



**ROLE OF THE BHUTAN BROADCASTING SERVICE (BBS)  
AFTER THE INSTITUTION OF DEMOCRACY IN BHUTAN**

**BY  
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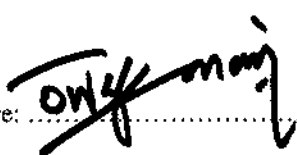
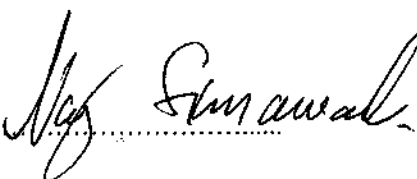
**SONAM RINCHEN: ROLE OF BHUTAN BROADCASTING SERVICE (BBS) AFTER THE INSTITUTION OF DEMOCRACY IN BHUTAN.**

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Bhutan has undergone major changes as a nation in the last one decade. The arrival of television and the introduction of democracy have greatly changed the socio-political landscape. Today, Bhutan is gearing towards the second parliamentary elections. In the new political environment, the Bhutanese media have to play a vital role in promoting and facilitating democracy. This paper tries to examine the role the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, BBS, has played and continues to play in the socio-political development in Bhutan. The paper in particular attempts to answer questions pertaining to editorial independence, its role as a public service broadcaster in the changing political scenario and as a provider of information on politics. This study concludes that the BBS news is credible. About 82.4 % of the respondents believe that the BBS provides an independent view. However, 17.6% of the respondents believe that BBS news and programmes are subject to censorship. The study also concludes that BBS news and programmes have huge impact on the viewers. The study also shows that BBS is the main source of political information and that the BBS needs to strengthen its watchdog role to effectively contribute to the growth of democracy. Around 44.1% of the respondents say that the BBS is not playing its role in fostering democracy. However, the general feeling is that the BBS is effectively playing the role of a public service broadcaster by informing and educating people on democracy and by providing a public forum.

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Thesis Advisor's Signature: .....

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BBS</b>	Bhutan Broadcasting Service
<b>TV</b>	Television
<b>DPT</b>	Druk PhuensumTshogpa
<b>PDP</b>	People's Democratic Party
<b>BKP</b>	Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party
<b>DCT</b>	Druk Chirwang Tshogpa
<b>DNT</b>	Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa
<b>NYAB</b>	National Youth Association of Bhutan
<b>BICMA</b>	Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority
<b>BTA</b>	Bhutan Telecommunication Authority
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>MoIC</b>	Ministry of Information and Communication
<b>GNH</b>	Gross National Happiness
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NA</b>	National Assembly
<b>NC</b>	National Council
<b>AIBD</b>	Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistics Program for the Social Sciences
<b>ABU</b>	Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union
<b>AIBD</b>	Asian Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development
<b>JICA</b>	Japan International Cooperation Agency
<b>BGAN</b>	Broadband Global Area Network



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Executive summary

On the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> March 2008, thousands of Bhutanese who were eligible to vote queued up at various polling stations across the country with great excitement to cast their vote for the first ever parliamentary elections in Bhutan. They were dressed in colorful Bhutanese *Gho* (for men) and *Kira* (for women) to vote for their favorite candidates. Some voters had even trekked for hours to reach their polling station to cast their votes. People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) were the only parties fighting the polls on a bi-party system.

Journalists and election observers from all over the world excitedly watched the history unfurl. That day the tiny Himalayan kingdom made its final step to democracy. The election result was relayed at around 9:30 pm through the only television channel, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), stunning the nation. The Druk Phuensum Tshogpa, (DPT), secured a landslide victory. Soon a parliament was established and government formed, setting the wheel of democracy in motion. Thus, Bhutan became a Constitutional Democracy after hundred and one years of absolute monarchy as planned by the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. Now, with the emergence of democracy in Bhutan media should keep citizens engaged by informing and educating public on democracy.

In a country like Bhutan with low literacy rate, low internet penetration and low print media readership, television is an effective instrument for promoting

grassroots democracy and informing people. Television should play a vital role in helping build peace and social consensus without which democracy is threatened. Throughout the history of mankind media has always occupied the forefront of socio-political and economic changes. In view of the above we can safely say that the media's role in the running of the affairs of a government is of that which cannot be relegated. It should play a central role in strengthening the democratic system and providing check and balance in a democracy. The former president of the United States of America (USA), Thomas Jefferson once said in one of his speeches on the importance of the media that if he were made to choose between a government without newspaper or newspaper without government, he would not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter (Jerry W. Friedheim, 2005).

Bhutan's first ever constitution guaranteed media freedom, freedom of speech and the right to information. It resulted in new laws, aimed at protecting and regulating Bhutanese media. Does BBS as a public service broadcaster get to exercise the rights guaranteed by the Constitution? Is it free from internal and external influences? Is Bhutan Broadcasting Service living up to the democratic needs of the country? Does it have enough freedom to carry out the roles and responsibilities? Are its mandates any different from earlier mandates? Is the Western concept of a watchdog role applicable to Bhutan? This paper attempts to seek answers to the above questions by looking at how the BBS has functioned after the institution of democracy in 2008.

## **1.2 Research motivation**

Today Bhutan is in the transition period. It is undergoing fundamental changes in politics, economy and every other aspect as a nation. Significant political, economic, and social developments are taking place.

With the advent of democracy the impact of media on Bhutanese society is going to be vast. Newer challenges ahead and how to cope up with these challenges is going to be an uphill task. In many countries, media has failed to provide positive expectations of civil society. Global competition and the profit motive have made the media forget its social responsibility. Rather, it is busy transforming citizens into spectators by offering them entertainment in the name of knowledge and communication. The electronic media has really made the world a global village. Just by pressing a button one gets to know the happenings virtually in any parts of the globe. In the days to come the extent to which the media is going to control people's aspirations in Bhutan cannot be undermined.

In the new political environment media will have to play a vital role in sustaining its democracy. In fact the success of the new path, initiated by His Majesty the Fourth King will in larger part depend on how the media is managed and practiced in the country. The Constitution of Bhutan guarantees the freedom of speech, press and expression in "letters" (Constitution of Bhutan, <http://www.constitution.bt>, 31 March 2012). Will it be translated into "spirit" by the government that would have to regulate these rights and by the citizens that will have to exercise these rights? How can it be translated into spirit if government interferes?

It was in 2010, during the fifth session of the Parliament when the Speaker of the National Assembly openly criticized the only national broadcasting service (BBS), on the coverage of its activities. The speaker said, "Is BBS a public service broadcaster? Or is it a government broadcaster?" He asserted that BBS must "*obey*" the government as the organization is owned and financed by the government. (History of BBS, <http://www.bbs.com.bt>, 10 February 2012).

With such comments from the government in achieving its vision of becoming "*A trusted public service broadcaster of international standing*" is a question. By judging the current scenario of the democracy BBS' vision to become a "trusted

public service broadcaster” will remain just that-a vision. The Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) was delinked from the government and established as an autonomous corporation by the royal decree on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1992. But after the introduction of parliamentary democracy, its role, vis-à-vis the government, has come under question (BBS, 2010). There is a general feeling among the government officials that media is being vindictive, focusing mostly towards the bad content.

At a meeting with the press on February 2012, Prime Minister along with the ministers pointed out instances where media have been irresponsible and saying media is being vindictive (Is Bhutanese Media Vindictive? <http://www.bbs.com.bt>, 15 march, 2012).

Is this a serious concern? It is indeed a universal trend with the media that bad stories make more news than the good ones. But, whether these stories are reported in a fair, balanced and accurate manner or not need to be ascertained by the newsmakers and news consumers. BBS has been managed by civil servants, of different managerial capacities, some good and some who left much to be desired. The one common result was the limitation of the journalistic and professional growth. Although by a Royal Decree of 1992, BBS was to function as an autonomous corporation, for all practical matters, it had to “abide” by some unwritten code of management. This was often some casual remarks here, some indiscriminate views there, passed by some prominent people. The management would often put producers, reporters and editors at the receiving end of unpleasant “briefings”.

The net result has been a flourishing practice of self-censorship where reporters and editors would censor out facts even before any reaction has been received. Then there is the unique Bhutanese journalism, which one could term as ‘speech’ journalism where the prime time news is dominated by speeches, workshops, and inaugurations by senior government officials. Editors often wait for press handouts and reporters are often “invited” to, and attend, the numerous workshops

and conferences (Media in the New Political Order, <http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt>, 5 January 2012)

This has left the major chunk of the population either un-reported or under-reported. Although the newest of the three traditional media, TV, has caught on to the audience who prefer watching TV more than reading paper or listening to radio. Besides, television, being the most powerful medium, has the social responsibility to conduct and encourage TV debates on various issues affecting the nation. It can bring the nation together through socially and culturally diverse programming and content.

In an article “Press freedom essential for Bhutan democracy” by Mishra, T.P. (2007), stated that Bhutan's heading towards democratisation is nothing short of an attempt to fool the international community. It had stated that there can be no democracy until it guarantees freedom of press and freedom of speech and expression. The government-controlled media will not relay the people's voice. It has also highlighted that Bhutanese natives are unable to attain uncensored news.

The government officials censor all news to be published, broadcasted or telecasted. Even other programmes on the radio, television and most of the write-ups in the newspapers are administered by government. The government not only dampens private publications but also imposes serious penalty on such auditions. Having read similar articles in some of the foreign papers I questioned myself as a citizen of Bhutan and as an employee in the media organization: How true is it? Or is it just a mere assumption? So those were some of the issues that inspired me to write this paper and try to find answers by doing some research.

### **1.3 Background**

To understand the growth of media and its role within the Bhutanese context one has to appreciate the overall arching development philosophy. This understanding is vital and it averts any prejudiced assessment or simplistic conclusion often drawn

by Bhutan-watch groups and so called upholders and press freedom in the world. Bhutan is a tiny Kingdom in the Eastern Himalayas still not widely known to many parts of the world. This is because the country remained in a self-imposed isolation until the first half of the twentieth century. The total superficial area of 38,394 square kilometers is sandwiched to the India- to the South and China- to the North.

Within these borders the country rises into the higher Himalayas like a giant stairway, dramatically climbing up from the lush green tropical forest to some of the highest mountains in the world.

The virtually untouched forest that covers 70.46% percent of the country is home to large number of flora and fauna making Bhutan one of the world's hotspots in biodiversity (Bhutan's Forest Cover is 70.46 percent, <http://www.bhutantoday.bt>, 19 December 2011).

Although Bhutan is a small country in size, it has many diverse language groups among its small population. A total of eighteen languages and numerous dialects are spoken among a population of 634,982 (National Housing and Population Census, <http://www.nsb.gov.bt>, December 10, 2011). Never having been colonized the country developed a distinct culture and tradition over a millennia. Three main ethnic groups namely, Ngalong, Sharchop and Nepali and several other minorities are dispersed across mountains and difficult territories.

Communication is still undeveloped, and except for a small group population comprising of government officials and business community, much of the Bhutanese people confines themselves within their farms in their rural areas. Until the sixties, Bhutan remained an isolated country, a forbidden Kingdom. Only thirteen western expeditions had entered the country beginning with two Portuguese, Jesuit missionaries in 1662 (Pommaret, F. 2003). This isolationist policy was to change forever with the enthronement of the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, in 1952. The King recognized that if Bhutan were to survive as a nation, it had to modernize its

economy and open its door to the outside world. Hence he initiated an intense political and social reform starting with the institution of National Assembly in 1953 as the parliament.

In 1961 the first five year development plan was launched with the focus on roads and social infrastructure such as hospital and schools. In 1965 the Royal Advisor Council was established as a consultative body to advise the King and the government and to supervise the implementation of programs and policies laid down by the national assembly. Three years later in 1968, the Bank of Bhutan was created to regulate the economy and monetary policies. In the same year, the Royal Court of Justice was formed separating the Judiciary from the executive arm of the government. In 1971, Bhutan was admitted to the United Nations as an independent and sovereign state.

The Fourth King who succeeded to the throne in 1972 continued the process of modernization and gave continuity to the progressive policy of the Third King. While the story of a nation's modernization is nothing extraordinary, what singles out Bhutan is the balance that the country has achieved between modernization and cultural preservation, and between economic development and environmental conservation.

#### **1.4 Development of Bhutanese media**

Bhutanese society has not yet shed its oral culture and Bhutanese journalists maintain that their biggest competitor is gossip and rumor. Current concern is that society might jump from an oral tradition to the visual media and not develop a literary tradition.

In this section I provide a brief profile of the Bhutanese media and an analysis of its origins and impact over the past one-and-a-half decade as the society tries to

grow out of its oral tradition. The media in Bhutan has seen a significant growth since the mid-1980s, with the establishment of BBS and the newspaper, Kuensel, and the small information revolution that took place in the 1990s with the introduction of television and internet.

Mass media in Bhutan until recently was comprised of Kuensel, the national newspaper; Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), the public service radio; TV; internet and cinema. This is not surprising as the country itself embarked on the modernization process only four decades ago. When the modern economic development started in 1961, priority of development was on creation of basic physical infrastructure such as roads, schools and hospitals. With decision makers concentrating only in the capital, it was appropriate and adequate to have only the Kuensel, an official bulletin catering mainly to the officialdoms.

In fact Kuensel did not start as a newspaper. It was more of a development newsletter carrying short write-ups on important decisions and events revolving around the capital, Thimphu. Similarly, radio was first broadcasted in 1973 as a weekly service for the Thimphu residents. It was initiated by an amateur radio operator and a group of volunteers of the erstwhile National Youth Association of Bhutan (NYAB). In fact the station was known as radio NYAB. However, with the bureaucracy getting bigger and development activities getting wider year-by-year, there was a need for wider coverage. Radio NYAB became full-fledged public service provider in 1979 after the station was bought by the erstwhile Department of Information and Broadcasting (History of BBS). Realizing the potential of radio to disseminating information, Radio NYAB was brought under the wings of the Ministry of Information and Communication. Further support from the Government and external aid the agency gave birth to the establishment of Bhutan Broadcasting Service in June 1986.

As the curtain of the twentieth century drew to a close, Bhutan launched the broadcast Television on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1999 and liberalized the media with foreign



television stations beaming it into the country from space. The day before, Bhutan was connected to the worldwide web (WWW) and cyberspace. Finally in January 2006, the first two independent newspapers were licensed under private ownership, marking a new era in the Bhutanese media. While this was a surprise for many who never believed that Bhutan would accept a western notion of free press, for Bhutan connoisseurs and operators in the Bhutanese media, this development was seen as a natural progression of the media in the country.

Today there are 12 newspapers in the country. The latest private newspaper to hit the people is “The Bhutanese”, launched on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2012, coinciding with His Majesty’s 31<sup>st</sup> birth anniversary. Its prime focus will be on investigative journalism, political, economic issues and corruption. It also looks into abuse of power, to inform and bring positive changes among others.

The seed for an independent media or press, in fact was sown in 1992, when by the Royal Decree, the two media organization, the Kuensel and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service BBS, were delinked from the government apparatus.

The following is an excerpt of the Royal Decree.

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

national newspaper, Kuensel, and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service will therefore be delinked from the Ministry of Communications to give them the flexibility to grow in professionalism and to enable them to be more effective in fulfilling their important responsibility to society. From the fifth day of the eighth Bhutanese month (October 1, 1992) the national newspaper, Kuensel, and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service will be established as two autonomous corporations. The Kuensel and the BBS corporations will be governed by an editorial board comprising of representatives of the government, media professionals, scholars, and eminent citizens". His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk, the Fourth King of Bhutan.

The decree clearly specified the mandate and professional role of the Bhutanese media, aside from implying fresh directions and responsibility (Kuensel editorial, <http://www.kuenselonline.com>, 19 February 2012) It is often referred to as the turning point in the history of media development in Bhutan. It can, therefore, be concluded that the growth of media has been in consonance with the socio-economic development of the country. It reflected the changes taking place in the social, political, and economic evolution of the country.

### **Dominant features**

The Bhutanese media has seen significant growth since the mid-1980s with the establishment of BBS television and the newspaper, Kuensel. To a large extent the media in Bhutan enjoys freedom of expression in spite of some political pressure.

The television channel shows music programmes, documentaries, films, religious programme, Educational and health related programmes, political talk shows and news of the hour. Although sometimes criticized for being unprofessional, media in general is making a great contribution to Bhutanese society. Radio is the most prolific

media in Bhutan, reaching a majority of the people in all 20 districts. Radio channels are considered a very important source of information.

In Bhutan Radio was launched in 1973, ever since it has played an instrumental role in disseminating information and bringing people together as one nation. For a country like Bhutan, where there is harsh geographical terrain and scattered population, Radio is and will play an important role in educating, informing and entertaining the people. It will also play a big role in emergency communication and disaster relief.

Apart from the BBS radio, some of the private radio stations also carry independent journalist content and news. However, most private radio content is music and entertainment. For remote communities BBS is the only source of information and this medium is yet to be fully exploited.

As of now the media sector in Bhutan is not highly influenced by the ownership structure. There is no dominating media moguls and do not have political affiliations. However, political pressure on media is mostly done indirectly.

One tool widely used by the government is to cut off “unfriendly” media from government advertising. With the advent of democracy, news coverage is mostly focused on corruption, political stories and reports covering social issues which did not get due exposure in the media.

### **Print media**

Kuensel was the only local newspaper available in Bhutan until 2006 when two more newspapers were launched. Kuensel started in 1967 as an official bulletin. Today with just a population close to seven hundred thousand there are twelve newspapers in the country. Print media published in two languages, English and Dzongkha. Although there are not many readers in Dzongkha, all newspaper houses

are directed by the government that English newspaper in the country to also have an equivalent edition in the national language that is Dzongkha. This is basically to promote the national language. Dzongkha newspapers are mostly consumed by rural population and monks. The English paper targets urban and the elite.

English newspapers have far more audience and also greater leverage among opinion makers, politicians, the business community and upper strata of society compared to the Dzongkha newspapers. Like in some other countries the print media in Bhutan is not divided linguistically with a series of media in vernacular languages.

### **Television (TV)**

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

*- King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, 2 June 1999*

BBS TV was first launched in June 1999 with a daily one hour broadcast in Dzongkha (the national language) and English. The news channel went nationwide in 2006. The introduction of television into Bhutan was sparked by the World Cup Final of France '98. The 3-0 victory of the home side over Brazil was watched by thousands on a big screen in Bhutan's National Square.

BBS's state monopoly will never end unless the market for electronic media is liberalized. The private channels have been issued licenses for cable only, which means that BBS is the only channel that provides terrestrial services to the population. The Invasion of television in the country has caused profound change. Young people are now much more in tune with globalization and what is happening around the world. The introduction of television had opened up the world to Bhutan. It gave people a better understanding of the global market and choices, introduced new ideas,

improved the standard of sports and most people believe that TV has made children smarter and given them more confidence.

With the change in time and the demand due to democratization, Bhutan Broadcasting Service launched its 2<sup>nd</sup> Television channel on 21 January 2012. The new channel known as BBS 2 airs current programmes and entertainment shows. One of the reasons for the launch is to provide live coverage to both the Houses when the parliament sat in session. In the past with just one channel and both houses requesting for the live coverage had put BBS in a very uncomfortable situation.

## **Radio**

Radio is a vibrant media in Bhutan and the dominant media in many rural areas where television does not penetrate because of the prohibitive transmission costs or simply a lack of electricity in rural households. Few years back, one of the ministers was visiting the remote valley of Merak-Sakten in the higher Himalayas, inhabited by a nomadic group.

Every morning from the window of the guesthouse where the minister was hosted he would see an old man defying the early morning chill to go and wash in the icy cold water of the Himalaya. On enquiring the man, the minister was told, “I am having my regular bath”.

Amused the minister carried on, “But don’t you feel cold?” the man replied “I was told I should take regular bath if I am to stay healthy”. Who told you? The minister asked. I heard it on the radio, came the reply. This short story portrays the power of the radio and the presence of this medium in the daily lives of rural Bhutan.

Radio is by far the most important media for the Bhutanese people. For a country like Bhutan, where there is harsh geographical terrain and scattered population, radio is and will play an important role in educating, informing and entertaining the people.

It will also play a big role in emergency communication and disaster relief. In some remote isolated communities, radio is the only source of entertainment, information and education.

Apart from the rural people, radio is gaining popularity, as people are too busy to watch television and often listen to the radio while driving to and from work. Radio is the most prolific media in Bhutan, reaching a majority of the people in all 20 Districts. In Bhutan Radio was launched in 1973. Ever since then it has played an instrumental role in disseminating information and bringing people together as one nation.

Apart from the BBS radio, some of the private radio stations also carry independent journalist content and news. However, most private radio content is music and entertainment. For remote communities BBS is the only source of information and this medium is yet to be fully exploited. Today, there are 5 private radio stations in Bhutan.

### **1.5 Legal framework**

The media in Bhutan enjoys freedom relatively compared to some of the neighboring countries in South Asia. Like few countries in the world Bhutan was never subjected to any military or authoritarian rule and has managed to thrive on basic democratic norms. Media in Bhutan never had to work under dictatorships and repressive regimes, with many restrictive laws and regulations for media in order to control it. For a country, which introduced television as recently as 1999 and which, until a couple of years ago had only one stated-owned newspaper, the effort in media-related activity, especially since the advent of popular democracy in 2008, has been remarkable.

## **Constitution**

The media in Bhutan upholds the fundamentals for a vibrant democracy and guarantees freedom of expression and the basic premise for media freedom. The constitution underlines the key civil rights inherent in a democracy and states that citizens: Shall be guaranteed fundamental rights, freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship including freedom of the press, radio and television and other forms of dissemination of information, including electronic. In some countries, the constitution and democratic governance was repeatedly set out of play by military coups and the country was under military dictatorship for more than half its existence.

Democratic norms were severely affected, but countries managed to survive through those darker days and reinstate its sidelined socio-political values. In those countries media has played a vital role. Even in the darkest days of the worst kind of military rule, it has been the media that kept the hope for the country and its future alive. However, fortunately, Bhutan with its dynamic rulers never led such situation to happen under the monarchy. Future is unforeseen as Bhutan is in its transition.

## **Media Act**

The Bhutan Information, Communications and Media Act was enacted by the 85<sup>th</sup> session of the National Assembly in 2006. Act provides: functions, responsibilities and powers of the Ministry of Information and Communications; the establishment of the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority: provision of ICT facilities and ICT services: provision relating to radio communications; provisions relating to media issues; provisions relating to cyber issues such as e-governance, e-commerce, consumer protection and online privacy; and offences, penalties and legal proceedings. However, there are a number of legislative and regulatory mechanisms that directly or indirectly affect media. Meanwhile, the Bhutan Information

Communications and Media Amendment Bill 2012, after certain major consultations and amendments were submitted to the Cabinet.

### **Code of ethics for journalist**

Journalists in Bhutan, as elsewhere, have a duty to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards. “Journalist shall provide independent and accurate news and information with integrity, remaining accountable for their actions, neutral in their position and keeping the national interest foremost in their minds at all times” (The Bhutan Information, Communications and Media Act 2006, <http://www.nationalcouncil.bt>, 12 January 2012).

The act says journalist should observe professional integrity, social responsibility, the right to truth, non-discrimination, sensationalism, protection of source, respect for privacy and human dignity recording of conversations, competition and fairness and national interest. The act says any journalists who contravenes or fails to comply with the provisions of the Code of Ethics shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable for any actions prescribed under the Act or the Bhutan Penal Code.

### **Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority**

The Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) was established in 2000 with the enactment of the Bhutan Telecommunications Act. The office was then called as Bhutan Telecommunication Authority (BTA). It was later renamed as Bhutan Communication Authority (BCA) in 2003 with the establishment of new ministry, Ministry of Information and Communication (MoIC). In 2005, it was named as Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority, extending its mandates to regulate ICT and Media services in the country. With the enactment of the Bhutan Information and Communication and Media Act 2006, BICMA was formally delinked from its parent



Ministry, MoIC to function as an independent, autonomous body on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2007.

The objective is to ensure:

- 1) Conducive environment for the development of the ICT industry.
- 2) Continuous technological advancement for the ICT industry.
- 3) An efficient and effective universal delivery of ICT services at affordable prices and to increase the productivity of business and quality of life.
- 4) Facilitate the establishment of an integrated, efficient and high quality ICT infrastructure in the country among others.
- 5) The Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority was mandated to improve standards of information pertaining to education and entertainment, expand the choice available to the people of Bhutan in the media or news, current affairs, religious knowledge, art, culture, socio-economic development, music, sports and other subjects of public and national interest.
- 6) It was also mandated to facilitate by improving the access to mass media at the local and grass roots level, ensure accountability, transparency and good governance through free flow of information. However, the general opinion among the media practitioners is that Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) is only acting as a license issuing office that has implemented regulatory barriers for broadcaster and newspapers. The 2006 Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) Act is being criticized for giving the Ministry of Information and Communication (MoIC) minister too many discretionary powers over BICMA which is supposed to be an autonomous media, film and telecom regulatory company.

## 1.6 Statement of the problem

Over the past few decades, media in Bhutan especially, Bhutan Broadcasting Service the only television channel generally reported news that has put the Kingdom in a favourable light. Most of the coverage was all to do with the visiting of prominent figures, annual events and some social events. BBS was mostly criticized for not reporting anti-government positions and statements in the past. News was dominated by speeches, workshops, and inaugurations by senior government officials. Editors often wait for press handouts and reporters are often “invited” to, and attend, the numerous workshops and conferences.

I still remember Bhutan Broadcasting Service radio talking about the vegetable price in Thimphu city and TV news only highlighting workshops here and seminars there.

Today, BBS has increasingly been highlighting societal problems and carrying critical stories of the government. Over the past few decades media in Bhutan did not play its role as desired. There was no diversified content or any serious investigative reporting. There was no journalistic guideline set by the government and no media regulatory in the past. Most of the information was government controlled because it was owned by the state or heavily subsidized by the government.

With the advent of democracy in Bhutan, BBS should now look at broader picture. The role of media in strengthening democracy is extremely vital. Democracy is generally defined as the rule of the people by the people and for the people. Meaningful democracy requires that informed citizens take the most appropriate decisions regarding various aspects of governance. Citizenship is a crucial issue for the success of the democratic state. Since the literacy in Bhutan is at a little over 48% percent (KUENSEL 2010), the role of the BBS television in Bhutan is extremely

important for the strengthening of democratic process by educating the citizens on relevant issues. The BBS is expected to perform three basic functions: it should be a provider of information, act as a watchdog for the people and interpreter of the events.

The prerequisite for enjoying the right is knowledge and information. The absence of authentic information on matters of public interest will only encourage wild rumors and speculations and avoidable allegations against individuals and institutions. The lack of an effective and viable media might call to question the sustenance of democracy in Bhutan. Therefore, this paper intends to look at how broadcast medium can play its role in effectively ensuring the continuation of democracy in Bhutan.

It will also highlight some of the problems that could militate against the emergence of a viable media and look at how the strength of Bhutan could be enhanced.

### **1.7 Significance of the study**

Media plays a significant and commanding role in democracy and public affairs, substantially impacting the formation of policy agendas and the performance of political institutions (Linsky, 1986). Media serve as both the primary and, in some cases, the only mechanism communicating information to the public. In addition, media often serve as the internal communication device among public officials and government leaders (Kingdon). Having quoted those writers

1) The significance of this study will lie in the difference it is capable of making to the enhancement of democratic ethos in the Bhutanese political system. Its principle is that media in general have a great role to play in mounting Bhutan's democracy.

2) It will also contribute to the advancement of knowledge as it relates to this

field of enquires.

3) It is hoped that it will provoke further researchers in the nearest future since this no researcher has studied about the impact of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service to the people. The study is the first of its kind.

### **1.8 Scope of the study**

The study is limited to the following:

A) The study will focus on the role of the BBS in fostering democracy since the first parliament election in 2008.

B) There is not enough literature in Bhutanese context to support the study. Most of the arguments will be referring to the findings from the questioners and interviews from academicians, university graduates, politicians and media practitioners.

### **1.9 Objectives of the study**

The Bhutan Broadcasting Service has lived up to the expectation in spreading useful and developmental information and in educating the society. This accounts for the tons of news stories, editorials, commentaries, interviews and other information giving activities. The Television channel has helped the Bhutanese people to keep abreast of the developments in political space of the country. As democracy was introduced in Bhutan about four years ago, it indicates that Bhutan is relative a young, emergent democratic country in the world. The biggest change in the past few years is that, while the television was a source of education and information in the past, they are now critical players in the political process of an emerging democracy. It is not just watchdogs of society, but a changing society themselves. The only television station in Bhutan is constructing new realities and values. When we accept this

growing responsibility of the media, we must accept that there is much to be done to develop the Bhutanese media both in terms of professionalism and capacity.

This study provides the insights that will provide the basis for policy decisions to ensure that media will strengthen Bhutanese society and the national identity because this goal has not changed. This paper will also look at the phenomena where Bhutan Broadcasting Service is likely to affect changes socially and politically, particularly in a democratic set up where they are supposed to function freely and speak fearlessly.

The main objective is:

- 1) To explore how the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) played its role in disseminating information since the first democratic election in 2008. It is vital to understand how the only broadcast media in Bhutan has been able to affect the informed opinion and thereby how it has been able to tackle crucial public issues.
- 2) To focus on whether or not Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) plays a constructive role in informing the public and serving as a bridge between the government and the people.
- 3) To answer the questions pertaining to issue such as press freedom in Bhutanese context, the role of the public service broadcasting and the independent press in the changing socio-political scenario.
- 4) To examine whether there is any external influence to the TV station and to the broadcasting programmes.

### **1.10 Research questions**

- 1) One of the main tasks of the media is to disseminate information to the public. Is the BBS television doing its duty in disseminating information?
- 2) Does BBS news and programmes affect listener's judgments? For any

effective democratic process it is essential that the media not only generate awareness amongst the public on critical and relevant issues but also create pressure on the government to enact desirable changes.

- 3) Does BBS influence political decisions and debate?
- 4) Another important role of the media is to act as a watchdog. If the media is subjected to censorship or stricter regulations it cannot perform the duty. Apart from newspaper, how is BBS television function as a watchdog?
- 5) Is BBS subjected to censorship?
- 6) How do you rate BBS in fostering democracy?
- 7) Is BBS television providing more discussion on democracy and people role in a democracy?
- 8) Has democracy helped free reporting and open up discourse in the television?
- 9) How fair were the media reports in the first general election?
- 10) Apart from some issues like national security and royal family, media are reporting openly on the Government and corruption. Is Television, particularly, more critical and playing a stronger watchdog role?

### **1.11 Expected outcome**

- 1) The result of this research will be useful for the future journalist in Bhutan to know how the only television channel in Bhutan played a role in the process of democratization and will have to play for the success of democracy in future.
- 2) The results of this study will be useful for the journalist in reviewing the past role by the media especially the broadcast.
- 3) This study will serve as a reference for other Bhutanese researcher to research in similar related field of studies.

## 1.12 Definitions of key concepts

**Constitution of Bhutan:** The constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan was enacted on July 18, 2008.

**BBS:** Bhutan Broadcasting Service is the national radio and television service in Bhutan. A public service corporation, it is fully funded by the government and it is the only television service to broadcast from inside the Bhutanese border.

**Kuensel:** It is the national newspaper of Bhutan. It was the only local newspaper available in Bhutan until 2006 when two more newspapers were launched. Today there are 12 newspapers in Bhutan.

**Ngalong, Sharchop and Lhotshampa:** These three are the main ethnic groups in Bhutan. Ngalong is referred to those sections of people residing in the western and northern part of Bhutan. Sharchop is another ethnic group in Bhutan. They are people from the eastern part of Bhutan. Lhotshampas are referred to the people of Nepali origin, residing in southern and some central part of Bhutan.

**National Youth Association of Bhutan (NYAB):** The first radio broadcasts commenced in November 1973, when the National Youth Association of Bhutan (NYAB) began radio transmissions of news and music for a half-hour each Sunday, under the name "Radio NYAB."

**Dzongkha:** It is the national language of Bhutan

**Merak-Sakten:** Merak and Sakten are two villages in eastern Bhutan. Merak - Sakten was closed to tourists for decades until recently. People of Merak and Sakten lead a nomadic life mostly depending on their livestock. Yaks are their main source of income and their food. Their dairy products are mostly sold or bartered for food in the

neighbouring villages. People of Merak are called as Brokpas. Today Merak has an elementary school and a health clinic.

**Thimphu:** Thimphu is the capital and largest city of Bhutan. It is situated in the western central part of Bhutan. Thimphu is the political and economic centre of Bhutan.

**Gross National Happiness (GNH):** The term "gross national happiness" was coined in 1972 by the fourth King of Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck who has opened Bhutan the age of modernization. He used the phrase to signal his commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan's unique culture based on Buddhist spiritual values.

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## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORIES

#### 2.1 Literature review

Discussions on the media in Bhutan tend to revolve around the traditional paradigm of the all-powerful effects of media. It tends to revolve around the recognition of Bhutan's unique situation as a small country and culture in a globalised world. Many academic papers written about the media in Bhutan places the media in the perspective of a small and vulnerable society transiting into a democracy. They support freedom of speech and information as a basic tenet in a democracy but emphasize on preservation of the culture and caution against liberal, unrestrained media policy.

Participants at a Media and Public Culture conference in 2006 called for discretion and careful judgment in the mass media in Bhutan so that they “support rather than destroy the culture and values of the country” as Bhutan undergoes through the process of modernization. Academics, journalists and analysts acknowledge the need for an open and independent mass media but advocate a more responsible media. Of particular concern is the impact of media on children and the young. Many academics point the need to find the right balance between liberalization and media control. They point to ways in which Bhutan should take advantage of the positive elements of media-public service rather than being consumed by the market-driven media. Several articles from the conference on Media and Public Culture call for clearer policies to prevent the negative impact of commercially driven media.

N. Balasubramanian and Jigme Nidup (Role of Media in the Changing Socio-Political Situations in Bhutan, 2007) in the Role of Media in Bhutan, argues that a

major challenge for media in Bhutan is “how to get the people out of this whirlpool of consumerism? What role will the media have in making the people at large rise from their individual selves to the spatial level or responsibility citizenship?”

To what extent will the media in Bhutan be circumscribed by neutrality, impartiality, security, anonymity and meritocracy?” These are the major issues requiring Bhutan’s attention according to the authors.

Tshering Dorji, (Attitudes towards mass media, 2006) found that most respondent in his study spent their time watching television. He concluded that a majority of people considered information the most important reason for using newspapers, listening to the radio and TV. The study revealed that the BBS television had also influenced the greatest number of people on decision-making.

Dasho Kinley Dorji and Siok Sian Pek, *The Media in Bhutan: In the service of the public*, highlights two critical issues as the basis for the discussion and as foundations for the role of the Bhutanese media. They say that media has become public space for Bhutanese society. It must be the forum for debate and discussions as society beats a path of change based on rational discourse. Public space is seen here as one of the building blocks of democracy. The paper also highlights that given the powerful forces of state control and commercial drive that is shaping the global media; the Bhutanese media must not lose focus of its priority in providing and in being a public service.

For democracy to work, media has the role to establish a diverse and vibrant public and cultural sphere, one that is truly Bhutanese and not copied. The media’s voice must be relevant to the average citizen. Dorji and Pek argue that media, as required by Gross National Happiness (GNH), means a strong public service role. It means providing space for public voices in the media. It also means addressing people as citizens rather than mere consumers, and it means addressing public service obligations above all else.

Many of the researchers have attempted to identify the role of the media in fostering democracy. The study of evaluations of the news media, particularly in terms of one dimension credibility has a long tradition. Martin Linsky (1986) says 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 agenda and the performance of political institutions. Linsky examined how media influenced individual public officials, government institutions and public policies at the national level.

Spitzer in (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.

Michael Barker (2005) in his paper highlighted that through the media, citizens learn how government policies will affect them, and governments gain feedback on their policies and programs. Media systems act as the primary conduit between those who might want to influence policy and the policymakers – controlling the scope of political discourse and regulating the flow of information. He stated policymaking is a political process which is affected by various social and economic factors and media systems play an integral role in shaping the social context in which policies are developed.

McCombs and Reynolds in (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 his research provides a good insight into the mechanism through which the media affects the democratic process. International media watchers generally hold the view that Bhutanese media are not totally independent in Bhutan.

While acknowledging a growing openness, they point out that Bhutanese media are generally not free to discuss openly the issues concerning national security, the royal family and the issues of the thousands of refugees in Nepal.

## 2.2 Theoretical approach

One of the theoretical perspectives that guide this study is neo-institutionalism (Scalapino *et al* 1986; Peters 1999; DiMaggio & Powell 1991); neo-institutionalism is the analysis of governing instruments in the context of political power relations. It reflects the theoretical perspective that the emergence of effective democratic institutions is dependent upon the emergence of an independent media system. This study takes a political approach to the study of press regulations in Bhutan. The political approach comes from the liberal concepts of democracy (Lichtenberg 1990; Keane 1991; Curran 1991; Gleason 1990; Held 1996) where the media play a watchdog role to make the government accountable to the citizens. This political approach takes into account political issues related to press freedom, such as the modes of rule and citizenship.

In the American perspective, for example, the media are a “Fourth Estate” playing an adversarial role against government and serving as public watchdogs. So, this study applies the theories of press in emerging democracies in the non-Western countries. This study reveals how the Western liberal models and theories about press have been accepted as an ideal in many non-Western countries (Austin 1995; Handelman 2004; Park, Kim and Sohn 2000; Hackett and Zhao 1997; Haynes 2001).

Media practitioners are trying to apply these theories as Bhutan is on the path towards democracy. The fundamental argument is that an independent press is an essential component for democratic development. It has been realized that the growth of an independent press system relies on the development of effective democratic institutions. Following the above theoretical discussion, this paper strongly supports the argument that an independent press is a prerequisite for the development of democratic institutions.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research design

This research paper is based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

#### 3.2 Data Collection methods

In order to collect data a set of research questions was set first. The questions were discussed with the advisor. After the approval of the survey question by the advisor, questions were then developed into questionnaires. The researcher then distributed questionnaires as per the sampling method. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed randomly among the university students.

However, the data was collected by using:

- 1) Primary sources and
- 2) Secondary sources

##### 3.2.1 Primary sources:

For the primary sources my data collection was from three board categories which included the following:

- 1) Questionnaires
- 2) Interview and
- 3) Partly from my own observation

In the primary sources I collected primary information by conducting a survey from one hundred university students studying in Royal Thimphu College and Royal Institute of Management Studies, both located in the capital city, Thimphu.

I also used in- depth interviews from elite individuals representing different elements from, ten civil servants, seven politicians, Member of Parliaments both from the National Assembly and National Council, six businessmen, six private sector employees to gain some expert insight. Elite individuals are those considered to be influential, prominent and well informed people in an organization or community.

I interview four villagers who are the major portion of the voters since they are the one who regularly listen's BBS radio and watch television regularly for day to day developments in the country since most are illiterate and cannot read newspapers. I also interviewed ten journalists to find out how they have played their role as a watchdog.

### **3.2.2 Secondary sources:**

For the secondary, I reviewed some of the studies carried out and writings on media. I as an employee of the BBS also did an audience survey in 2010 with regard to the news coverage by BBS, the survey covered around sample size of more than 6,000. Since I have the data readily available it was appropriate for me to incorporate in my paper some of the findings.

### **3.2.3 Population and sample**

Since the research was conducted in Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan, the subjects of this study consisted of university students, teachers, academicians and politicians.

### **3.2.4 Data analysis**

As a process of data preparation, the primary data collected were loaded into statistical software (SPSS). The respondent scores were tallied and summed up in order to obtain the total score of each measuring instrument. The score of the negative questions were also reversed to attain the accurate or precise measurement of the construct.

The systematic analysis was done with the help of Rangsit university library's SPSS program. The score from each sample were tallied and summed up to get the total score of each measuring instrument. Demographic data were analyzed descriptively to understand the demographic characteristics of the students.

### **3.2.5 Key Informants**

The key informants in this study are the chief editor of the news and current affairs department, BBS, general manager from the news and current affairs department and BBS radio department. I also used in-depth interviews from, eight teachers, three politicians, four businessmen, five private sector employees. During my study the occupational distribution was taken into account to get a reasonable cross section of society.

### **3.2.6 Survey**

To judge or measure the views of the people, a survey titled "Role of the BBS after the Institution of Democracy" was carried out. The respondents were mostly university students who always keep track on the BBS news channel. Apart from questionnaires, which were formatted in a manner that it began with definite "YES" or "NO" answers, five open-ended questions were also framed for further detailing.

Also, to get views from the journalists' ten reporters were selected from the Bhutan Broadcasting Service with different years of media experiences and carried out face to face interviews. Additional interviews were conducted to support the findings of the survey. This includes representatives from the political members and media regulatory body in Bhutan.

A detailed use of literatures, both local and international publications has helped me hold the issue in a wider context. Articles from various newspaper, forums, and International publications were referred largely for facts and figures and also to track down the transformation over the period.

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## CHAPTER 4

### RESULT AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter shows both the quantitative and qualitative result of the research. Firstly the quantitative analyses are presented, which includes respondents' demographic analysis, and secondly, the qualitative results from the in-depth interviews from the media practitioners, academicians, opposition leader, MP from the ruling government, MP from the National Council and framers.

#### 4.2 Demographic Statistics

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are analyzed and the results are presented in the tables below.

Table 4.2.1 Survey sample by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	46	67.6
Female	22	32.4
Total	68	100

Table 4.2.1 reveals that out of 68 respondents, 46 respondents are male with 67.6% percent and 22 respondents are female with 32.4 %. The highest numbers of respondents are male.

In Bhutan the female literacy rate is significantly lower compared to males because girls tend to drop out of school and are relatively low in numbers by the time they reach tertiary education (Rinchen 2008). According to the Population and Housing Census data from 2005, the literacy rate of Bhutan is 59. 5%. However, the female literacy rate is only 49.7% while the male literacy rate is 69.1%. Female enrollment decreases by the time they reach to secondary level due to the distance of the school from home and the need for girls to help at home. For variety of reasons, less female Bhutanese students complete their tertiary education compared to male.

Table 4.2.2 Survey sample by Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
18 – 20	8	11.7
21 – 25	32	47.1
26 and above	28	41.2
Total	68	100

The table 4.2.2 shows that of the 68 respondents the highest number of respondent is found in the age group of 21-25 (47.1%) followed by 26 years of age and above with 41.2 % and the lowest is in the age group of 18-20 with just 11.7%.

In Bhutan children begin their schooling at the age of 6 when they enter the first grade of primary, known as pre-primary class (PP). That is why even at the age of 25 to 26 years, students are still found studying in colleges.

Table 4.2.3 Survey samples by Education

Education	Frequency	Percent
Primary	1	1.5
Diploma	3	4.4
Bachelor	57	83.8
Master degree	1	1.5
Others	6	8.8
Total	68	100

Table 4.2.3 shows that out of the 68 respondents 83.8% percent has attend Bachelors followed by Diploma with 4.4% percent, Primary and Master Degree with 1.5% percent each.

Table 4.2.4 Survey samples of Place

Place	Frequency	Percent
Urban	58	85.2
Semi urban	6	8.8
Rural	4	5.8
Total	68	100

The table shows that majority of the respondents has come from urban area which is 85.2% percent. Only, 8.8% percent is from Semi urban and 5.8% percent from rural area. Majority of the respondents are seen form the urban dwellers because

like any other countries Bhutan is also confronted with the problem of rural-urban migration.

The migration is basically due to unbalanced regional development, lack of basic healthcare services, no higher education facilities, proper sanitation are some of the reasons why people are forced to move to the cities.

The Human Development Report 2009 reveals that urban migration rate in Bhutan is one of the highest in South Asia as many people move from rural to urban areas.

Table 4.2.5 Survey sample of family background

Family background	Frequency	Percent
Civil servant	29	42.6
Corporate employee	2	2.9
Business	16	23.5
Farmer	21	30.9
Total	68	100

The table 4.2.5 shows that majority of the respondents parents are civil servants. It shows that 42.6% percent families are civil servants, followed by farmers with 30.9% percent, 23.5% percent from business background, and 2.9% percent from corporate employee. Today, many civil servants in Bhutan, watching television have become a part and parcel of their daily life especially after the office hours. Most respondents say that watching television has become a family affair.

However, students from business background and farmers are comparatively less because they feel that at times watching television hampers their work.

### **4.3 Findings of the study**

#### **4.3.1 Tracing the growth of BBS**

In the past without any constitution provision that protects the right to expression and the right to information, which is enshrined in the constitution now, the growth of BBS as a national broadcaster was a daunting task.

The BBS television came into existence on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1999, coinciding with the silver Jubilee celebrations of the coronation of His Majesty the Fourth King. Its primary role was aimed at providing information to the general public about government policies and the happenings in and around the world. It started with a daily one hour broadcast in national language (Dzongkha) and in English only in the capital city, Thimphu.

In 2004 and 2005 live television was made available in two other districts. However, the most important event in the history of electronic media in Bhutan, the BBS launched its nationwide television service on satellite in February 2006. With the nationwide expansion on satellite, BBS TV is available not only in Bhutan but also in the region. The signal can be received in almost 40 other Asian countries – from Turkey in the West to Indonesia in South East Asia. On 21st January 2012, Bhutan Broadcasting Service officially launched its second Television channel. The new channel known as ‘BBS 2’ airs current programmes and entertainment shows.

“BBS in particular have been playing a very bold role unlike past. BBS today tackle almost every issues ranging from corruption, social issues, health, youth and criticizing even the elected leaders,” said one of the reporters. “Broadcasting station facilitates as a platform for the people to voice and help shape government policies and plans, and ensure that the elected government is held accountable to the people” said Kaka Tshering, one of the General Managers. Most of the reporters say that BBS

status changed from the official statement to the news bulletin. They say range of coverage has drastically changed now. “Now, with the right guaranteed in the constitution we report on corruption by the senior officials without a dearth of fear,” says a reporter from the station.

Reporters say now the coverage has become very vast unlike past. From the reports collected it is evident that Bhutan Broadcasting Service has evolved from the mouthpiece of the government to a more independent station, which highlights public issues, fosters public debates, and keeping eye on the functions of the government and its performances. “BBS is performing all the roles that an independent media is supposed to perform” said Jigme Thinley, the chief editor.

#### 4.3.2 Editorial Independence

The survey presented in diagram 1 show that about 82.4 % percent believes that Bhutan Broadcasting Service provides an independent view. This basically means that BBS is starting on a positive note and government officials and politicians are more receptive to the media and its change.

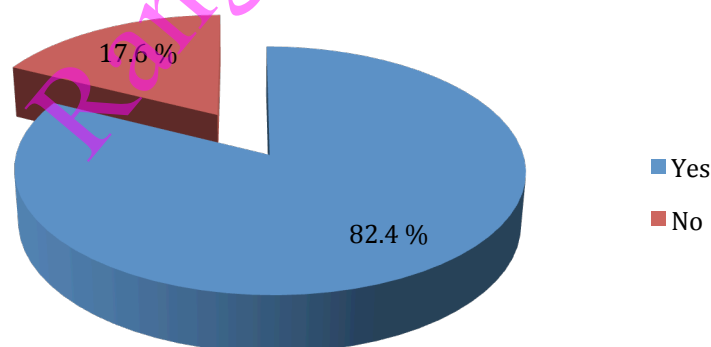


Diagram 1: BBS editorial independence as viewed by the respondent

The Media Impact Study conducted by the Ministry of Information and Communication in 2008 shows that BBS television is the most watched in Bhutan. According to the survey it shows that around (82.9%) percent have greater access to BBS TV than in rural residents with only (24.4%) percent. The Media Impact Study also reveals that (39.1%) says that BBS TV represents people's views and on the other hand the respondents has rated (29.1%) for the newspaper. "Television is considered to be more believable because people see pictures. Interviews are seen to be more open" Media Impact Study 2008. A BBS audience research survey was also conducted in 2010 with an aim to build audience database and study audience share of local and foreign channels. The survey conducted a sample size of around 6,000.

The survey shows that (88.2%) percent watch BBS television for news, announcement (9.2%), programme (8.4%) entertainment (13.8%) weather (10.6%) and commercial (1.7%). This clearly shows that most people are glued to BBS television just for the news. While rating BBS news most of the respondents have rated BBS news as informative, credible and timely.

Of the total sample size (61.1%) has rated BBS TV news as informative, 59.6% has rated the BBS news as credible and (47.1%) has rated it is timely. A parliamentarian attributes more credibility to BBS TV. "Television is true. In print, sometimes facts are distorted. Most of us were misquoted in print media. But for television there is no way we can be misquoted coz we speak to the camera" MP Ugyen Dorji said.

However, in general people acknowledge an improvement in Television news and the credibility. However, the study shows that BBS weather lacks credibility. The study shows that BBS TV has become an important source of news with an independent view.

Meanwhile, the right the freedom of speech is recognized as a human right under article 19 of the UN'S Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.To

safeguard this, there are several international agencies monitoring of the press freedom in countries around the world. Bhutan, being a small country has not been spared from this observation. Reporters Without Borders is one such that advocated press freedom.

The France-based international non-governmental organization, Reporters Without Borders (RWB) which conducts an annual ranking comparing each nation's state of press freedom, has placed Bhutan at 82 position this year, 2013. In fact Bhutan tops the index in South Asia followed the Maldives which has been ranked 103rd. Nepal has been ranked 118th, Afghanistan 128th, India 140th, Bangladesh 144th, Pakistan 159th and Sri Lanka 162nd. When it first released the press freedom index of the countries in 2002, Bhutan ranked 135 out of 139 countries Press freedom Index 2002 (The Bhutanese, 31 March, 2013).

The index is drawn by preparing a questionnaire with 44 main decisive factors indicative of the degree of press freedom. The questions relate to every kind of violation directly affecting Journalists and netizens (including murders, imprisonment, physical attacks and threats) and news media (censorship, confiscation of newspaper issues, searches and harassment). It also establishes the level of impunity enjoyed by those responsible for these press freedom violations (The Bhutanese, 31 March, 2013).

Meanwhile, Finland is rated as the country that respects press freedom best for the third year in a row. Syria, Turkmenistan, North Korea, and Eritrea are ranked as the worst countries for press freedom for two consecutive years

#### **4.3.3 Coverage in the first parliamentary election**

The campaign for the first historic elections, using the newly diverse media was characterized by “LIVE” debates between political party presidents on BBS TV and debates among all the 94 candidates. This was basically to introduce the candidates



and their plans and manifestoes to citizens who were about to exercise their franchise for the first time.

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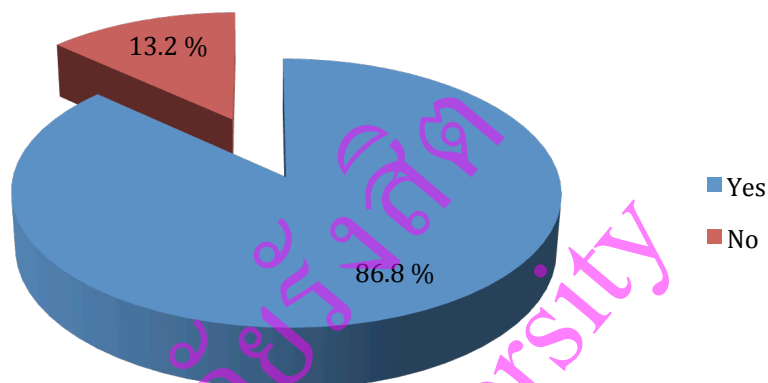


Diagram 2: BBS coverage in the first parliamentary election as view by the respondents

Most respondents say that the coverage initiated by the BBS television on the historic election, Bhutan's transition to parliamentary democracy in 2008 was fair and balanced. Of the sample size (86.7%) percent has rated BBS has played efficient role in covering the first parliamentary election in Bhutan. This clearly depicts that the BBS TV ensured that the Bhutanese were informed and educated about democracy and the electoral processes as well as candidates and their platforms. The survey shows that BBS mission to inform and educate the Bhutanese people which were assumed the greatest significance was achieved. "The live coverage of the mock elections in April and May 2007 brought the process alive for the Bhutanese, and helped BBS and the people of Bhutan prepare for actual election" said a TV reporter.

“If there was no BBS TV I would not have know who are the candidates from my constituency” said a man from Gelephu. He said interviews with party candidates and campaign stories by the BBS TV allowed the nation to get to know their future parliamentarians and make informed choices at the time of voting. Apart from other mainstream media, the BBS television has also played an important role in the country’s first historic elections. Although TV in the country is still very young, the station has established as a critically important element of democracy in Bhutan. “The investment made by the organization to provide training to the staff to cover elections made a difference” said a TV reporter.

Trainings were not only confined to reporters but also to camera. Observation and trainings were arranged to countries like India, Netherlands and Australia. One of the managers from the BBS said, although such trainings and trips were expensive, however, in the context of the overall national objective to build a good democratic system, it turned out to be a good investment. Professional ethics and objectivity are by far the most important attributes of good election coverage. Although there was no hard evidence of bribery or corruption of the media by political parties, however some correspondents say they were often cajoled to provide positive coverage of parties, campaigns and candidates. The correspondents asserted that, with their relatively unbiased reporting and objective analysis, the Bhutanese media and in particular BBS emerged as the true winners of the first-ever general elections in the history of Bhutan. The European Union mission also included a media monitoring team that concluded, in its final report, that the national media’s coverage of the elections was fair and balanced. This clearly shows that BBS has shouldered its responsibilities as public service broadcaster and played an important role in the post and pre-election.

#### **4.3.4 News coverage**

As BBS being public service broadcaster one of the important task of the organization is to disseminate information apart from education and entertainment.

It totally depends upon its ability to get the attention of the viewers and the quality of news coverage.

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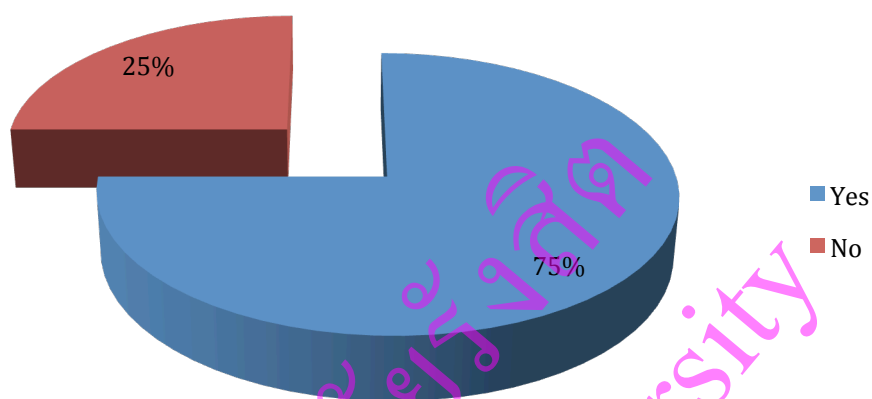


Diagram 3: BBS news coverage

Most viewers say that BBS Television news stories have become bolder; there are more attempts at investigative stories. The respondents were asked do you watch BBS every day. Those who responded negatively were not interviewed. When asked about whether the TV coverage has changed over the last five years, a vast majority of the respondents rated “Yes” (75%) and only (25%) “No”. However, many observers pointed out that the need for balance news coverage. They say media is too urban centric and rural issues are left out unreported. The Media Impact Study 2008 shows that, there is unanimous opinion among focus groups across the country that the media portray stories as if only Thimphu matters, and the remote areas and people from there do not matter.

In most survey paper it is found that people in rural areas would like to invite media to come to their district and organise something and have it broadcast or telecast. “At times we also want our village to be telecast in television,” said a farmer

from Chuzergang Geog in Sarpang. “There is so much happening in our village, some good and some bad but all goes unreported and never highlighted in the Television,” said the farmer. Some academicians said that the amount of rural reportage in the Bhutanese media remains far too low even with important stories on corruption. However, they say that BBS TV is doing quite well in covering rural base stories compared to print media. A teacher from Gelephu Higher Secondary School said BBS has improved in some minor ways. “There are a growing number of journalists who are working hard to bring social-sector stories into the media. So, there is some energy being built up on these issues. BBS TV is not yet critical, but at least it is trying to start” a teacher said. He said to have greater impact BBS should be more critical and provide information more on politics since people should know what democracy is all about.

#### **4.3.5 BBS role in fostering democracy**

When asked about the role of BBS in fostering democracy in Bhutan, 44.1% respondents rated “YES” and 55.9 % rated “NO”. From the survey, it is obvious that BBS needs to put more weight on issues like promoting public debate and acting as a watchdog of the government to strengthen its role as an institution that strengthens the roots of democracy.

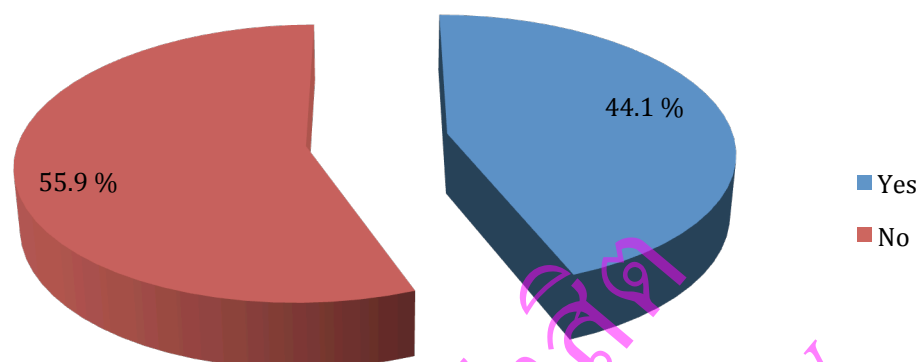


Diagram 4: Is BBS playing its role in fostering democracy?

The data in the BBS audience research survey 2010 initiated by the BBS also shows that respondents who watch BBS TV reported that they have learnt little on the subject of democracy. Of the 6,242 samples size only 17.8% respondents have said they have learned about democracy through watching BBS television.

The BBS audience research survey 2010 shows that the frequency to watch BBS TV is more to learn about democracy and politics. The survey also shows that 29.5% watch on the live proceedings of the parliament sessions. This clearly shows that most of the people depend on the BBS TV for information on politics.

“BBS's coverage of politics, on the other hand, has been much more restrained. Also, BBS TV does not yet actively present differing political views on its news coverage,” said Tshering Tobgay, Opposition Leader”. It is in the light that most of the viewers about the quality of reporting in BBS TV fail to provoke discussion over the critical public issues. This can be seen as a failure on the part of the BBS to promote greater spread of public debate particularly on politics and relevant issues.

A media observer said that 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. The observer said since the literacy rate in Bhutan is quite low it is the duty of the BBS TV to communicate to the people and create awareness of such issues. Since another important role of the BBS is to act as a watchdog for the public. It is very obvious that if BBS is subjected to censorship or with stringent rule and regulations it is very certain that the organization will not be able to perform its desired role as a watchdog.

When asked about the opinion whether the BBS news reporting is subjected to censorship, a majority of the people believe that BBS news is subjected to censorship. This is basically because most people feel that the BBS TV is not acting as a watchdog. Most people say that BBS should initiate more investigative reporting then focusing on the inauguration here and cabinet ministers visit there.

#### **4.3.5 Information on politics**

The incursion of television in Bhutan in 1999 gave rise to the belief that a new era was opening for public communication. Bhutan Broadcasting Service Television, with its penetration, its wide geographical distribution and impact has provided a new direct link between the people and the government. The BBS TV is providing a platform to know the elected representatives from all 47 constituencies.

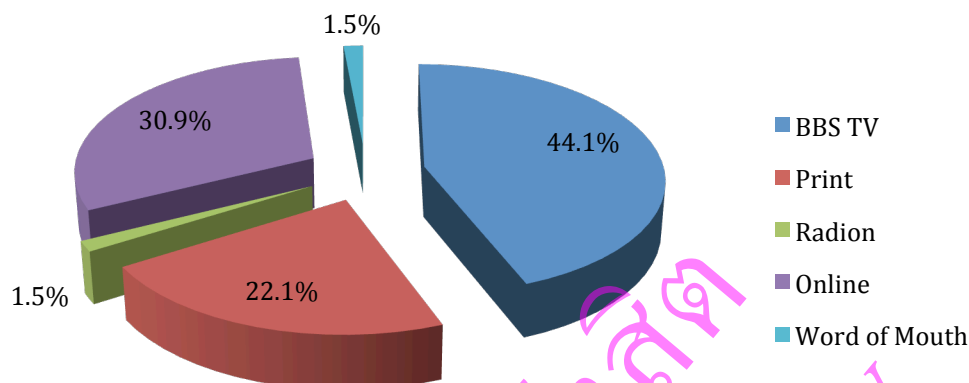


Diagram 5: Information on politics as viewed by the respondents

The above survey chart shows that highest of the respondents tune on to BBS channel for reliable political news coverage. Apart from media as sources of news and information, the survey also found that personal contacts are also sources of news and information. Most respondents indicated friends, parents and gossips as sources of news and information apart from media institutions. It is not surprising given the strong oral tradition in Bhutan where news, rumours, gossip and information are often spread through word of mouth.

The survey shows that large segment of public have been given a new, immediate contact with political events through BBS channel. By looking at the survey chart it clearly says that BBS television is fulfilling its mandate as a public service broadcaster.

Although BBS TV has not broadened public information about political issues and events yet most people trust BBS TV for political news coverage. The Media Impact Study 2008 reveals that BBS television is the most popular medium (39.5%)

of the sample, followed by radio (37.3%). The study also reveals that TV has become the main source of news and entertainment in Bhutan. The statistics show that households show a preference for TV as a source for news (45.8%) and as a source for entertainment (44.8%).

BBS TV is largely regarded as a source for news, while international TV channels are watched for entertainment purposes. This is not surprising since many people, ranging from civil servants to business people and farmers, all say they tune into BBS TV to see what is happening around the country. A businessman remarked: “I never miss BBS TV as I need to know what is on the agenda.” Media Impact Study 2008.

#### **4.3.6 Views from the media practitioners**

Political transition from monarchy to democracy has helped more liberal reporting and provided free discussions in the Bhutanese media in particular to the National television. Stories or news that was considered sensitive in the past is now a mere report. Television has become more critical and has taken on the role of watchdog, reporting on issues like corruption and other social issues. Media in general have become more critical now.

The Broadcast television is providing space for public discussion on topics like corruption, substance abuse, public health, social issues, and youth related issues, like never before.

Some of the reporters say that even though Television entered into Bhutan very late yet there is no dearth of freedom. A reporter who worked in BBS for almost ten years said even though BBS is being funded by the government yet it enjoys the same amount of freedom like any other private owned media houses. “The Bhutan Broadcasting Service has come a long way and now we have lot of independence” he asserted. However, reporters say that they should be very careful about reporting on



the national security. Reporters say they are Bhutanese first. Reporters acknowledge that they must, first and foremost understand national priorities and be careful in reporting on national security.

One of the General Managers of the broadcasting station said that BBS is a public service broadcaster. The mandate is to inform and educate the public. The General Manager said keeping the objectives in mind the television provides news and programming on a wide range of issues from politics, corruption, socio economic development, the environment, agriculture, health women's empowerment and child rights. He said that BBS is rated as the most credible media in Bhutan and the most dominant media in Bhutan. The Manager said people's demand is growing. They are becoming more and more media savvy. There is a demand for better coverage, more investigative reporting, to broadcast more news from around the globe. Talking on the instructions from the Government, the General Manager said BBS is an autonomous body and a public service broadcaster. "The government has no say in the day to day management or the editorial decision making. We do receive calls criticizing the coverage and asking for more positive news, but that's about it. The calls have no bearings whatsoever in the editorial decision making" he said.

Editors and some senior reporters said that the political transition has brought focus on the need of a strong media in the country. They say it is important for the media to play as a role of opposition at times. With the changing political system in the country they feel that that there is a need to strengthen the media in Bhutan. With the constitution guaranteeing the freedom of speech and expression and media law and regulations in place, they say that the growth of media is not very far.

#### **4.3.7 Thoughts of journalist working in Bhutan Broadcasting Service**

The constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan guarantees the freedom of speech, press and expression. Is it a mere symbolic? A mere symbolic because Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) fined the Broadcasting Service regarding a

panel discussion on a pre-paid taxi service televised. The station was fined saying that it was not decent and balanced in line with the Code of Ethics of Journalists.

A question arises as to whether holding a panel discussion is beyond the ethics of journalist. The incident happened in January 2009 almost a year after the first democratically elected government stepped in. However, journalists have now different views to share. Most of the survey respondents said that the advent of democracy is giving ways to strengthen media in the country. The government has taken initiatives to accommodate media by appearing more accessible. In a move to give access to media the activities of the government, a meet the press initiative was commenced by the government whereby a press conference is held with the cabinet every month.

During the conference, cabinet ministers including the prime minister makes available to the press to answers questions and clarify doubts on what the government is doing to the journalist. This move was indeed welcome by media practitioners.

“I never heard of such press conference held in other countries. Such an interaction helps to clarify doubts enduring in the minds of reporters and can get better pictures of the government. This also shows some transparency,” said a senior BBS reporter.

“The ruling government Druk Phunsum Tshogpa (DPT) is recognizing the importance of media in a fledgling democracy like Bhutan. The media can play a constructive role in democracy only if there is an enabling environment that allows them to do so,” said one of the respondents. He added the government is open in many of the issues.

Another respondents said, “BBS is not having problem in getting interviews from the elected members, they are very accessible provided they are free”. The journalist said they only have to make an appointment and the job is done. “Before reporters who wished to interview senior government officials had to wait even for

days for approval,” said the reporter. The reporter said today media in Bhutan is enjoying some freedom. “We can now get hold of any elected representatives, be it ministers even the Prime Minister is available for the interview,” said the journalist. Another journalist said we can even call on their phone and make an appointment for an interview. “We can call politicians any time be it morning, afternoon, evening or at night and they will get back to us even if they are busy,” said a reporter. The journalist added it was very rare to make an appointment though phone call before.

However, reporters did not deny that there are still government officials reluctant to raise voices or share information without the permission of higher authority. This is because they say is due to fear of losing their jobs or hampering their careers.

“It is very easy to get information from the people in rural areas. People in rural areas are more media friendly than those residing in urban areas. They are deprived of basic facilities and modern infrastructure,” a BBS bureau correspondent said. “They have nothing to lose making themselves available to media,” said a civil servant. “Now, there is no dearth of fear,” said another reporter who joined BBS six years ago. The reporters said, in the past to go for investigative report was never in the mind because of fear. Most journalists are of the view that the government is comparatively media friendly. Most of the survey respondents believe that the government officials are more receptive of media compared to the past. Some of the reporters with private owned paper say, government is taking media seriously and more freedom has been translated into spirit now.

But some reporters are of the opinion that that freedom of media ended with the slight improvement in terms of access to information only. However they are of the opinion that although media in Bhutan are quite young they feel that with time it will change. Journalist say it is not uncommon now to see front-page stories on corruption, scandals, failures in government policies, and even cartoons mocking of

senior officials. Reporters say now media is creating the public space for the people's voice to be heard.

#### **4.3.8 Reporting on politics**

Reporters from the Bhutan broadcasting service say that the first election was a huge task for them without any experience. Yet they say was a good start and a good experience. Most reporters said that the mock election gained them some experience to report on the election was held.

A senior reporter said BBS did a profound job in disseminating information and creating awareness to the people with regard to election. He said various programmes were produced highlighting some of the documents required during voting, voter registration, voter photo identity cards, polling stations, voting procedures and the use of electronic voting machines.

“By the time the primary round of mock election approached, Bhutanese people were aware of the basic requirements during elections” the reporter said. Another journalist said the BBS television undertook a massive exercise to provide live coverage from all constituencies. Reporters were deployed well in advance to all polling stations be it to the most remote corner of the country.

Most people agree that BBS did good share of duty during the first parliamentary election by educating voters; however, some say that the duty doesn't end there. They expect more of political news coverage. Some even criticize saying that Bhutan Broadcasting Service is not covering the failures and lapses of the present government. They say BBS only highlights the success stories of the government and never report on the failures of the government unlike some paper does without any hesitation and fear. They say BBS is a mouthpiece of the government with board of directors all appointed by the government. However, the chief editor of the Bhutan

Broadcasting Service Jigme Thinley denies such charges. He said it may have been true before but not anymore.

“BBS refrain from reporting or broadcasting any news stories that might incite religious and ethnic conflicts. If there is nothing to do with the security and the image of the country BBS never hesitate to broadcast,” Jigme Thinley said. He said BBS is a public service broadcaster and it is the mandate of the BBS to inform public on the activities of the government, be it a success or a failure.

#### **4.3.9 Views from the politicians**

The opposition leader from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Tshering Tobgay says that Bhutanese media coverage of politics has improved by leaps and bounds in the last four years. He said most of the improvements come from the print media. “Newspaper actively seeks out political stories and attempt to present different political views on issues,” Opposition leader said.

The opposition leader however, said that BBS news coverage has improved during the last four years. He said the quality and diversity of BBS's programs have improved tremendously. “Live reporting efforts are being made, however, the improvements are not noticeable, perhaps because changes have been gradual,” opposition leader said. “Bhutan Broadcasting Service is not playing a stronger watchdog role; the print media is a lot more vigilant and critical. TV seems to be more restrained,” Opposition leader said.

The Member of Parliament from the ruling government Ugyen Dorji from Deothang-Gomdar constituency said like democracy itself, media in Bhutan is at the stage of infancy but it is making a rapid growth every year. He said Bhutanese media has grown considerably, both quantitatively and qualitatively and has truly come a long way. The MP said BBS television being the sole state-run TV station in the country is in a position to exercise monopoly, which exposes it to the natural risk of

compromising the quality of its programme and independence. He said most state-run TV stations in other countries are reduced to government “mouthpieces”.

MP however, said BBS TV in addition to maintaining its independence has never compromised the quality of its programmes. “Coverage on politics and democracy has been extensive and its impact far reaching. The introduction of democracy began with the election of National Council in December 2007, which was telecasted “Live” by BBS TV. Later in March 2008, it made extensive coverage of the first general election in Bhutan,” Ugyen Dorji, Member of Parliament, National assembly said. The MP said the quality of media reporting especially print media is not so gratifying. “Political reporting is especially poor, inaccurate and highly exaggerated.

Most often subject’s views are deliberately misquoted to suit the preconceived notion of the reporter,” said Ugyen Dorji. He asserted that on the scale of 10, he would rate 5 for quality of political reporting by the media in general. With regard to BBS TV on political reporting MP said that it has been satisfying and encouraging because there is inherently less room for manipulation. When the person has to be shown speaking on television, there is no means by which the words of the subject can be twisted or rephrased,” the MP from the Dewathang-Gomdhar constituency said.

Some members from the National Council are acknowledging the responsibilities shouldered by the BBS television after the institution of democracy. Council members say news was a simple report of a certain development or a problem before but now it is now more informative. “News coverage and discussions in Parliament has seen some level of improvement in terms of dissemination of proceedings to the public,” said Sangay Khandu, MP, national council. However, some members feel that assembly proceeding outcomes were reported either incomplete or at times misinterpreted.

Council members say during some discussions, critical areas of discussions, which revolve around public interest, are left uncovered. They however, said television has also covered many important aspects of deliberations and helped keep the public informed. In terms of bringing different sides of stories council members say that public gets a more complete picture, BBS has been able to strike a fine balance. They say all in all, BBS news content as far as politics is concerned continues to improve and help keep the public informed.

#### **4.3.10 External Influence**

When people pose is there editorial independence in BBS, one is instantly leaning to think of regulatory body, legislators' autocrats and some affluent and influential people who control the editorial independence. The fact is that there also can be threat from external restrictions or an external influence from foreign countries, which supports the BBS, financially or technically.

The Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) the sole organization especially in television has professional partnership with several broadcasters and international media organizations and agencies. The BBS is a permanent member of the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union or the ABU, headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

ABU was established in 1964 as a non-profit, non-government, professional association to assist the development of broadcasting in the region. It promotes the collective interests of television and radio broadcasters and encourages regional and international co-operation between broadcasters (source: Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union).

Full members are national free-to-air broadcasters in the Asia-Pacific region. The ABU is funded primarily by annual subscriptions from members. The ABU runs a wide range of activities, including satellite TV news exchange, co-production and program exchanges and technical, programming, legal and management consultancy

services, as well as international frequency planning and coordination. It negotiates rights for major sports events and organises coverage for the region (source: Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union).

The BBS is also a member of the Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcast Development or the AIBD based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The AIBD is mandated to achieve a vibrant and cohesive electronic media environment in the Asia-Pacific region through policy and resource development (source: Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcast development).

**The Institute undertakes among others:**

1) Encourage regional dialogue and cooperation in electronic media policy, provides a regional platform for international cooperation in the electronic media development, assist member countries in human resource development as per their development needs.

Besides, the BBS has professional partnership and cooperation with other broadcasters like the NHK Japan, KBS South Korea, Radio Netherlands Training Center and the DW in Germany. The partnership is totally focused on human resource development and training. The partners also share and exchange Radio and TV programmes (BBS-Human Resources Development, HRD).

**Support from the International Media partners**

Media industry, especially television in Bhutan is at an infantile stage. The national television was launched only in June 1999 with an hour long broadcast in the capital Thimphu. “Skilled human resource remained a priority in the field. Moreover, media being at a developing stage – journalism as a profession is yet to pick up in the Kingdom. Paradoxically, the expectation from the Bhutanese audience is high, when it comes to quality news and programming. Audience also expects not just quality but



diversity and in-depth analysis of issues and concerns that affect their daily life. Therefore, for the BBS management, human resource development became an important aspect in all its plans” said Kesang, the general manager of the news and current affairs department.

The general manager said BBS is a national public broadcaster subsidized by the government, which provides just sufficient budget for its day-to-day operations. He said the BBS management is required to look for other avenues for human resource development in terms of finance. Kesang said commercial operation in the Kingdom is minimal due to the size of the market.

Bhutan has a total population of just close to 700,000. He therefore said, the only other viable option for BBS is to seek the support of other international broadcasters and agencies like ABU and AIBD for its human resource development.

“The partnership, over the years has had very positive impact on enhancing the skills of the journalists at the BBS, through provision of short term skilled based training and attachments provided by the partners” Kesang said. However, said the governments of India and Japan have been instrumental in the development of broadcast media in Bhutan.

### **Indian government support to BBS**

Diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan was established in 1968. India is not only Bhutan’s main development partner but also Bhutan’s leading trade partner (India-Bhutan relations).

The Indo-Bhutan bilateral relationships are characterized by close trust and understanding and extensive cooperation in the field of economic development, particularly in the mutual beneficial sector of hydroelectric power. The First Five

Year Plan (FYP) of Bhutan was launched in 1961. Since then, India has been extending financial assistance to Bhutan (India-Bhutan relations).

Apart from extending financial assistance to other sectors, the government of India also provides its assistance to the broadcast media in Bhutan.

The general manager of the news and current affairs department said that the assistance is purely as part of its bilateral relations between the two countries.

The general manager said the support is strictly in infrastructure development and human resource development. “Under the India government assistance, the BBS was able to expand its reach throughout the Kingdom. The assistance included not just the physical infrastructure in the form of studios and office but professional broadcast equipment for both radio and television. Today BBS has a professional Radio complex and TV complex broadcasting on several platforms – Radio, TV and Online with support from the Indian government” the general manager said.

He said the Indian government assistance is purely in the form of infrastructure and engineering, and no influence or pressure of any sort has been seen in BBS News and programme coverage.



The new TV center being built with assistance from Indian government (Pic Courtesy: BBS)

As an employee of the BBS and through my personal observation I also agree with the general manager and the chief editor of the BBS that the grant and assistance received by the BBS is purely based on goodwill basis and there is no influence over news and programme. But I also have some reservations. Through my personal observations as an employee of the BBS, I feel that there is no editorial influence what so ever, be it news or programme “directly”. I am saying directly because, the BBS up-till now has not received any directions from the government of India what to broadcast and what not to broadcast concerning India.

However, there are incidences whereby the BBS just ignore some hard core news which concerns India and China. I feel that the BBS has never highlighted negative issues be it news or programme concerning the government of India. This clearly indicates that BBS shows some courtesy for the assistance but on the other hand failing its role as a public service broadcaster and as an information provider to the people.

As people say, there is no as such call free lunch. I feel that the aid may have other functions as well. It may have been given as a signal of diplomatic approval or to strengthen media in Bhutan. The assistance could be to influence donor’s cultural influence, or to gain other kinds of commercial access in future as well.

I am saying the aim could be to influence cultural influence because with the arrival of television in Bhutan, the Indian movies are booming in Bhutan. I think Bhutanese are one of the biggest audiences of the Indian cinema. With the incursion of Indian cinema in Bhutan it not only promotes Indian culture but also gaining commercial activities. I feel that as time passes, more commercial activities will be gained by India. Since Bhutan is totally import driven country, almost everything that is found in Bhutanese markets are goods from India. The advertisement on the television will also gain commercial access since Bhutanese are one of the main consumers of Indian goods.

So in this way there are some influences over the Bhutan Broadcasting Service not directly editorial influence but in promoting the donor's culture and also commercial gains.

### **Japanese government support to BBS**

The Japan International Cooperation Agency or the JICA was involved in the BBS in the form of technical field. BBS receives JICA experts to help train BBS technicians and engineers and systematize the BBS engineering service.

The JICA and the BBS have had a relationship since 1989. The first technical expert from Japan was assigned to the BBS in 2003 to actively involve under the Japanese official development assistance or the ODA schemes. According to the JICA Bhutan office in Thimphu, the project was basically to bring positive impact on the Bhutanese people in terms of improved variety and quality of programmes available for viewers.

The Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN) terminals, provided under the government of Japan grant aid were used for the first time and enabled live reports from different places. The Japan government also support in content developing and trainings. JICA also helped in installation of Television Receive Only (TVRO) Systems. This system has helped those places in the country, which have no access to the television network will be able to receive BBS TV signal. JICA also provides training in news and production – by sending BBS staff to Japan (BBS annual report 2007).

Apart from other forms of assistance under the grant aid the JICA has provided satellite news gathering van, helped in setting up of master control system, establishment of transmission systems for bureaus using telecommunication link, purchase of news and production equipment for bureau offices (BBS annual report 2007).



Satellite news gathering van donated by Japan (Pic Courtesy: BBS)

“BBS has also worked with several other partners and governments especially in terms of human resource development of technology. The partnership so far has been very mutual and professional in nature. At any point in time, no partners has ever tried or even talked about influencing the news and programme coverage of the BBS” Kesang said.

Meanwhile the Japanese government is also providing some educational programmes on subjects like mathematics, chemistry, nature, beauty and some international affairs programme to telecast on the BBS television. Apart from the educational programmes, the BBS also broadcast programmes with regard to Japanese culture.

“Be it internal or external threats, they weaken the organization. Such threats will be unfortunate for a country, which is just in the wake of political transition. To form a vibrant democracy it is essential for media organizations to be vibrant and free from any external threats” the chief editor of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service said.

The general manager and the chief editor of the BBS said that there is no external influence with regard to the BBS policy and in the day-to-day affairs. However, through my own personal observation, I feel that there should be some motive behind for the assistance received by the BBS although in writing it is said that the assistance is based purely on bilateral relations between the two countries.

Most of the equipment in BBS is from Japan. Since most equipment has come from Japan, it has become mandatory for the technical staff of the BBS to be well equipped to handle. Technical staffs are also required to be well equipped not just in handling but also for the maintenance of equipment in future. To develop those skills BBS staff will have to get trainings from the Japanese experts whereby the BBS will have to spend and ultimately taking the portion of the grant back to Japan.

Since the Bhutan Broadcasting Service is broadcasting the Japanese culture it is one way promoting Japanese culture in Bhutan and promoting Japanese tourism sector. The BBS TV is available not only in Bhutan but also in the whole of Asia-Pacific region. The signal can be received in almost 40 other Asian countries so by broadcasting the Japanese programme BBS is promoting Japanese culture in rest of the countries.

Apart from the promotion of its tradition and culture, I do not see any editorial interference. The grant and aid from the JICA is totally on the basis of bilateral relationship between the two countries.

## CHAPTER 5

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Recommendations

In most of the research, BBS television was found to have contributed to change in various ways in a tiny Himalayan Kingdom even though the incursion of the Television in the rugged Himalayan terrain was seen only in 1999. In the survey and interview of villagers, it is found that the portion of people after watching BBS television pass on ideas and information to those who are deprived of the facilities.

The Audience Research Survey carried out by the Bhutan Broadcasting Service in 2010 also shows that people watch television more for news and entertainments. However, some desires to watch the television for programmes that are designed for better change in their livelihoods for instance programmes on agriculture and health related issues. With the significant move and sweeping change in the political reforms in Bhutan the television has an important role as the main channel of communication. Most people rely on the news as the main source of information and the basis on which citizens shape their opinion and voting choices.

1) Media can only act as a reflection to the citizen only if the masses are allowed to express their views. For this freedom of press is necessary. The freedom of press is enshrined in the constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, which guarantees the right to freedom of speech, opinion, expression and right to information. Keeping in view the rights guaranteed in the constitution, the BBS should make a point to report or broadcast without fear. BBS is a state funded institution receiving much of its funding as a subsidy from the government. Such funding will lead the organization in

an uncomfortable situation which might force the organization to foster closer ties with the government which will hamper the newly emerged democracy. In order to refrain from such situation BBS should now look for ways and means to sustain by its own without much financial help from the government. Such step will help BBS to be more independent with no conditions attached with the government. The public service broadcaster cannot represent the government if it is to maintain public credibility and faith. This can be only achieved if the organization can function on its own without much support from the government. If the organization is financially not viable a degree of editorial independence will be on the stake and serving the public interest will be a question.

2) To further speed up the dissemination of information on politics and democracy and provide a choice to the listeners it is important to broadcast in other regional languages as well. This is because some people do not understand Dzongkha the national language and English.

3) The research finding shows that BBS television is mostly viewed for information on political news. It is also rated that the news is independent, informative, credible and timely. Viewers say that contents are much enriched supplemented by visuals, life programmes, the validity and reliability of the content are well spelled out in the programmes. However, respondents say that BBS lacks political news reporting unlike newspapers. The research found that the primary source of information on the politics is from the BBS television. It is important for the BBS to provide more information and details on the stands of politicians. With new political parties emerging in Bhutan, it is now high time that BBS give prime importance on politics related stories. Voters feel that television is the most popular means by which voters obtain information on candidates and the news in general. Most feel that BBS should focus on the political coverage since their knowledge on politics will increase which will not make them vulnerable to manipulation.



4) The BBS television has over the years solely neglected the rural areas as such there is no balance of coverage. Despite some progress the coverage is mostly urban base. People feel that the ills of the rural dwellers, difficulties of their lives, burning sense of grievances are seldom portrayed in the television. The research also found that BBS television is concentrating only in the capital city and focuses on the urban development, news from remote areas of the country are never featured in the Television. It is high time that BBS television covers every nook and corner of the country and highlights the difficulties and day-to-day activities of the people in remote corners of Bhutan. Today in Bhutan voices of the people must be heard by the government, be it bureaucracy, and of course by the political leaders. In order to fulfill the mandate of the public service broadcaster it is high time for the television station to improve the coverage of the rural areas. The coverage can be strengthened by:

- a) Establishing more bureau offices in various districts.
- b) Since most of the reporters are not willing to go in remote areas, incentives or hardship allowances should be given to encourage more reporters to work in remote places.
- c) A LIVE panel discussion should be held in remote areas in order to give voice to the voiceless. Such debate will bring diverse and plural voices.

1. The research also found that the BBS television in some way is failing its role in fostering democracy in Bhutan. The inability of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service to broadcast on corruption is one of the reasons why BBS is being rated low in terms of the role of fostering democracy. This clearly shows that the information from the BBS television is not adequate to motivate citizens to intervene in the ongoing political processes, political interest and knowledge about politics and attitudes of the politicians.

- a) The Bhutan Broadcasting Service should now play more proactive roles and focus in reporting more on political news.
- b) BBS being the public service broadcaster information on all spheres

should be reached to the public. Since access to information is essential for the betterment of the democracy because it ensures that people make responsible and informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance.

c) The organization should also broadcast on corruption without any dearth of fear but with correct facts and figures keeping in mind the code of ethics of the journalist 2007.

d) The Management should support the reporter's for fear that the reporter is threatened by individuals or by the government. Only then the reporter will have the strength or the courage to report on corrupt practices.

e) Most people rely on BBS television for political news, it is important for the organization to broadcast political debates and keep inform the public on the political process in Bhutan.

f) Credibility should be maintained by providing balance views since most viewers believe what BBS broadcast.

5) Very soon Bhutan Broadcasting Service will be rife with election coverage reporting round the clock shifting the primetime programmes to all election. The second round of election will be held sometime in June 2013. Unlike the first parliamentary election this time there are five parties lined up to contest the election. Of these three are new besides the two existing parties, DPT the ruling government and the PDP in opposition. The three new parties are: Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT), Bhutan Kuengnyam Party (BKP) and Druk Chirwang Tshogpa (DCT). In some remote parts of the country people are not aware of the emerging parties and the general elections. "Dagana is among the most remote districts in the country, and its villages are quite isolated. It is no surprise then that the populace in this dzongkhag is not as informed as the rest of the country about the upcoming general elections. Some villagers are not even aware about the new political parties and many continue to remain oblivious to the march up to the next round of elections" (BBS 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2013). With the new emerging political parties BBS has a vital role to play informing people

about their future parliamentarians and make informed choices on the voting day. Generally people agree that BBS played an important role in the country's first historic election. But this time three new political parties are in the fray registered with the Election Commission of Bhutan. Bhutanese voters will experience for the first time multi-party election in the second parliamentary round of election in 2013. This means voters will head for a primary round of election for the first time.

a. There is no mock election this time like in the first parliamentary elections. As a public service broadcaster it is the mandate of the BBS to educate and create awareness what is multi-party system.

b. It is also important to create awareness and educate voters on the difference between the primary and general round of elections.

c. BBS should spell out the parties' ideology and approaches so that interested voters who wanted to vote based on the party ideology can have a better understanding.

d. Bhutan Broadcasting Service should introduce the candidates to the public to give voters some time to discover his or her capabilities so that they can exercise their franchise to a right candidate.

6) Finally, acute shortage of professional human resources has become a challenge in BBS and also in the other media organizations. Limited technical and professional capacities have hampered the development of the TV station. These are marked by the absence of basic reporting skills, ethics and investigative reporting. It is important to strengthen investigative journalism through training and through funding that can subsidize journalist wishing to undertake larger investigative projects.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Today, people in Bhutan are so apathetic about politics. In order to breed interests to the younger generation, Bhutan Broadcasting Service should provide a platform to the people for public debate and discussions on democracy and people's role in a democracy. With such platform, uninformed people will be informed and people's voices will be heard which will strengthen the feedback instrument to the government.

From the above discussion, BBS have done its fair share of task in consolidating Bhutan's nascent democracy. As presented in the paper, BBS does play a role as a watchdog to a certain degree. However, in order to ensure and pursue as one of the keepers of Bhutan's democracy and as an agent of social change, BBS should embrace more pro-active roles in informing people and educating on democracy.

Meanwhile, as the constitutions guarantees the right to freedom of speech, expression, opinion and right to information, the government on the other hand should also be aware of the importance of the BBS and give room and support to grow. However, BBS is fortunate enough to receive fair share of space without much interference by the government although the organization is funded by the government. Free from the whims of the government leaders and gaining the editorial independence, BBS is somehow fulfilling its mandate to the democratic need of the country.

Few years back Bhutan Broadcasting service was a source of entertainment and education. But the biggest change now is that BBS is one of the critical players in the political process of the country. The media in Bhutan and in particular the Bhutan Broadcasting Service must play a decisive role in the development of Bhutan. Apart from educating the Bhutanese on economy and political issues, BBS with its reach to around 40 countries in the world should let the world know where Bhutan exists.

Given the important mandate of the media in a young democracy with growing political and socio-economic challenges, the journey will continue to be long and arduous. However, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service has also the advantage of looking the right path with great care and attention from errors committed by those in other countries.

“No nation is born a democracy” Kofi Annan. In Bhutan the seed of democracy has just sown in. It is yet to shoot out. Now, it is the duty of the media in general to nurture the root of democracy. To do this a free, diverse and well managed media can be a strong force for change – helping to foster socio-economic development and promoting good governance and transparency.

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## APPENDIX

### Questionnaires

#### A Survey Questionnaire for studying the role of BBS after the institution of Democracy in 2008

##### I. The Demographic Background

*Please put the tick (✓) mark where it is applicable to you against each statement.*

01. Gender:	Male { }	Female { }
02. Age/Date of Birth	.....	
03. Level of education:	Primary	{ }
	Secondary	{ }
	Higher Secondary	{ }
	Diploma	{ }
	Bachelor	{ }
	Masters	{ }
	Others	{ }
Place:	Urban	{ }
	Rural	{ }
Family background:	Civil Servant	{ }
	Business employee	{ }
	Business Employer	{ }
	Farmer	{ }

Defining Editorial independence.

Sl#	Question	YES	NO
01	Do you think BBS, gives an independent view?		
02	Is BBS news bias?		
03	How fair was BBS coverage in the last election?		

Please put the tick (✓) mark where it is applicable to you against each statement.

Information from TV

Sl#	Question	Radio	TV	Online News	Print	Word of mouth
01	Where do you get information on politics					
02	Where do you look to get information on politicians or about the politics					
03	Where do you think the most reliable information on politics come from					

Impact of BBS News coverage

Sl#	Question	YES	NO
01	Has television affected the way you look at democracy in Bhutan and the political process		
02	Has TV coverage change in the last four years. Is it better?		
03	Is BBS Playing the role of a watch dog		

### **Questions to the Member of parliaments**

1. How do you rate the quality and the content of information about politics by the Bhutanese media in particular the BBS television?
2. Is there any change (news coverage) in the BBS television in the last four years?
3. What is your view on the growth of social media in Bhutan? Will it be an important tool for political influence, as it is the trend in Western countries?
4. Political scene in Bhutan is more complicated than it was. Your Excellency, what is your view vis-a-vis the change in political system and the growth of media in Bhutan?
5. Apart from some issues like national security and royal family, media are reporting openly on the government and corruption. Is television, particularly, more critical and playing a stronger watchdog role?

### **Questions to the General Managers, Chief editor of the BBS**

1. What do you think BBS cover and why?
2. What is the objective of your coverage? Do you think the coverage is fulfilling your audience?
3. What response do you have from your viewers or audience?
4. What do you think that BBS should do better?
5. What instructions do BBS get from the government?
6. Do you get any instructions from donor agencies? Is there any external influence?

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