

The Bhutanese Media: In the Service of the Public

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Introduction

Judging by Bhutan's experience in recent years, history is the documentation of dramatic events. Today we are going through a quiet revolution and witnessing technological advancement, the emergence of a middle class, a democratic wave, and thus an evolution of traditions, systems, and ideologies. All this is leading to the transformation of the social, economic, and political systems.

At this crucial juncture of history we look at the Bhutanese media which must draw on its own short history to provide a long-term vision for the future. As society prepares for unprecedented change, what is the role of the media in nurturing future generations? Even as it mirrors Bhutan's journey through time, how does the Bhutanese media define its agenda and find its own personality?

This paper attempts to establish a coherent role for the Bhutanese media as Bhutan seeks to create an enlightened society through the pursuit of Gross National Happiness. Today, as tradition gives way to modernity through social, economic, and political change the media is challenged to overcome social sensitivities and its own inhibitions to live up to the new responsibilities that come as a mandate and not as a choice.

With the debate on the Constitution of Bhutan begun, the paper will discuss the implications of the freedom of media, freedom of speech, and the right to information that will be guaranteed. It will try to portray these vast concepts in Bhutan's context and look at the new freedoms – with their intricacies and contradictions – to find the lines of balance.

The paper highlights two critical issues as the basis for the discussions and as foundations for the role of the Bhutanese media.

The first is that the media must provide – in fact it must become – the public space for Bhutanese society. It must be the forum for debate and discussions as society beats a path of change based on rational discourse. Public space is seen here as one of the building blocks of democracy.

The second is that, given the powerful forces of state control and commercial drive that is shaping the global media, the Bhutanese media

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must not lose focus of its priority in providing – and in being – a public service. This paper provides a strong justification to instil the concept of public service in the Bhutanese media against the tide of media commercialism that has overwhelmed the global media.

The definition of the media itself is broad and it is changing. We will look briefly at the entire spectrum of the Bhutanese media but, in discussing the role of the media, the thrust will be on the traditional media, and journalism, as a strong influence on a changing society.

The Bhutanese Media

Bhutanese society has not yet shed its oral culture and Bhutanese journalists maintain that their biggest competitor is gossip and rumour. A current concern is that society might jump from an oral tradition to the visual media and not develop a literary tradition. In this section we provide a brief profile of the Bhutanese media and an analysis of its origins and impact over the past one-and-a-half decades as the society tries to grow out of its oral tradition.

The Bhutanese media has seen significant growth since the mid-1980s, with the establishment of BBS and the newspaper, *Kuensel*, and the small information revolution that took place in the late 1990s with the introduction of television and the Internet. While still in their infancy the print media, digital film, radio and television channels, the Internet, and music are assuming clear forms with distinct patterns of growth.

A Media Impact Study (MIS), 2003, initiated by the Ministry of Information and Communication summarises the landmarks in the development of the Bhutanese media:

- Increasing literacy. As society became more educated, the information sector became a priority and thus the demand for professional media.
- Media was made independent of the government in 1992 by royal decree. This autonomy was a boost for media development.
- Technological advances raised the capability of media. This enhanced its sustainability.
- The growth in the economy is driving media growth. While this is currently limited, it will be a strong force in the future.
- Legislation and policy seeks to provide information as a right.
- Globalization has a direct impact on media development in Bhutan.
- Political reform and the Constitution will have a direct impact on the establishment of independent Bhutanese media.

Impact of Bhutanese media on society

The media is now a way of life for most Bhutanese although access to media and the interests vary between the rural and urban population, the rich and poor, the old and young. The MIS concluded that television, particularly international channels, had the strongest impact on urban society, especially on the youth population. Radio has been the main influence on the rural population and the print media reached the literate and policy makers.

Radio (good reach)

Radio is the most prolific media in Bhutan, reaching a majority of the people in all 20 districts. An estimated 77 percent of the population listens to the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (MIS) and development sectors like health, education, and agriculture recognise the strength of the radio in reaching people with vital information. For remote communities BBS is the only source of information and this medium is yet to be fully exploited.

Print (expanding boundaries)

Bhutan's print media consists of one newspaper, *Kuensel*, and some local publications, mainly educational and Buddhist texts. *Kuensel*, which currently sells 15,000 copies on Saturday and 12,000 copies on Wednesday, has an estimated readership of 130,000. With an online edition *Kuensel* is known to be progressively expanding the boundaries of discourse and has become increasingly independent in its views and in reflecting readers' opinions over the years.

Music (commercially driven)

Bhutan has a thriving music "industry" and there are more than 40 licensed audio-visual production companies. More than 75 percent of the surveyed population in the MIS owned Bhutanese music tapes. New contemporary music, called *rigsar*, was the most popular. In a free market situation many new talents had been showcased in the music industry. A common criticism of local *rigsar* music was that it was largely copies of Indian music.

Film (small Bollywood)

Digital technology provided the impetus for the growth of a fledgling amateur film industry. It has enabled amateurs to produce low-cost digital video films that have developed a captive audience. The production of films is a totally commercial venture and there are on average about 12 local films produced a year, screened mostly in the

larger towns with bigger audiences. Bollywood has a strong influence on Bhutanese films which are geared mainly towards mass entertainment.

Internet (new frontiers)

The Internet has, to an extent, broken down a hierarchical society and is promoting transparency in governance. Government organisations and businesses have started websites and Bhutan's draft Constitution was launched on the Internet. Digital forums, especially kuenselonline.com, is now regarded as a space for discussion and the public sphere has grown with the Internet.

Television (changing lifestyle)

The impact that has drawn the greatest interest is the impact of television and the response of post 1999 Bhutanese society. This sub section focuses largely on the impact of international television channels in Bhutan.

The debate goes on, sometimes exaggerated, sometimes subdued. While the full impact of international television on Bhutanese society is yet to be analysed, there is a growing concern in Bhutan over the perceived dilution of culture and the instillation of "undesirable" values in the younger generation.

The Media Impact Study provides some insight into the early impact of TV on Bhutanese society. Some respondents were positive about the impact:

- It had opened up the world to Bhutan
- Given people a better understanding of the global market and choices
- Introduced new ideas (such as fashion, food, politics)
- Greatly improved the standard of sports, especially football
- People believe that TV has made children smarter and given them more confidence.

Negative impacts were also highlighted

- Affected school and home work
- Children and youth were reading less and spending less time on outdoor activities
- Affected lifestyle (housework and eating and sleeping habits as families adjusted their daily lives around television programmes)
- Society was identifying new roles models like sports and film stars
- Consumer habits were visibly on the increase
- Traditions and culture (language, dress) was being diluted

The lack of study, analysis, and planning before the introduction of television is becoming more visible. In early 2005, the Bhutan Communication Authority decided to reduce the number of cable channels from 45 to 30 to help ensure quality programmes by filtering out undesirable or irrelevant channels. This move resulted in bitter protests from viewers.

Television is widening the gap between the urban population, which has access to information and entertainment, and the rural population which has no access to media. People in remote communities said that they did not feel they were a part of Bhutan (MIS) because they were not included in the media. Observers warned that the time spent in front of the TV had also taken away the individual's ability to participate in civic action.

Meanwhile Bhutan is limited by resources and trained professionals in the production of local content for television and other media to counter the uneven flow of the global media into the country. The billion dollar advertising industry is already targeting unsuspecting viewers and raising the concerns that the impact of television is reaching the core values in Bhutanese society.

Billboards advertising Pepsi have penetrated deep into the villages where drinking water is in short supply.

Bhutan is seeing, in the wake of the information revolution, a famine turned to glut, a significant impact on the eye, mind, and then on the psyche, "the impact behind the layer of harmless entertainment".¹

Media and Change

Gross National Happiness, the inspiration for change in Bhutan, requires that the kingdom draws on the global experience to adopt what is good and relevant. It also emphasises a pragmatism through which Bhutan does not succumb to global pressures but chooses technology and skills that strengthen, rather than dilute, the Bhutanese identity. This section will look at Bhutan's approach to information and media development and the potential impact on society, on governance, and on the process of democratisation.

In the knowledge century - the information age - Bhutan aims to establish a knowledge society and guarantees access to information as a right of every citizen. This is enshrined as a mandate in the draft Constitution - along with the freedom of expression and freedom of the media -and is established as government policy spearheaded by the Ministry of Information.

¹ Macdonald, Ross.

Bhutan sees that creating a knowledge society is not an impossible dream for a small and landlocked developing country and the evolution of an information society will develop its own momentum. But this is a complex and expensive task as noted in the UN Public Sector Report 2002:

"It is important to note that bridging the 'digital divide' is not simply an issue of building an information infrastructure nor of buying and handing out computers and modems to everyone in a society. Providing information alone will not work. It has to be done alongside person-to-person communications. The mass media, on its own, may reach people with key messages but the personal outreach is necessary to effect behaviour change.²

The media must play a vital role in educating, not just the young, but the entire population. It is only through the media that we can reach the decisions-makers who sometimes have no media savvy, implementers like the bureaucracy who may not have the skills, and the public to whom it may all be a new phenomenon.

But the media community is already gaining visibility and will be an important element of the emerging civil society as we see change in the work place, the home, and the market. Change is already coming from within and the IT and media culture is but a matter of time. Media is culture and will add depth to the current interpretation of Bhutanese culture which was viewed largely from a religious perspective in the past.

Governance

Transparency, accountability, and efficiency are the three pillars of good governance identified by the Bhutanese government which has been given the mandate to provide the political commitment, infrastructure, and education to achieve this. The Bhutanese media plays an important role in helping to make information accessible and understandable to the public and to facilitate popular participation in the processes of government.

For centuries, the notion that citizens might actively participate in all public affairs and make substantive inputs in policy decisions remained a distant prospect. Not any more. And it is the media that must foster

² Thornhill, Christopher (2000). "South Africa and Globalization", paper prepared for the International Institute of Administrative Sciences, First Regional International Conference, Bologna, Italy quoted in the UN World Public Sector Report: Globalisation and the State Democracy

transparency and accountability in government and create a responsive public sector.

The traditional and new media enables public officials to take major decisions by feeling the pulse of the people and, in that sense, ensures that public opinion plays a pivotal role in every major government action.

Decentralisation has been the theme for development in Bhutan and the government is making an effort to distribute information by setting up websites and linking databases and information systems through the Internet. The Bhutan Power Corporation and Bhutan Telecom subsidise power and telecom infrastructure in the rural parts of the country and the Ministry of Information has identified e-governance as a priority. It is piloting telecentres in various parts of remote Bhutan.

Bhutan may not see the creation of an “electronic republic” as envisioned in some countries but electronic democracy is already seeping into the standard structure and enhancing representative government.

The Bhutanese media was required to play an important role in decentralised governance. This role becomes more important with the process of democratisation in the emerging political system. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has emphasised, even as the country drafts its first written Constitution, that it will establish a system of democratic governance that is relevant and appropriate to Bhutan. And it is in this perspective that we will look at the role of the media.

While the concept of the media as the “fourth estate” in democratic governance emphasises the traditional watchdog role of the press this paper will emphasise the public service role of the media, providing other dimensions. Public service media forms the theme of this paper, elaborated in PART II, but in this section we will define the concept of public space as a vital element in a democratic system.

We look at public space – which is synonymous with the role of the media – as the space where discourse and dialogue takes place. The media is the public space, the provider of public space, and the vehicle in which public discourse takes place.

Classical liberal theory describes public space as the space between government and society in which private individuals exercise formal and informal control over the state—formal through election of government and informal through the pressure of public opinion.³ The sine qua non of democracy, in its purest form, is the empowerment of the individual.

In the functioning of a democratic system, it is the public sphere that keeps all the other elements of democracy in place. It is a social sphere

³ Jakubowicz, Karol, *Public Service Broadcasting and Democracy*

that is distinct from the “public authority” of the state on the one hand and the private sphere of economic relations and intimate family relations on the other. Habermas maintains that the bourgeois public sphere embodied a more general principle of “publicness” that the personal opinions of private individuals could evolve into public opinion through the rational-critical debate of a public of citizens which was open to all and free from domination.⁴

Bhutan must be aware that media is increasingly central to political life in democracies where politicians actively plan their publicity around the media to remain in public attention. Events are manipulated and appearances planned to give the illusion of public participation.

The success of democracy depends upon an “informed” public or, in the context of this paper, an “enlightened” public. That, in essence, defines the nature and the role of the media.

Looking Ahead

GNH – Media – creating enlightened society

In the perspective of this paper, we emphasise that Gross National Happiness is not an unfulfilled promise to confer happiness on citizens as it is sometimes perceived. In fact it is not even about the concept of happiness, a misconception that has led to some scepticism about GNH. Gross National Happiness is the responsibility of the government to create an environment in which citizens, as understood in Buddhist practice, can find happiness within themselves.

Happiness, in GNH, can be interpreted as the contentment that is the essence and expression of a good quality of life; as the personal development which should be the goal of national development, it symbolises the success of a wholesome development process, the end goal of good governance that leads to a good society. In a Buddhist perception, it is the enlightenment that comes to successful practitioners. We note here that enlightenment is not an esoteric possibility in the future or the next life as some people may believe but the enlightenment that is possible, in varying degrees, in the present life.

A critical element of GNH, therefore, is the empowerment of the citizen which is, as we understand, the basis of democracy. This means giving citizens the education to make informed decisions. It means enabling citizens to have the critical wisdom⁵ to open our minds to the

⁴ Tomlinson, J. in *Local Visions of the Global*

⁵ Buddha taught the need for freedom from belief systems that were against personal development so that individuals could develop the power of critical wisdom.

possibilities of enlightened living. It means, not just providing access to information but enabling the citizen to make reasoned decisions at the individual, community, and national level.

In other words it means the need for an effective media. The media becomes, in Buddhist terms, the skilful means – an indispensable tool – for the achievement of the four pillars identified by the government as well as other elements in the broader interpretations of Gross National Happiness.

The media is, therefore, inextricably linked to GNH. Just as GNH is a response to globalisation and global interpretations of development, the Bhutanese media has the responsibility to resist and provide alternatives to global trends in the media. If GNH found that economic development had taken precedence over happiness as a priority in development we find that the global media too is consumed by commercialism, generating materialism as an end goal.

Finally the media, as the public space for discourse, is the forum for intellectual discourse on GNH that is missing in Bhutan, the home of GNH, although the GNH discourse did begin in *Kuensel* in 1999⁶. It is the media's responsibility to not only provide more clarity on GNH but to make the concept palatable to a population that is more cynical than we often admit. It is the media's responsibility to reflect the varying degrees of understanding of GNH among the Bhutanese people to contribute to and deepen this discourse.⁷

Glocalisation – a response to globalisation

The implications of globalisation are multi-fold but, in the context of this paper, we look at the risk of Bhutanese culture being homogenised and the role of the media to balance this trend. While we argue that public service media is the healthy alternative to a commercialised global media, we stress the need for society to be able to withstand the pressure of the global media.

One strategy is glocalisation. Glocalisation is defined as the ability of a culture, when it encounters other cultures, “to absorb influences that naturally fit into and can enrich that culture, to resist things that are truly

⁶ *Kuensel* published the prime minister's first statement GNH. It was followed by weeks of discussions as readers responded.

⁷ The concept of GNH has been an intuitive concept in a society that is still steeped in Buddhist values that upholds the middle path. Hence, Bhutan's pro-social and sustainable policies. But for GNH to become a realistic and operational guideline for development there is a need to go beyond the instinctive and this can be done through more debate and discourse through the media.

alien, and to compartmentalize those things that, while different, can nevertheless be enjoyed and celebrated as different”⁸. The purpose of glocalisation is to be able to assimilate aspects of globalisation into your country and culture in a way that adds to your growth and diversity without overwhelming it.

The rise of alternatives through globalisation was meant to be good for viewers in giving them choice. But the truth is that we quickly degenerate to the lowest common denominator. Analysts state that globalisation empowers the common man and woman to have all these choices and, when that happens, it is inevitable that they will make the choices that seem the most attractive, modern, appealing, convenient and commercial.⁹ We recently saw this in India when the government-funded Doordarshan was forced to compete with the commercial channels by broadcasting popular shows at prime time and by introducing entertainment channels.

It is, therefore, critical for the Bhutanese media to help society resist the media onslaught because it is media that is changing the world. It leads to the need to control external media to balance the aerial invasion. The filters are particularly important because, as we know through experience, our infant media will not develop the capacity to withstand the multi-million dollar industry that is out to seduce the world.

The Public Service Media

In this section we will define public service media, particularly by its role and audience. Since we are recommending public service media as the most relevant and desirable form and approach for the Bhutanese media, we will also look at the challenges facing the public service media. These challenges, which include the high cost of producing quality original content, a key function of the public service media, are linked to the recommendations that come at the end of the paper.

Public service media is sometimes defined by its method of funding, sometimes by institutional form, sometimes by legal status, but the core element in the definition is the independence of the media from state and market control to allow it to truly serve the public.

In the past public service media was understood as government media, owned by government and run as the official voice. Media critic Noam Chomsky also warns that business corporations now run the world, the political parties, and the media.

⁸ Friedman reiterates the view of many analysts that glocalisation is an important filter to the threat of homogenisation brought about by globalisation.

⁹Zakaria

In 1933, the concept of an independent media, directly or indirectly subsidised by the government, emerged with the initiative taken by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which maintained its independence through a royal charter signed by the Queen of England. The format has been followed by broadcasting organisations in many countries including Australia and Canada and, to an extent, the NHK in Japan.

In Bhutan we talk of national interest. The public service media does not change this national goal but strengthens the public interest component of this goal. Public service media also recognises the importance of cultural diversity and, in that sense, the need to be different in each country to suit the specific priorities and conditions.¹⁰

Audience

Public service media is also distinctive for its audience and its relationship to the audience. Public service media recognises its audience, not just as citizens, but as members of different sections of society identified by age, sex, occupation, interests, education levels and, in Bhutan, their remoteness, all with varied interests and needs.

Despite much talk about the information society, public service media recognises that information by itself is not knowledge and it is knowledge that distinguishes us as human beings. So the pursuit of knowledge is the basis for the most valuable forms of communication.

Public service media in the west is appreciated particularly by the intellectual elite who appreciate high quality up market programmes. In Bhutan the media will have to cater to the masses, creating a need for diversity.

As Kiran Karnik described it:

It needs to concern itself with developing taste, promoting understanding, spurring literacy and development, creating informed debate, empowering the disadvantaged... issues that a commercial broadcaster need not even think of.¹¹

As Bhutanese citizens are given the right to information about Bhutanese society and the democratic process, the public service media needs to serve the non-consuming classes in far flung communities to make them a part of the process.

¹⁰ As the World Radio and TV Council states: public service must serve the cultural progress of our world not its own corporate interests.

¹¹ Karnik, K.

A diverse audience calls for a diverse media and today's audience requires both the one-way traditional media like radio broadcasting and the interactive forum like the Internet. As convenient as the radio is for remote semi pastoralist communities, the Internet finds immediate responses and feedback from the educated sections of the population.

Role

With the explosion of commercial television channels, governments and media watchers initially felt that public broadcasting organisations were no longer relevant. But the world soon came to realise that, as commercial channels became completely consumed by consumerism, public media had become more relevant than ever. It had become indispensable.

As media practitioners helplessly lamented the complete overwhelming of the media by commercialism, public service media – encompassing all media and not just public broadcasting – was the most powerful safeguard against the homogenisation of cultures and the swamping of all other media by prefabricated entertainment products, globally produced.

The press today is sensational, trivial, and largely senseless, be they tabloid newspapers or talk shows and serials. Governments and societies in many countries are recognising the public service media as being absolutely vital to sustain the quality, diversity, independence, integrity, original content, and standards in the media.

Public service media does not reject commercially funded programmes or print media but would ensure that adequate filters and regulations guide the balance of commercial and public media, backed up by dynamic support from people.

As a safeguard against the “dumb power”¹² of the entertainment-driven media, the public service media has a clear-cut if diverse role. The following specific responsibilities have been identified by promoters of the public service media:

- a mission to safeguard society and culture
- making up for the failures of commercial media
- creating a better informed and educated public
- help the audience judge what is good (paternalist conviction)

¹² Brown and Duguid describe the world embracing the “dumb power” of the information age where the focus seems to be entirely on more information, better processing, wider bandwidths. In such a scenario, quantity takes precedence over the quality of media.

- a political role to serve democracy.
- the traditional watchdog role of the press

Public service media needs to balance the commercial media and to provide healthy alternatives, combining public and commercial service, functioning with complete freedom from government and from commercialism. Journalists must take on the mandate to give the public what they need and not what they want. This is based on the sometimes controversial assumption that the public does not know what it needs and what it wants is the lowest common denominator.

Bhutanese media professionals must understand the serious responsibility of good journalism so that they benefit society and the processes including GNH. As the UNDP's Human Development Report 2002 states "The media can be free of both state and corporate control if it serves the public first and foremost and follows higher standards of professionalism and ethics."

A Buddhist perspective

The relevance of the perspective provided by Buddhism is all-pervasive. This section highlights the relevance of the concept of public service media to Bhutan.

In a western notion, the idea of control is central to communication but, in a Buddhist context, notions of sharing and mutuality are equally important. The western focus on media and its role in society hinges on control and influence with a stress on the intellect. In a Buddhist context the key to communication lies, not in the sender or in control, but in the receiver and understanding. There is a focus on choice. Buddhism states that life is a choice of decisions while western concepts seem to suggest that technological determinism and globalisation takes precedence over personal will.

As we have discussed in the context of good governance and democracy we need to give the receivers of communication the ability to reason, choose, and decide. GNH requires that people are able to make reasoned choice. Hence the role of the media to help create enlightened society. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck highlighted the responsibility of the people in choosing what was good from the media when he announced the introduction of TV and the Internet in 1999. (Silver Jubilee speech)

Within the Buddhist framework, the media has to offer to everyone a freedom which is conditional upon the freedom and dignity of others, so that individuals may develop a self-reliant responsibility rather than becoming what Ken Jones describes as the "conditioned animals of

institutions and ideologies"¹³. The good society, or the enlightened society, which GNH hopes to achieve, means that the media should also strive to provide a means and an environment which provides different ways to different kinds of people. It must provide the alternative views, the feedback, and the critical information to help remove obscurations in society, whether they be gross materialism, corruption, misguided policies, or social ills.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper, the Bhutanese media can eventually draw on Buddhism to find a Bhutanese personality, from the role of journalism as a skilful means to help empower the people to the inspiration that comes from the Drukpa Kuenley antics to challenge the establishment. After all, GNH is not a new concept but the expression of existing wisdom.

Challenges

As noble as the concept of public service media might be, however, the challenges are formidable. There is the dilemma of staying away from state control but being dependent on state subsidy. Balancing the powerful force of the commercial media poses an even more difficult task given market trends and forces. And, accepting that the public service media must attempt to be a healthy alternative to both these forces, there are several immediate obstacles that must be overcome.

Eyre¹⁴ adds that public service broadcasting is, in fact, facing oblivion for several reasons:

- it relies on the notion of an active broadcaster and a passive viewer and, in an era of wide choice, many viewers will 'pass on the wholesome, healthy and carefully crafted in favour of the easily digestible, pre-packaged and the undemanding'
- an enduring definition of public service broadcasting will be impossible to formulate
- it relies on regulators who will be unable to do a comprehensive job
- while regulation is necessary it is rapidly being outpaced by technological and commercial developments.

Bhutan suffers the disadvantages of many government-owned media that are structured like government organisations where

¹³ Jones, K., Buddhism and Social Action in Eppsteiner, The Path of Compassion.

¹⁴ Eyre R. The Guardian August 28 1999

employees work like civil servants. This will hamper competition with the commercial media at a time when it is also under pressure from the global media. The Bhutanese media will have to find the creativity, the quality, the professionalism as it grapples with its own evolution.

But the greatest shortcoming will be an acute shortage of funds, a problem which is the basis for most of the other problems.

Despite the apparent glut in media the world is short of healthy media content. To fulfil its accepted mandate and balance unhealthy programmes the public service media would have to produce voluminous original programming. With even the developed countries unable to produce adequate high quality programmes the developing world does not have the funding or the skills to meet its needs.

In a free market where content is produced only when there is a commercial return the main drivers of television content are entertainment programmes like sports and Hollywood films. Even the BBC, funded through a £ 900 million budget a year, cannot meet the demands.

Bhutan, a landlocked country which does not produce even raw material for the media, is an extreme example of the adverse economics of production and publishing. The national radio and television station is budgeted like a government department and *Kuensel* Corporation subsidises the newspaper with commercial printing.

Today, BBS and *Kuensel* are examples of potential public service media, functioning with growing independence, and fulfilling social obligations that require government subsidy. If it were to commercialise, *Kuensel* will sell only in Thimphu and Phuentsholing because distribution in the rest of the country is a loss. BBS would be forced to seek the lowest common denominator.

On the other hand the private media are showing blatant characteristics of the commercialism that is seen everywhere. Profit is the primary criteria for the production of film and music, the two most successful media, and the content is heavily influenced by Bollywood. Without a viable market it is likely that private media will have other motives like politics.

Recommendations

In drawing up recommendations for the Bhutanese media, on the basis that it must adopt a public service mandate, this paper will outline some broad needs based on the issues highlighted in this paper. This will provide a foundation for future research and policy considerations as well as specific steps based on the general direction that the policies take.

- Media access and information infrastructure needs to be central to development planning in Bhutan, not just to overcome the country's geographical barriers, but as an active player in the changes. (MIS, p.27) The draft Constitution is expected to guarantee freedom of expression and freedom of the media so it is necessary that the technological and legal structures are in place.
- The responsibility of the public service media also requires that the inevitable freedom of the media must come with a strong sense of accountability. Professional maturity being a long-term process, it is critical that the laws, rules, and institutions are put in place to ensure the accountability of the media.
- It is a healthy development that the Constitution is already being pre-empted by a converged Media Act. Regulations are being put in place and a Media Regulatory Authority has been established. Lessons from other societies would indicate that a code of conduct and code of ethics for journalists would serve the society well.
- Education and training of media professionals working in the changing environment will be critical to the success of the government's vision. This means the need for specific media courses, particularly for new private media in future.
- Various forms of filters will be required to ensure that the privatization of media enhances the citizens' needs and avoids the pitfalls of commercialism, which is driving much of the world's media today. Such filters would include guidelines for advertising, filming, television programmes, and directions for the print media.
- Media literacy programmes need to be introduced for the younger generation, the public, and the government to promote greater public participation in defining the parameters and guidelines for media to develop.
- Globalisation is an important filter. It requires a clear understanding of the global media and its impact as well as policy guidelines for both the international and local media to preserve Bhutan's unique cultural heritage.
- Diversification of media ownership is one of the most fundamental building blocks of a true democracy. Media ownership in Bhutan must be distributed region-wise with a ceiling placed on cross media ownership to avoid monopolies. Ownership must also reflect the pluralism of a democratic

society.

- Subsidy: As a landlocked developing country, Bhutan will be faced with the high costs of media production. The public service media will require subsidy in a variety of forms, from direct budgetary grants to indirect input like infrastructure, advertising, tax waivers, and other policy considerations. The government has invested in the information sector and laid the groundwork for electronic infrastructure with the establishment of the telecom network and the distribution of power. Such investments will need to extend to all areas of the media, including equipment and training of professionals.
- Funding should not be solely a state responsibility. Bhutan can draw from the experience of other countries and look at a range of source including license fees, direct and indirect subsidies from the public, advertising, and sponsors, divesting of shares of government owned media, and the sale of commercial products.
- The consumers must contribute so that they develop a sense of ownership that would be a healthy trend in a small society where media issues will inevitably be personalized. The consumer can pay in the form of license fees and the purchase of shares.

The Bhutanese media is still in its infancy but infancy can be an advantage. We are starting at the beginning and have vast global and regional experiences to draw from. As in other areas of development Bhutan can also skip the past generations of technology and take advantage of the latest advances. Just as *Kuensel* missed decades of the hot metal press and began the newspaper on a modern desk-top publishing system, Bhutanese media can make the best use of the ICT revolution. It must fulfil the progressive policies established by an enlightened leadership.

Conclusion

The Bhutanese media must be conscious that it functions in the environment of a small vulnerable society that survives on the strength of a distinct cultural identity. The development of the media must, therefore, show sensitivity to this cultural and social complexity in the environment of the rapid political transformation. The Bhutanese media will, in many ways, represent the credibility of the Bhutanese system and the credibility of change itself.

Although the role of journalism has changed through history in rapidly changing environments, it will continue to be an important player in national development. As Bhutan opens up to unprecedented change,

the role of the media has never been so critical, a role that will become more important with time.

GNH represents an enlightened approach to development and change. The Bhutanese media has a central role in the operationalization of GNH, not just to inform, educate, and entertain the audience, but to truly empower people so that they develop the ability and achieve the freedom to attain happiness.

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