

The Role of Mass Media in Bhutan: Accessibility, Influence and its Impacts

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Abstract

The information and views communicated through the mass media have a great impact on our daily lives, and for Bhutan, this is a new experience. Television and the internet were launched only in 1999 and, thereafter, the Bhutanese public has become increasingly connected with various forms of mass communication. This paper studies how the mass media industry has developed and progressed in terms of the accessibility, influence, and impact on the society. Surveys and interviews were conducted to collect data. Access to information has greatly improved through the establishment of community centers and more newspaper companies, as well as increased mobile phone subscriptions, cable TV connections and internet subscriptions. However, we also found that consumers of the media often felt that their views are not represented in the media. Furthermore, we found that mass media content including advertising influences consumer's opinion, but did not impact their behavior.

Keywords: Mass media; Accessibility; Influence; Impact; Opinion; Media policy

Introduction

In Bhutan, mass media primarily refers to radio, newspapers, cinema, television, and the internet [1]. It comprises a variety of modes by which senders can record information and experiences and transmit them to a large audience fairly rapidly. This definition summarizes those commonly used in writings on the media [2]. The mass media constitute a powerful and infusing force in our lives. We are bombarded by media messages daily. Today, most of the information that we get about our local, national, and international news comes to us through these mass media, which is very different from the situation before 1999 in Bhutan. TV and the internet were introduced in 1999 and mobile phones in 2003. The information and views communicated through these media have a great impact on our attitudes toward people, events, and problems. The media have relayed information to the people about the country's five year plans, development programs, and education systems, and this has motivated people to become partners in the progress of the country. Accessibility of information and communication have improved, and people are constantly consuming information; however, its excessive influence may undermine the traditional culture and value system [1]. Therefore, realizing the important role of mass media and, its impacts on society, and determining its future direction have become very important. Castell in 2007 stated that, throughout the history of information and communication, mass media is considered as a powerful factor that shapes social change. It can construct or deconstruct the norms and values on which the society is built, because the real challenge in society is the battle over the minds of the people [3].

The Ministry of Information and Communication, Bhutan conducted media impact studies in 2003, 2008, and 2013, which studied the trends of media evolution, its impacts, and challenges. These studies have presented thought provoking results. Further attention is required because many historically relevant events have occurred recently in Bhutan, such as, the second democratic elections in 2013, the building of community centers to improve the accessibility of information, and enhanced media and communication technologies. This paper attempts to provide an account of how media accessibility, its influences, and its impact have progressed over the years and

provide policy recommendations. The findings presented are based on survey results and interviews.

Literature Review

Wright in 1975 stated the major functions of mass media as the investigation of news, finding correlations, the transmission of culture, entertainment, and mobilization. However, he also stated that, there are underlying functions accompanying each of these. The underlying function of investigation is that the media provides news and data. Correlation means that the media displays the data to us after they have selected, translated, and interpreted it. The social transmission of culture implies that the media portrays our beliefs, norms and values. Media likewise entertain us in our leisure time and provides a respite from our everyday schedules. Mobilization is how the media function to promote societal interest, especially during crises [4]. Subsequently, McQuail in 1979, put forward five functions of the media., First, they can draw attention to problems, solutions, and higher authority; secondly, they can confer status and rightfulness; thirdly, they can persuade and influence execution; fourthly, they can help organize groups and maintain them; and fifth, they are a means of bringing psychic rewards and fulfillment[5]. There is an ongoing attempt to integrate various approaches to understand the effect of the mass media in society, but for Bhutan we have yet to determine the underlying functions of mass media. With economic development, the media have produced a much more networked and horizontally connected society, as opposed to the vertically connected society of a decade ago [6].

Jurgen Habermas in his sociological theory explains that the mass media are controlled by political and economic forces to manipulate

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the information consumer [7]. He states that this compromises the rightfulness of the communication power exercised by the mass media. However, the German political scientist Peter Klier does not agree with Jurgen's theory [8]. Klier argues that, there is a large amount of information freely available in addition to the mass media, and that people can choose among them. Another researcher, Doyle explains how mass media uses the cultural selection theory to bring about social change [9]. Cross-cultural comparisons indicate that the structure of the mass media may have a strong effect on political developments, and the mass media are influenced by many dynamics such as the overall editorial policy of a medium, and economic and cultural factors [10]. New innovations in technology are further influencing the effect of media. However, media critics argue that mass media are not able to fulfill their role due to many inherent barriers that are prevailing in any society.

According to the Classical Marxist approach, mass media are assumed to follow the ideological interests of the dominant class in society. The Marxist media theory perceives the media as a fusion of the existing economic and political elites and, therefore, reflects their interests. On the other hand, the liberal approach sees the media as facilitating social agreement through the dissemination of information and conflicting opinion. A review of the literature also suggests that although the media have a central role in mediating information and forming public opinion, the initiation of press freedom has created room for unprecedented manipulation via unethical mass communicators and influential people in society [11,12]. Much of this could impact the media consumer in a society.

Mass Media in Bhutan

Bhutan is one of the last countries to introduce these media, and people are enjoying the contents that media has to offer. There are still not many studies on the role that mass media has played in society. However, the few studies done have pointed out that, along with the increasing consumption of mass media, there are positive advancements with great potential in the fields of education and entertainment, and in terms of connecting Bhutan to the modern world. At the same time, it also symbolizes the beginning of the end for Bhutan's unique identity and culture with commercial advertisements [1,13]. The government philosophy requires that the Bhutanese media emphasize public service rather than commercialism, and it is important that mass media fulfill this requirement [14].

Most of us rely on mass media for current news and for information regarding what is important and what we should be aware of. People usually trust mass media as a source of news, information, education, and entertainment. Considering this, we should be aware of how mass media works in all regions of the country. However, it is difficult to make mass media accessible to remote areas because the challenge for any developmental plan in Bhutan remains the mountainous terrain, with more than 60% of the people living in rural areas. According to national statistics, the urban population consists of 196,111 persons, while 438,871 are in the rural areas [15]. The Bhutanese media has a central role in the operationalization of government philosophy, which is not only to inform, educate, and entertain the audience, but to actually empower people so that they enhance their ability to make the right decisions and achieve the freedom to attain happiness [16].

The Bhutanese media have been criticized for aping the global media instead of drawing lessons from them [6]. Unlike developed countries like the US and Japan, where mass media have developed over time, the proliferation in Bhutan has been very fast, and various forms

of media are developing at the same time, such as TV, the internet, and mobile phones. As a result, Bhutan is experiencing substantial changes in terms of the structure of the family and society. Bhutan is a small nation and is already witnessing some undesirable impacts of the intensive mass media development such as the weakening of social connections and family bonds, reduced attention to homework as well as increased violence among youth, increased materialism, and other negative effects including the misuse of apps through smart phones. Access to information has become so easy that within a few seconds, anyone can produce and distribute media content. This kind of media usage and consumer behavior calls for a proper understanding of the situation. Many of the media policies such as the social media policy, advertisement policy, and the national media policy are also currently in the draft stage and open for review. It is important to study the role of mass media and provide policy recommendations by understanding what Bhutanese media should be like and what type of content and programs are suitable for a country like Bhutan without succumbing to media imperialism.

Thus, the main objectives of this paper are:

- (i) Explaining the diffusion and penetration processes of Bhutanese media through various aspects such as accessibility in general, entertainment, education, and participation in democracy and politics.
- (ii) Investigating the influences and impacts of Bhutanese media on Bhutanese society and providing a review, assessment, and evaluation.
- (iii) Looking at the future from the viewpoint of media policy regarding the further utilization and development of Bhutanese media.

This paper aims to assess the impact and influences of mass media as one of the key factors that shapes society, its culture, and values by investigating the growth of the media, its purposes, and the inherent barriers in media coverage and information dissemination. We will discuss the role that mass media currently plays in Bhutanese society and analyze its impact by studying media growth and investigating people's choice of media content, preferences of media type, and its impacts on their work life, personal relations, attitudes and behaviors.

Mass Media in Bhutan: Past and Present

Media development

Mass media in Bhutan is at a very early stage and is currently developing. There is consistent growth in all forms of mass media such as print, broadcast, film, music, mobile phones, and the internet [17]. The concept of the media as a player in the growth of modern society began in the mid 1980's. The first Bhutanese newspaper, called Kuensel and started in 1967, and first radio service, called Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) and launched in 1973, were delinked from the government. They were made independent after His majesty the fourth king issued a royal decree on 18th September 1992, to enable them to be more effective in fulfilling their responsibilities toward society.

With increasing literacy and changing social needs, today Bhutan has twelve newspapers and seven radio stations. Today we can listen to radio in four different languages (Dzongkha, Sharchop, Lhotshamkha and English). Radio in Bhutan was the most effective media, especially for rural areas. These new radio services have created an avenue for people to voice their concerns and are already addressing a series of social issues. There are only two TV stations, both provided by BBS TV.

The channels, BBS and BBS 2, are the only channels that broadcast local news and TV programs in Bhutan. BBS TV was launched on 2 June 1999. It is one of the most important events in the history of electronic media in Bhutan. BBS TV is available in 40 Asian countries, from Turkey in the west to Indonesia in South East Asia. BBS TV broadcasts for five hours daily in Dzongkha and English. The same program is rebroadcast the following day. Various entertainment programs, such as live music request shows and children’s educational programs, are broadcast on weekend afternoons for about three hours. Cable television services are available in 19 of the 20 dzongkhags, and about 40 different channels are provided by the cable TV operators, out of which only two channels are Bhutanese. As of 2012, there were 58 cable operators, 54,120 cable subscribers, and 16,632 dish TV subscribers. The first cinema hall was started in 1960, and today we have 12 cinema halls. In 1999, Hindi films were the most popular followed by English movies. These films were not censored in Bhutan because the censor board of India had already approved them, and, therefore, cinema hall managers consider the films permissible to be watched in Bhutan [1]. The first Bhutanese film, Gasa Lami Singye, was produced in 1988. While the film industry is still in its early stages, the number of Bhutanese films has been increasing with more people venturing into the industry. As of 2012, Bhutanese produced 241 films. From the same time that TV was introduced, the internet was also launched in Bhutan in 1999. The number of internet subscriber has increased from 2,117 in 2003 to 109,526 in 2008 and 133,289 as of 2013. Most of the internet subscribers are government offices, while internet connections at home are also on the rise. Internet connection is gaining popularity with more electronic devices entering into the Bhutanese market such as personal laptop computers, smart phones, and tablets. In addition, the number of Bhutanese using online forums and social media sites is on the rise. Though mobile phones entered into Bhutanese society very late, i.e. only in 2003, today there are more mobile phone users than users of any other electronic devices. Mobile phones can be considered as a form of mass media because of their accessibility to mass communication, such as advertisements, public announcements, and the internet. Mobile phones are now

Media indicators	2003	2008	2013	A.G.R*
Audio visual production houses	42	96	112	10.3
Bhutanese films		116	241	NA
Books and publications by Bhutanese	207	1181	2832	29.9
Cable TV operators	33	52	58	5.8
Cable TV subscribers	15000	30000	54120	13.7
Cinema halls	8	10	12	4.14
Community Centers		45	100	NA
Computers nationwide	9000	13500	20983	8.83
Direct-to-home (DTH) TV		2000	16632	NA
Fixed-line telephone subscribers	23657	27937	27005	1.33
Internet Service Providers	1	3	4	14.9
Internet subscribers	2117	109526	133289	51.3
Leased line subscribers	26	168	317	28.4
Mobile telephone subscribers	2255	228347	560890	73.6
Newspapers	1	4	12	28.2
Radio sets	37000	77800	49641	2.98
Radio stations	1	4	7	21.5
Television sets	35000	47125	74846	7.9
Television stations	1	1	2	7.18

*Source: Bhutan Media Impact Study 2013, Ministry of Information and Communication, Bhutan."

*A.G.R.: Average growth rate (%)

Table 1: Trends of media growth from 2003 to 2013.

Group	Age group	Total (%)	Gender	Percentage
I	teens	52 (54.17)	Male	29.14
			Female	25
II	20s	18 (18.75)	Male	8.32
			Female	10.41
III	30s	18 (18.75)	Male	10.41
			Female	8.32
IV	40s and above	8 (8.33)	Male	6.24
			Female	2.08
Total		96 (100)		100

Table 2: Structure of survey respondents.

emerging as the 7th mass media, joining print, recordings, cinema, radio, TV, and the internet [18]. The number of mobile data users has also increased dramatically from 23,000 in March 2013 to 120,000 by the end of 2013. Today there are over 135,000 mobile data users registered using 3G. The growth rate or the demand rate for 3G has increased by six times in just six months. Recently 4G services have also been introduced in the capital.

As shown in Table 1, we have 560,890 mobile phone subscribers as of 2013, and all forms of media such as books and magazines, computers, internet subscribers, and TV sets have increased except for radio sets, which have decreased from 77,800 in 2008 to 49,641 in 2013. This shows the trends in media growth from 2003 to 2013. Looking at the figures, the mobile phone growth rate is the highest, which means that people now have easy access to information through mobile devices. The average growth rates for the various forms of media are as follows: mobile phones, 73.6%; newspapers, 28.2%; television sets, 7.9%; radio stations, 21.5%; and internet subscribers, 51.3%.

Accessibility, Influences and Impacts of Mass Media

Data and methodology

In order to measure the influence and impact of Bhutanese media on society, we use data obtained from our original interviews and surveys conducted in September 2014. Regarding the survey, we first selected two districts out of 20 randomly, i.e. Bumthang and Thimphu (the capital city). Questionnaires were distributed to 150 people, and we finally collected responses from 96 people (a 64% response rate). The target population consists of all age levels, from 14 to 57 years old, and consisted of students, unemployed youth, government officers, housewives, and retired civil servants in order to obtain a true picture of the population. The age distribution of the respondents is as follows: 54.17% were 14-19 years old, 18.75% were 20-29 years old, 18.75% were 30-39 years old, and 8.33% were 40 years old or above. In comparison, the national age distribution is 27.3% for teens, 20.1% for those in their twenties, 40.8% for those aged 30 to 55, and 11.8% for those above 55 (index mundi, 2014). Table 2 shows the details of the respondents of the survey.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 17 interview questions as follows.

Q1. How often do you utilize services provided through community resource centers?

1: Never, 2: Almost never, 3: Occasionally/Sometimes, 4: Almost always, 5: Always

Q2. What do you think would be the best way of utilizing community resource centers more efficiently?

Q3. What medium is the best way of engaging people in discussions about democracy and politics?

1: TV, 2: Radio, 3: Newspapers, 4: Mobile Phones, 5: Social media and online forums, 7: Public meetings and Individual communication

Q4. Does mass media influence your opinion? Yes or No

Q5. If yes, does it change your behavior and attitude towards that event or particular subject?

1: Never, 2: Almost never, 3: Occasionally/Sometimes, 4: Almost always, 5: Always

Q6. Do you think your opinion is being reported by the media? Yes or No

Q7. What level of priority is rural and minority news given in news reports?

1: Not a priority, 2: Low priority, 3: Neutral, 5: High priority, 5: Essential priority

Q8. Do you have easy access to national news and public announcements? Yes or No

Please explain

Q9. Are you aware of the media policy in Bhutan?

1: Not at all aware, 2: Slightly aware, 3: Somewhat aware, 4: Moderately aware

5: Extremely aware

Q10. If you are aware of the media policy in Bhutan, provide recommendations on how we can improve the policy.

Q11. Do reality TV shows such as singing competitions have any impact on Bhutanese culture?

Give reasons

Q12. Does the media (e.g. tape recorders, phones, CDs) have any impact on Bhutanese singing and dancing culture? Give reasons

Q13. How often do you buy products advertised in the media?

1: Never, 2: Almost never, 3: Occasionally/Sometimes, 4: Almost always, 5: Always

Q14. To what extent are your buying decisions influenced by commercial advertisements?

1: Never, 2: Almost never, 3: Occasionally/Sometimes, 4: Almost always, 5: Always

Q15. To what extent does the radio, newspapers, phones, and the internet affect your daily lives?

1: No affect, 2: Minor affect, 3: Neutral, 4: Moderate affect, 5: Major affect

Q16. Who do you think decides what becomes news (agenda setters)?

1: Media, 2: Politician, 3: Government, 4: Businessmen, 5: People, 6: Others

Q17. The policy for advertising and content for the broadcast and print media is being finalized in Bhutan-Do you have any recommendations?

Gross National Happiness, the inspiration for change in Bhutan, requires that the kingdom draw on global experience to adopt what is beneficial and relevant. It also emphasizes a pragmatism through which Bhutan does not succumb to global pressure but chooses technology and skills that strengthen rather than dilute the Bhutanese identity. This section will look at the potential impact of mass media on society – people’s daily lives, attitudes, and behaviors, and on the process of democratization. In the knowledge century, Bhutan aims to establish a knowledge society and guarantee access to information as a right of every citizen. This is enshrined as a mandate in the constitution of Bhutan-along with the freedom of expression and freedom of the media- and is established as a government policy spearheaded by the Ministry of Information [19].

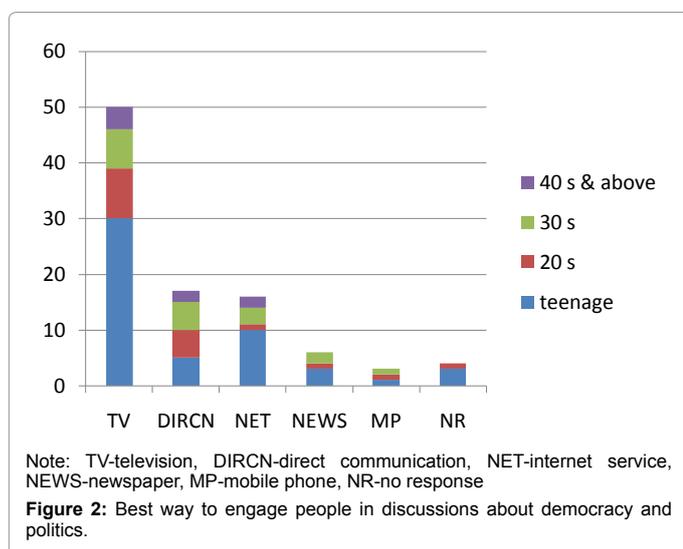
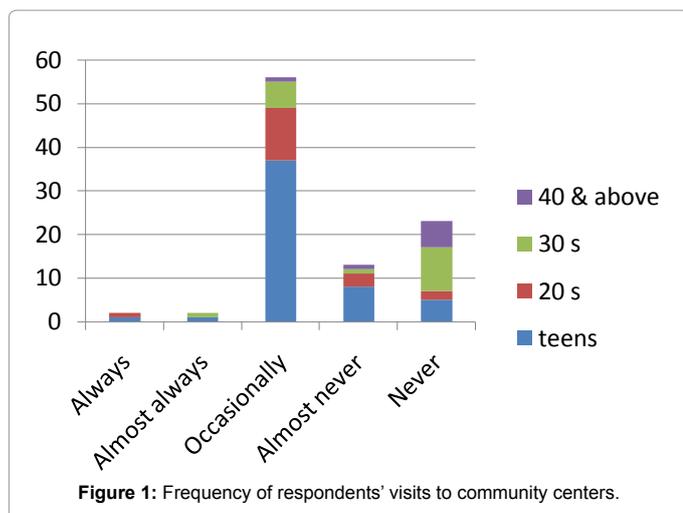
Mass media is now acknowledged as a potent tool that can be used to inform and educate those who would otherwise remain unaware of issues that directly affect them. Today, the news media, which includes print, radio, and television, and the internet, is playing an increasingly important role, along with the growth of the Bhutanese blogging community and social networking. During the 1930s, communication researchers were convinced that media had tremendous power. In fact, they believed the power of media was so great that it acted like a “magic bullet,” instantly penetrating the human mind [20]. Although researchers have altered their view of the impact of media, almost all researchers, media critics, and philosophers believe that media has the power to shape society, at least in some ways.

Using the survey results obtained from the respondents’ replies, we attempt to investigate the accessibility, influence, and impact of Bhutanese media. Accessibility is the quality of information being made available when needed. Influence refers to the process of changing behavior towards a particular program or product. Impact refers to change that is brought about as a result of consuming information from advertisements and other programs.

Accessibility

We consider that accessibility of mass media includes government initiatives such as the establishment of community centers and people’s engagement in democracy and opinion. In the survey questionnaire, Q8 asks whether Bhutanese people have easy access to national news and public announcements. We find that 88.54% of the respondents answered yes to this question. In an attempt to improve the media accessibility and coverage nationwide, the Bhutan government initiated a project to establish community centers. As of 2014, there were 189 community centers [21]. The community centers have facilities such as internet connection, fax and photocopy machines, and passport photo and telephone services. However, many of the community centers are being underutilized as per the people and also the media reports [22]. Therefore, in an attempt to seek a solution to this problem, we asked the frequency of the respondents’ visits to the community centers in Q1, and their replies are shown in Figure 1.

From Figure 1, we find that 58.33% of the people use the community centers occasionally. The percentage of men using community centers is lower, with females using the community centers 3.48% more than men. However, through questioning the community center coordinators in remote areas, it was found that they are being effectively utilized especially for photocopying, taking passport pictures, and browsing the internet in such areas. However, in urban areas, people hardly utilize the community centers. The majority of our respondents reported that they used the facility occasionally, followed by never. However, those respondents aged 40 and above never used the



community centers, because none of them said they used community centers almost always or always. In response to suggestions for improving the community centers, the respondents reported that such facilities should be situated in better locations, have more functional machines and capable operators, and that greater awareness of such facilities should be promoted.

Despite the great development in media indicators and the government initiatives to improve information accessibility through various projects, the MIS report 2013 still indicates that, 67% of the respondents did not participate in discussions about democracy and politics. Q3 asks what the best way to engage people in discussions on democracy and politics is. As seen in Figure 2, TV was listed by the respondents as the most effective way to engage the public in discussing political issues. Direct communication was the second most popular way mentioned, followed by the internet. 34 males and 16 female chose TV. As for direct communication, more females chose this option than males (12 females and 5 males). For people in their 30s, the first preference was TV followed by direct communication, but for teens, their first preference was TV followed by the internet. But for those respondents aged 40 and above, newspaper and mobile phones played no role in discussing about politics and democracy.

When people feel that their opinions are not being considered, they tend to withdraw from active participation. Q6 asks whether the respondents' opinions are reported by the media or not. In response, 46.8% of them reported positively, saying that their opinions were being reported; however, 42.7%, an almost equal number, say otherwise, and the remaining 10 people did not respond. In both the positive and negative response groups, the proportion of male and female respondents is close, although, comparatively, men tend to have more opportunity to report their opinions in mass media.

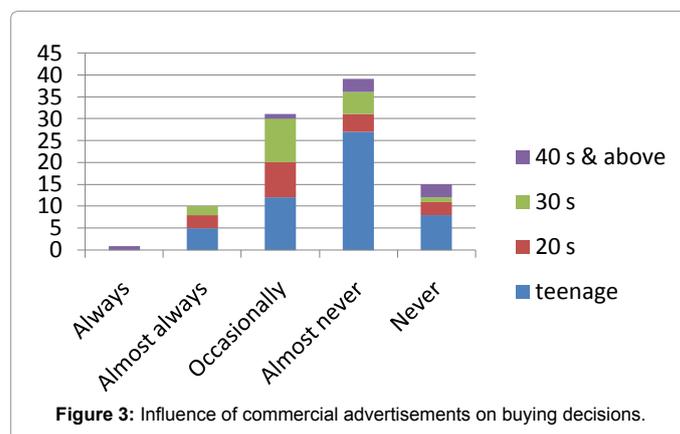
Question Q7 asks what priority the respondents think the rural and minority news is given. We find that almost half (48.9%) reported neutral followed by low priority (27%). The positive replies (corresponding to "essential" and "high" priorities) comprise only 6%, respectively. This implies that nearly 90% of the respondents have a rather negative view regarding the equal treatment of rural and minority news currently.

Influences

Responding to question Q4 regarding whether mass media influences the people's opinion, 79.16% respondents replied affirmatively. Even though all the groups have similar tendencies, those who fall in the age 40 and above group are evenly divided regarding affirmative and negative replies. Regarding question Q15 which asks about the extent to which mass media such as radio, newspapers, and the internet has affected their daily lives [13], we found that the largest percentage reported that it affected their lives moderately (32 out of 96 or 33.33%), followed by 23.95% reporting neutral, and 19.79% reporting a major effect, and this result was consistent at all age levels. Females reported a moderate affect followed by neutral and then major effects. However, men reported that, they were affected moderately followed by neutral to minor effects. The effect of mass media on the respondents' daily lives is almost similar at all age levels.

It is clear that Bhutanese lives are now being affected by mass media and the information transmitted. Since a large majority of the people has easy access to certain mass media and is also being affected by the transmitted information, we believe that the mass media must be responsible and play a positive and important role in society.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents' replies to question Q14, which asks to what extent their buying decisions are influenced by commercial advertisements. It is interesting that the largest percentage, 40.63%, reported that they were rarely influenced. They are followed by those who stated occasionally (32.29%), then never (15.63%). People aged in their 30s responded that it influenced them rarely, followed by occasionally, and then a moderate amount. Advertisements here refer



to all types of advertisements that people may come across in Bhutan, such as Indian and Bhutanese TV channel advertisements, Bhutanese newspaper advertisements, and internet advertisements.

Impacts

We attempt to investigate the impact of mass media on Bhutanese behavior and attitude. Here we mean by impact the change that is bought in society as a result of consuming information from advertisements and other programs through mass media. The study done by LaPiere found that influencing opinion does not guarantee a change in behavior, which means although people's opinions may be influenced, this influence does not necessarily change their behavior [23]. Thus, the following question asks how mass media changes the respondents' attitude and behavior towards a particular program or event. It is worth noting that men's behavior and attitude is changed more than women by 11.2%. For those who are in their teens and those in their 30s, their behavior is changed almost always, followed by occasionally. Q13 asks whether the respondents bought products after they viewed the product advertisements. We found that people buy products advertised in mass media only occasionally, followed by almost never and never.

Since the advertisement policy is being finalized in Bhutan, it is important for the general public's recommendations to be incorporated in the advertising policy of the country. The respondents said that the policy and content of advertisement should not mislead the public. They also said that the quality mentioned in the advertisement should match the products and services, and thus the advertisement policy should have guidelines for quality checks. In addition, the respondents stated that advertisement time should be less than the time devoted to the main content and announcements, and should not copy Indian-type commercialized advertisements. During the process of drafting the policy, the government should consult the people and involve them. However, some reported that it is no use commenting on policy, and that they had no recommendations because they trusted that the concerned officials are doing their best.

Though there was not much impact of advertisement on people's buying decisions, many studies point out the impact on culture, which is an important aspect. Bhutan seems to be emerging with a new popular culture of singing and dancing preferences. The traditional culture of dance used to involve dancing along to live singing rather than using tape recorders and other media. It has been a tradition for a long time, and such culture is passed down for generations. Questions Q11 and Q12 ask if Bhutanese reality TV shows, e.g., singing competitions, and various types of music media, such as CDs, have any impact on Bhutanese culture. The respondents replied that children are being influenced by the different culture they are being exposed to, but this exposure also encourages young people to find innovative ways to participate in national and international issues through song and dance, for example advocating drug abstinence. Bhutanese youth are also becoming more interested in Bhutanese songs and dances because of the opportunity to participate in reality shows, so the reality shows are a good way of promoting Bhutanese culture. It seems that through such shows, people are becoming interested in their age old traditions again. Thus, such shows are influential and have a great positive impact on our culture. Although international reality shows also have impacts on society, the respondents feel that some impact and change is inevitable. However, Bhutanese shows help to preserve the culture, and by performing in zhungdra and boedra, it is helpful in making us realize our culture and tradition. We all agree that music

media such as tapes and CDs have an impact on Bhutanese singing and dancing culture, which many youth are interested in. However, most of the youth prefer to sing and dance in English. In addition, the communication style has changed among youth; they tend to speak in Dzong-lish (a mixture of Dzongkha and English). Bringing new culture into society by copying neighboring countries' songs and dances is a recent major concern in Bhutan.

Question Q9 asks whether respondents are aware of the media policy in Bhutan. The largest percentage (36.45%) responded that they were not at all aware of the media policy of Bhutan, followed by slightly aware (34.37%). Only those in their 20s reported that they are slightly aware, followed by not at all aware. For those who said they were aware of media policy, Q10 asked how to improve the media policy. To this, they said that those working in the media should investigate the news properly before reporting in mass media. They also said that the media should have the right to publish the news which the people should be aware of and not to enter into the extreme personal issues. They also suggested that the media should take precautions for the viewers if a particular program contains explicit content which is not suitable for children. Finally, they said that the policy should be free of political control or influence.

Who sets the agenda matters to society. The media must act to spread development messages, and it is their obligation towards society to report events and programs accurately rather than manipulating news to favor an individual or association [24]. As seen in Figure 4, which shows the respondents reply to question Q16, the largest percentage (48.95%) said that the agenda setter is media. This implies that the media decides what become news and sets the agenda for the nation rather than the government. However, when analyzed by age group, people in their 20s reported that it is the media who sets the agenda, followed by the people, and then the politicians. Those in their 30s reported that, after the media, it is the government who sets the agenda, followed by the people. Teens reported that, after the media it is the people, followed by the politicians.

Summary, Conclusion and Policy Implications

Over the decade, the life of the Bhutanese people has changed greatly with the development of the media. Today, almost 80% of the population has access to information through various media. However, Bhutan has its challenges such as the scattered households and rugged terrain which make any development plan difficult. Since the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) radio, the national public service broadcaster, was started in November 1973 by young volunteers and TV stations provided by BBS TV were launched in June 1999, radio

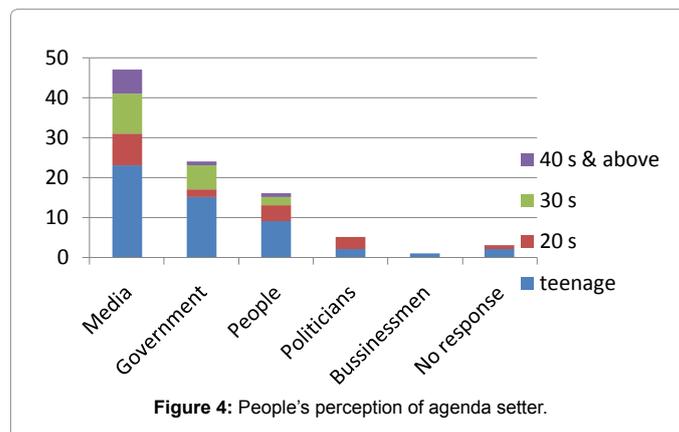


Figure 4: People's perception of agenda setter.

and TV have been the most important electronic media in Bhutan. On the other hand, the internet, also launched in Bhutan in 1999, has seen a drastic increase in the number of subscribers from 2,117 in 2003 to 109,528 in 2008 and 133,289 as of 2013. We know most of the current internet subscribers are government offices, while internet connections at home are also on the rise. Internet connection will become even more popular with more electronic devices entering the Bhutanese market such as personal laptop computers, smart phones, and tablets.

The Bhutanese government has initiated various projects to improve the accessibility of information, for example, by setting up community centers, similar to centers like SARI (Sustainable Access in Rural India) and E-Governance projects in India as described by Choudhary [25]. This would allow peoples to access information and online services; however, there have been critics in the mass media who claim that this is not functioning well. In the attempt to probe this issue, we found that most of our respondents used community centers services only occasionally followed by never. They would prefer that community centers be in better locations, have knowledgeable attendants who can operate the machines, and also provide reliable services. They also suggested promoting better awareness of the community centers. Besides community centers and improvements in media ownership, 67% of the respondents did not engage in discussions about politics. When asked about the best ways to engage the people, they chose TV, followed by direct communication, and then the internet. This could be because of the impact of live debate sessions on TV during election campaigns, and also because people prefer direct communications in the form of social gatherings or visiting each family to explain the parties' manifestos. The internet seems to be experiencing a surge. This could be because the largest group of respondents were teenagers and also because of the increase in subscriptions to 3G. Sometimes, people do not engage in discussions if they feel that their opinions are not being reported, as highlighted by the media development assessment report, which pointed out that bureaucratic barriers and traditional norms hinder the exercise of constitutional rights [14]. Similarly, the survey response also showed this slightly negative trend, and also that the respondents feel that the minority news is not given equal priority in news reports.

It is not surprising that mass media has influenced and affected people's daily lives moderately as well as their opinions. However, it is interesting to note that commercial advertisements, which are available to people via various kinds of mass media, rarely influences their buying decisions.

The behavior and attitude of men are being more affected by programs and events transmitted through mass media than women probably because men watch or read national mass media or sports channels more than women. It is very common to see men discussing sporting events such as archery or football, while women mostly watch Indian soap operas, which have nothing to do with Bhutanese culture and simply provide entertainment. However, people in their 30s are highly influenced, which indicates that this group of people is working in offices and has access to the internet and social media sites such as Facebook. People were occasionally influenced by commercial advertisements, but their behavior remains unchanged. For teenage boys and men in their thirties, the behavior change due to the influence of mass media could have implications. Unlike developed nations, where so much of the impact of commercial advertisements is being reported, Bhutan seems like an exception, where people are not influenced by commercial advertisements. Though their opinions may be influenced at times, their change in opinion does not necessarily influence their

behavior or their decisions. This could possibly be because most of the advertisements are provided by foreign channels. The products they advertise are not readily available in the market, and also the content is not relevant in the Bhutanese context. Furthermore, during the interviews, one of the respondents from a rural area of Bhutan said that, "if the products are advertised that means that product is not selling well, that's why they are advertising. Good and authentic products always sells out, and they don't need to be advertised". It is interesting to note that, many of the people felt this way. However, considering that Bhutan has a large youth population, it is important to note that of all the age groups, teenagers' opinions are being influenced by mass media the most, especially among boys, which could have policy implications. Regarding men in their thirties, this age group belongs to the working group, and for them, advertisements are not restricted to TV as they have access to all kinds of advertisements through various media, such as smart phones, newspapers, the internet, and social media. Government organizations and businesses have started websites, and Bhutan's draft constitution was launched on the internet. Digital forums, especially kuenselonline.com, and social media sites such as Facebook are now regarded as spaces for discussion, and the public sphere has grown with the internet. Today, media has picked up in vibrancy. For instance, the online edition of the paper provides a public forum for lively discussions on development issues and the policies of the government. Readers post feedback, criticize failed projects and ask the government for accountability. This online feedback system is now joined by social media sites, providing another platform for the people to voice their concerns and raise issues pertaining to national interest. Facebook users have also created groups for buying and selling, and they advertise their products. According to the data obtained from social bakers, 73.3% of Facebook users in Bhutan are in the age group of 18-34 [26]. Social bakers is an online networking analytics that deals with social media administration services.

Thus, in conclusion, we believe that media policy focusing on how to deal with this growing demand for the new "social networking society" based upon the appropriate infrastructure needs to be discussed in the government, mass media, and among academics also. In this sense we emphasize the importance of further investigation of Bhutanese mass media from different viewpoints such as accessibility, influence, and impacts.

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