpersons has become controversial among the audiences across the board.

### Hypotheses

1. People remember their favourite current affair programmes by the name of anchorperson who hosted that programme.
2. Anchorpersons have become symbol of identity for the TV news channels.
3. Anchorpersons play an important role in maintaining/promoting rating of TV News Channel.
4. Popularity of TV news channels depends on the popularity of the anchorperson.
5. Anchorpersons have become indispensable for TV news channels.

### Method

Descriptive survey technique was used in this study to investigate the perception of 240 respondents selected through stratified random sampling technique. Wimmer and Dominick [9] argue that a stratified sampling is the approach used by the researchers to select the adequate

desired subsample (strata or segment) of population which contain almost any variable (age, sex, educational level and socio economic status etc). Gender and level of education was used as strata for the study. The respondents were divided into two categories viz. male and female (120 respondents each). Male and female categories were further sub-divided on educational stratum viz. graduates and post-graduates. A sample of 60 graduates (30 male & 30 female) and 60 post-graduates (30 male & 30 female) of International Islamic University (IIUI), Islamabad were selected randomly for the study. The similar fraction of male and female graduates/ post-graduates of National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad were also selected randomly. The respondents were then approached through closed ended questionnaires and obtain their responses on five degree scale (likert scale) i.e. strong agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree. Responses were then analyzed through statistical package for the social science (SPSS Version 16.0).

## Results

Majority of respondents (51.7%) remember their favourite current affair programme by the name of anchorperson. Whereas, 32.6% of respondents acknowledged their favourite current affair programmes by the name of that particular programme. Twelve percent of respondents were the view that they remember their favourite current affair programmes by the name of that particular channel. Only 3.8% of respondents remember current affair programmes by other means like topic or issue discussed in program etc., (Q. How do you remember your favourite TV current affair program?) (Table 1).

Majority of respondents (90.3%) agreed that anchorperson has become as symbol of identity for their respective TV news channel. Seven percent of the respondents were uncertain about their responses on the phenomenon. However, 3.4% was not agreed with that notion (Table 2).

People's recognition of CurrentAffair Programmes	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
By the name of Anchorperson	122	51.7	51.7
By the name of Program	77	32.6	84.3
By the name of channel	28	11.9	96.2
Other	9	3.8	100.0
Total	236	100.0	

Table 1: People's recognition of Current Affair Programmes.

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	81	34.3	34.3
Agree	132	55.9	90.3
Uncertain	15	6.4	96.6
Disagree	4	1.7	98.3
Strongly Disagree	4	1.7	100.0
Total	236	100.0	

Table 2: Anchorpersons as Symbol of identity.

Statement	Level of agreement	
	Yes	No
Hamid Mir as symbol of identity for Geo News	227 (96.2%)	9 (3.8%)
Javed Chaudary as symbol of Identity for Express News	178 (75.4%)	58 (24.6%)
Asma Shirazi as symbol of identity for Saama News	176 (74.6%)	60 (25.4%)
Kasif Abbasi as symbol of Identity for ARY News	175 (74.2%)	61 (25.8%)
Junaid Saleem as symbol of identity for Duniya News	163 (69.1%)	73 (30.9%)
Absar Alam as symbol of identity for Aaj News	135 (57.2%)	101 (42.8%)

Table 3: Individual anchorpersons as Symbol for their respective News Channels.

Anchorpersons	TV Channels	Programs	Programs Timing
Hamid Mir	Geo News	Capital Talk	2000-2100hrs
Asma Shirazi	Samaa News	Faisla Aapka	2200-2300hrs
Javed Choudary	Express News	Kal Tak	2200-2300hrs
Kasif Abbasi	ARY News	Off The Record	2000-2100hrs
Junaid Saleem	Dunya News	Hasb-e-Haal	2200-2300hrs
Absar Alam	Aaj News	Aaj Ki Khabar	2200-2300hrs

Table 4: Anchorpersons, their respective TV News Channel, Program and timing.

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	101	42.8	42.8
Agree	99	41.9	84.7
Uncertain	25	10.6	95.3
Disagree	7	3.0	98.3
Strongly Disagree	4	1.7	100.0
Total	236	100.0	

Table 5: Popularity of TV Channel by Anchorperson.

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	95	40.3	40.3
Agree	92	39.0	79.3
Uncertain	24	10.2	89.5
Disagree	22	9.3	98.8
Strongly Disagree	3	1.3	100.0
Total	236	100.0	

Table 6: Indispensability of Anchorperson for TV News Channel.

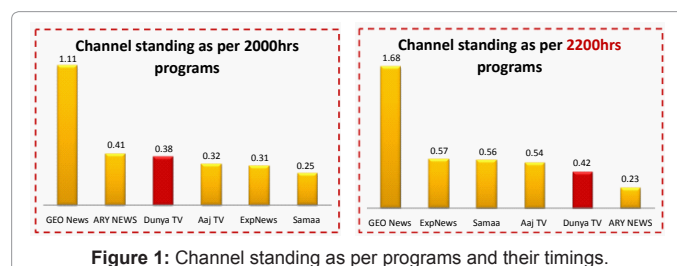


Figure 1: Channel standing as per programs and their timings.

It finds that 90.3% agree (Table 2) that an anchorperson can be a symbol of identity for a Pakistani TV news channel whereas the percentage agreeing that individual anchorpersons are symbols of their particular TV news program varies from a low of 57.2% to a high of 96.2% (Table 3). Clearly indicates that university students, who may be representative of the audience for these news channels in Pakistan, feel that anchorpersons play a key role in creating the identity of a Pakistani news program.

It finds that anchorpersons are playing an important role in maintaining/promoting the rating of these particular TV News Channels in Pakistan. Rating of TV news channels are influenced by the time slot give to these anchorperson. Figure 1, clearly indicates that the rating of Geo News is much higher than other, the responses are recorded in table 3 where 96.2% respondents reported Hamid Mir as symbol of identity for Geo News. Similarly Javed Chaudery attains the second largest response and also Express News rated second on the graph. Same as the case with the other anchorpersons and TV News Channels expect Junaid Saleem, anchorperson/host of Hasb-e- Hal telecast on Duniya News (Table 4, Figure 2-4).

Majority of respondents (84.7%) perceived that television channels having good anchorpersons are more popular among the audience than the one which has naïve and inexperience anchorpersons. Whereas, only 4.7% of the respondents were disagreed with that notion.

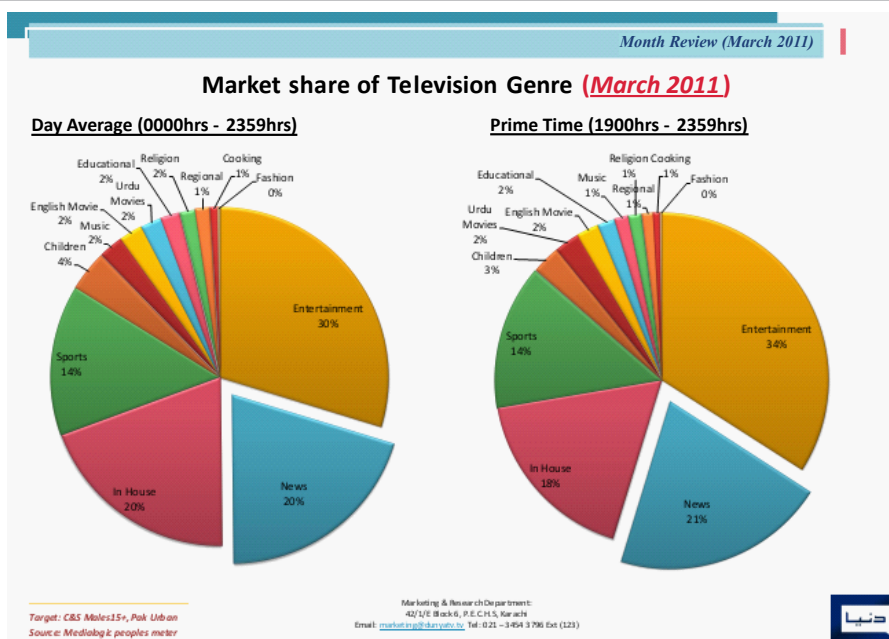


Figure 2: Market Share of Television Genre.

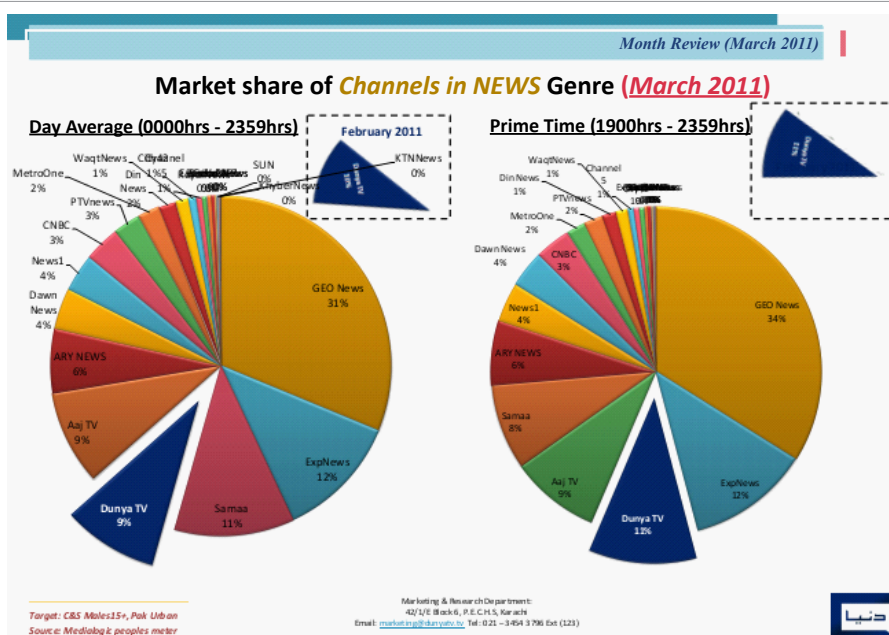


Figure 3: Market Share of Channels in News Genre.

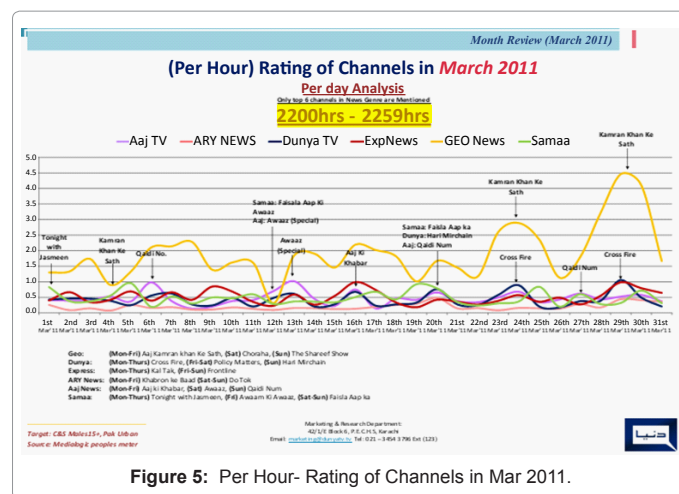
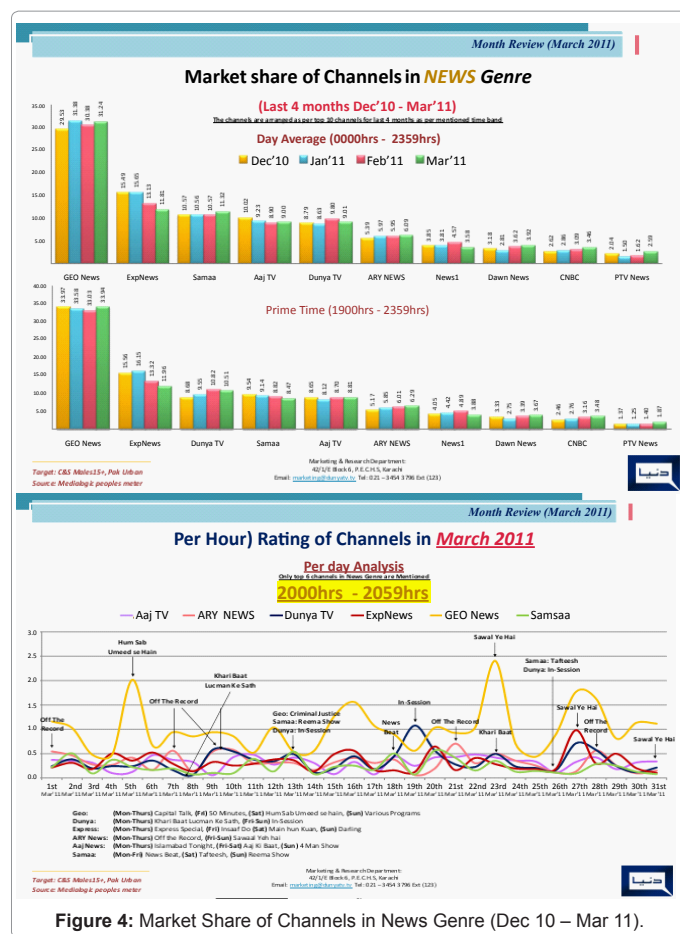
10.6 % of the respondents were uncertain about their responses on the phenomenon (Table 5).

Majority of respondents (79.3%) perceived that anchorpersons have become indispensable for TV news and current affair channels whereas, 10.6% of the respondents were not agreed with that notion. Ten percent of the respondents were uncertain about their responses on the phenomenon (Table 6, Figure 5).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Findings of the results indicate that an awesome majority

of respondents (51.7%) remember their favourite current affair programmes by the name of anchorperson which shows their attachment with anchorperson's personality. The research study also reveals that majority of 93.3% have view that anchorperson has become as symbol of identity for their respective TV news channels. The results of the study elucidate that 79.3% respondents believed that anchorpersons have become indispensable for survival of TV news and current affair channels. Overwhelming majority of respondents (84.7%) perceived that television channels having good anchorpersons are more popular among the audience than the one which has naïve and inexperience anchorpersons.



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