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DD scores a point

Our Correspondent

New Delhi, Oct. 25: At 56, DD still rocks.

A pan-India survey of television viewership that covered both urban and rural areas for the first time has thrown up what some might find hard to believe — Indians spent more time watching Doordarshan every day than any other channel.

The survey, which excluded the eight Northeast states, found that households on average spent a little over 53 minutes a day on DD National, 41 minutes on STAR Plus, and 38 minutes on Colors.

Another finding that emerged from the survey was that “prime time” for rural audiences was about an hour ahead of the slot for urban India.

But it was DD’s pull that was the surprise element in the readings for the week October 10 to 16 from the Broadcast Audience Research Council.

The results emerged from “people meters” installed by BARC in about 22,000 homes across India. All earlier data drew on towns with populations above one lakh.

DD National has also been ranked seventh among general entertainment channels, against its earlier positions of 12th or 13th.

STAR Plus was at the top among entertainment channels, while Aaj Tak was the most preferred news channel for that week.

Jawhar Sircar, the CEO of Prasar Bharati, the parent body of DD and All India Radio, said the findings were heartening. “Despite our compulsion to focus on public service programming, lack of publicity funds and good leadership at DD National, it’s heartening to see that so many people watch the channel and love it,” Sircar said.

“Now our aim would be to hoist DD National consistently among the top five entertainment channels, and DD News among the top three news channels.”

BARC India CEO Partho Dasgupta cited a possible reason for the popularity of DD National, state-run Doordarshan’s flagship channel.

“The highest average time registered for DD in that week (October 10-16) was at the back of the One-Day International cricket series between India and South Africa,” Dasgupta said, adding that readings from rural areas had other unexpected elements too.

For instance, out of every 100 viewers who watched shows based on music and youth entertainment, 44 were from rural households. In the English entertainment genre, rural households contributed to 41 per cent of the ratings.

Of the total English news viewership, more than half — about 52 per cent — were people who live in non-metropolitan cities.

Dasgupta said rural India’s “early-to-bed, early-to-rise philosophy” also showed up in the survey. “The rural peak viewership time is 5.30pm to 10.30pm, an hour ahead of the urban prime time from 6:30 to 11:30. This may change the conventional definition of prime-time TV and rural India could emerge as an important target for broadcasters.”

A senior executive with STAR India said it was “finally relieving” that an “overall feedback” from across the country was being used for rating content and channels.

“This will help us understand the preference of the demography which had remained unheard of so far,” he said. “Now it will help us tune our content in better ways and also tell advertisers what India watches and for how long.”

