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Audience Access And Participation In Media Planning And Development In Nepal

By

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AUDIENCE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN MEDIA PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL

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Introduction

Mass media in Nepal entered into a new phase after 30 years of repressive, partyless Panchayat dictatorship in April 1990 through the concerted effort of People's Mass Movement. Restoration of multi-party democratic and pluralistic society is a watershed to establishing a just, creative, progressive and a well-balanced society. The notion "right to know and right to be informed" is now delineated through the new constitution of 1991.

Nepalese communications are battling to overcome the problem of penetrating a situation characterized by task of low literacy rate, ethnic and language diversity, language deficiency, lack of creative design, elite hierarchical approach to solving communication policy and socio-economic barriers. Even after two years of experience to a free society, media in general are hung up on the present neglected stage instead of being disseminators of fundamental developmental progress, ecology, health, fast growth of population. Nepalese media provide news but a dynamic and analytical approach on the implications of news is not sought after nor are the audience informed or approached on how to behave after any event.

Media has put especially the elite Nepalese to a hill higher than we can see on the horizon. "Thus a need to change, opportunities synchronizing old and new ideas inviting means of change and aspiration and skills should be taught". (Schramm)

It is inevitable that mass media in Nepal should assist in meaningfully framing economic developmental activities through on approach of proper channeling of audience to two way communication process.

The present day Nepali culture is a mixture of three main roots. The traditional Aryan culture, the feudalistic experience and the third source is the opening in of floodgates of totalitarian regime in 1951 reinstated by People's Mass Movement in 1990.

Media in Historical Perspective

In Nepal before 1806 traditional cultural channels like oral and instrumental music, community gatherings, gossiping as well as social gatherings were the chief means of dissemination of information.

Journalism commenced in 1886 when Motiram Bhatta published a magazine "Gorkha-Bharat Jaevan". Ironically during the Rana family regime (1846-1951) the door to freedom and media development was tightly closed.
Even for listening to the foreign radio transmitting prior governmental approval was a must. During 1930 many people were fined Rs. 30 each for going through the columns of a foreign newspaper.

The few presses that existed Giddae Chapakhana (Vulture Press), Leefa (official press), Manaranjan Press (Entertainment), Narayan Press, Litho Press were primitive papers and concentrated in printing holy scriptures, military matter or governmental works.

Historically the Nepali daily "Gorkhapatra" now the most prestigious and effective newspaper of the country was first published as a weekly in April, 1901 and retained this status till 1945. From 1945 onwards till 1965 it was published as a bi-weekly, and later changed to a daily. In 1963 it was published by an organization incorporated as a government corporation. Its present circulation is about 50,000 copies. The English language daily newspaper "The Rising Nepal" was published regularly since February 18, 1961 and has a circulation of about 12,000 copies. It at present is also managed by the same corporation.

These newspapers are mostly confined to speaking out government policies. Graphic design is of rather poor quality. Few analytical articles, concentration on more international news of importance and answers to the queries "Letters to the Editor" is not taken case of seriously.

"Radio Nepal" is the first official electronic media and is still the only one of its kind, launched during the revolution of 1951 and is still functioning. It started broadcasting clandestinely from Biratnagar in 1950 and was then named "Democratic Radio". After the overthrow of the Rana regime in 1951 its name was changed to Nepal Radio which was renamed Radio Nepal in 1951. About 1/3 households corresponding to a little more than 1 million radio sets exist in Nepal covering the whole nation. It broadcasts 14 hours a day.

Nepal TV came into existence as a project in 1984. Both Radio Nepal and Nepal TV commenced their programmes without properly channelizing the resources, training manpower and chalking out definite strategy, objective and responsibility undermining the decoder's viewpoint. 10/1000 of the total population posses a TV set and the overall reach of population is only 18%.

The territorial reach of media is as follows: Radio possessed 74.5%, film 28.6%, television 14.7%, newspapers 15.1% and interpersonal 18.8%. Among the most effective communicative system Radio was rated first with 74.5%, film second with 11.47%, interpersonal third with 5.5%, newspaper 2.98% and TV came last with 2.9%.

These media so far are merely entertainment oriented and overlook the despondent 93% farmer's residing in villages. It is less effective and more intent on patch works and is preoccupied mainly with filling time.

The essential function of broadcasting and telecasting development programmes are being overlooked, ostensibly inform the public, in tune with the government's fiddle stick. Then bureaucratic hierarchical administration and monopolistic nature, lack of sincere professionalism and resource constraint is hard hitting to make them effective mass media. Audience priorities and wants is seriously trampled. There is wide void of news and views as well as interpretative and analytical reporting.
During the 30 odd years of totalitarian partyless Panchayat regime (1960-1990) mass media was treated as the government's mouth piece. License system, monopolistic government attitude, suppression of opinion and red tape was rampant. There was compulsion for journalists to be economically dependent on Government's beneficiary acts.

Ironically, in a country where 67% of the populace is illiterate, during 1989-1990 about 112 daily, 2 bio-weekly, 695 weekly and 94 monthly newspapers existed in Nepal. But the impact of the mass media among the population was negligible. Appropriate means to inculcate in the people the virtue of self-reliance, means for poverty alleviation, means to solve problems of unemployment and development was not adopted by the media. Recently even privately run prestigious have been forced to close down due to cut throat competition and government despondency.

Present State of the Media

Fierce political rivalry and partisan politics between the ruling Nepali Congress and the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) have been reflected upon the Nepalese media. So, accurate, balanced and credible media service catering to the needs and aspirations of the people is seriously lacking.

Nepalese media should incorporate a sense of regularity, develop professional journalistic approach, hedge the truth. Chairman of Nepal Press Council Nutan Thapaliya says, "Constructive, criticism and free expressing of opinion other than imposition or manipulating of news and ventilating strong sense of security as well as allowing free flow of information is the call of the day." It is sad that media indulge in personal criticism without substantial authenticity, indulges in character assassination, sensational and publicizing news by making them unjustly without substantiating them properly.

Contentwise news are highly politicized, one-sided, unbalanced, rumour-based, near existence of follow-up of news or lack of depth in it. Especially Newspaper media is technically not sound and are running as a "one man enterprise". Journalists are shrinking their responsibility, some even trespassing code of conduct. It is very sad that even privately owned newspaper journalists are trying to feed information contrary to the public's demand or satisfaction.

Some Examples of Present State of the Media as Regards Audience

1. Radio Nepal: "Children's Programme", "Question Hour" and the majority of the programme are not thought provoking and well prepared to suit the audience demand.

2. Education Column: Radio Nepal, Nepal TV, the Gorkhapatra almost by-pass the suggestions and recommendations ventilated by the audience as regards their performance of the programme. Thus majority of the audience are passive, powerless and not reactive.

3. Research: The audience attitudes, beliefs, likes etc. have not been properly studied nor feedback effects researched.
4. News component: Mass media, be it on the governmental or private ownership, present news as it caters to their interests. Thus recently there was a report on the private press about Minister Shailaja Acharya criticizing the government for corruption and commission malpractices the statement which eventually led to her resignation. But the governmental mass media kept silent on it and the audience came to know about this affair only thanks to the private press.


6. Audit Bureau of circulation is almost non-existent.

7. Compliance to the code of conduct is hardly fulfilled by the concerned communication authorities.

8. Recently a popular video film "Ujeli" was screened by NTV. The film was about child marriage in Nepal. It is estimated that in the rural Nepal about 40% of the girls marry before the age of 18. A publicity campaign to watch this film was launched in the vicinity of Kathmandu Valley. But the target audience residing in the villages for whom the film was made did not have exposure to the film because of the unavailability of TV.

9. Advertisements: Even liquor, smoking advertisements are frequently advertised in mass media for the sake of earning money. Even when fraud cases of "money laundering", "overseas job opportunities" have been verified and complained by the audience through "Letter to the Editor". These types of advertisements are seen frequently in the papers. Thus a serious credibility gap exists between the various media and the audience.

Audience Response

A study was conducted on Nepal's experience in Family planning. Family planning programmes has been conducted with assistance from donor agencies during the last twenty years. But, ironically population increase rate is still 2.7%. One of the chief reasons cited for this increase is that mass communicators have not been comprehensively motivating and creating people's awareness and attitude of change. The long process has technological change accounting 20% and psychological change accounting 80%. There is no monitoring or evaluation in media of family, assessments of immigrants coming from India. But there was general consensus that media were simply transmitting information, and not communicating about family planning affairs.

A radio broadcast programme "Hatemalo" (helping and being helped by others commenced on November 1982. It was broad casted every Saturday from 5:30 - 6:00 P.M. A survey of the audience attitude towards the programme showed that 20.5% were of the thought that findings in the programme was encouraging, 17.8% thought it's contribution to society, 16.4% found it co-operative and service motivation and 15.3% found it's strong content interesting.
For this programme each week 25 letters were received from the audience. Programme was centered around the fact that disabled people could also contribute to the society and people should be co-operative with the disabled people. Respondents felt that the programme possessed humanitarian attitude towards disabled and neglected people. Some disable audience said that listeners were motivated to deal with disabled people in a humanitarian way. But only about 60% of the disabled listened to the programme. The respondents felt that airing this type of programming in the media is very beneficial and it greatly alleviates the sorrow of the handicapped person.

The findings of the radio programme on environmental issues: Paluwa (leaves sprouting during spring) which is aired between 8:15 - 8:30 P.M. on Tuesday are as following:

This programme caters to homogenous audience. Audience response to the presentation and evaluation of the programme was 75% good, 19.4% so so, 4.8% not easily comprehensive. Mostly audience feedback was concentrated in receiving listener’s request for their materials to be broadcast. The findings showed that the "Listener’s Letters" were not maintained systematically. Many letters were not even related to environmental issues.

Ironically very few feedback was provided. Most of the respondents said that the programme lacked process of conceptualization, poor material selection, poor programme production and broadcasting centered upon programme producer.

1. Range of targeted audience must be narrowed down as treatment of programme materials.
2. Concentration must be given to "localized" information message while explaining various environmental concepts.
3. Clear and related but uncomplicated messages must be relayed in one programme.
4. Audience participation must be used to the maximum by acknowledging and notifying listener’s letters.
5. Better coordination between sponsors, coordinators and production broadcaster of the programme is required.
6. A sound system of monitoring the whole programme production emphasizing on implementation of programme should be developed.

Developmental communication expresses basic concept of development. It is appropriate time for Nepal to develop strategic and operational plan for efficient and equitable development of the system. Development message calls to humanity that human reserve conquer anything and everything.

UNESCO takes developmental communication as "learning to be". Tayler points out that through developmental communication "methods by which people can be involved in helping improve own economic, social condition becoming effective working group in the programme of their national development.

Overall Communication Development Strategy

Nepal is economically and topographically seriously handicapped in its developmental activities. Though 90% of the total population is engaged in agricultural sector Nepal imports food grains to feed its people. Serious environmental problem as deforestation, semi-desertification
in Western region is rapidly spreading. Population increase is about 2.7% while GNP growth is only 3%. Thus a new, dynamic communication policy to create awareness and implement developmental programme is necessary to counter these obstacles.

Availability and the Form of Adoption of Resources

Mass media in Nepal should endeavour to act according to the felt needs of the audience. Since the dawn of democracy in Nepal in 1990 in each and every Ministry of Nepal a government official overlooks the matter pertaining to his Ministry and answers to publics queries. Till now operation, financial and regulatory activities of mass media in Nepal is concentrated within governmental structures. Screening and advertisement of smoking, liquor and unreliable advertisement campaign is seriously putting at stake the credibility of governmental media structure.

Media as De Fleur states has not been conceptualized. "Media is a social being concerned to social environment." It is necessary to develop, modernize communication and create favourable change in attitude. "But in Nepal there is a serious lack of penetration of data research on audience behavioural change. Most audience don't have exposure to TV and are unable to respond, articulate their needs."

News is made more political, entertainment oriented and lacks socio-economic process. Also interesting programmes are seldom made and messages of importance given priority to. Felt needs, wants and foresightedness of the audience is not given priority. Nepalese are more engaged to meet their ends meet like providing meals, housing, shelter are prime motives of life consuming entire time.

Media Planning for Developing Countries

"Developing countries missed the industrial revolution. They must not miss the communications revolution." This quote from a Nepali statesman illustrates the concern and view of communications revolution. These are the steps developed for media planning.

1) Ascertain and determine the need for development of persons with certain skills.
2) How and what kind of skills is to be imparted so that the communicator turns into professional?
3) What kinds of resources are needed to do the job well?
4) How much budget, over what period of time and the funds required and how are the funds to be found?
5) How are the experts to face the competitors?
6) Design a suitable curriculum compatible to the changing circumstances.
Though information and com. support services have been provided since 1959 no comprehensive study of audience pattern have been conducted in Nepal. A coherent communication plan was adopted during 1971, 1989-1990 and a draft programme on New Com. Policy is in the making.

Com. plan 1971 gave impetus to opening Royal Nepal Film Corporation, Ratna Recording, News Agency (RSS) and a call to enunciate people's participation, motivate them, revitalize them. Communication planners without taking advice and understanding or analyzing felt needs knowledge, attitude, economical capabilities tried to impose ideas upon others.

Till now no comprehensive evaluation study has been carried out so far. People have had limited access to feedback information for corrective measures. Two-way information flow and linkage of channels is almost non existent. It failed in its capacity to bring about greater equality, economic and developmental change. Mass media planners and manipulators in Nepal have not seriously involved the target audience particularly in developmental works apart from some elites in this sector. They don't want to forsake their domain over others. The ushering in of multi-party democracy in Nepal has opened the flood gates for the development and implementation of New Communication Policy.

New Communication Policy of 1992 envisages to create "Information and Communication Ministry, Press Information Centre" which will be reorganized as "Information Department" and will be added with additional responsibilities. Governmental mass media corporates such as Gorkhapatra, National News Service (RSS), Royal Nepal Film Corporation are to be slowly privatized in due course of time. Inclusion of press to be economically and physically sustainable as business industry will be encouraged in the policy. Governmental medial transmissions shall be divided into national service and business service. Newsprint quota, transportation, wireless facilities etc. are to be made available to the communications at a subsidized rate in accordance with the audit bureau of circulation report. Frequency modulation (FM) radio stations for educational and entertainment shall be opened to institutionalized organizations. The professional rights be working journalists shall be safeguarded.

Planning beyond Economics

Planning action for communication is divided into (1) Intention, (2) Motivation and (3) Will to Act.

(1) Intention to change and make people aware of developmental communication and its importance.
(2) Motivation: place high value and reinforce these virtues to the audience.
(3) Will to Act upon: Creating dignity and a sense of purpose for enacting is necessary.

Possibility of Communications Planning

(1) Communication planning is possible only through masterminding investment in financial structure and control system of media.

(2) A scientific approach to execute investment policies in media through the perimeters of evaluation, perspective, implementation of national communication policy.
(3) Process and substance of audience participation should be encouraged.

Behaviour of probable decision theory to administrative requirements evaluation, participants and implementation stage whether it is properly harnessed or not.

Establish linkage with various regions, viability of resources are calculated properly without disparity in contravention to present trend of articulation.

Likewise combination of messages and channels in what order, extension system according to situation capabilities is very effective. Also decentralization, language, cost willing to change, channel outreach, establish accurate balanced credibility, creating intensive and integrative programme to communications planning is vital for the development of communications.

Decentralization and Audience Approach

Audience approach to media planning should also be inculcated. The degree of centralization within Nepali mass media as it exist today if not controlled audience will be left to be powerless and passive. Thus an integrated approach to planning procedure to stop imbalance among media views is necessary.

Accessibility and Participation

Participatory input devices should be applied between encoder and decoder whereby audience of low income, less education socially backward society could take part in self management.

Till now in Nepal community participatory approach to planning in media is almost negligent because it threatens existing media hierarchies.

Evaluation and Adoption

Community leaders should actively partake and decide in methods and means of media evaluation by assisting people better understand the situation.

Community leaders and audience feelings and wants in general in Nepal are suppressed and succumbed to monopolistic policy of elitist class. This policy should be discouraged and slowly eliminated.

Institutional Aspect

Media (whether government or private control) should be integrated and comprehensively guided so as to make it responsive to the needs of the population group.

But internal and external restrictions in safeguarding audience interest should be taken into account. Also communication autonomy, appropriate technology transfer not detrimental to social structure should be taken into account.
Solution

Right to information is delineated through article 11,12,13 of the constitution of Nepal 1991. Thus synchronization and co-existence of government and private media institutions is the call of the day. Developing better reception and providing quality programmes is necessary to combat cut throat competition from India, CNN or BBC TV.

Likewise extension and conglomeration of messages and channels should be put in order. Also age, language, cost, willingness to change, audience outreach, establishment of accurate, balanced, reliable media creating intensive and integrative programme is vital to communication development.

A short term crash programme in imparting appropriate and professional training and necessary skills of communication procedure should be encouraged in Nepal.

1. Media should concentrate in issues and contents. News is not only events but a process.
2. Media delicensing will be fruitful in enhancing a competitive atmosphere.
3. Expanding skills and infrastructural development is encouraged whereby audience possess access to communication development to stimulate demand.
4. Extension of communication programme in field activities, technical and manpower training should be provided. Only during two months of Nepal-India trade impasses in (1989-1990) communication sector lost Rs. 8.5 million.
5. Facilitate to buy receiving set owners and provide opportunities to exposure to the masses.
6. Undertake research activities in mass media field.
7. Many Nepali parliamentarians express their disapproval over the functioning especially of government media. Chief complaint being their monopolistic nature and the news presentation is in a disbalanced way favouring the government which needs to be rectified.
8. With the institutionalization of democracy pressure group such as Environment Forum, Women in Environment, Consumers' Society, journalist, Political Party and professional institutions should apply pressure so that mass media possess accurate, balance, credible approach and audience content and viewpoint is given top priority which at present is very low.
9. Selection of a School of Communications under Tribhuvan University Catering to the growing needs of the country and having nexus of separate entity which commensurate with the kinds of job they are doing is the need of the day.
Conclusion

Media should provide just, dynamic, free from exploitation society and associate maximum people in development, establishing just and harmonious social life.

It is high time to bring about desirable change in the behavioural complex of the people. Phenomenon of communication especially has greater significance in disseminating information on improved practices and ways of living. Communication principally should be used to stimulate, encourage and give advice to accomplish by involving audience and take their suggestion, techniques of influence.

Media is tailored not only to serve the interests of a few minority, but of the majority audience. The floodgates to a just dynamic and a democratic communications policy is in the making in Nepal. Nepal should not miss this golden opportunity.

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