

# Selling Desire and Dissatisfaction: Why Advertising should be banned From Bhutanese Television

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## Abstract

*Managing modern media represents a fundamental challenge for Bhutanese government, society and culture. As a commercialised force, modern media seeks new markets in order to profit from them. The extent to which any local population is genuinely enhanced in the process is a matter of serious debate. This paper considers the downside of commercial media and its intentions in Bhutan by looking at the nature of commercial television and how it might be constructively managed by Buddhist aspirations. Central to the argument that follows is the psychological nature of desire and dissatisfaction and how these states are to be minimised in a Buddhist sensibility but maximised in a commercialised one. Commercial television is driven by a marketing agenda that seeks to embed deep-seated desire and dissatisfaction in order that these be profitably exploited by selling material goods that will nullify these newly cultivated feelings of lack. From a Buddhist perspective this can only be destructive to positive progress when one bears in mind that the Four Noble Truths see desire as constituting the critical entrapment that needs to be overcome if individuals (and society as a whole) are to be capable of meaningful progress towards genuine feelings of fulfilment. Advertising on television aims to undo the pull of Buddhist aspiration and entrap populations within a delusional and harmful materialism. The conclusion reached in this paper is that Bhutan ought to consider an outright ban on television advertising in the same way as it has effectively banned billboard advertising across much of the country.*

## Introduction

The banner under which we gather begs two essential

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questions: what precisely will the impacts of media on Bhutanese culture be and how might these influences be best managed in order that they contribute effectively to the happy society that national policy seeks? This writing will attempt to shed a little light on these complex but essential questions through examining the broad nature of commercial media impact particularly in the domain of television.

Before proceeding though, I should make my working definitions clear. Media in the context of this paper is taken to include all major channels of technology-based communication – television, radio, newspapers, cell-phones, magazines, the internet etc. Taken together these are sources of information, advice, entertainment, persuasion, titillation and profit. (The last factor is, as we shall see, a critical component in understanding the nature of modern media and its intentions). Culture in this paper, is taken to represent the shared worldview a society coheres around and in particular, the sets of moral ideals its teachings, activities and practices aim to facilitate. As with media, the intention of cultural arrangements is what I will focus on as this will allow for a clear point of connection between the indigenous doctrines of Bhutanese Buddhism and those of an incoming commercial medium.

### **Aspirational Culture and the Example of Buddhism**

If we choose to define culture by the ideals that lie at its heart, then we engage in an essentially aspirational analysis. In this framework, cultures exist to facilitate the achievement of a moral imperative which demands that we become more humane, wise, and inclusive in spirit. The moral codifications of the world's great religions including Buddhism, articulate and justify the most responsible ideals of human development. Participatory events such as *Tshechu*, *Puja* and *Losar* reinforce these ideals through opportunities for community engagement and participation. Acts of fasting, retreat, charitable giving, service and the cultivation of mindfulness shape individual aspiration and pull people towards personally realizing the benefits of connection and

contribution. In sustainable societies the world over culture can be seen to perform this essential role.

*The Nature of Buddhist Aspiration*

In Buddhist culture, humanity is seen to exist on a basic existential continuum – one defined by an essentially moral potential. At one extreme, we can remain ‘stuck’ as greedy, hateful and ignorant individuals, bereft of true happiness and harmful to both ourselves and others. Or alternately, we can move progressively towards the opposite pole of happiness, generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom. The measure of a well-led life then is the extent to which narrow selfishness can be effectively transcended.

In Buddhism there are three fundamental entanglements that hamper our progression and render us unhappy and harmful. These are craving, ill-will and delusion. The aim of Buddhist culture is to facilitate emancipation from these hindrances and the suffering they spread. A Buddhist cultural arrangement accordingly exists to reinforce this movement by weaving together a complex fabric of teachings, public happenings and private practices, each playing its part in validating the authority of aspiration. In Bhutanese culture, the teachings of the Buddha permeate public consciousness spread by *kanjur* and *tenjur*, *gomchen* and *gelong*, jakata stories and folk tales. Families and villages come together for ritualised celebrations that simultaneously reinforce community and Buddhist ideals. The annual *tsechu* held in *dzongs* all over Bhutan beautifully brings together many of these strands. *Lhakhangs*, *chortens*, *mani* stones and the sounds of chanting are constant reminders of Buddhist aspiration throughout the country. A parallel role is played by the painted symbolism of ‘the four friends’ which appears almost universally in Bhutan to act as a gentle prompt towards willing cooperation.

In conduct, Buddhism urges respect and care for all sentient beings and so restraint in the name of others’ thriving is a key, if not the key tenet of Buddhist philosophy in all its many forms. To help facilitate this, Buddhist culture

blesses the taking of time for reflection and for the cultivation of mindfulness. To live within such an aspirational culture is to exist consciously within an atmosphere of expectation in which tendencies towards a narrowing exclusionary selfishness are challenged by an authoritative call for personal improvement. In Buddhist culture, the cultivated individual rises above narrowness and superficiality to realize the satisfactions of a deeper connectedness and contribution. This is the ideal towards which all Buddhists are encouraged to aspire.

At the heart of Buddhist philosophy are the Four Noble Truths, a practical code for living wisely and well. In these key teachings, the Buddha identifies liberation from desire in particular as the critical pre-requisite to realizing our potential for simultaneous contribution and happiness. Simply put, the Four Noble Truths state that the suffering we experience in life has its roots in unfulfilled desire and that this suffering can be most effectively undone by following a basic set of practices known as the Eight-Fold Path. These represent eight basic modes of being aimed at overcoming the constraints of craving, ill-will and delusion and cultivating instead an essentially appreciative and generous mode of being that makes possible the simultaneous satisfaction of both self and others. Overcoming desire then is central to Buddhist aspiration as it unlocks our ascendant potential and releases us from the suffering inherent in feelings of deficit.

To indulge desire on the other hand, is to strengthen the pull of a separative self and encourage its futile demands for self-fulfillment. If desires are indulged then the self becomes caught in a perpetuating cycle of non-satisfaction. The basic dynamic that the Four Noble Truths point to is that desire and non-fulfillment are inseparable co-existent states. Desires or wants are experienced as negative states that can only be overcome by obtaining the specific object of desire. Furthermore, craving is fed by its own indulgence and the more one indulges it, the more it comes to dominate our lives. Instead of the satisfaction we think will come from giving in to craving, we end up strengthening it and its power to

overwhelm us with unhappy feelings of deprivation. This is the paradoxical karma of greed and the Buddhist solution involves undoing egotistical demanding by resisting it until finally it begins to release its delusion-forming grip on consciousness.

The mastery of attention through meditative practice in all of its forms is key to realizing our potential in Buddhism as it opens the conscious space within which integration and realization can occur. To be mindful is to be conscious of the karma of desire, wise to the subtle interconnectedness of all things and accepting of the responsibilities that emanate from these complex truths. In combination then, practicing awareness and consciously generous thought, speech and action, sets us on a practical path to realizing our simultaneous potentials for freedom, fulfillment and positive contribution to the world around us. Buddhist culture exists to facilitate these mature states and to challenge the unhappy limitations of self-centered desire.

### **Western Aspiration and the Challenge of Market Culture**

In any analysis that seriously wishes to comprehend the impact of media contact in Bhutan it is important to distinguish between the aspirational aspects of Western culture and the non-aspirational sub-culture of the market. In general, it would be fair to say that the aspirations of 'high' Western culture are largely consonant with those of Buddhism. Both value freedom, equality, justice, peace, compassion and generosity. Although each may connote different content and emphasize contrasting methods to attaining these ends, the fact that the ends are shared allows for a potentially harmonious integration. Furthermore, they share a common emphasis on achieving these ends by cultivating wisdom and moral intention.

Market culture on the other hand is an entirely different beast. In it, the high ideals of Western culture as a whole are deemed irrelevant as effective means to progress. Founding its faith in the de-personalized mechanisms of the marketplace, a different character type is idealized – a morally

unimproved one free to enact an exclusionary self-interest. In the sub-culture of the market, collectively positive outcomes are believed to be most effectively obtained by abandoning the improvement of selfish intentions as a central cultural strategy. In this collapsing of aspiration, moral maturity is undermined and here we find the fundamental challenge that market culture poses for many traditional cultures worldwide.

Throughout Western history, the market has been viewed with clear caution, due in large part to its de-moralizing potential. Inflating, lending and leveraging, conquering exploiting and gouging all constitute legitimate parts of the great battle for material gain. Unrestrained, the drive for profit polarizes as advantage is used to force an indecent distribution of material burdens and benefits. The intention to personally gain while ignoring the interconnected costs to others constitutes the destructive market mindset that any aspirational culture tries to counter. In the West, the Church contained moneyed aggressiveness for centuries under threats of immediate and permanent spiritual exile before passing responsibility into the hands of democratic government and its secular forces of law. Neither aspirational form has however, been able to hold back the market's inexorable rise to dominance.

The critical ideological liberation break for market culture came with the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment and the rational articulation of a self-correcting market mechanism. The notion of a market mechanism, as most will know, was most completely formulated by Adam Smith (and later narrowed and hardened by purists like Hayek and Friedman). Zealously expanded, its assumptions provide the perfect cover for market culture to break free of cultural/moral oversight as its mechanisms are deemed to be *necessarily* benign. In market culture then, the market assumes its own ultimate authority – one with little need for external control, moral or otherwise.

In the broader atmosphere of the European culture in which the market was conceived, personal improvement through the cultivation of moral character was still seen to be the foundational requirement for any broader social progress. Thus, as in Buddhism, civic virtues like wisdom, compassion

and generosity were to be institutionally encouraged to as great an extent as possible. But in his seminal market text, 'The Wealth of Nations', Smith proposed a contrary economic mechanism that would produce collective benefit without the need for pro-civic intention or the cultivation of moral character. It was the 'free market', a domain of economic activity liberated from traditional cultural constraints. Narrow selfishness, and not generosity drive the market to unintentionally produce the greatest benefit for the greatest number. Thus, for market culture, good intentions are unnecessary and so have imperative status in providing for the common welfare. Progress should be measured not by the improving moral intentions that may underlie it, but rather by the improving outcomes of action alone - quarterly profits, annual sales, market share, economic growth and GNP in particular. In the market fundamentalists' world exclusive intentions become alchemically transformed into inclusive outcomes by the magic of an 'Invisible Hand'. Thus, goes the argument, if market-based selfishness is so necessarily beneficial, it should, by rights, be liberated from the compromising oversight of an unnecessary and indeed obstructive cultural idealism.

As wielded by the ideologues of the free market, this argument has unstitched cultural fabrics on a global scale. This is a critical point to bear in mind when thinking of media and its specific influence on Bhutanese culture. For as we shall see, incoming media has been systematically colonized by a market culture that is singularly opposed not only to Buddhist ideals but to moral ideals in general as 'imposed' guides to market conduct.

The spread of market culture and of its ability to undo traditional societies is an astonishing historical phenomenon. Market forces have liberated themselves from the shackles of cultures, kings and governments. They have broken through layers of social and economic protection to assume the mantle of righteous hegemony in the contemporary global order. Ever since the rationalist formulation of a market with a mind of its own, economic liberalism has forced its advance under the twin principles of historical inevitability and amoral

individualism. At the tip of this advancing force these have become fused into a cynical belief in *an inevitably amoral individualism*. At this point, aspiration is deemed not only difficult but downright dangerous as it literally ceases to exist as a rational option.

In recent decades across both the over-developed and under-developed worlds, market culture has advanced with great pace. Free market capitalism has effectively erased communism from the ideological map as it has spread consumer culture deep into Eastern Europe and Asia. The restraints of Keynesianism have been largely defeated and with them the credibility of major central government control of most national economies. Nationalized industries have been privatized, barriers to ownership, imports, capital markets, land and labour torn down as government has retreated leaving societies to be arranged by market agendas. Although market sovereignty has and is being challenged in many parts of the world - perhaps most notably in Latin America and the Arab world, elsewhere the inevitability of market culture and of competitive individualism seems to be increasingly accepted. The commercialized media has played a critical role in securing these victories - operating as a channel through which non-aspirational identities are advertised and idealized. With media's capture by the intent and ideology of gain, it has been transformed into a critical source of pro-market socialization. It achieves this by incessantly encouraging a delusional solution to the sufferings inherent in the human condition.

#### **Discerning Impact - Commercial Television in Bhutan**

To consider the total impact of commercial media on Bhutanese culture would be to attempt an almost impossible task given the infinite variety of forms and content involved. Media technology has developed at a remarkable speed over the past few decades bringing wholly new potentials for entertainment, intrusion and influence. Cell-phones have metamorphosed from being limited communications devices into multi-media interfaces capable of receiving not only still



images and text but streamed TV and Movie clips. The internet has opened up endless possibilities for interaction and consumption. Computer games absorb hours of teenage attention combining advertising, action and addictiveness. Modern media is a shifting scene of immense complexity and in order to avoid the generalities that would be inherent in attempting to capture all aspects of media influence, I will from this point on limit my focus to commercial television and its role in market culture. Although more limited in scope, this will allow for a clearer analysis, and one capable of producing specific policy recommendations. In looking at television consumption there are two dimensions of influence that deserve particular attention; the effects of absorption in the medium per se, and the impacts of the commercial content that is actively delivered through the medium. The potential harmfulness of television can then be usefully considered in terms of its intention to capture attention and cultivate desire.

#### *The Capture of Attention*

The primary impact of commercial media is the absorption of attention it induces. In the case of television in particular, vast amounts of audience time are devoted to passive consumption wherever it spreads. Active talk and family interaction wither as television absorbs attention. Meal-time conversation vanishes, quiet time is obliterated and community contribution drops off precipitously (see McDonald 2004, for a summary of this literature). Television and other major media aim to absorb attention utterly, drawing it away from other interests and to the extent that it succeeds, it acts as a powerful agent of disconnection.

This disconnection operates in a number of spheres. Media absorption distances the self from social and physical surroundings as attention and awareness are captured by a small screen. It disconnects us from immediate others as we reduce interdependent interaction. It disconnects us from the general cultural atmosphere of aspiration as we remove ourselves into a non-participatory isolation from community.

And most of all, media consumption, particularly in high doses, acts to *disconnect us from ourselves*.

As a person's attention is relentlessly drawn into a commercialized media world, it is for that time at least, effectively lost to any integrative capacity for realization. The competitive drive to capture as much attention as possible pushes mass media, and television in particular, towards split-second sensationalism— more explosive effects, more traumatizing violence (real and unreal), more explicit surgery, more alluring sexuality delivered with ever-more punch and rapidity. Thus absorbed and focussed, awareness cannot connect self with others, nor with surroundings, nor with the deeper levels of one's own being. Television absorption obliterates reflective consciousness and in so-doing eradicates the broad awareness necessary for realizing the truth and value of interdependence.

(If one doubts that the above is true, I would encourage them to conduct some simple experiments. Try having a meaningful conversation with someone while the television is on at normal viewing volume. How often is your attention drawn away and the holistic quality of the flow of conversation fragmented or lost? Or try meditating with the television on. Can you control attention and focus it in ways that are not constantly shattered by televisions insistent drawing of attention into itself?).

In absorbing awareness so completely, the popular media and particularly television direct the viewer away from directly experiencing the profound satisfactions inherent in contribution and connection. The resulting 'emptiness' becomes the fertile ground in which material greed thrives. For the Buddhist scholar David Loy, consumerist market culture represents a failed 'lack project', an ultimately futile attempt to find meaning and fulfillment through material accumulation. The stuck individual of the marketer's dream, cannot be fulfilled as they fail to realize the karma of desire. As such, they provide the perfect medium for market manipulation.

In Buddhism, cultivating an integrative awareness is central to all practice. Attuned awareness allows us to

integrate emotions, rationality and insight as we realize their dynamics and co-relations. Awareness of others' troubles and joys allows us to connect generously and compassionately with them and to identify common interests. Awareness of our involvement in the natural fabric brings appreciation and a sense of respect and restraint. As consciousness expands to become more inclusive and integrative, it becomes healthier, happier and more helpful to the general cause of genuine human aspiration. With broadened awareness comes the possibility of realizing the joy of interconnection and with this felt involvement comes the ability to respond in generous, compassionate and wise ways. For Buddhists, the cultivation of these skilful means reflects the growing capacity for profound happiness. However, in market culture, commercial media aims to undermine this foundational process by drawing awareness away from realizing integration, collective involvement and appreciation.

Thus, any for-profit medium like television is inherently problematic for Buddhist aspirations insofar as it aims to export awareness from its immediate context. The total effect of hours of attentional absorption particularly in television and the internet are not fully documented but certainly in the process of consumption vast swathes of attention are turned over to a dulling and disconnecting escapism. In this privatized consciousness the individual becomes increasingly disoriented and prone to feelings of lack. This deliberately cultivated state of unsatisfactory emptiness holds the key to market expansion as it prepares the psychological grounding for a highly profitable delusion, that the problem of existential lack can be solved most efficiently through indulging an ever-expanding materialism.

#### *The Cultivation of Desire*

As market culture has emerged victorious from the aspirational project that spawned it, it has spread to capture major media as a strategic necessity. Television was formerly controlled by and large by a more edifying and civilizing imperative than mere profit-maximization. State television

along with radio generally originated in a context of an aspirational national project. From Europe to North America, from the Antipodes to Asia, public television was founded to broadcast an edifying mix of entertainment, arts, education, children's programming, politics and news. In the decisive market victories of the 1970's and 80's however, the mass media was largely handed over to profit-seeking business and with it, to the ideology of market culture. In the process advertising hours and content have intensified markedly. Thus, in New Zealand where I live for example, advert-free days and times have disappeared as market owned media have come to devote up to a quarter of all television time to direct marketing manipulation.

Transfixed by the small screen, heavy consumers are prone to delusory deception, particularly given the exact precision of the 'campaigns' and 'weapons' employed by today's marketing corporations. Material goods are inserted in the happiest of scenes, they are constantly associated with success, power, admiration, love, ease and self-esteem. In the process of applying this basically behaviourist law of association, the true routes to these outcomes are obscured and replaced by new associations between material consumption and personal realization. Direct marketing influence represents an intentional blurring of the true connection between the ends of aspiration and the immaterial means by which these can be best achieved. In the delusory world of the market, there is no need for hard aspiration and the inconvenience of challenging one's appetites if true happiness is to be secured.

Instead, the individual is constantly cajoled into believing that essential satisfaction necessarily involves the consumption of mediating material goods and services. However, it has been amply demonstrated that beyond a very basic level of material satisfaction, increased consumption is subject to the law of strictly diminishing returns. Thus, beyond a very limited point, happiness comes not from more material consumption but from the cultivation of relationship, community involvement and a sense of higher purpose and meaning. Endlessly expanding consumption in the

marketplace then is of strictly limited value in forging a happy and sustainable society (see McDonald 2003, for a review of relevant literature).

In Buddhism, to buy into the temptations of materialist desire is to fall into a lack of true perspective and thus to act out of ignorance. As previously discussed, indulging desire does not lead to its cessation but to its inflammation. Desire is akin to a mosquito bite in its response to attention. If one gives into individualized material desire, one falls into a perpetual state of desire, an insatiable feeling of hunger or of lack. This is the basic state of suffering that concerned the Buddha and its cessation was seen to lie in becoming aware of desire's limitations and freeing oneself from its limiting karma. Advertising, the force that runs commercial media, seeks to embed these limitations in order that they be profitably exploited.

Considered in combination with the attentional effects of commercialized media, the fundamental challenge posed by television can be seen in relatively stark outline. Potentially it is a powerful medium for embedding desire and fracturing attentional mastery. But in seeing this, how is Bhutan expected to respond given its interest in cultivating widespread happiness? In particular, what might government do to ensure the corrupting aspects of major media are countered in the name of maintaining the genuine progress that underlies the true attainment of a GNH dream? The fact of the matter is that if media policy is not carefully crafted, the authority of Buddhist aspirations will be rapidly undermined as many individuals (and particularly the younger generation) abandon themselves to finding false purpose in the market's immediate indulgences. Media policy will I believe, be a critical test of the meaning of 'good governance' in Bhutan.

### **Good Governance and Controlling Cultural Corruption in Bhutan**

I have argued before that good governance in the context of Buddhist culture can only be defined by Buddhist ideals (see McDonald, 2005). Thus, if we place the impacts on attention

and desire within the clarifying frame of Buddhist analysis, the nature of good governance becomes clear in outline at least. Good governance exercises in facilitating the attainment of widespread wisdom, generosity and compassion through protecting the authority of these ideals. Inherent in this protection must an aspect of due diligence through which society is protected from the most egregious attempts to undermine the imperative status of these ideals. In the case of incoming market-driven media, such a rear-guard action is necessary given the aggressiveness of the intrusion. The ruthlessness of market expansion is revealed in its symbolic representations of “conquering” or “penetrating” markets, of “target populations”, “victorious campaigns” and other such violent conceptions. In the modern age, protecting a cultural worldview from aggressive corruption has become the necessary counterpart to continuing to teach and practice the more deeply rooted ideals of tradition.

So what specifically might good governance in the realm of the media involve in a Buddhist context? First of all, it should be clear that the justification for controlling commercialized media lies in directly addressing the propriety of its underlying intentions. Marketing media *intends* to cultivate delusion and do this through a fundamental process of disconnecting the individual from interconnected involvement. A market society is exposed to potent psychological manipulation intended to instill feelings of material frustration. Given limited resources, the cultivation of further greed in the contemporary world order is morally problematic to say the least and a fundamental restraint is required if justice and sustainability are to be established in the long term. A restriction on the cultivation of greed is clearly wise and is ultimately an expression of inclusive compassion for those excluded by the current economic order. Indeed, what are the next generation of Bhutanese to be left with if the current generation cannot maintain restraint? In the realm of television at least, Bhutanese officials would be exercising constructive authority if they were to institute a ban on broadcasted advertising through television.

If direct marketing were to be removed from television it would return the medium to a much more justifiable status. There is no need to have broadcasting dominated by profiteering motives and if these were tamed television and indeed all media, could play a more constructive part in shaping the public mind. In fact to purge it of this rude tendency would be to re-approach the ideal market-society balance the original Enlightenment experiment aimed for.

In the original outline of the marketplace, it was conceived as a contributory arena within which people's genuine needs and desires are serviced. Central to its legitimacy is the notion of the sovereign and rational consumer – a type that is clear about what will improve their well-being and one whose desires have been self-generated. In this conception, the free individual freely engages in exchange, wholly uncorrupted by any larger institutional manipulation. And while market culture has become highly sensitized to the 'illegitimate' meddlings of church and state, it has maintained a self-serving blindness to its own profound shaping of the public mind. Marketing delivered through the commercialized media enforces one of the most finely-honed forms of socialization that has been brought to bear on any human collective. It can cultivate feelings of guilt, fear, inclusion and failure as effectively as any organized religion and in seeking to embed manufactured desire in the public mind, marketing culture critically oversteps the boundaries of its own self-defined legitimacy.

Under assumptions of the sovereign rational consumer, the market assumes moral value as the servant of the larger public interest. But when this state is violated, the power relationship is reversed as society at large comes to serve the narrower interests of market players. In free market theology there is no legitimating argument to defend this reversal and hence the common attempt on converts behalf to collapse all moral analysis into the reductionist framework of a necessarily selfish intent. Those at the forefront of advancing market culture – marketers, defend this assault on sovereignty and rationality by hiding behind a shabby defence of merely providing neutral information for use in rational

decision making. But such self-serving duplicity is deceptive as any even brief consideration of the blatant associations forged by media advertising can instantly demonstrate. The attentions of beautiful people, the happy families, the inspiring backdrops, the fawning friends all imply that the deepest satisfactions will emanate from consuming mundane products. Such hopeless delusions systematically subvert consumer rationality and so compromise the market's genuine potential to serve society and its collective happiness. These ideals are silently replaced by corporate priorities of profit gained through shaping the public mind to expect the profound satisfactions that markets promise, but cannot provide. Thus, to ban advertising from television would be to bring the market closer to its proper place in a decent and improving social order and it is, for reasons previously explained, essential as a protective measure for any aspirational culture founding its progress on the constant cultivation of self-restraint.

There are additional benefits to the central ones that have been argued thus far, a key one being a critical slowing in the pace of social and market reformation. In many cases, traditional cultural aspirations are primarily undone by the disorienting pace of change that suddenly-opened markets experience. To allow unrestricted access, especially for media and advertising influence, would be to open Bhutan to a powerfully disorienting whirlwind of change. If this pace were slowed by silencing the frenetic insistence of marketers, there is a very real chance that the market as a whole could be governed in ways that contribute considerably to national happiness. It is important to note here that in banning advertisements cheapening intentions, no restrictions are placed upon the expansion of any goods or services in the economy. These can enter and thrive as the public chooses. It is not the right of the market to function organically that is being challenged but rather the right of the market to force its expansion through false association and collective demoralization. If falsely inflated and poorly considered demand is reduced, sensible and sustainable direction of the 'market as servant of society' is much more likely. With its hyper-



aggressiveness tamed the market can be absorbed within a more responsible cultural framework - one in which happiness ultimately lies in realms beyond the restrictive psychology of purely personal gain.

Television content is as we know, increasingly shaped by commercial incentives to capture and retain attention. The Bhutanese government like those in all nations will need to institute and apply a rigorous code to govern media content and use. In more commercialized societies used to managing media content, violent or sexually explicit programming is limited to the later hours of the evening. Pornography and sociopathy, gambling and racism are monitored by censors and compliance structures are in place to remove the most offensive programming. These, along with a whole raft of measures need to codified and put in place as soon as possible. In previous writings I have suggested considering an overall limit to hours of broadcast in order that the essentially disconnecting power of television be restricted in a simple but effective way. All day and all night broadcasting is not a right that any media company has as a matter of course. I would again suggest that some such restrictions be actively included in any broad review of the media's place in a changing Bhutanese society.

### **Conclusion**

In 2005, Bhutan received much positive mention in the international press for instituting two restrictions over the market. First, it banned the sale of cigarettes in the kingdom given the health costs associated with the habit. Second, the City authorities in Thimphu instituted a ban on billboard and shop-front advertising. These moves are positive examples of good governance where the larger interests of community health or aesthetics are maintained in the face of a potentially compromising market shift.

I believe that banning television advertising in Bhutan would likewise constitute a positive example of good governance in a Buddhist context. It, in combination with a ban on billboard advertising and other complimentary policies

could constructively contain the most impertinent intrusions of market culture. It is abundantly clear that the market philosophy of gain and disconnection is failing us and that central to its failure is an ignorance of the fundamental importance of recognizing inter-dependence and the responsibilities that attend it. Sooner rather than later, we are as a species going to have to fundamentally challenge the logic of a self-correcting market model given its demonstrable failure to correct its own disastrous trajectory.

Appetites are clearly outstripping the material base of the planetary ecosystem and as such they need to be contained. Bhutan could set the world a positive example by actively banishing advertising from television. It would simultaneously demonstrate the non-inevitability of market hegemony and provide an alternative model of more responsible development for others. As current levels of television saturation in Bhutan are relatively low, few major costs would be involved. The usual arguments that if advertising is limited, jobs will be lost, simply does not apply to Bhutan as a predominantly non-industrialized society. Social change in a positive direction tends to come as a result of inspiration, and if Bhutan were to judiciously tone down the aggressive assault of marketing culture it might inspire similarly sensible and responsible moves elsewhere.

And finally while talking of inspiration it is critical that we remain aware of the essential nature of the Middle Path in Buddhist culture. To balance the old and the new in constructive ways is the challenge set before government in Bhutan. It involves a walk along a razor's edge of fine balance. The market and the media will inevitably continue to enter Bhutan and to fertilize its existing culture. In finding the middle way though, a certain clarity is required within which considerate and balanced decisions can be made. Commercial media pulls consciousness so radically and effectively into itself that it leads us far from a middle way and beyond the balancing pull of Buddhist aspiration. Buddhism rules out extreme methods of involuntary force to gain adherence and if balance is to be obtained, incoming market culture must similarly be restrained from its use of mass marketing

weaponry to secure irrational conversion.

If good governance is defined by the cultural aspirations it seeks to serve, then good Buddhist governance in Bhutan would involve controlling the socially destructive impacts of advertising and excessive desire. In so-doing government would be acting in a way conducive to happiness, by maintaining the cultural pull towards appreciation, satisfaction, generosity, wisdom and care, while removing much of the anti-cultural pull towards non-appreciation, dissatisfaction, selfishness, delusion and carelessness. Such policy formation would rejuvenate a positive cycle wherein traditional wisdom, good governance and private practice reinforce each other to secure a balanced and responsible happiness. If on the other hand, the impacts of market media are not brought under the authority of good governance then a negative and unhappy cycle of deterioration will almost certainly begin in which significant sectors of Bhutanese society abandon responsibility, care and wisdom to the detriment of on-going happiness. (See McDonald, 2005 for more detailed development of this cyclical model).

The world would be a better place if wisdom, generosity and care lay at the heart of the global order. But as market culture continues to expand its dominion it systematically collapses personal aspiration and embeds a radically less progressive sentiment. Media policy in Bhutan represents a critical test of the country's ability to protect its cultural inheritance and advance a wiser model of development. In this paper, I have focussed on television to illustrate the propriety of recommending that media policy be governed by Buddhist ideals and understandings. The argument however, extends in thematic fashion to include all incoming media intent on spreading a new non-aspirational psychology. Bhutan's GNH framework assumes that the satisfactions of Buddhist aspiration are superior to those of the market - hence the elevation of GNH above GNP as a measure of importance. Harmony, happiness and sustainability cannot be built by cultivating isolation, dissatisfaction and careless consumption and thus cannot be secured in any society dominated by systematic marketing suggestion and the

hungry consciousness it intentionally breeds. Keeping this understanding firmly in mind will go a long way towards crafting a sensible and culturally consonant response not only to the specific disruptions of television, but further, to the broader challenge of media management in general.

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