

Media and the Maverick Mind: Need for Media Literacy: A Lay View

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Abstract

This paper makes an attempt to provide a glimpse of the evolution of media over the years in response to the changing warrant of times; then it discusses the scope of media literacy and the importance and characteristics of media and media bias. An attempt is then made to discuss the advent of mass media in Bhutan and their role in the emerging political scenario; the paper concludes by suggesting the need for a more enlightened responsibility for the Bhutanese media.

Introduction

The human body is a multi-faceted receiver of myriad impressions and stimuli that permeate our environment. We receive the world and its numerous impressions and presences with our eyes, with our ears, with our hands, with our nose, and with our tongue. We know and interpret our environment by seeing, by hearing, by touching, by smelling, and by tasting. Our senses open our being to the world and bring the world to us. We encounter the physical objects, the sights, the sounds, the smells, the feel, and the taste, and create internal images of the objects and events that surround us.

Samovar et al (1981, 107) argue that:

What we see is light transmitted to us in the form of electromagnetic radiation; what we hear arrives in the form of different air pressures. Our taste and smell are the result of various molecules coming in contact with our mouths and noses, and what we feel or touch is really

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various forms of energy pressing our bodies. These energies carry no inherent experience for us. Experience, as we speak of it here, is each of us making sense out of our environment through the development of structure, stability, and meaning of our perceptions. This development involves internal operations that we perform by converting these impinging energies into electrochemical, neurological impulses that we route through our nervous system to our brains, where we convert them into meaningful experiences.

In as much as all human beings possessed the organs of sense, we were autonomous, self-reliant and self-sufficient. There being no relevance of a divide on either side of which we could fall, we were all equal. There was true democracy, if we will.

This mode of knowing and understanding our surrounding was the result of direct experience. We were decisive actors in as much as we used our own faculties without any suggestion or manipulation from other quarters to perceive reality. It was a world directly lived. Now, the world is *re-presented* to us through the media.

The word media (singular – medium) comes from an old Latin root—*medius*-- meaning ‘middle’. Media, therefore, refer to all the technological processes that operate between the sender of a message and the receiver, thus facilitating communication. The ‘middle’ is the communication link between the encoder of a message and the decoder. Communication happens when the sender, or encoder, and the recipient, or decoder, share the intent of the message transmitted through different forms of media. A & C Black (2006) define “media as the various means of mass communication considered as a whole, including television, radio, magazines and newspapers, together with people involved in their production”.

According to Toffler (1983), historically, the evolution of media can be seen as following at least three modes of communication. In the first wave, communication was direct as it passed from mouth to mouth and face to face within very small groups or communities. In the absence of newspapers,

radio, or television, the only viable means of communicating messages to reach a large audience was by assembling a crowd, which was the first mass medium.

In the course of time, as the system of wealth creation came to be based more and more on mass production in a factory, there was the need for greater communication at a distance and this need led to the rise of the post office, telegraph, and telephone. Necessity was the mother of invention already. The need to have a more homogeneous workforce in the factories led to the invention of more technically-based mass medium. The result was the invention of newspapers, magazines, movies, radio, and television. All these media were capable of carrying the same message to millions of people at the same time.

They became the principal instruments of the industrial societies.

The third wave communication system represents the realities and needs of the post-mass production economy. In this mode, the products are customized and their images, ideas, and symbols are sent to closely targeted groups, population segments, markets, age categories, professions, and ethnic and life-style groupings. This new, high diversity of messages and media is necessary in the light of the changed system of wealth creation which requires a far more heterogeneous workforce and population. The new media are closely inter-linked and fused together, feeding data, images, and symbols back and forth into one another, using fax, computers, word processors, electronic type-setters, digitized imagery, electronic networks, satellites, or other inter-linked technologies.

Elsewhere in the world, conventional methods of communication have ranged from cloud messengers to pigeons to horse-riders to runners to postal carriers to Morse code to telephones to electronic mails, with all the intervening media that have connected peoples and communities and nations through history. The need to communicate has engaged the ingenuity of the human race down the centuries to invent myriad ways to send and receive messages from the most intimate and personal to the most formal and official.

Media and their Importance

Today, media include radio, television, newspapers, books, movies, the Internet, recorded music, magazines and other means of communication. Media occupy a significant amount of our time and become so powerful a social institution that they are supplanting or relegating to the background the influence of the older institutions such as the education system, culture, or religion. Most people in the more advanced societies cannot imagine life without the various manifestations of the media. Life would be totally different if there was no television, movies, radio, recorded music, computers, books, magazines, newspapers, Internet, and the like.

Croteau and Hoyness (2000, 5-6) assert that:

If the media were eliminated, nothing else would be the same. Our entertainment would be different. We would not follow sports teams in newspapers, watch TV, or go to a movie for fun. We would not listen to recorded music at parties or for relaxation. Our understanding of politics and the world around us would be different because we would not have newspapers, television, magazines, and books to explain what is happening in our communities and beyond. Even our perceptions of ourselves would probably be different since we would not have television characters and advertising images to compare ourselves against. For example, we might not concern ourselves so much with the latest fashions, music, or cars if ads did not imply that we should be concerned with such things.

Croteau and Hoyness suggest that if there were no media, we would have plenty of time for ourselves in which to engage in other creative hobbies; our social and community life would be more active; and we would occupy ourselves in educational discussions and debates. They point to the influence of the changes beyond our personal lives: "The behaviour of politicians, business executives, and leaders in other fields would change without media. Government would operate differently. Without advertising, business would be fundamentally different. Education, religion, and every other institution would also be different without media, as would

social movements and citizens' organizations."(ibid, 6-7)

One of the momentous developments in the evolution of mass media was the invention of the printing press. The print medium was the only means of reaching out to a large audience at a distance, thanks to the invention of the printing press by Johannes Guttenberg in 1450 by converting the winepress into the first printing press. According to Anderson (1991, 37), "at least 20, 000,000 books had already been printed by 1500, signalling the onset of Benjamin's 'age of mechanical reproduction'". He goes on to say that "...possibly as many as 200,000,000 volumes had been manufactured by 1600...it is no wonder that Francis Bacon believed that print had changed 'the appearance and state of the world'".

The compulsion of physical distribution of the products of print medium still remained because the speed of distribution depended on the speed of the horse, or train, or ship—the main means of transport then.

The limitations of the print medium were, however, resolved by the sound recording and film medium, the broadcast media, and the 'new' media, developed and perfected over 130 years since Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877. The invention of radio followed by television has transformed broadcast media. In the same way, the development of the magnetic tape, compact disc, the Internet, moving pictures, talking pictures, videocassette recorders, digital video disk, in the print, film media—all the 'new' media that uses cable television, satellites, fiber optic technologies, and computers—have revolutionized mass media.

The Kingdom of Bhutan has had its own many forms and media to communicate between people and people, community and community, from valley to valley, district to district, between ruler and ruler, from government to people, people to government, sovereign to subjects, citizens to sovereign, between government and government, head of state and head of state, nation and nation. The purposes of communication too have varied from the need to arrange the marriage of the daughter or bartering a horse with a bull, to celebration of a local festival, to collection of tax, to labour

contribution, to administration of local affairs, to national referenda, to deputation of state representatives, or to exchange of greetings, among others.

The Royal Government of Bhutan articulated its acknowledgement of the prospect that media has for Bhutan to “leapfrog into the 21st century and to help form a society enriched by information, knowledge and skills” during the 2000 Round Table Meeting held in Thimphu with its development partners.

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck underscored the importance of the media in the development of the country:

Today, as Bhutan enters the age of communications, its priorities are geared to meet the needs and demands of the times. The kingdom has seen a dramatic increase in the literacy rate of the population as a result of the special attention given by the Royal Government to the education sector. As technological advancement brings the international community closer together, it has also established the infrastructure to modernize and strengthen communication and information links with the rest of the world. It is the policy of the Royal Government, therefore, to facilitate and encourage the professional growth of the Bhutanese media which must play an important role in all areas of development. Such a role is especially relevant to the national policy of decentralization which aims to involve all sections of the society in the socio-economic and political development of the kingdom. (Pek, 2003)

Further, according to the 2003 draft media policy: “the Royal Government of Bhutan recognizes the role that the Bhutanese media will have to play in national development in a changing environment. Following the initiative taken by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo, the royal government emphasizes that the media must continue to grow in professionalism to fulfill its role to ‘Inform, Educate, and Entertain’.”

The Department of Information Technology’s *Bhutan ICT Policy & Strategies* (July 2004) spells out the Royal Government’s overall objectives to develop ICT in the country:

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- To use ICT for good governance;
- To create a Bhutanese info-culture; and
- To create a high-tech habitat.

These objectives are to be pursued through formulation of sound policy, development of infrastructure, building of human capacity, enhancing content and application, and expanding opportunities for enterprise. In his foreword to the BIPS document, the then Prime Minister of Bhutan, Lyonpo Jigme Thinley said that

The application of ICT to Bhutan's development needs holds great promise for all sectors. Providing relevant market information can increase the income of our farmers. New communications technologies can take phone lines and data into remote valleys. ICT can improve the operations of our government institutions, increasing integrity, accountability and transparency. It can be a means to express our unique national identity and culture through local media and cultural preservation initiatives.

Lyonpo added that "ICT can also play an important role in furthering Bhutan's political evolution. The policy of decentralization can be enhanced through improved access to information and services in remote regions. Democratization will be aided by increasing citizen access to information and participation in the political process."

The government's ICT White Paper (October 2003) states that "with people at the centre of development, Bhutan will harness the benefits of ICT, both as an enabler and as an industry, to realize the Millenium Development Goals and towards enhancing Gross National Happiness."

When media is mentioned in Bhutan, what comes to mind immediately is the broadcast media particularly represented by radio that includes BBS, regional and international programmes; print media that include *Kuensel*, and of late *Bhutan Times* and *Bhutan Observer*, and regional and international programmes. Recent arrivals include television--BBS, regional and international; film and music—local, regional and international—and most recently the Internet. Books, magazines, journals, art, architecture,

festivals, dances, songs, rituals, sports, traditional ballads, and other forms of cultural practices allow the Bhutanese to communicate among themselves and with the outside world.

Media and Media Characteristics

Media are among the most aggressive and pervasive of forces that characterize modern life. They inform and influence our life and culture in obvious and subtle ways, shaping the way we think and act. It is, therefore, necessary to learn how to view the products of media through a critical lens and deconstruct the media text to understand the message beneath the surface. Dawe et al (1999) advance the theory that all media texts:

- Are a function of constructions;
- Have their own codes through which they communicate;
- Have a commercial value;
- Have a target audience;
- Express values;
- Contain representations.

Every product of media is a function of numerous decisions involving several players bent on creating the desired effect on the customers. All the materials and resources are consciously marshaled to create the impression of the real and the natural.

Every medium has its own distinct language, code, and features that it uses to communicate its message. It employs the technical resources that include the different kinds of camera shots, brush techniques, perspectives, and composition to achieve the effect. The symbolical codes the medium uses include the images that convey the message through connotation rather than by denotation.

All media texts have a hidden agenda. They have a commercial motive and want to sell a product.

As an audience, a viewer brings his or her own experience, meaning, or outlook to bear on what he or she is

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viewing. The way one views a media text depends upon one's upbringing, family values, cultural sensitivities, age, gender, needs and anxieties, education, attitude, and experiences in life.

Many media texts have a target audience such as children of a certain age-group, youth, women, and other critical target groups which determine the volume of investment that the media industry is going to make.

Media texts are value-laden. They carry strong messages and encourage a certain way of life or standard of living. A critical viewer must crack the media code and look beneath the surface to find out what the media text is up to and draw one's own considered conclusions.

Media texts wield immense power of portrayal. Often, the representation of people and objects could be true to life; but at other times, what is portrayed is out of proportion to reality. Media are often accused of presenting an unrealistic or a stereotypical view of certain classes or groups causing untold harm to the parties in the process.

Toutant et al (1998) discuss the way media texts exploit the power of images, words, and sounds to achieve their effect. Decoding advertisements, for instance, involves looking at how they work and what they hope to achieve. Knowing this requires critical thinking about images, words, and sounds.

Images

Photographs are the most common type of images in advertising because they give the impression of being the most realistic. It is important to know though that an image in an ad is not trying to show reality, but to create the right mood to persuade the viewer to buy the product. A critical viewer needs to ask:

- How are content, composition, camera techniques, colour, and light used to create the mood?
- What do the images have to do with the product? Do they give us factual information?

- How would we describe the people in the ad? Are they average in looks? Are they stereotypes? What does their body language communicate?

Words

Media texts communicate the message by implication rather than by statement. They suggest rather than say. Advertisers exploit the creative and persuasive potential of words to hook the customers. They use metaphors, metonymy, hyperbole, euphemism or fuzzy words, and facts and figures as a means of communicating their message.

Critical viewers ask:

- What mood is created by the choice of words?
- Are the claims for the product based on facts?

Sound

Sound is the only means of communication in a radio advertisement. A television commercial has the luxury of image to work with sounds to create the desired effect. The choice of music, the tone of voice, the pace of speaking—all contribute to communicate the message. What mood is created by the choice of music?

Toutant et al present three powerful instruments that the advertising industry uses to catch our attention. They call these emotional hooks! They are: 1] Testimonial, 2] Lifestyle, and 3] Common fears. As far as testimonial goes, a well-known person declares the product to be terrific. This strategy appeals to our need to find acceptance and security by modeling ourselves after hero figures. Lifestyle—here the product is associated with a desirable life. This hook appeals to our desire to fit into the society and achieve success, an exciting life, good health, and happiness. Common fears are a dimension of our life which the advertising industry capitalizes on by focusing on our common insecurity. Am I pretty enough? What do my friends think of me? The product is shown to be the solution to the imagined problem.

Literacy and Media Literacy

The changing wisdom of successive generations question facts, discards ideas, and demolishes theories. The robust certainties of yesterday become the shaky uncertainties of today, and tomorrow will see the inadequacy of today's sound affirmations. In traditional societies, the ability to read and write conferred on the individual special privileges and standing vis-à-vis those who were not as fortunate. Even to this day, significant numbers of children and adults around the world still do not enjoy this basic human right and are denied the light of learning. The opportunity of just being able to read and write will take a long time for many millions. However, there is the emergence of a new reality to confront—that of the digital divide that separates the haves and have-nots of a different order. The old notion of the economic haves and have-nots is not a unique phenomenon anymore. In the more fortunate parts of the world, the mere ability to read and write is not good enough. One must be media-literate.

According to Considine (1995, online) Media literacy generally refers to “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of formats including print and non-print”. To Considine, media literacy is an expanded information and communication skill that is responsive to the changing nature of information in the society. Media literacy addresses skills the students need to be taught in school, the competencies citizens need to have as they consume information in their homes and living rooms, and the abilities workers need to have as they try to meet the challenges of the economy. With the emergence of infotainment and the decline of objective, neutral, and reliable news, responsible citizens need to possess the ability to question the accuracy and authenticity of information in all its forms, not just print. They need the ability to make reflective critical responses to this information.

Considine states that media literacy is about more than just consuming information. A media literate person is able to produce, create, and successfully communicate information in all its forms, not just print. When it comes to media

literacy at the institutional level, particularly the education system, it is a function of understanding the culture and lifestyle of the youth, finding out the influences that they encounter, how they respond to those influences and preparing them to be critical receivers and users of these influences. The major sources of the influence that young people encounter are the mass media. It is important for the students to learn how to analyze and evaluate what they see and read and form their own considered opinion, without being carried away by the spectacle. As far as teachers are concerned, media literacy provides them with an opportunity to examine the reliability, authenticity, and motive of the media texts.

It is important to make use of the tremendous opportunities opened up by the proliferation of the media industry. The media channels bring the world of science, technology, sports, music, art, literature, mathematics, philosophy, jurisprudence, economics, politics, fashion, holidays, hobbies, governance, environment, people, and cultures from around the world to our living room. Media also bring to us a whole body of information, sights and sounds and power which are not always wholesome. Inability to distinguish what nourishes our positive values and higher tastes could have costly consequences on young minds. The spectacle of Helen of Troy on the stage could lead to a Faustian end. Media can suck the soul and lead an individual to premature damnation of sorts.

It is, therefore, crucial that media opportunities are marshaled to be a pathway to knowledge and individual growth rather than an instrument of bondage and depravity. Students need to be given opportunities to develop their own voice and personality and discover their place in the larger scheme of the world. At times, students could be involved in comparing the effect of a written text with a film version, in examining the images in music videos and newspapers, in writing an article or a letter to the editor on a certain media issue, in producing a pamphlet or a little programme for the radio, or even in creating a video of their own.

Even as students encounter a media text, they need to

constantly ask themselves:

What is the message being conveyed?

What is the source of the message?

How is the message being sent and who is it intended for?

What could be the purpose of this message?

What is the relevance of this message to me? Do I need it?

Responding to a visual text involves our aesthetic, emotive as well as affective dimensions. It is important here for the teachers to encourage the students to interact with a visual text in their own individual way and express their opinions in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

As suggested in Atlantic Canada (2000) students can:

— Engage in a discussion about the elements of design and colour and explore the ways in which the artist communicates his or her message by using these elements;

— Discuss the emotions and feelings the visual image creates in them, and create their own visual representation of a written text that they are doing;

— Deliberate on the special effects a visual image creates that other media do not.

Our schools of the future could be vastly different places of learning compared to today. In many countries, students and teachers have access to a huge body of information available through the Internet, on-line databases, multimedia sources, and CD-ROMS, among a host of others. Books and teachers will still be there, but the way information is found, manipulated, and used could be very different. This changed scenario would call for the achievement of information literacy that involves “the ability to access, interpret, evaluate, organize, select, produce and communicate information through a variety of media technologies and contexts to meet diverse learning needs and purposes” (English Language Arts, 2000).

Some futurists are already visualizing tomorrow’s

classrooms. For Rickelman and Kaplan, for instance:

This classroom will be made up of several learning centers, with no identifiable focus for information delivery. Tables will be placed around the room. The teacher will still provide guidance and facilitate student learning, but the methods will be vastly different. Some students may be in a corner of the room, learning about whales from a multimedia, interactive CD-ROM program. Other students will be linked to the Internet, where in small groups they will search web sites for information and use e-mail to link to people in other countries. Some students may leave the classroom to attend a teleconference with students from other continents and compare and contrast where they live as they learn about diverse world customs. Homework assignments are downloaded into students' portable computers for them to take home, or homework can be accessed from home via the Internet. Students who are absent or who are on vacation can have easy access to work completed throughout the day as well as homework assignments that they missed. They can submit assignments via e-mail or the Internet. The world, via computer links, will be the standard reference. More traditional students might use key word searches to gather relevant information, and issues such as web site censorship and the veracity of Internet information will be discussed in school and home.

- Rickelman and Kaplan 2000, 307

This is the vision of an ideal technology-rich scenario, but most schools especially in the poorer countries of the world are still struggling with the barest minimum of resources. Yet, the opportunities provided by the Internet to access information are huge and exciting. As things stand, more and more schools are going to become wired. The Internet could soon become the most preferred mode of sharing information amongst the different stakeholders including the school, teachers, parents, and students. Information explosion and its abundance can often be maddening and the searcher could be lost in the digital wilderness. It is, therefore, important that teachers and students know how to locate the relevant information in a sea

of possibilities. Key word search is a helpful guide to narrow down the field to a manageable level and relevance.

With all the excitement and opportunities that the Internet provides, it has its own share of problems. Well used, the Internet is an inexhaustible mine of information and education; abused, it can be the source of all dangers. The violence and the horror, pornography and scandals that the Internet and the entertainment industry breeds are a major cause for concern among parents and teachers. As early as 1993, the American Psychological Association estimated that an average American child saw 8,000 murders on television before finishing elementary school.

Several studies have been done to assess the effects of media violence. Some results point to the fact that exposure to violent programming could lead to more violence. Children exposed to violence on the screen could exhibit violent behaviour, otherwise termed 'aggressor effect', or increased fearfulness about violence, otherwise termed 'victim effect', or increased callousness about violence directed at others, otherwise termed 'bystander effect'. Paik and Comstock (1994) analyzed over 200 studies on television violence and concluded that there was 'a positive and significant correlation between television violence and aggressive behaviour' (cited in Croteau and Hoynes, 2000, 109)

Speaking on the downsides of popular culture, the 1995 presidential candidate, Bob Dole remarked: "One of the greatest threats to American family values is the way our popular culture ridicules them. Our music, movies, television and advertising regularly push the limits of decency, bombarding our children with destructive messages of casual violence and even more casual sex." He expressed his concern over the work of "corporate executives who hide behind the lofty language of free speech to profit from the debasing of America", and added, "We must hold Hollywood and the entire entertainment industry accountable for putting profit ahead of common decency."

Children with access to the Internet can easily obtain pornographic or sexually explicit, morally repugnant, and indecent or obscene materials online—materials that may not

otherwise be easily available in text or video version. Exposure to such materials would have a bearing relative to the power of their content and presentation. In many cases, parents and elders may have no clue to what their children are viewing.

Cyber-crime is a new phenomenon that the world is faced with. With the advent and rapid expansion of ICT, the world is fast becoming borderless. It used to be said in the eighteenth century that when France caught cold, the whole of Europe used to sneeze. Now, when a hacker or cyber-criminal hatches an idea, the whole world is infected. Geographical boundaries do not limit the passage of a computer virus that can derail crucial military, defence, and medical security systems within seconds and still the cyber-criminal could escape capture and penalty. As nations become more and more technology-dependent, cyber-terrorists become ever smarter in wrecking havoc by sabotaging online services like banking, stock exchanges, financial transactions, aviation control systems, water purification systems, and oil and gas production and storage facilities, bringing all functions to a standstill.

The concerns of the country over the use and abuse of the media were expressed by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck on June 2, 1999 when television and the Internet officially came to Bhutan:

I would like to remind our youth that television and the Internet provide a whole range of possibilities which can be both beneficial as well as negative for the individual and the society. I trust that you will exercise your good sense and judgment in using the Internet and television.

- Pek, 2003

Talking about the media, Marshall McLuhan, Canadian commentator, theorist and professor, said:

Once we surrender our senses and nervous system to the private manipulation of those who would try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and our nerves, we don't have any rights left. Leasing our eyes and nerves to commercial interests is like handing over the common

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speech to a private corporation, or like giving the earth's atmosphere to a company as a monopoly.

- Anderson & Barry, 2002, 335

Media literacy is also about the need not to surrender our soul to the machinery of advertising and popular culture.

As far as the lives and experiences of the young go, the school curricula have a significant influence in shaping both. It will be the primary responsibility of the Bhutanese education system to inform and empower the younger generation to examine the worth of what they see and hear and read. Accepted that it is not possible to barricade the youth or even adults against the unhealthy influence that they might encounter, it is still desirable and necessary to mount programmes that include media literacy as an important part of being educated. Curriculum planning, materials selection, pedagogical choices, and assessment practices will be powerful instruments in engaging and promoting the more positive energies and imaginations of the Bhutanese youth.

It is heartening that the Ministry of Education has made a positive beginning by incorporating aspects of print and visual media into the new English curriculum. The materials selected provide useful opportunities to students to examine the representation of the world by popular media and allows them to critically evaluate the construction and presentation of media messages. More needs to be done.

Media Bias

However objective and unprejudiced the media industry may claim to be, it is not totally free from taint. Part of learning about the media is to be aware of the biases that plague even the media. Media bias is a term used to describe a real or perceived bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media, in the selection of which events will be reported and how they are covered. The term 'media bias' usually refers to a pervasive or widespread bias contravening the standards of journalism, rather than the perspective of an individual journalist or article (Wikipedia).

Wikipedia identifies the following kinds of bias:

- Ethnic or racial bias, including racism, nationalism and regionalism;
- Corporate bias, including advertising, coverage of political campaigns in such a way as to favour corporate interests and the reporting of issues to favour the interests of the owners of the news media;
- Class bias, including bias favouring one social class or bias ignoring social or class divisions;
- Political bias, including bias in favour of or against a particular political party or candidate. Political bias has been a feature of mass media since its birth with the invention of the printing press in the 15th century;
- Religious bias, including bias in which one religious viewpoint is given preference over others. Media bias towards religion is most obvious in countries where media is controlled by the state, which is in turn dominated by a particular religion;
- Sensationalism, which is bias in favour of the exceptional over the ordinary. This includes the practice whereby exceptional news may be overemphasized, distorted or fabricated to boost commercial ratings;
- Language may also be a more subtle form of bias. Use of a word with positive or negative connotations rather than a more neutral synonym can form a biased picture in the audience's mind. Eg terrorist, bombers, hijackers, militants, assailants, gunmen, extremists, attackers, freedom fighters, for insurgents...
- National and ethnic viewpoint — many news organizations reflect or are perceived to reflect in some way the viewpoint of the geographic, ethnic, and national population that they primarily serve. Media within countries is sometimes seen as being sycophantic or unquestioning about the country's

government.

Print media has its own share of biases. Galtung and Rage (Goatley, 2000) have identified a number of factors that determine the selection of material for news which include the following:

- Bibliography to elite persons—only prominent individuals or popular heroes are newsworthy;
- Bibliography to elite nations—only powerful and wealthy nations make news and are worth highlighting;
- Media are often aligned with certain cultures rather than others and report more favourably on them;
- The degree of intensity of the news and its impact value are significant factors;
- Unexpectedness provides novelty to the news report and gives media an element of surprise;
- Happenings that focus on the negative sells. Media find the positive monotonous and unappealing. Negativity is, therefore, the favoured fare.

The Bhutanese media have come a long way; they have a longer way to go. The print and broadcast media in particular have proved to be tremendously effective tools in articulating the various dimensions of our country and our culture. They have followed the diverse events and developments that have marked and shaped the march of our country in the course of the last several years particularly in the aftermath of the advent of Bhutan's modern socio-economic development. The media have recorded and highlighted the upbeat moments as well as moments of despair, times of great national jubilation as well as times of great anxiety, periods of abundance as well as phases of scarcity, experiences of all-galvanizing patriotic upsurge as well as moments of doubt and insecurity. The Bhutanese media have sung hymns of glory about the wonder that is Druk Yul; they have described the sights and the sounds and the smells that characterize the unparalleled

floral and faunal wealth of our country. The media have sat in the hall of the National Assembly conference venues, workshop sites, openings and inaugurations; witnessed births and deaths; and partaken in anniversaries and observances, meetings and weddings.

The Bhutanese media have introduced and taken our country to different parts of the globe and helped raise the profile of the land and its people. The books that the Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese writers have authored and the documents, films, documentaries, journals, newsletters and magazines that the government and non-government, as well as international agencies, have produced, present their own images of Bhutan and the Bhutanese to people beyond our borders even as they have informed us about ourselves. Through the local and international media, Bhutan has been able to tap into the intellectual resources of humanity in diverse fields of science and technology, inventions and discoveries, art and literature, mathematics and philosophy, culture and beliefs, sports and fashion, and values and practices as the country continues its active engagement with the wider world further afield.

Thanks to the proliferation of telecommunications facilities, even the remotest gewogs in the country can link themselves to the rest of the world through VHF telephone lines. Over 33,000 fixed lines and 51,000 mobile phones connect the Bhutanese to themselves and to the rest of the world. The advent of satellite television has opened up new possibilities and vistas for the Bhutanese people.

The arrival and evolution of mass media have been a great boon for the Bhutanese people as they try to understand their culture, their hopes and aspirations and as they attempt to sharpen their view of the world. Media can and do reflect the obvious and the physical to a degree of precision and accuracy that is often a wonder to the lay. However, there is a deeper, profounder and less dramatic dimension to phenomena. And these often lie outside the scope of mass media.

The strength of the Eastern civilizations in general and that of Bhutanese civilization in particular is believed to

derive from the cultivation of the inner resources of the human being. We often call our religion *nang pai choed*—the religion of the inner—and we term our culture *nang pai loogsoel*—the culture of the inner. Our grandest programme yet—the cultivation of Gross National Happiness—will succeed only with the cultivation of the finer resources of the Bhutanese mind.

Having decided to lift the veil of isolation and having joined the family of nations, Bhutan needs to endeavour constantly to achieve the difficult balance between the best that it has inherited from the past and at the same time selecting and assimilating the best that modern science and technology have made available to mankind. This will include the benefits accruing from the proliferation of diverse means of communication and mass media. Will the media be able to discover and advance the best that Bhutan has or is capable of, or will it only whet the appetite for more of the flesh and matter? Will the media truly educate the Bhutanese people to select the best from among the available fare or will they merely tickle their more vulnerable and maverick selves?

All nations, communities and cultures possess the vital life-force that is more complex and subtle, unlike the active objective expression that seems more real and immediate to most. Underneath the often arrogant and pervasive external life of nations and peoples, there is the subjective self of balance, equanimity, and harmony. How do the media perceive unity and relationships that lie beyond the range of the obvious? How will the media discover the qualities that provide standards and points of reference beyond the ephemeral and the superficial? If the media feed on and pander to the more appetitive spirit of the human beings and touch them where they are most vulnerable, what will they offer to those dimensions of individuals who might rather cultivate the principle of contentment?

The power of the Bhutanese mind is already getting sorely tested against the power of the emerging power of media. Whether or not the Bhutanese mind will be able to withstand the tide of mass media and sift and sort the essential and the authentic from the flashy and the

fashionable to keep the nation's soul intact will actually determine whether the country will be able to continue being faithful to its true self.

As momentous political changes sweep across the country in the run up to 2008 and beyond, the Bhutanese media will have to decide whether it will swim with the tide and respond to events as they unfold. Or, will they lead the way and educate our masses to empower them to participate in the political process? As powerful as the media are, they have a responsibility not only to react to happenings around, but also to anticipate events and prepare the people to face up to the challenges. Of what use will this mighty force be if it does not look for and advance what is true and good and beautiful?

The Bhutanese media is also faced with the challenge of being able to present a truly inclusive and comprehensive picture of the diversity and the variety that truly constitute the uniqueness of our country. This ability will correct the often distorted view that readers on and viewers of Bhutan get from a distance. It has to have the vision and the courage to discover and highlight the uniqueness as well as the commonality that our different communities share which build the solidarity and unity of our nation. The media can and should be a most significant instrument to bring our scattered communities and people to know and appreciate that there are other people like themselves who are their compatriots.

Today, media have a unique opportunity to honour and celebrate those common bonds and similarities that unite us as a nation rather than belabouring the differences that divide us. The BBS cameras should be able to turn a full 360 degrees and shine their light in all the directions of the country. The print and non-print media, books, films, magazines, pamphlets, music, and other cultural expressions should be truly representative of the genius and contributions of the diverse peoples of our country. Media should do all they can to refrain from engaging in the ignoble job of stereotyping and taking divisive acts that weaken our society and our system.

Conclusion

The sensational and the spectacular are newsworthy, but the gentle and the sublime hold the people together. The Bhutanese media will have to discover and pursue a role for themselves beyond the dramatic and the fashionable and be truly a conscience-keeper of the nation. This too is media literacy.

In the ultimate analysis, media literacy is:

- The power of knowing only a means to an end and not an end in itself, where human beings can use the means to achieve an end of their own deciding;
- Understanding that human beings may consume information but should not be consumed by it;
- The affirmation of the integrity of the human person and valuing the sacredness of the human being as an active agent capable of making judgments about the integrity of what they encounter.

Media will serve our country well if it can help in raising “the intellectual tone of the society, cultivating the public mind, purifying national taste, supplying true principles of enthusiasm and sobriety to the ideas of the age, and facilitating the exercise of political power...” in much the same breath as Newman wished the universities to do.

If the opening of a brave new world only panders to cultivation of the flesh and leads to the debasement of the finer impulses of our people and society, the great opening will actually be a great closing of the Bhutanese mind.

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Appendix: A glimpse of the evolution of mass media through the ages

Timeline/Year	Event related to media
100 AD	Papermaking develops in China and spreads through Asia and Arab world by the year 600
700 AD	Arabs carry Chinese techniques for papermaking to the West
1000 AD	Moveable type made of clay in China
1400 AD	Moveable metal type developed in Asia
1450 AD	1456 Gutenberg perfects moveable metal type and hand press in Germany; the Bible is printed
1600 AD	First “newspapers” appear in Germany, France and Belgium
1700 AD	1702 <i>London’s Daily Courant is first daily newspaper</i>
1800 AD	1833 Mass-circulation media begin with the first “ <i>penny press</i> ” newspaper, the New York Sun
	1837 Telegraph is first demonstrated
	1839 A practical method of photography is developed by Daguerre

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	1844 Samuel Morse sets up telegraph link Washington and Baltimore
1850 AD	1876 First telephone message sent by Alexander Graham Bell
	1879 Edison patents the electric bell
	1884 Eastman perfects roll film
	1894 Motion pictures are invented and the first films are shown to the public
	1895 Radio messages transmitted by Marconi
1900 AD	1903 "Great Train Robbery" becomes model for storytelling with film
	1920 First regularly scheduled radio broadcasting, by KDKA in Pittsburg
	1927 "The Jazz Singer" is first feature-length film with synchronized speech
	1933 TV is demonstrated by RCA
	1937 First digital computer created telephone parts
	1941 First commercial TV is broadcast
	1946 The first mainframe computer is invented at the University of Pennsylvania

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	1947 First transistor is developed by Bell Labs as alternative to vacuum tubes
	1949 Network TV begins in the US
1950 AD	1956 Videotape recording (VTR) is invented
	1957 Sputnik, world's first communication satellite, is launched by USSR
	1961 San Diego cable operator is the first to import television signals from another city (Los Angeles) for distribution to subscribers
	1969 First nodes of the computer internet are created in Pentagon plan to establish a decentralized communications system that can withstand nuclear attack
	1970 Early (and expensive) video cassette recorders (VCR) introduced
	1971 Invention of the microprocessor
	1975 The first microprocessor is marketed
	Fiber optics transmission begins
	HBO begins transmitting programming to cable TV system by satellite
	1977 Qube, the first interactive cable system, begins in Columbus, Ohio

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	200,000 VCRs sold, more affordable machines enter the market and sales boom
	1990 World Wide Web (WWW) started as simple user interface for wide variety of data types
	1997 Digital video disc (DVD) first introduced
	1998 Digital television broadcasting begins.

Source: Media Society: Industries, Images and Audiences, Second Edition (2000, p 9-10) Pine Forge Press

