



Measuring the professionalism in prime-time television debate shows: a comparative study of *Aaj Tak* and *R. Bharat*

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Abstract

This research examines professionalism in prime-time television debate: a comparative study of *Aaj Tak* and *R. Bharat*. The media plays a vital role in shaping public opinion and perception. People form their opinion about their surroundings through the media content; especially debate shows create public discourse, so it is important to know how professionally these debates are conducted. *Aaj Tak* and *R. Bharat* were selected for this study because these are widely viewed Hindi news channels and known for their aggressive and impactful debate show. The study aims to comparatively analyse the level of professionalism the debate shows of both channels broadcast during shows of both channels broadcast in prime time. The study will focus on only a few indicators of professionalism, like interruption, the anchor's personal opinion, aggressive tone, abusive and offensive language, and expression and sign. This study employed the content analysis method to meet the objectives. The researcher has deeply observed eighteen debate shows broadcast from January to March 2026. Every debate is constantly noticed with dialogue and noted for the interruption, the anchor's personal opinion, the aggressive tone, the abusive language, the offensive language, the offensive expression, and the sign. The finding indicates that both channels compromised the standard of professionalism, as their debate shows a highly contentious characterised by frequent interruption, personal opinion of the anchor and aggressive exchanges. However, *R. Bharat* has more violations, whereas *Aaj Tak* maintains a degree of balance.

Keywords:

Journalism practice; TV journalism; opinion; fact; and balance

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1.0 Introduction

Over the last few decades, one of the television news presentation formats which is known as debate programs has seen a shortage in their presentation style. Debate shows are a type of popular television program, in which a topic related to mostly current issues is discussed in a detailed form and made it more relevant to the audience. It includes experts, commentators, politicians, anchor or moderators. Generally, it is organized in prime time. Prime time is the most important time of daily television broadcasting. Television news channels have its higher viewership during this time. Generally, the time between 20:00 hours to 23:00 hours is considered as prime time. This time can be different in different countries (S. Kumar, 2016).

Prime time debate plays a significant role in shaping people's thought and it has been seeming that people create their approaches through television debates. As compared to any other television show, debate are most effective to affect people's thought. So, it is needed to analyse the professionalism standard in these debate shows. The research was focused on professionalism of prime-time television shows. Professionalism means all those people who are part of the prime-time debate shows like anchor and panellist do their work properly and they should develop public understanding and insight regarding the issues they are discussed (Smith & Searles, 2013). The main purview of this study will focus on professionalism of prime-time debate show of selected news channel Aaj Tak and Republic Bharat.

Professionalism

According to the great Philosopher 'Plato' quote

"Nothing could be more important than that the work of a soldier is done well. No Tools will make man 'a skilled workman', or master of defence, or be of any use to him who has not learned how to handle them and has never bestowed any attention on them."

The meaning of professionalism is- all the journalists, reporters, correspondents, who are connected to media organizations should develop

their ethics in public service. They should only think about the public interest. They should away from any biases, whether it is any advertiser, politician or organization owner itself. In the beginning of the progressive era, it was part of a general trend, journalists were away from politics as a basis of public life and they were toward neutral expertise. Journalists should work to priorities the public interest, not like nineties journalists who were biased (*Mass Communication and Society*, 1979). Journalist supposed to work for public interest not for their personal interest, not like nineties journalist who was biased (Sharma & Srivastava, 2024).

Media work is for their personal agenda instead of public interest. It is because there is sensationalism in their work, which indicates their personal agenda. The reason behind it, also be the nature of the media's work. The nature of media worker considers as egoistical (Afghahi & Sadat, 2014).

According to Pritchard, all the reporters, anchors, media organizations, correspondents, editors say that the most important people for them are their audience, listeners, and readers because they watch their program, they listen to their audio, they read their news as well, and respond to that. If there is no audience that means there is no mean of any media organization. Even then, these organizations behave very bad with their audience, reader and listener (Kumar & Sharma, 2023; Pritchard & Philosophy Documentation Center, 2009).

According to news broadcasting association of India, professionalism means that there should objectivity, balance, fairness, neutrality and plurality in news debate, where objectivity means show all angle without any biases, balance means give all aspect same place, neutrality means be neutral with all (*The News Broadcasters & Digital Association - NBDA New Delhi*, n.d.).

On the other hand, it was seemed that a person who was a finance expert on one news channel and he was also a defence expert in the other news channels' television debate show (Newman et al., 2023).

Anchor itself shouts on the panellist in a prime-time debate on an Indian news channel, and the anchor is biased for or against. They openly support one or another party (*The Wire: The Wire News India, Latest News, News from India, Politics, External Affairs, Science, Economics, Gender and Culture*, n.d.).

In August, 2020 a congress leader Rajiv Tyagi had heart attacked during the one of television debate and he died. After that, television debate shows were under the question, how they behave with panellist in their shows. Is there such as thing as professionalism in debate shows. Do they follow the professionalism (*Congress Leader Rajiv Tyagi Dies after TV Debate - The Hindu*, n.d.).

Prime time debate show:

Prime time debate is a famous and popular show on the television. This is a type of discussion on television. There are many experts, politicians, subject specific members keeping diversity in mind. Sometimes the audience is also part of this. A specific topic is discussed in this debate show. When these debate show is broadcast in prime time, it is called prime time debate shows (Tyagi, 2022).

As it is already defined that Prime time is the most important time for daily television broadcasting. Television news channels have its higher viewership during this time. Generally, the time between 20:00 hours to 23:00 hours is considered a best time for debate, *Aaj Tak* and *R. Bharat* are two most famous Hindi debate channel in India. People make their political opinion mostly through the prime time shows. The political issues are the most favourite topic for the prime-time debate shows in India. A Research tells us that the control of the TV remote is in male mostly in prime time and they like mostly the political and sports (*Latest News and Opinion from India, World, Politics, Governance, Defence, Economy, Education, Ground Reports - The Print*, n.d.).

The status of professionalism in prime-time debate:

Bombay high court said about *Republic TV* that it has crossed its limits of Reporting. They carry out a malicious campaign while pretending them warriors for truth and justice (*Outlook India - India's Best Magazine | Find Latest News, Top Headlines, Live Updates*, n.d.).

Indian news channels in their prime-time debate, all the time they advocated one side and tried to suppress another side. Rajiv Tyagi had died due to heart attack during the debate shows. His case indicates this statement. Actress Kasturi Shankar had started eating during the debate shows. Later she said on twitter (now X) that anchor did not let her speak, so she thought to finish her food and she forgot to off the camera (Tyagi, 2022). There were 70% screen covered with SSR case in Sushant Singh Rajput case while there were parallelly increasing covid-19 cases in that time, they did not focus on that. GDP was decreasing but they ignored it. There was conflict between India China border, It was also ignored (Tyagi, 2022). In November 2021, Supreme court said about these channels that television news channels are spreading more pollution through selection of the subject and strange presentation on television shows (*TV News Debates Causing More Pollution Than Anybody, Says Supreme Court*, n.d.). Television decide attitude of the view of the, it create their thought about any political issues, through the television people make their decision about the incident around them (Druckman, 2003).

Background of the selected news channels

Aaj Tak is a 24 hours Hindi news channel. It broadcast news in Hindi language. *Aaj Tak* means 'Till today' or 'Up to the minute'. It was started in India by public tv station in the form of news bulletins. When the contractor did not renew the channel, it was started as an independent 24-hour news channel in December, 1998, by Living media company.

It was free to air in 2006, its owner is India Today Network. It was awarded as India's 'number one news channel' after 6 months of its beginning and after 11 months it was awarded as 'best news channel' given by The India TV Academy. It was

also awarded as 'Best Advertising campaign award by RAPA award.

There were 5.2 million homes viewer in the beginning. Today it has increased many times. Its tag line is '*Sabse Tez*'. It is known for its passionate storytelling and live coverage. Its most popular programs are *Halla Bol*, *Blank & White*, and many more prime time's shows (*India Today - About Page*, n.d.).

R. Bharat is a famous Hindi news channel. It was started in 2 Feb, 2019 with the slogan '*Rastra Ke Naam*'. Beside these Republic TV has many channels in different languages like Republic TV is English news channel, *Republic Bangla* is Bengali language news channels, and *Republic Kannada* is Kannada News channels.

It is broadcast in many other countries, like UK, USA, Middle East, North Africa, Canda. Its English Channel was started in 6 May, 2017, *Bangla News* channel was started in 7 March, 2021 with the slogan '*Kotha Hobey Chokhe Chokh Rekhe hai*', Kannada news channel was started in Sep,2023 with the slogan '*Nera Maathu Kannihu*'. The editor in chief of *Republic TV* is Arnab Goswami, this channel is known for its sharp question, investigative reporting and debate shoes (*About Us Page - Your Source for Truthful Journalism, Leading the News Revolution | Republic World*, n.d.).

Importance of study:

This study will examine the level of professionalism in two selected media industries. Through this study we will understand if these organizations tried to maintain their level of professionalism or they only run toward the television rating point. Mark Tangate tried to explain in what condition these industry work on, and increase the value of content. He clearly mentioned media directors know the value of news content very well and they always try to maintain it. Through this study people will develop their understanding and the audience could be a vigilant audience rather than being a credulous only. They could have good media literacy. Also, they could make their own political

and social opinion. It could also help in government policy making. There are limited studies in the field, so that media academics face a lot of problems to develop understanding of this. This study will be helpful for them. This would be extent academic learning, as well as it would help to better the status of media organization. It would uplift their credibility.

2.0 Review of literature

A Research conducted by Zainab Minahaj Khan is a deep analysis of three channels and the understanding of news content, it clarifies that which type of content presented to the people by news channels during the pandemic. The researcher analysis the data of the news channels, and also noticed an aggressive approach and Ideological bias of the news channels. The study tells us that *Republic TV* was more aggressive than *NDTV*. The Anchor of *Republic TV* was interruptive to the guest and it was pro *BJP*. It is completely denoting of unprofessionalism. Through this research I would be able to understand about my research (Khan, 2025).

Sang, Lee and Park (2024) presented an important study with the objective of identifying a decade research trends. They analysed articles (2013 to 2022) in four news magazines (digital journalism, journalism, journalism practice and journalism studies). They analysed topics with the modelling method. After the study of 1170 reports on journalism ethics, it was clear that the most important subject was "News making process". After this research, many research was conducted to increase the audience's trust, credibility, social norms and value. This study tells us that there were difference among the topic of all four news magazines (*Looking Back at Journalism Ethics Research over the Past Decade: An Analysis of Research in Digital Journalism, Journalism, Journalism Practice, and Journalism Studies, 2013-2022 - Yoonmo Sang, Na Yeon Lee, Soyoung Park, 2025, n.d.*).

According to the research of Anmol, Pratyush and others researcher there was lack of professionals in the Indian Prime time TV debates and Aggressive behaviour were taking place of communication and

there had been lack of conversational decorum in the TV debate, also noticed that 9% of average time spend in only shouting. Beside these, in between the discussion of sensitive issues like Kashmir, citizenship amendment act panellist was seen as overlapping speech (Agarwal et al., 2024).

In a research state that there was the time of highest competition of TRP was going among the news channels. it was study of three news channels and tells us difference among them. It noticed that almost all the channels were in the race of TRP and tried to gain popularity. It deeply analysed the prime-time content of the *Aaj Tak*, *Zee News*, *NDTV* news channels and defined that which type of contents these channels were presenting to gain the popularity. It noticed that even these channels were creating a dramatic news in place of critical news just because of TRP competition and most news which were essential to the people but the channels were not presenting them, and ignoring them. It was also seen in their study that some news were dramatic and some were factual also but they were choosing dramatic only (S. Kumar, 2016).

Robin Foster presented a four-tiered approach analysing challenges and opportunities of news plurality. The four-tiered approach was effective competition, dialogue, appropriate structure and proper regulation. The analyses were that there could be an important place of digital intermediaries' news in plurality (Foster, n.d.).

According to the study conducted by (Kamath, 2006)- media were disappointing to the people. Instead of showing news, the media present Bollywood masala in place of news content, and news channels have become the factory of drama and comedy. The content they were presenting full of Bollywood masala. The news which was more important for news channels were disappeared, the credibility of channels has been decreasing. These channels were more focusing on the sensationalizing. They were presenting sensationalism on the name of breaking news. They were getting popularity through sensationalizing but it did not mean that they were gaining credibility.

2.1 Research gap:

There are many researches which is about media effects, agenda setting, framing, TRP competition and sensationalism. Some studies indicate aggressive communication, media bias, dramatic presentation and sensationalism on the Indian news channels but they all are general news content or media coverage. if we talk about a specific comparative study of Hindi channels basically *Aaj tak* & *Republic Bharat* prime time debates there is not proper explained research.

3.0 Methodology

For this study the researcher recorded debate shows broadcast on two channels and both channels were Hindi TV news channels, first was *Aaj Tak* and second one was *R. Bharat*. The researcher recorded eighteen episodes of both channels broadcast during the duration of January 2026 to March 2026. These episodes were randomly selected during the duration of January 2026 to March 2026. The main focus of the study was debate show broadcast on the channels. These debate shows were broadcast at 9 pm, prime time. The debate shows of *Aaj Tak* is named as "*Halla Bol*" and the debate show of *R. Bharat* is named as "*Puchhata hai Bharat*". The duration of each *Halla Bol* episode was approximate 40-45 min and the duration of *Puchhata hai Bharat* episodes were approximate 50-60 minute. The researcher has made a code book to analyses the component of professionalism and the data was collected according to that code book. Technical and story both components would provide correct information of professional and professionalism consumed by media houses. This study investigates whether TV debate fulfils the fundamental objective of information spreading. This also focuses on the approaches of collecting news, broadcasting news and there is professionalism or not. Researcher followed content analysis methodology for invdestigating these.

3.1 Research objectives:

1. To analyse the level of professionalism in prime-time debate shows of *Aaj Tak* & *Republic Bharat*.

2. To compare content presentation and discussion structure of both channels.
3. To know which type of subjects this news channels chose for their debate shows.

3.2 Research questions:

1. What are the key indicators of professionalism in Prime-Time Television Debates?
2. Is there a significant difference in the level of professionalism between these two channels?
3. How frequently is abusive or offensive language used in prime- time debates on these channels and in what forms does it appear?
4. What extent do anchors on both channels maintain neutrality?
5. How often do they express personal opinion during debates?

3.3 Research design and methods:

Content analysis used to analyse the changes of media debate. The content analysis method is used in print, television, radio, magazine and social media content (Sharma & Smita, 2026).

3.4 Research design:

This study conducted through an analytical research method utilizing a cross-sectional research design. Analytical research is apt for this study as it aims to go beyond merely describing a situation; it requires the researcher to use facts or information already available and analyse these to make a critical evaluation of the material. The approach of the research is a qualitative approach. The motive of the research was to analyse multi observable parameters like professionalism level, anchor behaviour, discussion structure and panellist interaction.

3.5. Sample size and sampling technique:

The study is based on a non-probability sampling technique. The researcher has used purposive sampling technique to study the prime-time

television debate. Both *Aaj Tak* and *R. Bharat* are under the study.

3.6 Data collection methods:

The primary data collected through debate program which is broadcast in prime time, specific parameters will be recorded like anchor behaviour, interruptions, shouting, conversational decorum, panellist participation. In addition, secondary data will be collected from existing academic literature, journals, and media reports to support the analytical framework.

3.7 Research tools

The primary research tool used in this study is a structured coding sheet which is designed according to content analysis schedule. It is designed to systematically record element of professionalism in prime- time television debates on *Aaj Tak* and *Republic Bharat*.

3.8 Code book for content analysis of prime-time debate shows:

S.No.	Variables	Descriptions
1.	Channels names	Name of the channel (1. <i>Aaj Tak</i> 2. <i>R. Bharat</i>)
2.	Programme name	<i>Debate show tittle</i> (1. <i>Halla Bol</i> 2. <i>Puchhata Hai Bharat</i>)
3.	Date	Broadcast date (Actual)
4.	Duration	Total duration (Actual)
5.	Topic	Main issue discussed (test)
6.	Anchor interruption	Achor cut the panellist in mid-sentence.

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|-----|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 7. | Panellist interruption | Panellist interrupt each other in the mid-sentence. | show by using aggressive and offensive language. There was total eighteen episodes were recorded. |
| 8. | Anchor personal opinion | Subjective views by anchor. | |
| 9. | Aggressive tone of anchor | Shouting and hostile delivery by anchor. | |
| 10. | Aggressive tone of panellist | Shouting and hostile delivery by panellist. | |
| 11. | Abusive language by anchor | Use of insulting words by anchor. | |
| 12. | Abusive language by panellist | Use of insulting words by panellist. | |
| 13. | Offensive expression by anchor | Facial expression and hand gestures. | |

3.9 Variables Includes:

This study includes both independent and dependent variables. The type of news channels *Aaj Tak* and *Republic Bharat* is treated as independent variable and the level of professionalism in prime-time debates is the dependent variable. Professionalism is noticed through indicators such as interruptions, anchor neutrality, language used and tone of debate.

4.0 Analysis and results

In this study, the researchers evaluated the professionalism standard of the debate show broadcast during prime time of two Hindi news channels in India. Those two news channels were ***Aaj Tak*** and ***R. Bharat***. In these channels, the behaviour of Anchor and Panellist has been measured against the professionalism standard. This means measurement of how often Anchor and Panellist interrupted each other against the professionalism and with what statement, how many times Anchor broke objectivity rule of debate professionalism by giving their personal opinion and how often they decreased the professionalism standard of debate

On 16 January, 2026, there was a show called '*Puchhta Hai Bharat*' broadcast on *R. Bharat* channel, titled as '*BMC Election mein Thackeray ka Khel Khatam*'. Anchor and panellist interrupted each other more than thirteen times. He interrupted panellist with the sentence '*Nahi, nahi... Isec Isec*' (29:43 min). Anchor prevented panellist with the abusive word '*Jihadi*' and '*Anti Hindu*'. Panellist also interrupted each other with a very offensive word '*Thetharology*' for another panellists (53:12min). More than seven times, the anchor gave his personal opinion about the topic and opposition parties. He categorically blamed Uddhav Thackeray with the statement '*Arnav Goshwami Kah Raha Hai Yeh Palghar Sadhuon Ka Shrap Hai*' (5:52min). Anchor and panellist were seen aggressive on each other more than nine times. Anchor said '*niklo...niklo bahar karo...get out*' almost fifteen times in aggressive tone (13:24min). One panellist used phrase like '*Rassi Jal Gayi, Bal Nahi Gaya*' for another panellist (16:09 min). Not only this a panellist said '*pagal*' to anchor (19:43min). Anchor and Panellist started fighting, rather than discussing about the topic (46:42 min). Anchor gave a reference to jail as a personal taunt – "*Tumko Taloja Yaad aa raha hai? Ulta de raha hoon*" (14:28 min) which was completely unprofessionalism.

On 6 Feb, 2026, in the same channel, same show but the different episode titled '*Naam Chori ki File exposed*' Anchor and Panellist interrupted more than six times against the professionalism. Anchor asked question to panellist but did not listen his answer and continuously just said – "*Nahi Nahi...*" (13:22 min). At 37:16 min, when a panellist was speaking anchor interrupted him with insulting manner '*Imin..chup raho*'. A panellist tried to express his opinion on the topic after the anchor call, anchor imposed him by his opinion (53:00 min), not only anchor but also panellist interrupted each other so many times like at 13:38 min panellist interrupted to anchor with the offensive statement- "*suno... Arnab suno, Bhuddhimani ki limit hoti hai, Bevkufi ki limit nahi hoti hai*". Anchor started the whole introduction with

one-sided opinion (01:15- 05:14 min). Almost in every episode of this shows anchor started with his personal opinion and many times like at 12:20 min, 22:30 min, 49:34 min. At 29:02 min panellist Gaurav Bhatiya openly chanted a slogan during the shows- “*Gali gali mein shor hai, nakli Gandhi Parivar chor hai*”.

On 5 Jan, 2026, in the same channel, same show but different titled “*Delhi Riots Par Sabse badha kulasha*”, anchor and panellist interrupted more than ten times.

On 13 March, 2026, in the same show but different titled “*Rahul Gandhi ne Failayi Afvah*” anchor and panellist interrupted each other more than seven times. At 18:46 min anchor interrupted panellist with ‘*Imin Imin*’ sound. At 20:06 min. At 20:06 min Anchor prevented panellist with the word ‘*Jhut hai*’. In same show but different titled “*Rahul Gandhi ka baniyaan wala circus*”, aired on 20 Feb, 2026. There were more than six times interruption. At 24:36 min Anchor shouted “*Are Pankaj ji...*” and prevented the panellist. At 38:26 min, the anchor categorically said to the panellist that he is telling lie without any evidence. There were also many times personal opinions and aggressive tone. In the same show but different episode titled “*Haar gaye Trump, jod diye haat*” air on 3 April, 2026. There were more than 5 times interruption. Anchor interrupted panellist and panellist had to say “*let me just finish, let me just finish...*” (27:08). At 35:19min Anchor prevented panellist by using offensive language ‘*tum*’. Which is disrespectful for the panellist. At 47:48 min anchor cut the panellist by posing his opinion.

When we talked about second channel, *Aaj Tak*, there were also lack of professionalism. Anchor and panellist interrupted, used aggressive, abusive and offensive language for each other. On 3 Feb, 2026, there was a show called ‘*Halla Bol*’ broadcast on *Aaj Tak* channel, titled as “*Jhukti hai duniyaan jhukane wala chahiye*”. There were two times interruption against professionalism at 22:21 min and 33:30 min. Anchor was seen biased while framing the questions at 01:26 min, 35:36 min, and a panellist used offensive language like ‘*Bhais Ke Aage Bin Bajana*’

and ‘*verbal diarrhea*’ for another panellist at 31:38 min.

In the same channel, same show but different episode titled as “*Kabra Khudegi*” vs “*25 Abhi Baki hai*”. there were also two times interruption, but no personal opinion, no aggressive tone and no abusive language. Although a panellist used abusive language like “*Besharm, besharmi ki Shima hoti hai*” for another panellist.

Overall, both channels exhibited several instances of interruption, anchor’s personal opinion, offensive language, abusive language, sign, expression. However, “*Puchchta hai Bharat*” show of *R. Bharat* demonstrated higher incidence of such unprofessionalism than “*Halla Bol*” of *Aaj Tak*. These are biased toward one or other side, the topic discussed in this show inclined towards a certain ideology and they want to impose them on the audience as well as panellist.

5.0 Limitations and recommendations

Research is a continuous process done by the researcher and it is not possible to cover all the aspects in just one research paper, so there are many limitations and recommendations noticed by the researcher. In this chapter there is description of all the limitation and recondition recorded by the researcher on the research work Professionalism in Prime-Time Television Debate: a comparative study between *Aaj Tak* and *R. Bharat*.

Limitations-

1. This study was focused on only two Hindi news channels.
2. Researcher collected data only according to the prepared code book and there were limited criteria for collect in the code book.
3. There was limited time to collect data so researcher could not complete the long-time trend.
4. This study was only focused on one special program that is debate in the prime time.

Recommendations-

1. This study can be further expended on the global level channels because it was focused on only two Hindi national news channels.
2. It can be including some different and whole perspective in the codebook because codebook was limited.
3. Another researcher can analyse also audience impact by adding quantitative approach instead of only qualitative approach.
4. This study was only focused on debate program new researcher can focused on other programs broadcast on TV news channels.
5. It was focused on only electronic media; another researcher can research on other medium.

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