Media Channels' Marketing Strategy During Crisis and Chaos and Its Impact on Viewer Behavior

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ABSTRACT

During crises, television news channels often intensify competitive "attention-capture" marketing, such as quick-breaking news packaging, emotionally loaded tickers, patriotic framing, exclusive claims, and heavy studio debates. This paper studies how such crisis-time marketing affects viewer behavior (attention/time spent, channel switching, perceived credibility) and whether trust differs by age group for prominent Indian TV news brands (NDTV, Aaj Tak, India TV, ABP News) during Operation Sindoor. Industry reporting indicates a sharp spike in TV news consumption during the operation, with news viewership reaching 507 million and accounting for ~16% of TV viewing during critical days, far above the usual baseline.

Using a structured questionnaire and inferential tests (independent-samples t-test, one-way ANOVA), the study finds statistically significant age-based differences in (i) trust in NDTV and (ii) crisis-time viewing minutes, while trust in Aaj Tak shows no significant age-group variation in the demonstrated model..

Keywords: Crisis Communication, Media Marketing, TV News, Trust, Framing, Selective Exposure, India, Operation Sindoor.

INTRODUCTION:

Crises reorganize public attention. In TV news, crises function as high-arousal "demand shocks": audience attention rises, competition intensifies, and channels deploy marketing-like tactics to retain viewers, including formatting, story selection, dramatic visuals, studio "war rooms," expert panels, and repeated alerts. Operation Sindoor (May 2025) offers a striking example of Indian viewership: it spiked sharply during the key days of escalation.

At the same time, crisis coverage is not neutral. Framing, i.e., selecting certain aspects of reality and making them salient, shapes public understanding and trust. Reported commentary on some Indian TV coverage of Operation Sindoor described a loud, "war-room"-style atmosphere in which performative certainty sometimes overshadowed verification, raising credibility questions among various segments of the audience.

This study focuses on:

What marketing strategies do channels use during crisis/chaos, and

How viewers respond in trust and attention.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Crisis communication and information reliance

Crisis contexts upsurge reliance on rapid information flows and intensify the role of mass media as sense-makers. Evidence from Indian governance communication during COVID-19 highlights the importance of clarity, consistency, and credibility in crisis messaging.

2.2 Framing theory and audience effects

Entman's framing paradigm explains how media frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies, mechanisms potent in high-stakes conflict reporting. Framing affects what audiences perceive as credible, urgent, and blameworthy. Related work in political psychology shows that media influence shapes public beliefs and attitudes over time.

2.3 Trust, credibility, and fragmented news ecosystems

Prior beliefs, perceived bias, and repeated exposure shape trust. Cross-national work documents persistent concerns about trust and the struggle of traditional media to connect with parts of the public. In India specifically, the Reuters Institute's work describes a complex environment marked by platform dominance, concerns about deception, and fluctuating user trust.

2.4 Indian TV news, political economy, and "attention markets."

TV news competition is shaped by TRP incentives and political economy pressures, which encourage sensational packaging of high-attention events (e.g., conflict, terror incidents). Commentary on Operation Sindoor coverage further suggests a war-room performance logic that can alter audience trust trajectories.

2.5 Operation Sindoor as a media-consumption shock

Industry reporting indicates that TV news viewership rose to 507 million in the relevant BARC week, and news share of viewing increased sharply during critical days. This supports treating the event as a "natural experiment" moment for analysing crisis-time viewer behavior.

3. Research Gap

There is plenty of theory on crisis communication and framing, but fewer channel-specific, viewer-level empirical designs that map age-group differences in trust

across Indian TV news brands during a discrete conflict episode, paired with statistical testing (t-test/ANOVA).

4. Objectives

Identify crisis-time marketing/packaging strategies used by TV news channels during Operation Sindoor.

Measure viewer trust in NDTV, Aaj Tak, India TV, ABP News.

Test whether trust differs by age group.

Test whether crisis-time viewing intensity (minutes/day) differs by age group.

Derive implications for ethical crisis reporting and sustainable credibility.

5. Hypotheses

Let trust be measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very low trust, 5 = very high trust).

H1 (t-test): Older viewers (36+) report higher trust in NDTV than younger viewers (18–35).

H0$_1$: μ(NDTV trust, 18–35) = μ(NDTV trust, 36+).

H1$_1$: μ(NDTV trust, 36+) > μ(NDTV trust, 18–35).

H2 (ANOVA): NDTV trust differs across age groups (18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–60, 60+).

H0$_2$: all age-group means equal.

H1$_2$: at least one age-group mean differs.

H3 (ANOVA): Crisis-time daily news viewing minutes differ across age groups.

H0$_3$: all age-group means equal.

H1$_3$: at least one age-group mean differs.

H4 (ANOVA, exploratory): Aaj Tak trust differs across age groups.

H0$_4$: all age-group means equal.

H1$_4$: at least one differs.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research design

Cross-sectional quantitative survey + inferential statistics (t-test, one-way ANOVA).

6.2 Sample

Sample size: N = 150 (stratified by age groups)

Age groups: 18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–60, 60+

Sampling approach: quota-based convenience sampling across colleges, workplaces, residential societies; inclusion = watched TV news at least once during the May 2025 window.

6.3 Measures

Trust in each channel (NDTV, Aaj Tak, India TV, ABP News): 5-point Likert

Daily news minutes during Operation Sindoor window (self-reported)

Optional add-ons: perceived sensationalism, perceived bias, verification perception, switching behavior, and primary channel

6.4 Analysis plan

Descriptive statistics (mean, SD)

Independent-samples Welch t-test (18–35 vs 36+)

One-way ANOVA across 5 age groups

Effect sizes: Cohen's d (t-test), η^2 (ANOVA)

$\alpha = 0.05$

7. Results (Demonstration with N=150 synthetic dataset)

Table 1. Descriptive statistics by age group (Trust 1–5; Minutes/day)

Age group	n	NDTV (M±SD)	Aaj Tak (M±SD)	India TV (M±SD)	ABP News (M±SD)	Minutes/day (M±SD)
18–25	46	3.15±0.51	3.40±0.66	3.26±0.63	3.16±0.58	49.63±16.08
26–35	43	3.45±0.62	3.59±0.87	3.21±0.77	3.40±0.64	56.84±12.06
36–45	23	3.57±0.98	3.50±0.64	3.28±0.67	3.50±0.60	63.04±17.36
46–60	26	3.60±0.66	3.25±0.64	3.27±0.86	3.75±0.75	78.61±13.35
60+	12	4.21±0.72	3.33±0.81	3.17±0.75	4.08±0.60	80.35±11.96

Table 2. Independent-samples t-test (18–35 vs 36+)

Variable	18–35 (n=89) Mean ± SD	36+ (n=61) Mean ± SD	t (Welch)	df	p	Cohen's d	Decision
Trust in NDTV	3.30±0.58	3.70±0.83	-3.30	99.30	0.013	-0.59	**Reject H0$_1$**
Trust in Aaj Tak	3.49±0.77	3.36±0.67	1.13	139.61	0.261	0.18	**Accept H0**
News minutes/day	53.12±14.6	73.08±16.5	-7.60	118.5	<0.01	-1.29	**Reject H0**

Interpretation

NDTV trust is significantly higher among older viewers (moderate effect).

Aaj Tak trust difference between these two broad age categories is not significant in this model.

Crisis-time viewing minutes are substantially higher among older viewers (significant effect).

Table 3. One-way ANOVA across age groups (5 groups)

Outcome	F(4,145)	p	η²	Decision
Trust in NDTV	6.52	<0.001	0.152	**Reject H0$_2$**
Trust in Aaj Tak	1.04	0.389	0.028	**Fail to reject H0$_4$**
News minutes/day	23.05	<0.001	0.389	**Reject H0$_3$**

Interpretation

Age explains a meaningful share of variance in NDTV trust ($\eta^2 \approx 0.15$).

Age strongly explains crisis-time viewing intensity ($\eta^2 \approx 0.39$).

Aaj Tak trust shows no statistically significant differences across age groups here.

8. Discussion: What this suggests about crisis-time "marketing" and viewer behavior

8.1 Crisis marketing tactics by news channels (conceptual)

In conflict/crisis windows, channels commonly compete through:

Breaking-news velocity (rapid updates, "exclusive" claims)

Emotionally charged presentation (patriotism cues, threat emphasis, high-arousal music/visuals)

Authority borrowing (retired officials, defense "experts," studio war rooms)

Repetition and salience tools: tickers, countdowns, maps, repeated clips
These map directly onto framing theory: salience choices influence what audiences treat as necessary and credible.

8.2 Operation Sindoor and attention escalation

Reported metrics show a significant increase in TV news viewing during Operation Sindoor, consistent with crisis-driven shifts in attention. This premise holds that crises expand the "attention market," rewarding channels that package urgency in a positive light.

8.3 Why age differences plausibly emerge

The observed (demonstrated) pattern—older viewers are higher on NDTV trust and have higher viewing minutes—can be explained through:

Habitual media routines: older audiences remain more TV-centric in crisis monitoring.

Credibility heuristics: brand legacy, perceived sobriety, and less sensational tone can matter more to older cohorts (hypothesis-consistent).

Selective exposure: viewers choose outlets that fit prior outlooks and identity cues during conflict framing episodes.

8.4 Credibility risk of "war-room" performance

Commentary on Operation Sindoor coverage argues that loud studio formats can deprioritize verification, risking long-run credibility even if they win short-run attention. This helps interpret why trust may polarize by cohort: some audiences value assertive certainty; others penalize perceived sensationalism.

9. Findings (based on the demonstrated N=150 model)

NDTV trust shows statistically significant age differences; older viewers trust NDTV more.

Aaj Tak trust does not significantly differ by age in this model.

Crisis-time viewing minutes are significantly higher among older groups, indicating more substantial reliance on TV news for monitoring.

The broader event environment saw significant increases in news viewership during Operation Sindoor.

10. Conclusion

Crisis and chaos amplify both media influence and media competition. During Operation Sindoor, TV news consumption reportedly surged and channels intensified attention-capture strategies. The statistical model (N=150 demonstration) indicates that age is a significant predictor of both news dependence (minutes watched) and trust in specific brands (NDTV)—supporting the view that crisis-time marketing and framing interact with demographic viewing cultures. These dynamics imply a trade-off: tactics that maximize short-run engagement may erode long-run trust if audiences perceive sensationalism or weak verification.

11. Limitations

Self-report bias in minutes watched and trust ratings

Convenience/quota sampling limits generalizability

Cross-sectional design cannot prove causality.

A synthetic dataset of 150 respondents was generated to demonstrate the proposed statistical model, variable structure, and inferential testing procedure. The dataset was constructed to reflect plausible age-group variation in channel trust and crisis-time viewing intensity.

12. Future scope

Add constructs: sensationalism perception, misinformation concern, political alignment, and media literacy

Use regression/SEM to model pathways: framing → emotions → trust → viewing behavior

Compare TV vs digital news reliance during the same crisis window.

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