

# Panel Infiltration Investigation SOP – BARC India

March 2023

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## PURPOSE

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) serves the purpose of outlining the process in which Broadcast Audience Research Council India (BARC) investigates panel infiltration and under what criteria is a channel placed on Vigilance controls within BARC's Data Validation Processes<sup>1</sup>.

## INTRODUCTION

BARC takes panel infiltration very seriously and regularly conducts audits and checks on panel homes to identify an infiltration. BARC's Data Validation Processes do have facilities to adjust for outlier audience estimates for channels which have been confirmed as having infiltrated the panel. These processes are done to ensure the robustness and accuracy of BARC's audience estimates. However, it is important that all processes are statistically based, fair, and have no element of subjectivity. As such, these processes are strictly followed and overseen by BARC's Independent Oversight Committee (OC). BARC Management has no ability or authorization to place a channel arbitrarily or subjectively on vigilance controls. At the same time, in the absence of empirical evidence as described in this SOP, channels must be given the benefit of the doubt when they are mentioned for possible panel infiltration.

Like all BARC's processes, these processes are under constant review under the spirit of continuous improvement. These processes, therefore, are subject to change as new methods are developed which can improve their efficacy in negating the impact of panel infiltration. All the process improvements and enhancements are done under the oversight and guidance of the OC. All changes to existing processes, or the addition of new processes, require review and approval from the OC. BARC Management cannot undertake any changes or apply judgement in these matters in the absence of the aforementioned approval.

As per BARC's End User License Agreement (EULA), BARC is unable to disclose to subscribers the outcome of any investigation and whether any channel is currently under Vigilance controls.

The Code of Conduct for redressing Viewership Malpractices is published on the BARC website<sup>2</sup>.

These processes are a portion of BARC India's much broader Data Validation Processes. At the same time, while these processes are an important input for BARC's Disciplinary Processes, they are a distinct and separate SOP. Disciplinary Actions fall under the scope and authority of BARC's Disciplinary Committee (DisComm).

## SCOPE

This document is an SOP and thus outlines the processes followed by BARC but does not include the specific analysis techniques that are prescribed and followed, as those belong in Working Instructions (WIs). For security reasons, BARC does not release these WIs externally to ensure the integrity of these Data Validation processes and to prevent the misuse of any such information.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://barcindia.co.in/whitepaper/data-processing-and-validation-processes.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://barcindia.co.in/policy-updates/barc-code-of-conduct-for-redressing-viewership-malpractices-effective-11-jan-2021.pdf>

## PROCESS

### 1. TRIGGERS TO INITIATE INVESTIGATION

There are three primary means which can lead to an infiltration investigation:

#### 1.a. Complaints

BARC takes all complaints received seriously. Every complaint of panel infiltration is automatically actioned for investigation as per sub-section 2 below. These complaints can be received by various means, including the vigilance contact, [vigilance@barcindia.co.in](mailto:vigilance@barcindia.co.in), which is displayed on BARC's website<sup>3</sup>.

#### 1.b. Statistical Signatures

Audience estimates are constantly reviewed and analyzed by BARC. Using various statistical and machine learning techniques, irregular changes in viewership patterns are identified and flagged for investigation as per sub-section 2 below. As laid out above, the specific statistical techniques and benchmarks deployed are confidential to BARC's relevant teams and not placed in the public domain, to prevent their misuse and data tampering.

#### 1.c. On-ground Confirmation

While conducting regular operational and maintenance visits, households are asked, or they may volunteer, if they have been approached by external parties with the aim of influencing their TV viewing habits or show signs of infiltration. This provides some input into the possibility of infiltration. Additionally, while investigating a particular channel for infiltration, a household may admit to being approached to view a different channel. This also is a marker that infiltration has occurred.

In both cases, the household information is sent to BARC analysts for data analysis and verification as outlined in sub-section 3 below.

### 2. VIGILANCE INVESTIGATION

In cases of complaints or where statistical signatures have been crossed, the first step is to conduct a deeper statistical analysis to identify households that have shown statistically significant changes in their viewership patterns. This step not only furnishes a list of households to be investigated, but also acts as a data-based confirmation of possible infiltration.

This list of households is then sent to the BARC Vigilance team where an on-field investigation is done. Should any household be found to be infiltrated, it is immediately isolated from the audience estimates and flagged to be removed from the panel.

Provided one or more household is found to be infiltrated, the process moves to sub-section 4 below where it is placed on Vigilance. Should no home be found to be infiltrated, the channel is cleared from the investigation.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://barcindia.co.in/reach-us>

### 3. CONFIRMATION OF INFILTRATION

BARC requires both on-ground and data-based confirmation in order to place a channel under vigilance controls. In cases where infiltration was triggered by on-ground activities (sub-section 1.c. above), only ground confirmation would have been received. In these cases, further data analysis occurs.

### 4. DATA VALIDATION FOR INFILTRATED CHANNELS

BARC estimates television audiences through the data obtained from a sample (i.e., the panel) of households. In cases where infiltration has been found for a channel, doubt must be given to the veracity of the entire set of data coming from the household meters. As such, the viewership of these channels must pass through a far more stringent outlier detection method.

This outlier detection process is an additional step within BARC's existing Data Validation Processes. Viewership from every household of an infiltrated channel is statistically compared to the empirical viewing distribution in order to make an inference as to whether the viewership is genuine or possibly influenced. Influenced viewership is treated using accepted statistical methods thereby adjusting the overall audience estimates. These processes are fully automated, and system driven. There is no human intervention.

BARC's Independent OC is the empowered committee that has oversight of the entire process. Any changes to the system require the OC's approval. BARC Management has no authority or ability to change these processes in the absence of approval.

The OC also monitors the channels on Vigilance ensuring that this overall SOP is strictly always adhered to prior to every weekly data release.

### 5. PROCESS FLOW

The above sections are summarized in Figure 1 which outlines the entire process flow.

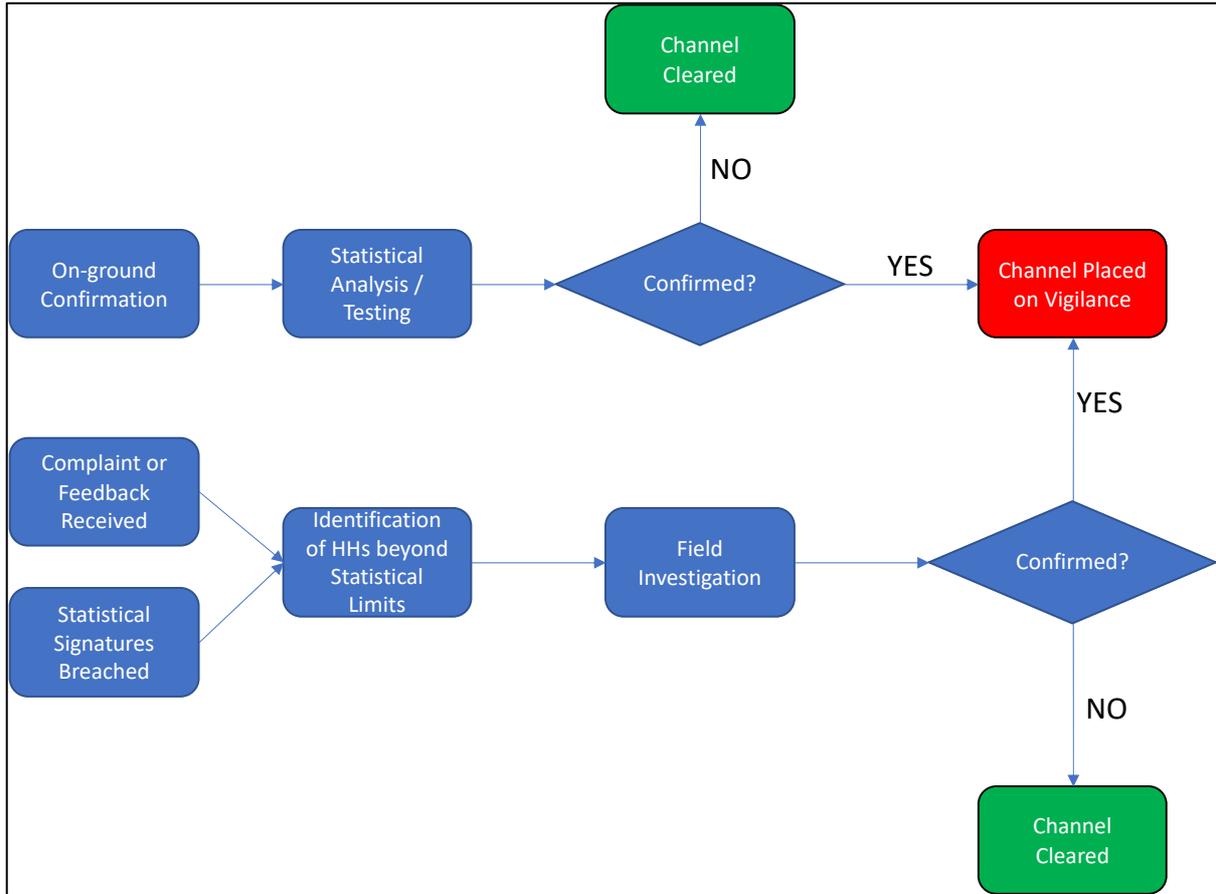


Figure 1. Process flow for infiltration investigations.

## CHANGE HISTORY

Version no.	Effective Date	Significant Changes	Previous Version no.
1	March 2023	Base document	n/a