

# Role of Kuensel in Fostering Democracy in Bhutan

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## Abstract

*In this study, the role of Kuensel in fostering the democratic process is estimated on the basis of four important functions: provider of information, interpreter of the events, initiator of public debate, and as a watchdog. Since its inception Kuensel has greatly contributed to disseminate the information and later in promoting public discussion, albeit on a smaller scale. Findings of this study suggest that Kuensel's regular readership is not very high and also that its news reporting despite its above average quality cannot make an impact on people's opinion.*

*The finding of this sample study suggests that Kuensel is rated as average by the people for its role in fostering democracy. Its aggregate point score is 22.66 out of 40. Its failure to explore and focus the crucial community issues, and consequently its inability to provide alternative solutions to the community problem has resulted in the poor rating. Its role as a watchdog over the public institutions is also rated below average, which is not surprising considering that about 82% respondents believed that reporting in Kuensel is subject to censorship.*

*The regression estimates suggest that issues relating to participatory journalism are vital in strengthening the democratic process. It is relevant for not only Kuensel but also for other media in general.*

## Introduction

The mass media constitute the backbone of democracy. Role of print media and especially that of newspaper in strengthening democracy is extremely vital. Democracy is generally defined as the rule of the people by the people and for the people. This type of meaningful democracy requires

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that informed citizens take the most appropriate decisions regarding various aspects of governance. People make social choice through the voting process. Citizenship is a crucial issue for the success of the modern democratic state. Citizenship refers to the rights and duties of the members of a state. It is argued by historians that citizenship has thus expanded with democratization to include a wider definition of the citizen regardless of sex, age, or ethnicity. The concept was revived in the context of the modern state, notably during the French and American Revolutions, and gradually became identified more with rights than obligations. In modern times citizenship refers conventionally to the various organizations which institutionalize these rights in the welfare state.

The role of modern media is extremely crucial for the strengthening of the democratic process by educating the citizens on the various relevant issues. The media is expected to perform three basic functions: provider of information, watchdog for the people, and interpreter of the events.

Newspapers act as transmitters of information on a variety of public issues and as interpreters of different events. People, the main players in democratic systems, decide the policy issues either directly or indirectly. In this decision making process, access to information about the working of the socio-political system is essential.

We need suitable benchmarks for political knowledge to analyze what the public learns from the news media. The literature provides two broad approaches on the role of media, the civic approach and the relativist approach.

### *The Civic Approach*

Traditionally speaking, it meant providing a narrow type of 'ideal' information about the government and public policy that all citizens need to know.

### *The Relativist Approach*

It is based on the assumption that people have a limited stock of political information which is insufficient to make any social choice. The role of the media is to provide all the

necessary information that is crucial in making informed opinions and judgment on the relevant public and social issues.

But the concept of civic approach to journalism has undergone an evolution and now it is interpreted in various manners. Most would probably agree, however, that civic journalism is both a philosophy and a set of practices that require a newspaper to go beyond the mere telling of the news. Rather, it strives to invigorate the democratic process, usually by seeking out the concerns of average citizens and motivating them to become involved in solving civic problems. It requires a more active role than that of the traditionally uninvolved observer; civic-journalism coverage usually involves the promotion of public discussion of key issues and the reporting of positive, solution-oriented stories (rather than "conflict" stories). Civic journalism also usually goes beyond modes of coverage: papers sometimes organize communities (or their leaders) with activities intended to spark movement toward solutions, or at least toward greater civic unity.

It is thus quite evident that the media plays an important role in providing vital information to the people (stakeholders in the democracy). Its role in strengthening democracy lies in performing this vital task. The modern media look at this responsibility in different ways. Some act like the provider of information, others take the responsibility of providing analytical interpretation of the information and a small section, whose number is on the rise, act as public watchdogs.

How do newspaper journalists envision their social role in the broadest sense? Media researchers for several years have found that journalists seem to identify with one, two or even all three of these functions: as disseminators of information; as "watchdogs" (in some research called "adversaries") of powerful institutions (especially government); and as interpreters of events. Most studies have found that the interpretive role is embraced most widely among newspaper journalists, with the least-agreed-upon being the watchdog role.

It would be not impertinent to quote The American

Society of Newspaper Editors (1997) which highlighted the present trend:

There seems to be a declining (but still solid) commitment to all three of these traditional understandings of the purpose newspapers serve. It could be that journalists are less sure generally about the role newspapers play, or should play, in the broadest sense.

The media has a crucial role in governance, human rights and the elimination of poverty. The media can become a major force in improving the quality of governance. Tight government controls and censorship makes media ineffective. According to DFID (2001) the article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that:

Everyone has right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without any interference and to seek, receive and impart information through any media regardless of frontiers.

On the other hand too little control may lead to domination of commercial media ruled by advertising which is detrimental to the interest of those without purchasing power. Good management, professional and technical skills are equally vital to make media an effective tool in fostering democracy.

Public debate and discussions on relevant and significant issues is very crucial for the success of democracy. Nelson Mandela (1994) wrote in his autobiography about the importance of public debate in democracy:

Everyone [that] wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. ...The foundation of self governance was that all men were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens.

In the absence of the tradition of public discussion, the newspapers and other media have to play a crucial role in stimulating such discussion amongst the wider segment of the population.

In short, the media enables strengthening of democratic process by:

- Making people more aware of their rights;
- Making people more aware of political and social issues, available options;
- Initiating wider and pluralist debate on the relevant public issues;
- Drawing attention towards institutional failure such as- corruption, nepotism, callous attitudes and general inefficiency of the government machinery;
- Creating pressure for improved government performance and efficient delivery of public services; and
- Extending public accountability.

### **Media Research**

Many researchers have attempted to identify the role of the media in performing these functions. The study of evaluations of the news media—particularly in terms of one dimension, credibility—has a long tradition. Whitney (1985) has traced systematic public opinion research on media credibility back to the 1930s, when Gallup and Roper surveys included questions asking respondents if the press was credible and believable. McLeod, Kosicki and Pan (1991), summarized early research on the impact of media images and reported that audience members who believe the media is of high quality are—surprisingly—less likely to learn from news in the media than are those with a negative evaluation of the media in this dimension. Spitzer (1993) emphasized that the media possesses a distinctive capacity to shape public policy. Kingdon (1995) suggested that news media shapes public policy by linking people inside and outside the government.

Linsky (1986) found that the media plays a significant and commanding role in democracy and public affairs. He also maintained that the media substantially impacts the formation of political agendas and the performance of political institutions. Graber (1984) commented that “Although the verdict is mixed about the extent of media influence on various political arenas, evidence strongly suggest it is a

sizable factor.”

Gunther and Mughan (2000) found that cross-cultural comparisons convey the strong effect of the media on political development. McCombs and Reynolds (2002) stated that there is plenty of evidence that the media has a strong influence on people’s perception about the issues which are important and for which they seek solution from the government.

The evidence in this research provides a good insight into the mechanism through which the media affects the democratic process.

### **Objective of this study**

In this paper we plan to evaluate the impact of *Kuensel* on the public life. It is important to understand how *Kuensel* has been able to affect the informed opinion of the public and thereby how it has been able to tackle crucial public issues. For a society which has remained shut from the rest of the world till the middle of the last century; public awareness about relevant issues and the ability of the general public to debate over the issues was greatly compromised. Has the arrival of *Kuensel* changed the situation? Is it an important area of research?

In the last two and half decades, the RGOB, under the leadership of the present King, has been making a series of attempts to democratize political institutions. It is therefore not surprising that the Times Magazine has named His Majesty the King as one of the 21 most influential leaders in the world. Now the question is to what extent the fourth estate is able to play the required role in fostering democracy. *Kuensel’s* responsibility to strengthen democracy is even more important. Since there is no proof of how it has played the required role, it is important to gauge how the readers rate *Kuensel* in this respect.

The central objective of this study is to find this out and to statistically test the significant parameters.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on primary as well as secondary data. For this study we collected primary information by conducting a sample survey in Kanglung. We used stratified random sample selection for the members of Sherubtse College: students and others, which included teaching and non-teaching staff. The list of names was used as a sample frame. For non-Sherubtse samples, we used a convenient sample selection process in the absence of any reliable sample frame. Sample units are the individuals who read *Kuensel*. The random sample selection was difficult in the absence of a reliable sampling frame. We carried out questionnaire-based data collection. A total of 176 persons were interviewed, but 35 questionnaires were omitted either because of non-response or due to incomplete or inconsistent responses. The samples were asked to give their response to different questions and the answers are analyzed on a point scale to find out the average score for each response and overall conclusion.

Secondary data were used to trace the growth of *Kuensel* and its contribution to fostering the forces of democracy. For assessing the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy, I explored different issues of *Kuensel* which were randomly picked up. For selecting samples of *Kuensel*, I used the stratified sampling method so as to provide proportional representation to different decades. Samples selected belonged to the years: 1969, 1972, 1978, 1980, 1986, 1995, 1998 and 2002.

### **Findings of the study**

#### *Tracing the Growth of Kuensel*

In a social setting with a strong centralist tendency, without any constitutional provision that protects the right to expression and the right to information, the rise of *Kuensel* as a national newspaper was no mean achievement in and of itself. *Kuensel* came into existence in the late 1960's as an official fortnightly news bulletin of the Royal Government of

Bhutan. Its primary role was aimed at providing information to the general public about government policies, which can be termed a civic approach. Organizationally, it was under the Ministry of Development. In 1980's, its status changed from the official news bulletin to the news bulletin and in the same decade it turned from a fortnight to a weekly news bulletin. In the 1990's it became a national newspaper. In 2005, *Kuensel* started appearing twice a week.

As an official mouthpiece, it was not supposed to generate debate on the issues of public interest. Under the Department of Publicity it was obviously an official mouthpiece of the government. In the earlier phase, *Kuensel* did not have an editorial as a regular feature and whenever they appeared, they were limited to some significant events which were absolutely non-controversial. By the late 1980's, editorials were a regular feature of *Kuensel*. Initially, it did not provide any scope for reader's responses. In 1990's, when its status was changed to a national newspaper, editorials and reader's opinion started featuring as regular content.

The analysis made about the role of *Kuensel* is based on the reporting in the sample issues of *Kuensel*.

*Kuensel* did not carry editorials in 1969. The *Kuensel* issue of September 10, 1972 featured an editorial titled "Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, Kingly Reformer". On September 24, 1972, the editorial of *Kuensel* covered the three resolutions in the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the national assembly. In 1980 and 1986, *Kuensel* issues did not contain any editorials. The 1990's witnessed reader's opinions, which implied an improved role of *Kuensel* in generating public debate. In an issue of *Kuensel*, dated February 18, 1995, a letter by Chhoekhi Wangchuk of Galing Lhundrupjhung is a testimonial of the changing role of *Kuensel* in generating public debate on relevant public issues. In this letter Chhoekhi responded to the article "Galing: A village neglected" (*Kuensel* January 28, 1995) by Tenzin Rigden about the decline in the education in Galing due to faulty government policy. Not only did *Kuensel* point out the flaws in the government policy but also aroused a public debate.

On another occasion Tashi Wangchuk wrote on June 24,



1995: “*Kuensel* should be pleased with the way a section of the society is influenced by its editorials”. This comment showed that *Kuensel*’s reporting was able to influence popular opinion. But again he pointed out that most of the letters were written by expatriates. *Kuensel*’s reported inability to initiate public discussion among Bhutanese nationals reflects the lack of a culture of public discussion.

In 1995, the range of the coverage of the editorials was very vast. It included non-controversial topics such as “No spares” (Jan 21) about the unavailability of spare parts for imported vehicles. What is more significant is that this editorial was written in response to the letter by a reader on this issue. It is an example of responding to the needs of the public in a participatory approach to journalism. Other editorials included relevant public issues about: crime and unreliable police statistics (Jan 28), professionalism and quality of the work of the private contractors (April 15), and tackling fronting (June 10), which highlighted the fronting practices of Bhutanese businessmen. In this editorial the ability of the ministry to tackle this problem is questioned very subtly as “whether ministry barks far fiercer than its bite”. It also raised scepticism whether the key ones would be caught. This editorial is an indicator of the evolution of *Kuensel* into a more independent newspaper which acts as a watchdog over public institutions.

From the samples of editorials and reader’s responses it is quite evident that *Kuensel* evolved from a mouthpiece of the government to a more independent newspaper which highlights the relevant public issues, fosters public discussions on these issues, and also keeps an eye on government performance. *Kuensel* has performed all of the three roles that a modern media is supposed to perform. Its ability to transmit that information conveys its strong role in promoting democratic values.

How *Kuensel* is rated by independent organizations is also important to know. I have an excerpt from the Freedom House’s Bhutan country report (2004):

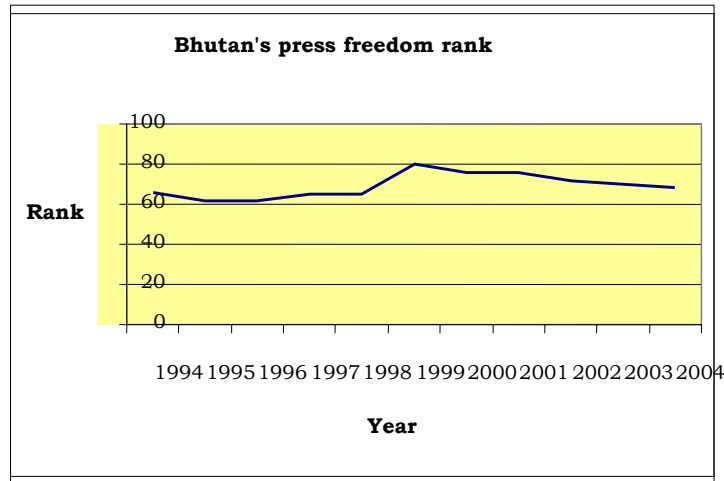
Freedom of expression and of the press is restricted. In the

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absence of a constitution or clearly defined legislation concerning the operation of the media, the legal environment for the press remains opaque. Criticism of Bhutan's political system has by tradition been prohibited. Bhutan's only regular publication, the weekly *Kuensel*, generally reports news that puts the kingdom in a favourable light, although it does provide occasional coverage of criticism of government policies during assembly meetings. *Kuensel's* online edition, which is updated daily and contains reader feedback, provides a somewhat livelier forum for discussion and debate. In past years, journalists working for *Kuensel* have reportedly been subjected to threats from the government, but no cases of official harassment were made public during 2004. The broadcast media, which consist of the state-run Bhutan Broadcasting Service radio station and television station, do not carry anti-government positions and statements. Cable television services are privately run and carry uncensored foreign programming. However, while they are thriving in urban areas, their growth has been somewhat hampered by a high sales tax and the absence of a broadcasting law. Internet access is growing and is unrestricted, and a second Internet service provider started operations in 2004.

Any judgment on this cannot be made as there is no strong evidence to either accept or reject the report.

**Graph 1: Changes in press freedom rank of Bhutan**



Source: Freedom House, "Freedom of the press" Freedom House Surveys, 2004

Freedom House conducts annual surveys and ranks different countries on the basis of their level of press freedom. Bhutan's press freedom rank deteriorated in the 1990's but improved during the present decade. Graph no.1 shows the press freedom rank of Bhutan since 1994.

#### **Readers' Response**

Any unbiased judgment on the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy would call for getting the feedback from the readers. How they rate *Kuensel* will reflect the ability of this medium to penetrate the minds of the end beneficiaries.

Of the 141 samples, 98 (69.5%) were male and 43 (30.5%) were female. Gender-wise distribution of samples is not based of their respective weight in the population.

#### **Disseminating Information**

One of the important tasks of the media is to disseminate

information to the public. It depends upon its ability to get the attention of the readers/viewers and the quality of news coverage.

The respondents were asked the questions: Do you read *Kuensel*? And do you read editorials in *Kuensel*? Those who responded negatively to the first question were removed from the study.

As the table no. 1 suggests, a small segment of the respondents i.e. only 29% read *Kuensel* regularly, while 44.7% respondents said that they read it more or less regularly. About 26% of the respondents accepted that they read *Kuensel* only occasionally. Only 16.3% of the female respondents reported reading *Kuensel* regularly, which is less than half of the male respondents i.e. - 34.7%. On the same line, more of the female respondents (30.2%) as compared to the male respondents (24.5%) conveyed that they read *Kuensel* only occasionally.

When asked about their habit of reading editorials (table no. 2) 23.4% of respondents conveyed that they read editorials regularly. A predominant majority, i.e. 68%, revealed that they read editorials only sometimes, while 8.5% of the respondents never read editorials. As far as the habit of reading editorials is concerned there is less of a sharp difference between male and female respondents as compared to reading the *Kuensel* itself. These gender based differences in the reading habits are largely due to the fact that females are less interested in political affairs. This analysis becomes more significant considering the fact that all the samples belong to the more educated category of the society. Logically this would imply that as we move down the ladder the penetration of media becomes less strong.

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**Table 1: Reading Kuensel**

	Male	Female	Total
Regularly	34 (34.7%)	7 (16.3%)	41(29.1%)
More or less regularly	40 (40.8%)	23 (53.5%)	63 (44.7%)
Occasionally	24 (24.5%)	13(30.2%)	37 (26.2%)
Total	98	43	141

**Table 2: Reading editorials**

	Male	Female	Total
Regularly	25 (25.5%)	8 (18.6%)	33 (23.4%)
Only Sometimes	65 (66.3%)	31 (72.1%)	96 (68.1%)
Never	8 (8.2%)	4 (9.3%)	12 (8.5%)
Total	98	43	141

When asked for their opinion about the whether the news coverage of the *Kuensel* is wide, 56.7% respondents believed that news coverage is wide. About 85% of the respondents believed that news reporting by *Kuensel* is informative. Many respondents believe that news reporting is informative but a relatively lesser number of thinks that its coverage is wide. It is equally significant to note that about 72% of the respondents were of the opinion that *Kuensel* reporting is able

to bring out different viewpoints on critical and relevant issues.

*Inducing Discussions*

It is quite surprising in the light of the high readership and better opinion about the quality of the reporting in *Kuensel* that it failed to provoke discussion over the critical public issues amongst the readers. Only 18.5% of the respondents conveyed that they participate in the discussions and 81.5% respondents never participated in any of the discussions. This is a pointer towards a lack of culture of public discussions which is against the spirit of democracy. This can be seen as a failure on the part of *Kuensel* to promote greater spread of public debate on the relevant issues. The other side of it is brighter in the sense that 19 of the 26 (73%) respondents who participated in any discussion on the issues raised by *Kuensel* believed that these discussions were based on better informed opinions. Table no. 3 provides the analysis of the extent to which reporting in *Kuensel* affected reader's judgment on any issue. More than half of the respondents (52.5%) expressed that their judgment on any issue after reading news reporting in *Kuensel* did not change or they do not remember it. Only 14% respondents agreed that their judgment on any issue changed very often after reading reporting in *Kuensel*, while 33% respondents expressed that it happened only sometimes. It is interesting to note that 62.8% of the female respondents expressed that their judgment on any issue never changed from the reporting in *Kuensel* as compared to only 48% of the male respondents. Similarly, only 7% female respondents told that their judgment has changed very often after reading reporting in the *Kuensel*, as compared to 17.3% of the male respondents. Identification of the reasons of these gender based variations in the answers is not the scope of present study and future researchers may look into this aspect.

**Table 3: Does *Kuensel* reporting affect readers' judgment?**

	Male	Female	Total
Yes, very often	17 (17.3%)	3 (7%)	20 (14.2)
Only sometimes	34 (34.7%)	13 (30.2%)	47 (33.3)
Never/do not remember	47 (48%)	27 (62.8%)	74 (52.5%)
Total	98	43	141

For any effective democratic process it is essential that the media not only generate awareness amongst the public on critical and relevant public issues but also create pressure on the government to enact desirable changes. This helps to bridge the communication gap between the rulers and the ruled especially when the majority of population does not take up the issue directly. There is no objective evidence to evaluate the role of *Kuensel* in inducing discussions amongst political leaders in the national assembly and influencing their decisions. We have attempted to gauge this from what the *Kuensel* readers think about it.

The findings are listed in table no.4, according to which 56% respondents felt that news reporting or editorials in *Kuensel* create pressure on the political leaders for discussion and decision on those issues. We made curve estimates to find out the association between education level and belief of the respondents about inducing discussions among the political leaders and affecting their decisions. The curve estimate (as shown in graph no.2) reflects a negative association. With a higher education level, people think negatively about the role of *Kuensel* in this sense. This is probably because with higher education, analytical faculties of the people improve. Variable 1 (education level) is independent and variable 2 (dummy variable for the reply by

the respondents in yes and no) is a dependent variable. Table no.5 shows there is a small negative correlation (-0.167) between the two variables and the value of  $r^2$  is 0.027, which explains that about 3% of the variation in the answers can be explained by changes in the education level. The coefficient of determination is very small and therefore insignificant.

**Table 4 (a): Does Kuensel influence political decisions and debate?**

	No. of respondents	%
Yes	79	56
No	62	44
Total	141	100

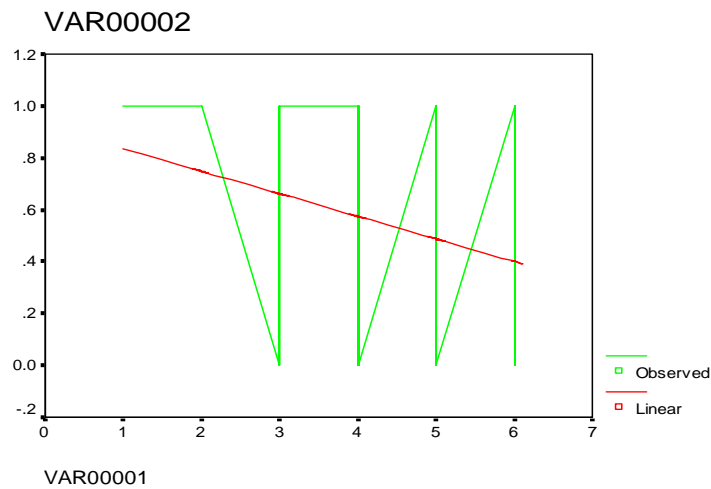
**Table 4 (b): Education level and Kuensel's influence in inducing debates and discussion**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.165	.027	.020	.4931

a Predictors: (Constant), VAR00001



**Graph 2: Curve estimate of the impact of education level on belief in influencing political discussions and decisions**



### Acting as Watchdogs

Another important role of the media is to act as a watchdog for the public over the public institutions. If the media is subjected to censorship or stricter regulations it cannot perform this duty. When asked about their opinion whether the reporting by *Kuensel* is subjected to censorship, a predominant majority i.e. - 82.3% of respondents thought it is subjected to censorship. This is also because of the strong belief among the respondents that *Kuensel* is not acting as a watchdog. All the respondents except one conveyed that *Kuensel* should initiate investigative journalism.

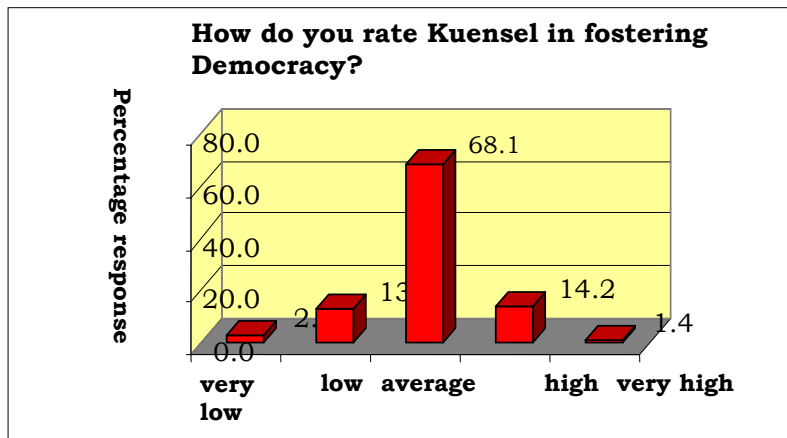
**Table 5: Whether Kuensel is subjected to censorship?**

	No. of respondents	%
Yes	116	82.3
No	25	17.7
Total	141	100

**Role of Kuensel in Fostering Democracy in Bhutan**

When asked about the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy in Bhutan a vast majority (68%) of the respondents rated it as average. 2.8% and 13.5% of the respondents rated it very low and low respectively. Only 1.4% of the respondents rated it very high. (See graph 3)

**Graph 3: Kuensel’s role in fostering democracy**



62.4 % of the respondents rated the quality of reporting in *Kuensel* as average and 14.2% of the respondents rated it as high. 2.8% and 13.5% of the respondents rated it as very

low and low respectively. None rated it as very high. To the question whether *Kuensel's* editorials provide critical understanding of the significant issues 57.4% of the respondents rated it as average and 17.7% respondents rated is high. 19.9% and 5% respectively rated as low and very low.

**Analysis of the respondents' opinion on the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy**

To quantitatively assess the overall role of the *Kuensel* in fostering the process of democracy in Bhutan we asked different relevant questions (as shown in the table no. 6) to the respondents. The respondents were asked to put their answers in numeric scale of 1 to 5 in an ascending order of opinion, i.e. from “strongly disagree” as 1 to “strongly agree” as 5. The numeric scale was combined with a verbal scale to facilitate the exact meaning of the numeric scale. For each of the questions we have calculated the average score, which represents the extent of the contribution of the *Kuensel* in that particular aspect. The aggregate score is a sum of the average score for each of the questions which reflect overall rating of the *Kuensel* in fostering the democratic process in Bhutan.

Table 6 suggests that the average score of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy is 2.99, that is 3. It means that the respondents rated it as average when the question was asked directly. The average score of *Kuensel* for the quality of its reports is 3.13, which is above average. For developing enterprising stories for focusing attention towards community problems it rated 2.92 on the numeric scale. As far as the ability of *Kuensel* to generate public discussion is concerned, it scored the lowest average point of 2.6. This is a main area where *Kuensel* seems to have performed the worst. *Kuensel* scored 2.89 points for the ability of its editorials to provide critical understanding of crucial issues. *Kuensel's* average score for taking up issues relating to corruption is 2.65. Its low rating for this issue is largely due to the fact that 82% of the respondents believed that it is subjected to censorship by the government. For the rest of the issues its rating is also

below average. The aggregate score of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy is the sum of the average score for all the questions taken together. The aggregate score of *Kuensel* is 22.66 out of 40, which is equivalent of 2.83 on a scale of 5. This implies that *Kuensel's* role in fostering the democratic process can be rated as average. The points given by male and female respondents to the *Kuensel* on the performance of its various roles are quite consistent and reflect a very low degree of difference. There are some interesting internal inconsistencies in the points given by respondents: when asked directly about how they rate the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy, female respondents gave them lower points (2.91) as compared to the male counterpart who gave 3.01 points to *Kuensel*. But the aggregate score given by females (22.77) is higher than that of their male counterparts (22.56).

It is quite clear from this evidence that *Kuensel* needs to put more emphasis on issues like promoting public debate and acting as a watchdog of the government to consolidate its role as an institution that strengthens the roots of democracy. This can be done by improving the editorials in order to provide critical understanding of the issues to its readers. In the absence of better knowledge about the relevant issues, people are not able to debate on the relevant public issues on a larger scale. Persistent arguments are an important part of public life in democracy. Public debate provides the citizens constant opportunity to participate in the public decision-making process. To make such public discussion more effective, the media will have to play a very powerful role as a disseminator of the relevant information on public policies. Besides this, *Kuensel* will have to give more importance to raising the issues of corruption in public life, without which not only would its public rating be low, but its position as a democratic institution would weaken, especially in the face of emerging competition. This would depend upon how the media is free to operate.

In the quantitative analysis different variables are categorized as:

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- Average score of *Kuensel* (var1) is also taken as a dependent variable;
- Editorials providing critical understanding of significant issues (var2);
- *Kuensel* generating public discussions (var3);
- *Kuensel* providing alternative solutions to community problems (var4);
- *Kuensel* developing enterprising stories to focus attention towards community problems (var5);
- *Kuensel* conducting town meetings to discover issues (var6);
- *Kuensel's* ability to focus on issues of corruption (var7);
- Age of the respondents (var8);
- Education level of the respondents (var9).

Var1 is defined as a dependant variable, and it is a proxy variable representing the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy. Var2 to var9 are defined as explanatory variables. Var8 and var9 are exogenous variables, which cannot be affected by the media. The exogenous nature of var8 and var9 raises the importance of policy-induced variables in fostering democracy. The remaining explanatory variables (var2, var3, var4, var5, var6 and var7) are policy controlled variables, i.e. changes in the policy of reporting the news can determine the aggregate score.

A linear regression test is conducted to identify the extent to which each variable affects the dependent variable.

**Table 6: Points scored by Kuensel on different issues pertaining to its role in fostering democracy**

Issues	Average score (given by males)	Average score (given by females)	Average score
Rate the role of <i>Kuensel</i> in fostering democracy	3.01	2.91	2.99
Rate the quality of reports in <i>Kuensel</i>	3.11	3.16	3.13
Rate the ability of editorials to provide critical understanding of the significant issues	2.85	2.95	2.89
Rate the extent to which <i>Kuensel</i> is able to generate discussions	2.63	2.56	2.60
Reporting in <i>Kuensel</i> provides alternative solutions and	2.84	2.86	2.84

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points out trade-offs involved in community problems			
<i>Kuensel</i> develops enterprising stories to focus attention towards community problems	2.92	2.93	2.92
<i>Kuensel</i> conducts town meetings to discover issues in the community and follows up	2.57	2.74	2.64
Ability of <i>Kuensel</i> to raise issues relating to corruption in the government	2.65	2.64	2.65
Aggregate score	22.57	22.77	22.66

**Curve estimate for association between var8 and var1**

It is natural and logical to assume that people gain experience with age and develop a greater ability to analyze things. In this case, how they rate the role of *Kuensel* in fostering

### *Media and Public Culture*

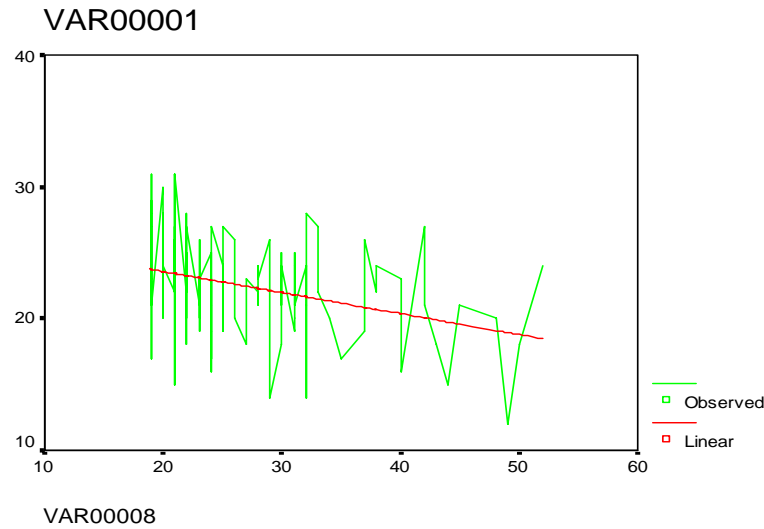
democracy would be affected by their age. We have run a regression test on var1 for var8. The intercept of the regression function is at the aggregate score of 26.76, which can be termed as the mean score. Slope of the regression function is (-) 0.1596, which implies negative association between age and the aggregate score. Value of  $r^2$  is 0.11; hence only 11% of the variation in aggregate score can be explained with the variation in age. The regression estimates suggest that with the increase in age people's rating of *Kuensel* declines. It is an area in which *Kuensel* will have to look into to improve its reporting quality to make it appealing to the more experienced segment of the population.

#### *Test Results*

Independent: VAR 8

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
VAR1 LIN .111 139 17.34 .000 26.7616 -.1596





### Curve estimate for association between var9 and var1

Education level of the people is another important factor determining how they rate democratic institutions. With a higher level of education, people's understanding of different issues improves and they are able to make an appropriate decision. We have run a regression test on var1 for var9. The mean value of the aggregate score is 23.01 with a slope of -0.092. There is a small negative association between var1 and var9. The value of  $r^2$  is also very small (0.001), which means association is extremely insignificant. From these two tests it is ascertained that age has played a stronger role than education level in affecting the aggregate score. It is a surprising result that level of education does not influence people's rating of the media. I can not offer any explanation of this phenomenon.

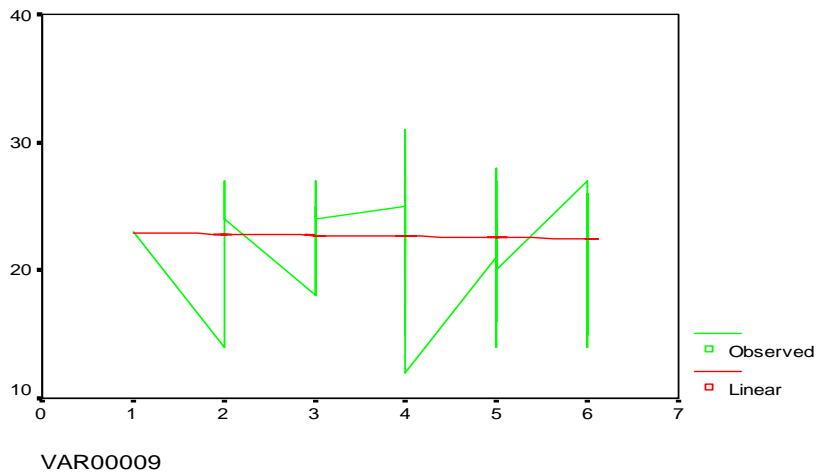
#### Test results

Independent: VAR9

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Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
VAR1 LIN .001 139 .09 .770 23.0140 -.0920

VAR00001



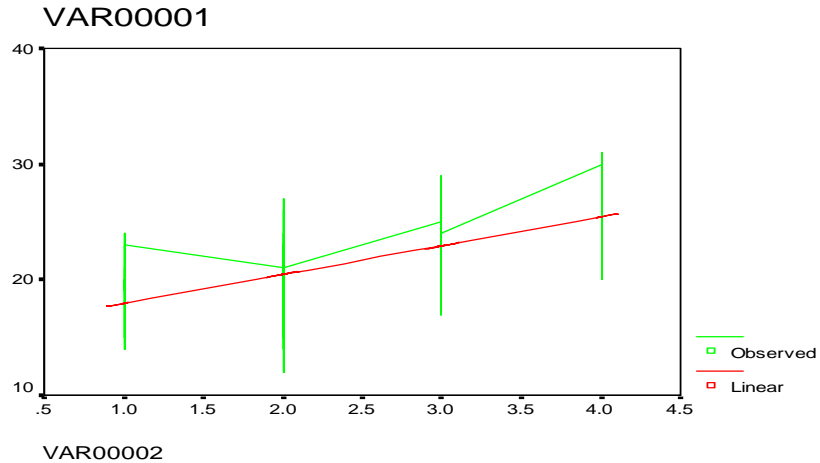
**Curve estimate for the association between var2 and var1**

Good quality editorials help the readers in developing critical understanding of the issues and consequently strengthen their ability as enlightened citizens. A regression test reflects that var1 is positively associated with the changes in var2. The mean value of var1 is 15.45 and the slope of the regression line is 2.49. The value of  $r^2$  is 0.285. The better the people rate the editorials of *Kuensel* the higher is their rating of *Kuensel* in promoting democracy as their understanding of critical issues increases and they make better informed social decisions.

**Test Results**

Independent: VAR2

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
VAR1 LIN .285 139 55.28 .000 15.4562 2.4918



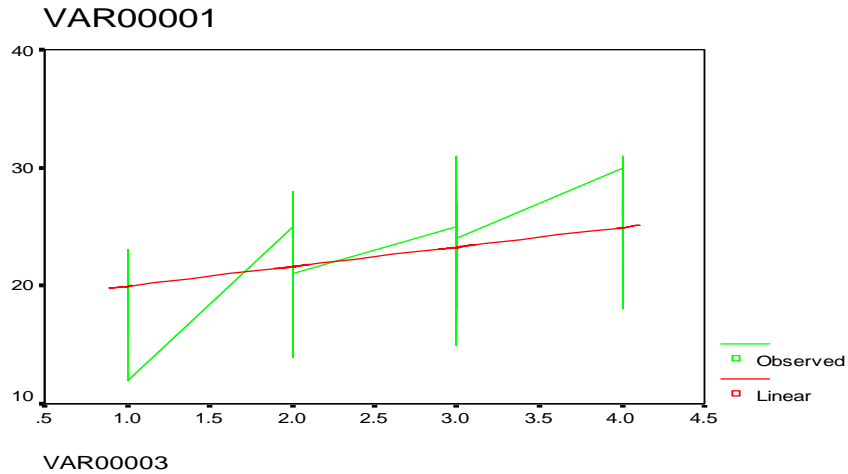
### Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var3

The ability of the media to promote public discussion on critical public issues is an important variable that affects its ability as a democratic force. Regression estimates suggest that the mean value of var1 is 18.31 and slope of the function is 1.65. There exists a high positive association between var1 and var3, given that the change var3 brings about is more than the proportionate change in var1. The value of  $r^2$  is 0.129.

#### Test Results

Independent: VAR3

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
 VAR1 LIN .129 139 20.62 .000 18.3195 1.6520



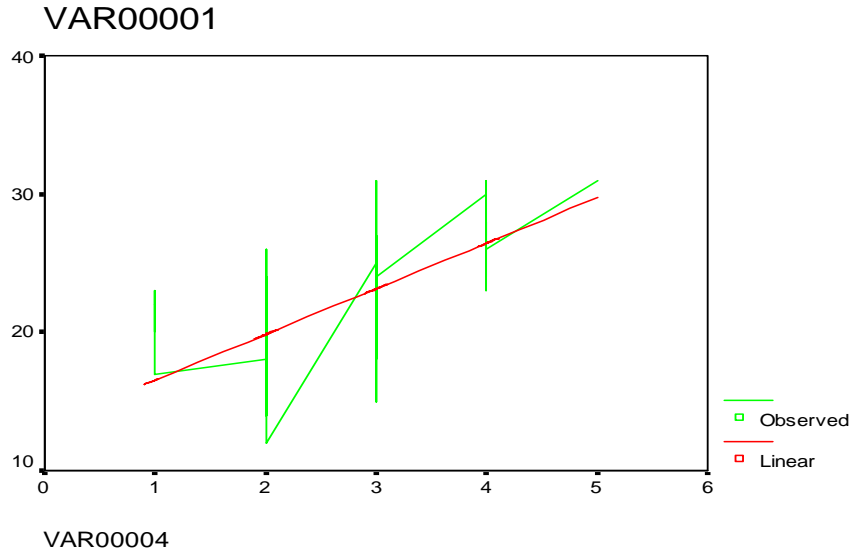
**Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var4**

The ability of the media to provide alternative solutions to community problems provides a larger range of social choice to the public and thereby positively influences the democratic decision making process. Regression estimates suggest that the mean value of var1 is 13.24 and the slope of the regression line is 3.30. The value of  $r^2$  is 0.446, which means about 45% variation in var1 can be explained in terms of variation in var4. There is a strong positive effect on var1 from var4.

**Test results**

Independent: VAR4

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
 VAR1 LIN .446 139 111.95 .000 13.2455 3.3002



#### Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var5

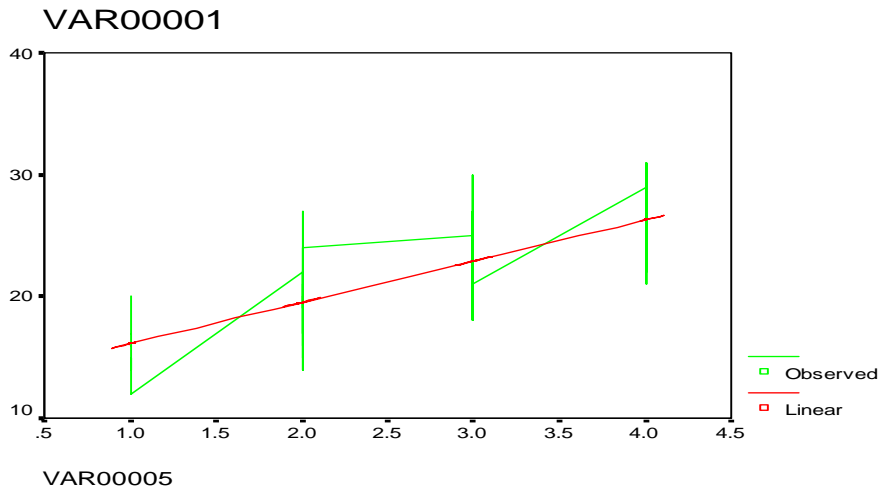
An increasing portion of media literature highlights that the media should try to focus attention on community problems by developing enterprising stories. Such stories draw the attention of public as well as the government and thus facilitate more prompt attention to tackle the issues. It helps to reduce delays in taking action. We have run regression test for var5 on var1 to check the association. The mean value of var1 is 12.77 and the slope of regression line is 3.37, which reflects that changes in var4 have more than a proportionate effect on var1. Value of  $r^2$  is 0.5 which implies about 50% of the variation in var1 can be explained through the variation in var5.

#### Test results

Independent: VAR5

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Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
VAR1 LIN .503 139 140.84 .000 12.7709 3.3745



**Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var6**

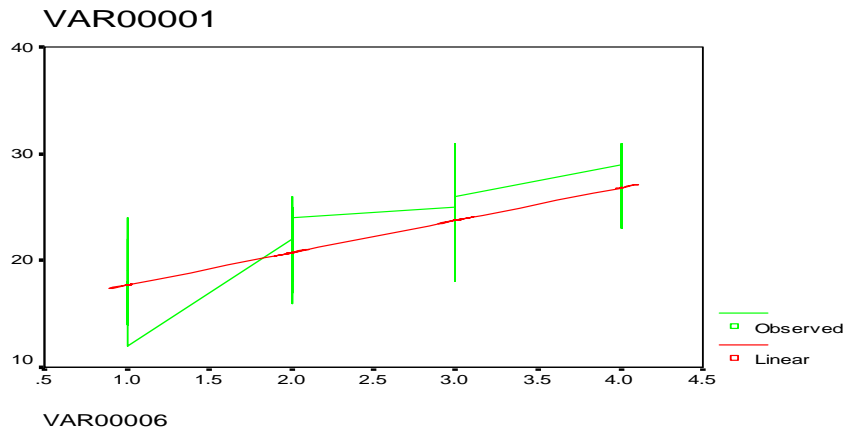
The ability of the media to promote a democratic approach to governance also depends upon how it interacts with the community to discover the relevant and critical issues and bring them into public discussion. The media should interact actively with the community to address their problems. This is increasingly being recognized as an important ingredient of participatory journalism. Such action forces public institutions to notice the issues and address them. How this variable (var6) affects democratic process, measured as var1, is an important question to be answered. Regression estimates reflect that the mean value of var1 is 14.67 and the slope of the function is 3.03. Var6 has high positive effect on var1. Value of  $r^2$  is 0.518, which is significant.

**Test results**

Independent: VAR6

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sigf b0 b1

VAR1 LIN .518 139 149.63 .000 14.6718 3.0332



**Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var7**

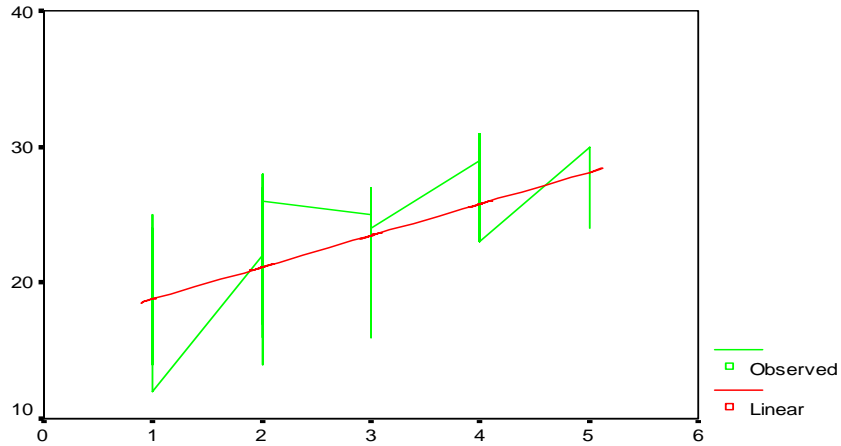
Media is one of the most effective institutions of democracy as it acts as a watchdog of the people on public institutions. It is supposed to focus on the issues relating to corrupt practices of public institutions. By bringing out these issues it can create social and political pressure for good and clean governance. If the media performs this function effectively it can contribute to making the benefits of public policy reach the weaker segments of society. Regression estimates for var7 on var1 suggest that it is positively associated. The mean value of var1 is 16.45 and the slope of the regression function is 2.33. The value of  $r^2$  is 0.387.

**Test results**

Independent: VAR7

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sigf b0 b1  
 VAR1 LIN .387 139 87.80 .000 16.4529 2.3355

VAR00001



VAR00007

To find out which policy-induced explanatory variables have the highest effect on the independent variable, a comparison is made between the values of  $r^2$ . The value of  $r^2$  is a measure of overall goodness of fit, called a coefficient of determination. Though the straight comparison of the  $r^2$  values of different models is not appropriate, it can be done if the sample size in the different models is same. In the table no.7 such comparisons are made.

**Table 7: Comparing the  $r^2$  values for different regression**



**models**

Regression model	r <sup>2</sup>
var2 on var1	0.285
var3 on var1	0.129
var4 on var1	0.446
var5 on var1	0.503
var6 on var1	0.518
var7 on var1	0.387

Of the explanatory variables, var6 has the highest r<sup>2</sup> value; hence it has relatively the largest impact on var1. The var5 has the next most significant explanatory variable, as its r<sup>2</sup> value is marginally less than var6. Var3 has the least affect on var1. The ranks of the policy-induced explanatory variables on the basis of the r<sup>2</sup> values are given in table no.8. The aggregate score of *Kuensel* is mainly influenced by its ability to identify crucial issues, by its ability to interact with the community, and by its ability to raise community issues and find out alternative solutions to them. These are the three areas the media will have to focus on. The importance of var6, var5, and var4 indicates that Bhutanese people rate the ability of the newspaper to foster democracy most significantly on the basis of their participatory activities.

When Bhutan moves towards constitutional democracy the focus of *Kuensel*, as well as that of other media, should be directed towards a participatory approach to journalism. The result of this study shows that only by doing so can they effectively turn into a strong institution that fosters democracy.

**Table 8: Rank of the policy induced explanatory variables**

Rank	Variable
1	var6
2	var5
3	var4
4	var7
5	var2
6	var3

### Conclusion

*Kuensel* has been rated as almost average by the respondents in its role in fostering democracy. It earned an aggregate score of 22.66 out of a maximum of 40 (equivalent of 2.83 on a scale of 5) on its role as an institution to foster the democratic process. The gender-based difference in the rating of *Kuensel* is very marginal, or rather non-existent.

*Kuensel's* score for its contribution to generate public discussions, for focusing on corruption issues, identifying community problems, drawing public attention towards them and providing alternative solutions, has been below 3 on the numeric scale which is defined as average on the corresponding verbal scale. Why its rating is almost average is largely due to failure of *Kuensel* to highlight these issues.

The findings from linear regression for the dependent variable (role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy) on policy-induced explanatory variables suggest that the rating of

*Kuensel* in fostering the democratic process is greatly determined by its participatory approach to journalism as reflected by var4, var5 and var6. The  $r^2$  value for these regressions is greater than it is for other variables. The more these issues are taken care of, the greater would be its contribution in strengthening democracy. As Bhutan moves towards constitutional democracy the media will have to focus on a participatory approach to make it more relevant in strengthening the democratic process.

The exogenous explanatory variables—age of the respondents (var8) and education level of the respondents (var9)—are found to have negative effect on the rating of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy. As people grow older and as they receive higher education, they rate *Kuensel* low for its ability to foster democratic processes.

Only 29% of the respondents read *Kuensel* regularly and 26% read it occasionally. Only 23% of the respondents read editorials regularly and 8.5% of the respondents never read it. The readership data convey that these percentages are very high as compared to countries at a similar level of development. From its inception, *Kuensel* has greatly contributed as the disseminator of the information and later in the 1990's it began to induce public discussion on the relevant public issues. This is quite an extraordinary achievement for a newspaper which grew as an official bulletin of the government.

The survey findings suggest that 81.5% of the respondents never participated in any discussions on the issues raised by *Kuensel*. This could be either due to lack of a tradition that discusses public issues or due to the inability of *Kuensel* to prompt discussions as it may not be raising those issues which concern the majority. But 73% of those who conveyed having participated in the discussions on the issues raised by *Kuensel* agreed that these discussions were based on better informed opinions due to reporting by *Kuensel*. Another significant finding of the study is the fact that 56% of respondents believed that reporting in *Kuensel*, and public debate initiated by it, create pressure on political leaders to discuss those issues in the national assembly. However, this

opinion becomes less strong as the people become more educated. With the increase in education level, *Kuensel* in particular and other media in general will have to be more focused on creating pressure on political decision-making processes.

The inability of *Kuensel* to highlight the issues relating to corruption in public institutions is one of the important reasons why *Kuensel's* rating is low. A predominant majority (82.3%) of the respondents were of the opinion that it is subjected to censorship by the government. The freedom of speech and expression provided by the draft Constitution would probably take care of this in the future and would make news reporting more free. Increasing competition from emerging newspapers would require that *Kuensel* become more focused.

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