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**What Is Citizen Journalism? A Critical
Analysis from the Perspective of the
South Asian Association for Regional
Co-operation**

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Abstract

With the rise of internet literacy across the world, men and women on the street are increasingly participating in the news media more than ever before. Early speculations about the influence of citizen journalism imbued the practice with an almost messianic ability to save both journalism and democracy. Whilst these suggestions were influenced by a small amount of data analysis, mainly from Western countries, they were encouraging and demonstrated the potential of citizen journalism in representing the voice of ordinary people.

This thesis suggests that citizen journalism is not only promoting the perspective of ordinary citizens, but is also supplementing the coverage of the mainstream media, building relationships, shaping the public sphere, and fulfilling the critical role of a watchdog. Analysing data from a sample of twenty-four different English language citizen journalism sites, this thesis examines the phenomenon of citizen journalism, focusing on the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation. Employing a mixed methods approach, quantitative and qualitative analyses were undertaken of the data set.

The results show that citizen journalism sites in the larger and more developed SAARC countries provide more coverage of news than those in the smaller and underdeveloped countries. Political news is given the highest priority by the majority of the sites whilst news about war and terrorism is given the least. The analysis has also discovered that the sites function as a bridge, bringing people living in different parts of the world together and enabling them to engage in political discourse and the sharing of knowledge and experience. Moreover, citizen journalism is helping people to educate themselves about the culture and political systems of their new countries while also forming their own community online. This was particularly the case with the sites that were owned and operated by the diaspora people living in the West. In addition, with a few exceptions, the majority of the sites make substantial use of supplementary materials to enhance news articles, encouraging readers to participate in interactive news activities, such as posting comments.

The study has also found that citizen journalists come from a wide range of backgrounds, from politicians acting as citizen journalists to students aspiring to generate revenues through commercial advertising on the Internet. However, they differ from each other in terms of their news values and news presentation — some of the sites offer more political news than others whilst others behave more like the mainstream media, providing a wide range of news articles. On the other hand, a few of the sites are less active and provide fewer news articles than others. The study has also found that citizen journalists from the SAARC countries include works of fiction as part of their news output, thus offering the slightly different definition of citizen journalism from that in the West.

Keywords: citizen journalism, citizen journalists, news media, news articles, SAARC countries

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Initials and acronyms

ACRBN	Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal
APP	All People's Party
BBC	The British Broadcasting Corporation
BPPP	Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party
CNN	The Cable News Network
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
GNH	Gross National Happiness
HLMC	High Level Media Commission
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NRI	Non-Resident Indians
NRN	Non-Resident Nepalese
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PTV	Pakistan Television Corporation
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation
SAFMA	South Asian Free Media Association United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WFP	World Food Program

Chapter One

1. Introduction

Citizen journalism has attracted a great deal of attention of media scholars and researchers in recent decades, and there have been extensive studies on the phenomenon of citizen journalism, in part because it encourages 'the man or woman in the street' to become a news contributor. By providing the coverage of news on a wide range of issues, these people may be able to tell their stories, expressing their political views with few editorial constraints. They may also be able to address the 'democratic deficits inherent in a corporate-dominated, highly commercialised media system, its inequalities of access, representation, and political/ideological power, its economic and structural integration with globalizing capitalism and consumer culture' (Carroll and Hackett, 2006 p. 83). Therefore, it is often suggested that citizen journalism may play a crucial role in conveying alternative opinions on important news issues and, at the same time, perform the critical role of a watchdog.

With the introduction of modern technology, people are actively engaging in the news media. From the introduction of emails or emailing lists to the current era of online discussion forums and social media, we are witnessing a rapid growth in the use of the Internet, and people are communicating with each other online in many different ways. Using the Internet, people from one continent of the world are able to share their work experience with that of another (Thorsen, 2009). Social media has further changed the mode of communication, making the flow of news and information more dynamic and changing the ways in which news and information are produced, transferred, and consumed by the public. Modern

technology, such as the Internet, has now further enabled ordinary people to do essentially what professional journalists are able to do – they produce and distribute news information in many forms, from podcast editorials to reports about council meetings on the Internet (Cheri, 2014). In a broad sense, citizen journalism has brought about a tremendous 'press revolution', adding an online dimension to the field of media, changing media environments and impacting traditional journalism practices in the world (Stempel et al., 2000).

Some prominent media critics, such as Gillmor (2006), suggest that this new form of journalism – which allows ordinary people to act as a journalist at little cost, in theory, with a global reach – is rapidly changing the mode of communication across the world. He describes the traditional media relationship as a lecture in which consumers either accept or reject what is produced but have little say over content. The proponents of the citizen-media initiative see citizen journalism as transformative and suggest that citizen journalism gives a voice to those who would never usually be heard in the mainstream media and provides people an opportunity to share their political views through a widely accessible platform (Joyce, 2007).

As the communication system has gone online, most media organizations appear to have realised the potential of their news audience and have now started embracing the experience of their audiences by sharing their stories and using their knowledge and hosting their opinions. In 2006, CNN launched its own news site, *ireport.com*, dedicated to citizen journalism where citizen journalists from any part of the world could publish their news articles with little editorial constraints (Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Kperogi, 2010). The site now publishes a large number of news articles written by its citizen journalists from around the

world every day. The mainstream media has also now started relying on the participation of readers, particularly those who are able to create content that potentially enhances the quality of news coverage (Paulussen and Ugille, 2008; Wardle and Williams, 2010). Moreover, it provides spaces for readers to engage in political discussions about important news events, such as elections (Thorsen, 2010).

With the introduction of the Internet, people from South Asian countries are also experiencing a growth in the use of digital media. From the 2008 Mumbai terror attack to the recent devastating earthquake of Nepal, they published a number of first-hand accounts of news events on the Internet. During these crises, citizen journalism was the main source of communication, seeking immediate information about new developments for many South Asian diaspora around the world. Some media commentators even remarked that the use of social media during and in the wake of the earthquake in Nepal had signalled the beginning of the real citizen journalism in the country (*The Nagarik Daily*, 23 May 2015).

Citizen journalism in South Asian countries has now widened the parameters of public participation in discourse on issues of public concern by using a range of genres and media, enabling social activism, and sparking debates. In 2011, the Global Information of Pakistan stated that a growing number of Pakistani people were realising the potential of the Internet and engaging in the news media, frequently publishing videos of human rights violences, such as illegal detention, torture and the killing of political activists, citizen journalists, and students (Ahamad and Dad, 2011). In spite of being one of the least developed nations in the region in terms of internet penetration and having a low literacy rate, Pakistan has now become home to some of the most successful users of the

Internet for advocacy, driving social and political discourses for human rights and democracy. In 2006, the government of Pakistan blocked several websites in response to growing citizen journalism reports about the negative actions of the government (Ahmad and Dad, 2011).

With the recent economic growth, the people of South Asian countries are also experiencing a new way of life. The South Asian region is forecast to have an economic growth by a real 6% in 2015 and by 6.4% in 2016 compared to 5.4% in 2014, potentially making it the second fastest growing region in the world after East Asia and the Pacific (The World Bank, 2014). With the increase in household income per capita, the public's attitudes towards the news media have also gradually changed in recent decades. There are 116,531 periodical titles in India alone, and some 373,839,764 copies of newspapers are sold daily (Pandita, 2013). Several universities and colleges in the region now offer degree courses in journalism and mass communication. In addition, several press institutes across the region are providing short journalism courses to those aspiring to become journalists.

An increased trend in the world towards globalization has also added a new dimension to the public sphere of the South Asian countries. Entrepreneurs from developed countries are involved in South Asian countries, making the region one of the best lucrative spaces for capital, talent and ideas (Pillai, 2013). Today, South Asian diaspora is among the world's largest and most widespread, and it is growing exponentially. It is estimated that over twenty-five million people of Indian descent live abroad; many millions more have roots in other countries of the subcontinent, in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. There are three million South Asians in the UK alone and approximately the same number resides in

North America (Chatterji and Washbrook, 2013). South Asians have also a significant presence in Southeast Asia and Africa, and are increasingly visible in the Middle East.

This emerging trend of globalization has further enabled greater interaction and integration among the diaspora people, forming and expanding diasporic communities in the world. Thus, beyond the economics the diaspora movements also contribute to diasporic identity building in host countries. This process of diaspora re-engagement has added a new dimension to the political discourse in the public sphere of South Asian countries.

Despite poverty, the rise in political awareness and political activism has further changed political engagement in recent years. The decades-long civil wars of Sri Lanka and Nepal have ended giving a new hope to the people of both countries. Bhutan has made a new transition from an absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy through its first general election in 2008, becoming the world's newest democratic country. Fighting the Islamic militants, Afghanistan is also making its way to political transition, and people are actively involved in citizen journalism.

Despite these new dimensions, citizen journalism is limited to a small segment of South Asian population due to the lack of some basic infrastructures required for citizen journalism practices, such as electricity, computers and the Internet. The governments of South Asian countries in recent years have prioritised digital access, and cheaper smartphones are enabling millions more to access to the Internet; however, internet penetration in the region is relatively low by global standards and thus only a small number of users have a fixed internet connection. Most people access to the Internet via cybercafés due to poor

technological infrastructures. In addition to infrastructure limitations, there are also other challenges, such as cost considerations, internet illiteracy, and languages.

South Asia is frequently described in the Western media as an emerging economy where poor people are becoming rich; however, South Asian countries are still home to many of the developing world's poor — about 571 million people survive on less than \$1.25 per day, and they make up more than 44% of the developing world's poor (World Bank, 2013). This conundrum of everyday contradictions intersects with the world of the news media and citizen journalism in several ways (Sonwalker, 2009). Yet, citizen journalism is taking off with speed: media businesses are growing rapidly and the population of South Asian countries are now some of the largest news consumers in the world (Pandita, 2013). Hundreds of local television channels and local radio stations, some of them initiated by ordinary people, have grown in recent years. Beyond gushing news accounts and a variety of Western models of reality television shows, such as *The Nepali Tara* of Nepal and India's *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, citizen journalism is also changing the public perception of life, often providing news coverage from alternative perspectives. In 2012 Bhutanese citizen journalists, for example, provided an extensive coverage of news about increasing suicides among the refugees in the US and elsewhere and discussions in the coverage of news ranged from the causes of the suicides to how to take effective measures to overcome depression in new countries. A similar coverage by citizen journalists was observed in the Indian state of Assam in the same year, where violent clashes erupted between indigenous Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims, killing at least 100 and displacing over 400,000 people.

The number of mobile phone users in the region is making citizen journalism all the more important, with the public uploading mobile phone snaps of news events to various news sites, including social media, as and when they happen (Gaur et al., 2013). Mere moments after the Mumbai attack in 2008, ordinary people who were witnessing the unfolding drama posted messages on the micro-blogging sites, such as Twitter. Some mainstream media outlets, including *The BBC*, used the first-hand accounts provided by ordinary people of the events on their blog posts, twitter messages, and in e-mails. Footage captured on mobile phones by guests trapped in the hotels was shown on Indian news channels (Sonwalkar, 2009).

Whilst there is an increasing amount of research into the citizen journalism phenomenon, academic studies focusing on the South Asian region have received limited attention. There is evidence that there have been a few attempts to comprehend citizen journalism from the region, but they are more focused on a specific country, particularly India, than on the whole region (Sonwalker, 2009; Thomas, 2012; Noor, 2012). Thus, scholarly contributions in this area have been limited and are rarely comparative and transcultural in scope from the global point of view.

It is in this context that this thesis aims to investigate the phenomenon of citizen journalism, focusing on the eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (hereafter SAARC), namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, in South Asia. Particular focus is given to, first, what types of news issues are covered by citizen journalists from the SAARC countries, and second, how citizen journalists

from the region provide the coverage of citizen journalism news to their news readers.

1.1 Aim and objectives

Given the amount of research into citizen journalism that predominantly focuses on the Western concept of citizen journalism practice — such as how ordinary people engage in the news media or how the mainstream media is incorporating user-generated content in its coverage of news — it is essential to investigate the phenomenon from a comparative perspective elsewhere in the world. Thus, the aim of this thesis has been to provide an insight into citizen journalism from the perspective of the SAARC countries by analysing the salient characteristics of citizen journalism from this region during the year 2012. This period was important in the region as it witnessed several important news events, including government changes, social and political crises, and peace processes. In order to achieve the above aim, five objectives were identified.

The first objective is to investigate the genres of citizen journalism news articles in the sample. An important focus of this aspect of the thesis is to assess the patterns of citizen journalism news from a comparative perspective. This means that this thesis will provide an insight into the patterns of citizen journalism news from the SAARC countries.

The second objective is to analyse the supplementary materials used in the coverage of citizen journalism news in the sample. This will be achieved in two ways. First, by analysing images used in the coverage of citizen journalism news from a comparative perspective, and second by analysing hyperlinks used to enhance news articles by citizen journalists. This means how supplementary

news materials are used in the coverage of news in the SAARC countries will be discussed from a comparative perspective.

The third objective is to investigate citizen journalists as well as their participation in interactive news activities, such as comments. This objective will be achieved through two measures — by analysing the backgrounds of citizen journalists, e.g. political activists, refugees, or students etc. Second, by analysing the comments that ordinary people have posted on the sample about news articles. The outcome of the analysis will be helpful in understanding who the citizen journalists in the SAARC region are and how they engage in discourse through the news media.

The fourth objective is to critically analyse the construction of discourse in citizen journalism in Bhutan. The achievement of this objective will help us to understand the phenomenon of Bhutanese citizen journalism in greater detail.

The final objective is to assess what the relationship is between the SAARC model of citizen journalism news practice and that of the West. In this respect, this thesis will examine the news practices in the sample to see whether there are any similarities or differences with the West.

In order to address these broad issues, this thesis will aim to answer the following series of questions:

- What is citizen journalism?
- What characterises citizen journalism news from the SAARC countries?
- How does citizen journalism from the SAARC countries differ in comparison to other contexts?
- How do Bhutanese citizen journalists construct discourses in their

coverage of news?

1.2 An overview of the thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters as follows:

Chapter one: Introduction

This chapter provides an overall introduction to this study. In addition, it introduces the aim and objectives.

Chapter two: The basic concept of citizen journalism

The second chapter is concerned with the concept of citizen journalism, and discusses contemporary citizen journalism. Particular focus is given to two main perspectives: a broader perspective and a narrow perspective. The thesis then discusses the five models of journalism that encompass the norms of modern journalism in which ordinary people participate in the process of news. In addition, the chapter discusses the historical dimensions and practices of citizen journalism around the world. The chapter also highlights criticisms surrounding citizen journalism. Finally, the chapter provides an overall discussion about citizen journalism.

Chapter three: Conceptual and theoretical framework: From the democratic function of the media to an active audience as a content creator. This chapter is concerned with the conceptual and theoretical framework. Focus is given to the elements that have some form of relationship with citizen journalism. It briefly discusses the roles of the media, focusing on its five democratic functions. The chapter then discusses the perceived crisis of the traditional media. Particular

focus is given to the economic perspective. The chapter also discusses the role of the Internet that enables ordinary people to engage in the news media, who create news content.

Chapter four: An overview: South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation. This chapter introduces the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation from three different perspectives — politics, economy, and the media. Each of the individual members of the SAARC countries is briefly discussed to highlight the political and economic environment. The chapter also discusses the media environment in each of the SAARC countries, within which citizen journalism aims to play the critical role of a watchdog.

Chapter five: Research design and methods

Chapter five is concerned with the methodology employed in this thesis. The chapter outlines the research design and methods, discussing a mixed-methods approach. Particular focus is given to content analysis and discourse analysis. Sampling techniques, data collection and coding procedure are also explained in detail.

Chapter six: An analysis of citizen journalism news from the member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation.

This chapter is concerned with the analysis of citizen journalism news and supplementary materials, including hyperlinks in this study. First, the chapter highlights the common characteristics of the sampled sites and the dataset that was used for this study, followed by an analysis of the dataset from a comparative perspective. The chapter also discusses comments posted by readers about news articles in question in the sites and then discusses findings

from various perspectives. The conclusions section summarise the overall findings from the analysis.

Chapter seven: Citizen journalism: The discursive reproduction of news issues in the coverage of Bhutanese news.

This chapter is concerned with discourse analysis focusing on the coverage of Bhutanese citizen journalism news. The analysis begins with a brief introduction to Bhutan, followed by the national identity of the Bhutanese people and three dominant ethnic groups. Particular focus is given to the Bhutanese refugees and their coverage of news on bhutannewsservice.com. The chapter also discusses the coverage of news on two other sites — tsheringtobgay.com and sangaykhandu.com. Findings are analysed by individual site. The final section provides the definition of citizen journalism from the perspective of Bhutan.

Chapter eight: Citizen journalism from the perspective of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation.

This chapter discusses the phenomenon of citizen journalism from two perspectives: a macro-level perspective and micro-level perspective. The chapter highlights the governments' policies towards the media and censorship practices and the challenges of citizen journalism. The last section discusses the overall findings, defining citizen journalism from the perspective of the SAARC countries.

Chapter nine: Conclusions

The final chapter brings altogether the findings of chapter two, four, six, seven, and eight. Discussion begins from the rationale of this study and the methodology employed in this study. Discussions are drawn from four main

broad themes, i.e. news organizations, citizen journalists, news practices, and news values. This essentially offers the characteristics of the coverage of news by citizen journalists, providing the definition of citizen journalism from the perspective of the SAARC countries. The final section of the chapter discusses the limitations of this study, offering some recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two

2. Citizen journalism: Concept, history and criticism

This chapter is concerned with the concept of citizen journalism and discusses contemporary citizen journalism. Particular focus is given to two main perspectives: a broader perspective and a narrow perspective. It also discusses the five models of journalism that encompass the norms of modern journalism in which ordinary people participate in the process of news. In addition, it discusses the historical dimensions and practices of citizen journalism around the world, highlighting criticisms surrounding citizen journalism. Finally, it provides an overall discussion about citizen journalism.

2.1 Citizen journalism as a concept

Recent decades have seen a rapid growth in the ways in which ordinary people engage in the citizen-media initiative, widely known as citizen journalism. However, as citizen journalism exhibits the characteristics of several different models of media practices, a range of terms have been employed by academic and researchers that aim to capture various aspects of the phenomenon, including alternative media (Kim & Hamilton, 2006; Atton, 2008; Kenix, 2009; Berger, 2011), participatory journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2006; Joyce, 2007; Paulussen et al., 2008), underground press (Ke, 2000; Menayang et al., 2002; Lewes, 2009) and user-generated content (Hermida and Thurman, 2008).

In the years since the 2004 Asian tsunami catastrophe, it has also been called 'open-source journalism', 'hyper-local journalism', 'distributed journalism', or

networked journalism (Allan 2009). Among the other new terms that have entered the lexicon are: user-created content, audience material, 'we media', community journalism, collaborative journalism, pro-am collaboration, crowd-sourced journalism, interactive journalism, network publishing, bridge media, and random acts of journalism (Kelly, 2009). Despite these diverse terms, they all fall under the broad umbrella concept of the Internet technology, such as blogs, that allows ordinary people to interact and collaborate with each other to share news and information. The variety of these terms defining the phenomenon suggests that there is no common understanding about the phenomenon 'except that ordinary people actively participate in the process of news and that the range of practice is broad' (Kern and Nam, 2009, p. 641).

With the development of new technology, citizen journalism not only brought about a 'press revolution' (Gillmor, 2006, p. 36), but also added new dimensions to the field of the media, changing media environments and affecting traditional media practices (Stempel et al., 2000). As a result, the traditional media saw a dramatic drop in its audience and decline in credibility, which coupled with the emergence of the Internet and online citizen journalism, the beginning of which can be traced back to the mid-1990s (Gillmor, 2006).

Some proponents of citizen journalism, such as Gillmor (2006), describe this change as a transition of the media, whereby citizen journalists will be able to provide coverage of news from their own perspective. By offering coverage of news not covered in the mainstream media, citizen journalists are able to address 'the democratic deficits inherent in a corporate-dominated, highly commercialised media system, its inequalities of access, representation and political/ideological power, its economic and structural integration with

globalizing capitalism and consumer culture' (Carroll and Hacket, 2006, p. 83). In addition, they may play a crucial role in conveying alternative opinions on important news issues and at the same time perform a watchdog role. Thus, citizen journalism is overall based upon the idea of ordinary citizens playing an active role in the process of news-making.

2.2 Defining citizen journalism

Finding the right language to describe social change is crucial. In some cases, a new language is required; in other cases, existing terminology needs to be adapted to encompass new realities and new opportunities (Adler and Goggin, 2005). An example of this is citizen journalism, which has been used to date primarily in the context of media practice that takes place outside the professional newsroom. The expectation that ordinary people will participate in the process of news as they gain awareness and are equipped with modern technologies is now widespread in media discourse and studies.

It has been suggested that the objectives of early proponents of citizen journalism were more political, as ordinary people practised journalism only to achieve or address their political issues. So, it is often argued that early citizen journalism was largely caused by publications that were politically biased (Lewes, 2000; Menayang, 2002; Gillmor, 2006). The trend continued to evolve and grow and has attracted an increasing number of supporters in recent decades (Kern and Nam, 2008).

Citizen journalism has no professional norms and limitations and has been practiced for a variety of purposes over time. As a result, there is currently no single, widely agreed upon meaning for the term that defines the phenomenon.

However, there is a more or less universally accepted notion whereby a majority of the authors agree that the concept of citizen journalism emphasises the involvement of the audience as news producers, but the degree of their participation, the importance of technology, and their roles may differ (Jack, 2009). Thus, how citizen journalism is defined may depend on a large degree on the perspective and interest of the definer (Kelly, 2009).

From the time of emails or emailing lists to the era of online discussion forums, we are witnessing a growth in the use of Internet technologies, such as blogs, with which citizens communicate with each other. These technologies not only provide users a platform, where a plurality of views co-exists and interactive activities take place, but also encourage ordinary people to engage in debates about current affairs. As a result, ordinary people are increasingly using these tools by writing news articles, commenting or reporting on various news subjects, ranging from politics, human rights, to community-related news issues.

With the development of the Internet, recent decades have seen a rapid broadening of the ways in which ordinary people communicate with each other, creating and distributing news and other relevant information nearly on a global scale. Social media has further changed the mode of citizen journalism, making the flow of information more dynamic and changing the ways in which news and information is being produced, transferred, and consumed. Using modern technology, ordinary people are now able to do essentially what professional journalists do – they produce and distribute news and information in many forms, from podcast editorials to reports about council meetings on a blog (Chery, 2014).

Thus, there are a variety of definitions of citizen journalism. For the purpose of this thesis, one definition of citizen journalism presented in the 2003 thinking paper 'We Media' by Bowman and Willis (2003), may be useful to discuss here, and the definition is presented in its complete form:

'...the act of citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news information... the intent of the participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires' (p. 9).

This definition highlights some of the key elements of citizen journalism and its relevance for a democracy, although it does not discuss whether the role of citizen journalism is to supplement any perceived deficit in the coverage of mainstream news or to complement mainstream news coverage by providing additional news. The authors describe citizen journalism as a new model of journalism, in which ordinary people are the key players, who create and disseminate reliable and relevant news information. While the word 'alternative' is not used in the above definition, by making no reference to the mainstream media, it is clear that the authors see citizen journalism functioning as an alternative media, with ordinary people providing a wide range of news and information that informs the public.

Rosen (2008) provides perhaps the most precise definition of citizen journalism. According to this author, when the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, that's citizen journalism. By suggesting 'the people formerly known as the audience' the author indicates those people who were on the receiving end of a

media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another — and who today are not in a situation like that at all. 'The people formerly known as the audience' here are those who are 'typically excluded from or misinterpreted by local television news: low-income women, minorities and youth, the very demographic and lifestyle group who have little access to the media and that advertisers don't want' (Lievrouw, 2011, p. 125).

Rosen (2008) gives examples by suggesting that once they were your printing presses; now that humble device, the blog, has given the press to us. Radio stations, which were once controlled by a small group of people, have now been replaced with podcasting, which gives radio to us i.e. ordinary people. Shooting, editing and distributing video once belonged to you 'Big Media'. Now video is coming into the user's hand and audience-building by former members of the audience is alive and well on the Web.

However, the perceived new situation, in which the 'former audience' engages in the news process, often arrives only after several 'media reforms by governments and business focused upon state policies towards the communication industries' (Carroll and Hackett, 2006, p. 84). And relations between the media and the public are mediated through a wide range of more or less informal, but often organized, pressure groups, such as occupational or political bodies, which seek to influence directly what the media do – especially by trying to set limits to what they publish (McQuail, 1998). Thus, governments and media organizations themselves are more responsible for the emergence of citizen journalism.

What is celebrated in Rosen's (2008) definition is a shift in the process of the political economy of the press whereby the 'former audience' are able to identify news issues and address them from their perspectives. The 'former audience' use press tools, such as mobile phones, to capture evidence and to create content, and people are connected with each other with modest effort. Rosen's (2008) reference to 'press tools' highlights the important role that technology has played in this phenomenon. He further suggests that when the 'people formerly known as the audience' wish to inform the public about news, a shift in power goes with the platform shift. 'The people formerly known as the audience' are simply the public made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable (Rason, 2008). This means that there is a shift in the news process, in which ordinary people become the authorities about news events, challenging the traditional media. In other words, citizen journalism functions as alternative media when people are connected to knowledge. Thus, Rosen's (2008) definition captures the elements of the former audience which plays an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information, using the press tools.

Based on the various definitions discussed above, media practices in which private individuals are responsible for creating and disseminating news content online may be defined as citizen journalism in the contemporary context. Citizen journalism thus includes a wide range of coverage ranging from current affairs based blogging to commenting upon news materials posted by others or traditional media outlets to reporting eye-witness footage from cell phones (Goody, 2009). It usually speaks for and to the social out-groups, keeping radical criticism alive. On the other hand, it rejects the norms and values of traditional

media and relies heavily on its network of citizen journalists for news contributions (Kim and Hamilton, 2006).

The definition of citizen journalism, however, may depend on the political environment in which citizen journalism is being practised. In liberal countries such as the West, for example, citizen journalism is discussed in terms of its coverage of crisis events, providing real-time images and accounts through informal networks (Gillette et al., 2007), while in non-Western countries, the phenomenon still remains underdeveloped and little is known about its potential. As a result, citizen journalism in countries such as Myanmar is often viewed with great caution (Sinclair, 2009).

Citizen journalism appears in newspaper form on the Internet, defining itself with various names, including blogs, and is perceived by a large number of readers, visitors, or even advertisers as alternative to the media. Its primary aim is often described to supplement traditional media coverage by providing additional information or breaking news and at the same time, pointing out errors in mainstream news articles and when mainstream media fails to perform its journalistic duty. Thus, citizen journalism often presents news articles from oppositional or alternative perspectives (Kim and Hamilton, 2006; Gillmor, 2006).

As citizen journalism captures a range of activities, there are no complete settled boundaries. However, it is generally agreed that ordinary people are the news contributors. The only difference between citizen journalism and traditional media occurs is in the mode of content delivery in which the audience spends time on the Internet with citizen journalism and news contributors are predominantly ordinary people. Therefore, it might be fair to assert that citizen

journalism is primarily practised by ordinary people who are able to use modern technologies.

2.3 Types of citizen journalism

According to Barnidge et al. (2011), citizen journalism may be defined from two different perspectives. The first is from a broader perspective, which refers to amateur news reporting. This model includes a range of amateur practices, such as re-posting, linking, 'tagging' (labelling with keywords), rating, modifying or commenting upon news materials posted by other users or by professional news outlets, whereby citizens participate in the news process without necessarily acting as content creators (Goode, 2009, p. 1288). In this category, citizen journalists perform their activities in collaboration with traditional media organizations by contributing news content. They produce a range of news content from personal narratives, political opinion, breaking news, first-hand reports of any number of subjects, commentary to travel photos and humour (Barnidge et al., 2011).

In this model, media organizations make use of user-generated content in various ways: they may incorporate the user-generated content into their main news articles, often in main headlines. Or, they simply publish news articles in their news sites that are devoted to citizen journalism. In addition, a medium may assign its network of citizen journalists to cover news issues on specific subjects. However, news content containing pornography, hate speech, disturbingly violent behaviour, or anything that infringes on copyright are not published. Because news articles are often published without going through editorial processes, 'responsibility for the quality of the reporting, it follows, rests

not with the news sites but rather with 'you' [the contributor]' (Allan and Thorsen, 2009, p. 2).

This model may be seen as a strategic move by big media organizations to co-opt potentially oppositional citizen media and expropriate the labour and creative energies of ordinary people who participate in such corporate-sponsored citizen media (Kperogi, 2010). Cable News Network's (CNN hereafter) iReport.com demonstrates this type of citizen journalism.

A more narrow definition of citizen journalism refers to the reporting of newsworthy events often on an *ad hoc* basis, providing news articles before the mainstream media covers news events, such as a disaster or crisis. In this model, citizen journalists focus on the reporting of newsworthy events, typically using new modern technologies, such as mobile phones. It can be one or a number of individuals, a citizen group, or a non-profit organization without a paid staff running a news blog, news website, community radio or newspaper (Nip, 2006). South Korea's OhMynews.com demonstrates this model of citizen journalism.

What makes this model so unique is its approach. In contrast to the broader perspective of citizen journalism, which often relies on the mainstream media, this model aims to establish itself as an independent news provider, relying extensively on its network of citizen journalists for news contributions. It challenges the ethics and practices of the traditional media, by granting an influential public platform to a new set of users and reports (Joyce, 2007). However, although citizen journalism rejects the norms and values of traditional media, this model of citizen journalism replicates commonplace characteristics of

mainstream news organizations, such as financing itself primarily through the sales of commercial advertising on the Internet (Kim and Hamilton, 2006).

In this model, citizen journalists are responsible themselves for creating and updating news articles on a regular basis. They publish a range of news content, ranging from breaking news to comments. However, they usually see themselves as complementing or supplementing professional news organizations and in some cases, holding mainstream media up to scrutiny (Thomas, 2012). Despite providing a wide range of news coverage, this model often focuses more on local issues, and produces news articles that are equivalent to those of local newspapers (Carpenter, 2009). Thus, this model is often seen as the media of social movements led by political activists to bring about changes in society rather than to inform the public with independent news as far as possible (Kern and Nam, 2008).

In this model, citizen journalism becomes more active, when politicians and media establishments fail in their duty, and aims to establish itself as alternative media by providing alternative news and political ideology (Ke, 2000; Menayang et al., 2002; Cammaerts, 2009; Lewes, 2009). Thomas (2012) describes this model as nothing more than an alternative channel for middle-class opinion-making rather than providing a space for inclusive deliberation on key issues facing the nation. The table 1 below illustrates how these two different models of citizen journalism differ from each other in terms of their ideological perspectives.

Table 1
(Citizen journalism perspectives)

	Broader Perspective	Narrow Perspective
Type	Partnership between citizen journalists and traditional media	Information network of citizen participatory
Organization	Corporate	Volunteer citizen-media initiatives
Aim	Seeks to unify the global force by recruiting citizen journalists from all over the world	Seeks to address news issues ignored by traditional media
Dominant news content	News, opinions, interviews	News, opinions, analysis, information on current events
Dominant content format	Texts, photo images and YouTube videos	Texts and photo images
Revenue	Advertising	Most are volunteers, some rely on donations, others sale of advertising
Censorship	Some high-profile news articles are censored	Not applicable
Remuneration to reporters	Not applicable	Some sites make minimal payment
Assignment	Yes, when important news events take place	Not applicable

2.4 Comparative media systems: An analysis

The media is described as playing a role in informing the public about what happens in the world, particularly in those areas where audiences do not possess direct knowledge or experience (Happer and Philo, 2013). Several different frameworks have emerged for the analysis of media systems in the last few

decades. However, most of the discussions about media systems are highly ethnocentric, in the sense that they refer only to the experience of a single country, and in every part of the world, media systems have formed differently, depending on their political, economic, and legal environment (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002).

Siebert *et al.* (1956) have proposed a typology of four models to examine the media systems of different countries around the world – authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet communist concepts of the press. The authoritarian model is described as serving the interests of the elite or authorities or influential bureaucrats who control the media (Mishra, 2015). This model is based mainly on the absolute power of the monarch or authoritative leaders, and censorship is a common practice for political, moral, religious, military and corporate reasons. Thus, the media under this model enjoys only as much freedom as the national leaders at any particular time are willing to permit. Some of the countries that currently practise this model include Israel, Syria, Zimbabwe, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, the libertarian model – which is often described as having emerged to replace the authoritarian model – is distinguished by three closely inter-related characteristics: state intervention is limited compared to other models, news debates are centered around the 'objectivity norm', and commercial sales for revenues (Mishra, 2015). This model promotes absolute freedom for the news media to act as a watchdog, revealing things happening in society without any forms of censorship or authority blockades. This model is popular in Western countries, particularly the USA and the UK.

The social responsibility model, which is described as having risen out of the

mass-media community itself after World War II, has its roots in libertarian model. This model goes beyond the libertarian one, in that it places more emphasis on the press's responsibility to society than on the press's freedom (Karthik, 2012). The philosophy of this model is to report on the performance of government institutions, critiquing the government and unveiling tyranny and corruption by the media. In the mid-twentieth century, this model was adopted by most developing countries.

In contrast, the communist model of media system arose, along with the theory of communism itself, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and Karl Marx is described as its father. The concept of this model is that the government should undertake or control the media to serve the working-class people and their interests (Karthik, 2012). Under this model, the media is an instrument of the government and integral part of the state. The media is owned and operated by the state (i.e., the elite that runs the state) and directed by the Communist Party or its agencies. Some of the countries that are currently practising this model are North Korea and Cuba.

Although these models are widely used to understand media systems, they are often described as being too narrow to capture the varied social and political theories underpinning media policies around the world (Downey and Mihelj, 2012). The two models that apply to democratic systems – the libertarian and social responsibility models – have both been criticized by some scholars for having their roots in US journalism – and have not been very useful for understanding variations among democratic systems (Overholser and Jemieson, 2005). For example, '[they] tells us little about why *Le Monde* [a French daily evening newspaper] seems so different from the major metropolitan American

newspapers; both would have to be considered examples of the 'social responsibility' model, which sees the press as bound by ethical obligations to the reading public' (p. 5).

Media systems have also been examined from different perspectives. For example, Hallin and Mancini (2004) identify three major regions of media system developments in the West: the Polarized pluralist/Mediterranean, Democratic Corporatist/Northern Europe, and Liberal /North Atlantic models. The distinction between these models is not just one of quantity. It is also distinction in the nature of newspapers, its relation to its audience and its wider process of social and political communication. The 'Polarized Pluralist'/Mediterranean region, which includes France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, has the least advanced media systems in terms of information distribution and diversity of voice and culture due to socio-historical factors surrounding the development of the media sector in the region. More specifically, newspaper circulation in Southern Europe is relatively low and is often subsidized by political actors. Target readers are a small group of elite, mainly from urban areas, well educated, and politically active (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

These characteristics may also be found in the media systems of Latin America due to their historical connections between the two regions and obvious parallels in their political development, particularly in the fact that, in both regions, the conflict between liberal democratic and authoritarian traditions continued through most of the twentieth century (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002, p. 175).

In contrast, the 'Democratic Corporatist' Northern Europe, which includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, and the 'Liberal/North Atlantic model' of the United Kingdom

and Ireland and the US, took an earlier turn toward democracy, has a more professionalized and independent media industry, and a greater socio-historical tradition of social-welfare institutions (Kogen, 2010 p. 2). The newspaper market has high circulation and tends to be addressed to a mass public not necessarily engage in the political world.

Although these models discuss modern-day media systems, their studies are based on general observations of Western countries, reflecting key dimensions including the development of media markets, political parallelism (e.g. press freedom, diversity, media tradition), journalism professionalism, and state intervention on the media. Thus, the study discusses little about emerging media systems in other countries, where new models of media systems are emerging. For example, the Russian media has been called a two-tier, dichotomous media system due to its close ties with the regime that tightly controls some media outlets, notably national TV (Dunn, 2014). Thus, the Russian media has also been labeled as a media system, with conflicting messages within and between fields of communication (Beumers, Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009 cited in Lehtisaari, 2015).

Similar media systems emerge in the Arab world, where certain provisions of the law do not allow press freedom and thus the media remains among the most repressed. The media is primarily used to propagate government views, and royal criticisms of religion and royal family in countries such as Saudi Arabia are restricted. Thus, any form of expression that insults Islam in the Arab world is potentially punishable by death, as is the crime of apostasy (Freedom House, 2015).

When focusing on the SAARC countries, evidence suggests that the media has

come a long way, supporting the struggle for freedom and exhorting people to throw out the British rulers. Even after the independence of 1947, the media continued to support struggles, promoting patriotism during border conflicts (i.e. Indo-Pakistan on Kashmir), separatist movements (i.e. Pakistan and Bangladesh), and the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989). In addition to promoting patriotism and greater democracy, the media also experienced a democratization process from authoritarian regimes into democratic ones. For example, during the civil wars of Sri Lanka and Nepal, the media continued to promote democracy as well as criticizing politicians, despite political pressure and direct bans by governments. A similar media development emerged during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

With the end of these civil wars, commercial media emerged in fiercely competitive environments. Online news sites are now actively providing news content, often challenging the mainstream sources. Despite these changing media landscapes, each SAARC country continues to retain its own distinct media system due to its political, economic, religious, cultural, and legal systems.

To generalise, the SAARC countries demonstrate complex and varied media systems, which may be classified into two broad categories that fit into the models proposed by Siebert *et al.* (1956) – the authoritarian model and the libertarian model. The authoritarian model may be distinguished through two interrelated characteristics. First, this model of media system emerged primarily to serve the king, including certain elite groups. The main objective of this model is to protect and promote the political ideology of the king and the elite. An example of this model may be found in the media system of Bhutan, where the media serves the interest of the king.

Second, the media is owned and operated by the government or elite groups who shape public opinion. This model of media system finds its presence more in the Maldives and Bhutan, but also prevails in a modified form in other SAARC countries.

The libertarian model, on the other hand, may be identified by three main characteristics. First, the SAARC countries now offer vibrant media systems, with a growing newspaper market, television channels, and online news sites dedicated to news (Banaji, 2011). After the economic reforms of the 1990s, the media has become overwhelmingly commercial and entertainment centred, representing the US model of commercial media system. Even in countries such as Bhutan, commercial newspapers and television channels are growing.

Second, state intervention in the media is limited compared to the past, although some countries, such as the Maldives and Afghanistan, continue to control the media for political and religious reasons. Third, there is a growing trend of journalistic professionalism, such as the recruitment of trained journalists, production of investigative news reports, and provision of journalism training. Journalists critically judge politicians and government policies, giving opposition voices space in the media. Journalistic terms, such as 'investigative journalism' and 'news objectivity', are some of the most frequently discussed topics now in countries, such as India (Stahlberg, 2006).

With increasing privatisation and entrepreneurial advancements, media developments are taking place in line with political and social changes, and each SAARC country is developing its own model of media system that fits into its social, political, and economic environments. Thus, despite their geographical proximity and historical ties, each SAARC country differs from the other in terms

of its media systems. In particular, India has seen a phenomenal growth of media in recent decades, with the improvement of technology and growing awareness as well as political mobilisation. The creation of one of the world's biggest television markets (e.g., Cable and Satellite TV channels), consisting of an increasingly Westernised, middle-class audience, with growing purchasing power and aspiration to a consumerist lifestyle, has also contributed to the new landscape of the India media (Thussu, 2007). Given its globalisation model of commercial media largely dependent on advertising for survival, it may be suggested that the Indian media is influenced by the Western model of media system, particularly that of the US that focuses on market forces.

Other countries, such as Nepal and Bhutan with young democracies, represent media systems somewhere in between the pure market (US) model and, to some extent, the public service (Denmark and Finland) or the UK models, in the sense that the media promotes the concerns of farmers or marginalised groups, and at the same time generates commercial revenues for its own survival. More specifically, the Nepalese media is dedicated to promoting the issues of marginalised groups by providing material in native languages. In particular, FM Radio Stations have been active since the restoration of democracy in the 1990s. Similar media practices may be seen in Bhutan.

In contrast, Sri Lanka and Bhutan represent somewhere in-between the pure market (US) model and the two-tier, dichotomous (Russia) model, where some media outlets, particularly the national TV, are strictly controlled by the state and used to promote the political view of the governments. The Internet is seen as a tool for democracy, and governments are promoting the use of the Internet for social and economic development. However, they also use various measures to

control the content online for political and religious reasons. As a result, some online news sites from these countries are operated abroad. Similar control on the Internet may be found in the Maldives and Afghanistan.

On the other hand, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives represent somewhere in-between the pure market (US) model and the Arab world model that restricts the media from criticising Islamic tenets. Thus, despite relative media freedom in recent decades, the media in these countries is restricted from covering or writing on religion.

The ecology of media systems has been thus shaped by the policies of governments and commercial imperatives. Unlike in Western liberal democracy, where a free flow of information is constitutionally guaranteed, press freedom and citizen journalism in the SAARC countries still remain underdeveloped and thus little is known about their potential. How we define media systems in the region may vary depending on the social and political circumstances in which they exist or take place. Given the emerging media landscapes, one may suggest that there is considerable cross-national variation in the movement towards the US model of media system, despite the fact that the media emerged during the British rule.

2.5 A review of journalism

In the past, citizens have practiced several different models of journalism, seeking a more equitable sharing of political, economic, social, cultural, and/or informational resources and status (Carroll and Hackett, 2006, p. 84). These media practices emerged during different media and political environments, and each of these models differ from each other in terms of their objectives.

Therefore, there are some subtle overlaps in the various models of citizen-media initiatives. To understand these models more precisely, it is helpful to identify how each of these media practices deals with a philosophy that argues from a distinct perspective. This thesis first proposes a typology of five models of journalism that encompass the norms of modern journalism in which ordinary people engage, and then analyses citizen journalism as a distinct model of media practice.

2.5.1 Traditional journalism

Traditional journalism is the process of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news information to the public by the mainstream media. It takes place in three main different formats: print, radio, and television in both on and offline. It comes in several different forms, such as breaking news, feature and investigative stories, editorial, columns and reviews (Niles, 2013). In traditional journalism, professional journalists are the gatekeepers who filter through the happenings of the world, select the significant events, and report them for their audience. Ordinary people don't play any part in the news process except as news sources from which journalists gather information and opinion. However, most people, except government officials, have little chance of becoming news sources for the news. Professional journalists perform the entire news process, from news gathering, writing, editing, to publishing, exercising their professional news values at every stage. However, members of the news audience can send letters to the editor or lodge complaints after the news is delivered, which may feed back to the journalists for making correction or for future reference (Nip, 2006, p. 216).

2.5.2 Public journalism

In trying to address the double disconnect, 'one between journalism and citizenry and one between citizens and public life' (Rausch, 2012, p. 66), public journalism aims to engage ordinary people both in the news-making process and the use of the news. It promotes the civic role of non-governable groups, what Rosen calls 'the people formerly known as the audience'. Public journalism aims to address the important issues that members of the public are most concerned about, which it identifies by organizing focus-group discussions, round table and local community forums and subsequently publishing the results in the news pages (Benesh, 1998, cited in Haas 2003). In addition, the process of public journalism involves asking questions of relevant individuals or authorities and the public to identify the priority issues. Just as in Habermas's (1989) public sphere, town hall meetings, citizen panels, and polls are common techniques that are used to identify the concerns of the community, which then form the reporting agenda for the journalists. However, news articles are often presented from the perspective of citizens rather than politicians or experts (Hass, 2003).

During the news-gathering process, professional journalists often report back to the citizens on what they have found in order to generate discussions in search of solutions to the problems (Charity, 1995, cited in Haas, 2003). There have been cases when citizens even partnered with the professional journalists in gathering the news. However, professional journalists generally remain gatekeepers in editing and publishing the stories that frame the issues and present the story elements in a way that address public concerns and helps the people to participate in the community. News articles written by citizens are often included as part of the public-journalism package (Hass, 2012).

One of the central goals of public journalism is to focus on the news issues of shared concern to the public (Haas and Steiner, 2001). Thus, in public journalism, citizens are assigned different roles in the problem-solving process from experts, (Haas, 2003). Thus, public journalism increases the capacity of the community to act on the news (Rosen, 1997), by examining issues in alternative ways. It takes the initiative to report on major public problems in a way that advances public knowledge of possible solution (Haas, 2003).

2.5.3 Participatory journalism

Participatory journalism is part of a broader phenomenon of audience involvement in the newsgathering process (Lorenzo-Dus and Brayan, 2011). Participatory journalism is pro-am journalism whereby readers, writers, and editors participate jointly in the ongoing process of news production and circulation via online and social media (Lievrrouw, 2003). Although the term, 'participatory journalism', has been coined recently, mainstream journalism now accepts the idea of giving news users the chance to express their views about public affairs (Nip, 2007). However, the term is used inconsistently: sometimes it is used to include a phenomenon that is more appropriately known as citizen journalism (Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Goode, 2009); at other times, it is used to include a phenomenon in which ordinary people work in collaboration with professional journalists (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Thurman, 2008; Paulussen and Ugille, 2008; Wardle and Williams, 2010; Lievrrouw, 2011).

In participatory journalism, citizens can produce news articles more or less independently from news organizations. However, professional journalists generate some other content if needed, and publish and market the whole news product (Nip, 2007). In recent developments, participatory journalism has

matured to resemble traditional journalism in form and practice, whereby ordinary people provide 'independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant news information' (Bowman and Willis, 2003, p. 9). Participatory journalism is a bottom-up, emergent phenomenon in which there is little or no editorial oversight or formal journalistic workflow dictating the decisions of staff. Instead, it is the result of many simultaneous, distributed conversations that either blossom or quickly atrophy in the Web's social network (Bowman and Willis, 2003, p. 9). News contribution from the audience is solicited within a frame designed by the professional journalist or news organization. In this definition, the BBC's 'Have your Say', which probes news users' views about the news and then publishes them in a particular section of the news product, is a case of participatory journalism (Nip, 2007).

In recent years, participatory journalism has become one of the main features of mainstream media organizations, such as *The Guardian* and the BBC. These news organizations regularly solicit experiences and stories from news users and ask for news content contributions from whoever is interested in reporting on specific aspects of developing news articles. The 'Letters to the Editor' section of newspapers could be considered a forerunner of participatory journalism, though the content submitted by news readers is more often edited. Public journalism projects that include stories written by ordinary people are often described as the pioneer of participatory journalism as they published the experiences, not just views, of ordinary people (Nip, 2007).

2.5.4 Multimedia journalism

The concept of multimedia journalism is relatively new in media studies. It may be defined as a process of combining text, images, sound, videos and graphics,

to convey news articles (Martyn, 2009). In multimedia journalism, several different media are collectively used to present a news story package. In more precise terms, multimedia journalism refers to both the presentation of news articles and journalistic practice on the Web. It is an integrated (although not necessarily simultaneous) presentation of a news story package through different media, such as (but not limited to) a website, a Usenet newsgroup, e-mail, SMS, MMS, radio, television, teletext, print newspapers and magazines (Deuze, 2004, p. 140). A multimedia journalist can be one multi-skilled reporter telling a story for TV, radio, and online. An example of such multimedia journalism is the news briefs or summaries written by print, broadcast, or online reporters that are used for e-mail or SMS news alerts.

In this model, multimedia journalists — who could be professional or non-professional people — are responsible for gathering news articles. They may observe events, verify and edit news articles on social media, and analyze information and data and check accuracy before they are published on the Internet. Journalists working in different media collaborate and present a news story package on a website using two or more media formats, such as (but not limited to) spoken and written words, music, moving and still images, graphic animations, including interactive and hypertextual elements. The teams of news workers from print, broadcast, and online jointly gather news and information and plan a story package intended for distribution across all media. For an example, photojournalists publishing galleries or slideshows of pictures for which there was no room in the print edition.

Multimedia journalism exhibits the characteristics of online media in terms of competence, as multimedia journalists are required to be a little bit of a writer, a

photographer, a video maker and a sound person, as well as being able to cut, edit, and assemble media content on the web. They must also be able to use social media as the process of multimedia journalism involves more news-interactive activities on the Internet, soliciting public comment through the use of social media features, such as Facebook and Twitter. In addition, journalists must be able to communicate their ideas clearly regardless of the genres in which they work. This means that multimedia journalism is more about networking, as multimedia journalists are dependent on each other for the proper functioning of the project.

2.5.5 Citizen journalism

In citizen journalism, ordinary people are responsible for gathering and disseminating news content without any interventions from professionals. In the contemporary context, it refers to a wide range of web-based journalistic activities from current affairs-based blogging, photo-video sharing, to commenting upon news materials posted by another user or by professional news outlets (Goode, 2009). It can be one or a number of individuals, a citizen group, or a non-profit organization without a paid staff running a news blog, news website, community radio station, or newspaper (Nip, 2006; Cammaerts, 2010) where citizen journalists are free to participate in a virtual public sphere, creating their own news content and interacting with peers (Goode, 2009). Since not all citizen journalists are professional, citizen journalism often transcends the traditional notion of professional values such as a concept of 'objectivity', publishing news content without the constraint of censure or the pressure of advertisements (Kenix, 2009). It rejects standard notions of professional ethics and can take place in settings both in and outside mainstream media. Its

practices range from gathering, publishing, and updating news content to peer-to-peer sharing news information (Goode, 2009). In this definition, CNN's iReport.com can be an example of citizen journalism.

2.6 Citizen journalism: Historical dimensions

Some scholars, such as Ross (2011), argue that the history of citizen journalism is actually the history of journalism itself. This assertion leads us to think about the modern age of communication, which is generally considered to be the fifteenth century when the moveable printing press was first introduced to both the government departments and members of the public, to publish printed materials in the form of pamphlets in the West (MacBride, 1981). These early pamphlets were used for various purposes, from promoting political apologies to providing manifestoes to tracts for and against predestination in theology (Brill, 2015). However, there is no evidence that these pamphlets had been used in the form of citizen journalism (i.e. to provide news and information to educate the public).

Gillmor (2006) provides a more specific timeline by suggesting that actual citizen journalism was brought about by political revolution in the late eighteenth century, when writer and activist Tom Paine published political pamphlets that not only thrilled patriots but also threatened loyalists in North America. Pamphlet literatures were the main medium during the pre-revolutionary period through which people could express their views and opinions on contemporary affairs (Gillmor, 2006; Ross, 2011). More often, the content of the pamphlets offered alternative perspectives and were suitable for debates in a democratic nation (State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs, 2015). Thus, the late eighteenth century may be described as an important period for the

history of citizen journalism, given the role ordinary people played in providing alternative perspectives by publishing pamphlets.

However, with the introduction of new technologies and changes of politics in the world, citizen journalism has taken many forms over time and ordinary people have been practising journalism in a variety of ways for various purposes. For the purpose of this thesis, citizen journalism is classified into three different periods that fit into the description of the history of citizen journalism. The period ranges from the eighteenth century when pamphlets were first used to provide news and information to the present day of the Internet that has enabled people to communicate online.

The first period may be categorised as the 'revolutionary era', in which ordinary people published pamphlets to communicate with the public on current affairs. The main objective of 'revolutionary era' citizen journalism was to achieve political goals rather than provide the public with independent news analysis. What makes this model so important is its oppositional or alternative perspective that led many countries to become independent from Western colonial powers, particularly the British (Gillmor, 2006). This model was characterised by personal journalism, which means there was little concern about achieving news objectivity. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* — which challenged the authority of the British government and monarchy and played an important role in the process of American independence in 1776 — may be considered as an example of this model. Gillmor (2006) further suggests that another prominent citizen journalist in the early history of media was Ben Franklin, whose *Pennsylvania Gazette* was civic minded and occasionally controversial because of its alternative political news content. Although it was published in the form of newspaper

between 1728 and 1800 (i.e. before the time period of the American Revolution), *The Gazette* provided its readers with a first-hand view of colonial America, the American Revolution and the New Republic, offering important social, political, and cultural perspectives of the time (Gillmor, 2006).

The second model of citizen journalism may be categorised as the '1960-1970s era', in which several different underground newspapers (also known as the radical press) and pirate or underground radio stations emerged, first in the West and then elsewhere. These underground media were also called countercultural 'community newspapers' in the US, and were used by outspoken thinkers and writers who directly challenged the dominant American culture (Marcellus, 2012). In this model, citizen journalists created debates about current affairs, advocating for a better world, free of war, hate, injustice, poverty, and ignorance, including the issues of women. Some of the examples include Radio Donna in Rome, Nanas Radioteuses in Paris, and Radio Pirate Women in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s (Karpf, 1980). During these period, these radio stations played significant roles in promoting different social values, different cultures, and political opinions, often challenging the government (Ke, 2000).

This model gained its popularity after the World War II in 1945. By the end of the 1970s, over eighty-three citizen newspapers — most of them monthly with an average of 10-12 pages per issue and with very little advertising — were in circulation in the UK alone, and sold anywhere between 100 and 85,000 copies on streets (Harcup, 2003). In the US, this era saw a dramatic growth in citizen-media initiatives (in both print newspaper and radio), although there was a long tradition of amateur radios even before the World War I (Cammaerts, 2009). While underground newspapers saw a rise, citizen journalists had no agreed

upon definition of common terms, such as democracy (Nevošejt, 2012). Citizen journalists themselves often both created and documented news events and engaged in power struggles and infighting within the same organizations. This amateurism led to the blurring of the lines between reporting and activism. Lewes (2009) suggests that the rise of this model as a result of the failure of traditional media in their democratic roles.

However, this model saw its decline in the aftermath of the introduction of media reforms in Western countries, whereby media organizations were required to meet certain legal criteria. In the UK, for example, radio stations were required to obtain a 100 watt licence, which for most was too expensive (Cammaerts, 2009). This led many underground media outlets to close or become part of the mainstream media.

The last model of citizen journalism is now being constructed out of Internet technology whereby various individuals or media organizations are able to produce news content independently or in collaboration. One of the striking features of contemporary citizen journalism is the 'speed, low cost, and global reach with which subjects can be brought to the national and international news agendas, including issues that are those in power would prefer to be ignored' (Jurrat, 2011, p. 9).

This model of citizen journalism gained its international prominence during times of crisis: the attacks on Twin Tower in New York and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 were the first time that people looked to the Internet for eyewitness accounts (Jurrat, 2011). The term 'citizen journalism' became prominent in media discourse after the 2004 Asia tsunami when the photos and videos that tourists had uploaded on their personal webpage or blogs appeared

on television and in the print media (Allan, 2009). However, it was not until the 2005 London bombings — when people affected by the attacks sent their mobile images and personal accounts to the BBC — that mainstream media organizations realised the significance and potential of such news content, also known as user-generated content, produced by ordinary people (Lorenzo-Dus and Bryan, 2011). Many different mainstream media organizations now frequently use user-generated content, encouraging their audiences to contribute their eyewitness accounts or photo images. CNN has launched its own site, *iReport*, dedicated to the concept of citizen journalism in 2006 on which citizen journalists from any part of the world can publish their news articles.

The most recent development in contemporary citizen journalism is the use of social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, which have become increasingly popular among users (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media has become a feature of political and civic engagement for people around the world. A 2014 survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre found that 74% of American internet users used social-networking sites, particularly Facebook and Twitter, to know what is happening in the world. The Centre also reported that 71% of online American adults used Facebook, followed by Twitter users 23%, and 66% of those social media users had undertaken at least one of eight civic or political activities using social media.

These findings suggest that the development of citizen journalism has been largely influenced by political and technological environments. However, the current media environment demonstrates a new emerging media trend — citizen journalism and traditional media are merging to form a conglomerate and ordinary people are becoming part of the traditional media. So, the history of

citizen journalism may 'depend on the preferred definition of 'citizen journalism' being employed — or even of 'history' for that matter — let alone the perspectives, interests and motivations of the person marshalling selected facts into a compelling narrative' (Allan, 2009, p. 17). In other words, how we describe the history of citizen journalism may depend on how we understand it.

2.7 Citizen journalism: A practice

While academic discourse about citizen journalism has become a global phenomenon, there has been no worldwide call for citizen journalism, as there has been for media literacy, regulation of media conglomerates, or changes in the international flow of cultural products. Even within Western countries, such as the US, citizen-initiative media has occurred in small or medium-market newspapers, and professional journalists have been among the most strident critics of citizen journalists, arguing that amateurs have problems of fakery, manipulation, partisanship, bias, and lack of accountability (Buerk, 2009). Yet, the movement of citizen journalism echoes important trends in international communication. What makes citizen journalism so important is its grassroots approach — it promotes civic participation in media, giving a voice to those who would never be heard in the traditional media (Gillmor, 2006). Given the range of practices, citizen journalism tends to vary from country to country or from region to region depending on media, political, and technological environments. Therefore, citizen journalism has its share of strengths and weaknesses in terms of its democratic roles.

Michael Bromley at the University of Queensland identifies two categories of citizen journalism in non-Western countries. According to this author, citizen journalism is strongest where the form of government could be characterised as

'soft authoritarianism', such in countries like Malaysia and South Korea. On the other hand, in countries such as Myanmar, where there is a repressive regime and the media is controlled by the state, there are fewer examples of citizen journalism.

It is, therefore, important to take account of the political environment within which citizen journalism is undertaken. Given that it is practised variously, citizen journalism may be viewed from at least three different perspectives. The first type of citizen journalism takes place under a form of government that may be characterised as 'liberal democracy'. Countries such as the US and the UK may be considered under this category, where citizen journalism has matured beyond personal blogging and gained mainstream acceptance. In these countries, many features of citizen journalism have been widely adopted by the mainstream media. For example, *The Guardian*, one of the daily broadsheet newspapers in the UK, allows its readers to leave comments 'below the line' of most articles. Although comments posted by readers may rarely appear in print, some scholars suggest that allowing readers to post their comments on news articles may help professional journalists to gather the facts of news events in their news coverage (Thurman, 2008). Similarly, *The BBC* frequently solicits experiences and eyewitness accounts about important events, such as the Syria war from its news audience.

In this model, citizen journalists often present themselves as a pressure group against unpopular political decisions of the government. Belgium's Anti-war Movement in 2003 is an example of this where citizen journalists not only published their arguments on various websites and blogs but also organized peace rallies against the invasion of Iraq in Brussels (Carpentier et al., 2009). In

addition, they provided the coverage of underreported news issues when professional journalists couldn't access the news sources or deliberately ignored the stories as trivial issues.

The second type of citizen journalism is undertaken under the government of what Bromley calls 'soft-authoritarianism' (Sinclair, 2009). Countries such as South Korea and Malaysia may be considered under this category, where the media is frequently monitored by the state. For example, when South Korea's OhmyNews was launched in 2000, the site was hailed as a pioneer of citizen journalism. In South Korea, the site was considered as alternative media (Kim and Hamilton, 2006). By April 2005, it had over 37,000 contributing citizen journalists from all over the world. However, the government saw the increasing influence of the site as a potential threat and tried to ban it from publishing news content on the Internet in 2002. As a result, the site published a print edition.

One of the central characteristics of this model is working relationships between professional and citizen journalists. Although the traditional media doesn't provide spaces for citizen journalists, it often relies on citizen journalism for breaking news. In addition, professional journalists choose citizen journalism as an alternative platform to publish news articles that are rejected by their editors. However, when it comes to sensitive issues, such as religion or ethnic issues, both citizen and professional journalists choose not to cover the issues to avoid future problems (Steele, 2009). This has been seen most commonly in countries such as Malaysia, where people of different cultural backgrounds live together. Despite such relationships, citizen journalists may find it difficult to win professional recognition from their fellow counterparts in other countries, particularly the West (Zuckerman, 2008).

What makes this model so important is its alternativeness. As citizen journalism has the ability to publish news content on the Internet without the constraint of censure or pressure of commercial advertising, citizen journalists often present themselves as activists, promoting their alternative views. Citizen journalism serves these activists as a platform for mobilizing interest groups during campaigns with varying degree of success. An element of this assertion can be seen in the 2002 South Korean presidential election. During the election campaign, the supporters of candidate Roh Moo-hyun launched political campaigns online. OhmyNews not only published news content it received from the supporters, but also joined the campaign, updating news regularly. After he won the election, Roh gave his first interview to OhmyNews (Joyce, 2007).

Thirdly, citizen journalism under the government of what Bromley calls 'repressive regimes'. Countries, such as Myanmar and China may be considered under this category, where media organizations are forced to work as a news aggregator for political parties or the government. In these countries, citizen journalism remains underdeveloped for several different reasons, including the need for a credit card to register a domain (He and Zhu, 2002). On the other hand, governments' strict policies discourage people from operating citizen-journalism sites, such as blogs. In 2005, for instance, the Chinese government introduced a new policy whereby people were required to register their identity with the government in order to host a non-commercial website. If bloggers post an article that is politically sensitive or critical to the government, they may face having their blogs removed or blocked (MacKinnon, 2009).

2.8 Citizen journalism: Criticisms

While citizen journalism is often portrayed as a new model of media practice that gives a voice to those who would never be heard in the mainstream media and provides an opportunity to share their views, 'whether it will actually make a significant change for journalism and the press remains open to dispute' (Lievrouw, 2011, p. 130). Just as proponents imagine the future of citizen journalism as a series of significant projects that will potentially change the media landscape, opponents imagine the future as a series of refutations. The emergence of citizen journalism is often seen as a result of deficits in mainstream media coverage, however, critics are concerned about the quality, significance, relevance, and influence of citizen journalism in society (Hopkins, 2007; Thurman, 2008; Lewes, 2009). They warn that the declining institutional power of the media will have far-reaching and ruinous consequences for democracy itself. They insist that the traditional press still has an indispensable role to play as the key gatekeeper, agenda-setter, and mediator between the people and their governments and other powerful institutions, and that this role is distinct from that of the traditional 'audience'. Berger (2011) notes that:

citizen journalism is supposed to be a process in which persons whose status is not that of hired hands in a media enterprise, but who are outsiders that are nevertheless engaged in the sustained generation of journalism. However, the mere activity of content creation (such as capturing a photo of disaster, letters to the editor, reader comments on online articles, SMS views run as a tickertape on a TV screen), which doesn't add any value like a caption, contextual knowledge or photo-editing and layout semiotics, would

not normally be counted as citizen journalism. The content needs to have publicly oriented, balanced news articles that will be genuinely useful to readers (p. 710).

In a strict definition, journalism involves creating and disseminating media content that includes 'some original interviewing, reporting, or analysis of events or issues to which people other than the authors have access (Nip, 2007, p. 218). However, critics argue that citizen journalism fails to meet these requirements. Mike Godwin (1999), as cited by Lievrouw (2011), puts forward his arguments as follows:

How can they [ordinary people] be journalists if they have got no editors? It will be harder to tell truth from fiction and rumour. Once it's possible for anyone to write and publish something that has the appearance of being 'real' journalism, the public is likely to be fooled by frauds and phonies....won't there be a Gresham's law effect in which all the bad, phony journalism drives out the good, true stuff?

... These little guys will never be able to do what the big boys do. No Web-based one-man journalist has the resources to do the important stories.... What about fairness and accuracy? What happens when there's a sudden influx of amateur journalists who haven't served the kind of ethical apprenticeship that those of us who came up through traditional media organization have served? (p. 130).

Lasica (2003) defines citizen journalism as a slippery creature as everybody knows what audience participation means but [nobody knows] when that translated into journalism. Indeed the very meaning of 'citizen journalism' is widely questioned and criticised as being vague, since not all content produced by citizens can be considered citizen journalism. David Hazinski at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism argues that, in the first place, citizen journalists lack the professionalism of journalism. He warns that, when everybody who owns a laptop thinks they are a journalist and doesn't understand the ethics, it's dangerous. Without the code of journalistic ethics that is drilled into professionals through formal training or on-the-job experience, partisanship, conflict of interest, and shoddy journalism are likely to be the norm (Joyce, 2007). Critics argue that journalistic elements, such as news values, structure, and impartiality may be abandoned as people begin writing their own news. This may lead to facts missing, sources not being checked, and the benefits of the editorial process being lost.

Critics also argue that citizen journalism is not a perfect system. It is somewhat fast and loose, which allows amateurs to publish unverified media content, including hoaxes. In addition, they are concerned that the decentralization of news creation and dissemination may lead to increased abuse and conflicts of interest by journalists. What it means is that citizen journalists produce untrustworthy news articles as they are not subject to the same rigorous editorial process used in the traditional media (Joyce, 2007). An element of this criticism is reflected in the coverage of a report on CNN's *iReport* by a citizen journalist. On October 3, 2008, a citizen journalist posted a report on *iReport* that Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, was rushed to hospital after suffering a major heart attack. Because *iReport* was associated with CNN, some news outlets picked up

the story as reliable. Within minutes, Apple's stock price spiralled to a 17-month low (a plunge worth almost five billion of market value) as the rumour gained momentum across the Internet. The stock price managed to recover much of its lost ground only after the news was revealed as untrue (Allan and Thorsen, 2009).

This example highlights the negative aspects of citizen journalism, suggesting that news articles provided by ordinary people may be unreliable. So, from the journalistic perspective, citizen journalism may not be a useful platform for the public sphere beyond its connection to professional journalism (Blaagaard, 2013).

Another critic, Vincent Maher (2005), summarises his objections to citizen journalism in what he calls the three deadly E's: ethics, economics, and epistemology. In terms of ethics, he argues that professional journalists are governed by established institutional codes and standards, professional training and accountability to their employers. Citizen journalists, in contrast, are self-taught amateurs, governed by uncoordinated individual self-interest and fear of litigation. He states that they produce nothing, except commentary and feedback.

Regarding economics, Maher (2005) claims that, in traditional news organizations, professional journalists are protected from the economic demands and priorities of advertisers (traditionally called 'the wall' between advertising and editorial content). In addition, advertising in traditional media is non-contextual, that is, unrelated to the editorial content with which it appears. Both of these factors tend to insulate journalists from undue economic influence on their news judgement and coverage. In contrast, the editorial decisions of citizen

journalists are directly influenced by what sells and the advertising on their sites is contextual, that is, closely related to the content being presented.

Finally, with respect to epistemology, Maher (2005) suggests, 'the blogosphere... is a mess'. He asserts that, where traditional journalism and 'old media' are tools for 'reflection and crystallisation of truths', citizen journalism is merely a tool for activism and contesting truth. That is, traditional journalism produces knowledge, establishing clients with formalised relationships, while citizen journalism is heavily dependent on participatory peer contributions and makes no such authoritative knowledge. So, there is a high possibility that ordinary people document their own lives for themselves, their friends, and those who care.

In other words, amateurs are unqualified to produce and publish original content. If they do this at all, they can only produce commentaries and can occasionally report breaking news when they happen to be on the scene, such as the London bombings or Hurricane Katrina. However, such commentaries may only reflect the imbalanced and subjective views of the authors who write news. In addition, citizen journalists are more likely to produce what is considered offensive or provocative content as they do not practice any standard journalistic codes. An element of this criticism can be noticed in the arrest and conviction to three years' imprisonment of the Egyptian blogger and activist, Abdel Kareem Soliman, in 2007. Soliman called Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak a dictator and accused the Islamic university, al-Azhar, of being a breeding ground for terrorists and of repressing critical voices. It was generally accepted that Soliman's conviction would act as a deterrent for other Egyptian bloggers.

However, Soliman's conviction led to a campaign of solidarity, which resounded not only in Egypt but also internationally (Cammaerts, 2008, p. 364).

On the other hand, citizen journalism may be abused by promoting the voice of extremists and helping to spread messages of hate or xenophobia that would never be allowed in the mainstream media. Citizen journalists may be activists within the communities they write about, which may fuel civil unrest, political instability, and ethno-religious crisis, though the aim of such anti-movements is often to address the issues of society (Okoro, 2013). Furthermore, citizen journalism such as blogs may also be misused by political or religious elites for propaganda strategies. Just by being elites, their sites may be automatically read more often than those of ordinary bloggers. Consequently, people may be inclined to trust material they find on the Internet, particularly if it is called 'news', and the news may implicitly validate content that might be inaccurate, offensive, or otherwise lack credibility.

One example of such a strategy was observed in the blog posts of US politician Howard Dean, an ex-governor of Vermont. By appropriating a strategic communication model developed by the social movement MoveOn.org, Dean managed to create a campaign dynamic that unexpectedly put him in a position to challenge Al Gore in 2004 (Cammaerts, 2008). Although his presidential campaign was unsuccessful, Dean was the top fundraiser and front runner for the democratic presidential nomination due to his online campaign. In 2003, the Dean campaign posted 2,910 entries on its 'Blog for America' and received 314,121 comments, which were also posted there (Cornfield, 2005, p, 2).

For critics of citizen journalism, amateurs don't adhere to the basic ethics and standards of journalism, and the quality of their news content relies sometimes

on the person who contributes news articles. Thus, some critics argue that not all amateurs are citizen journalists: some are activists who want to bring about change in society (Woo-Young, 2005) and others are simply driven to citizen journalism by their economic interest, with the primary aim of financing themselves through the sales of commercial advertising on the Internet (Kim and Hamilton, 2006). An interest in politics or profit may affect the quality of content and news selection. In addition, the type of news content citizen journalists select may also create echo chambers, promoting greater group polarization and balkanization (Joyce, 2007), trivialising the issues of national and international interest.

2.9 Summary and conclusions

In this chapter, the aim was to discuss the phenomenon of citizen journalism as a concept and then define it from a broader perspective. Thus, the first part of the chapter offered several different terms and phrases that have been used to define the concept of citizen journalism over time. Providing evidence supported by scholarly arguments by various authors, the concept of citizen journalism was described as a media process based upon ordinary people playing an active role in the process of news-making. In addition, some of the key elements of citizen journalism and its relevance and roles in a democracy were discussed in the contemporary context.

Several definitions of citizen journalism proposed by various scholars were discussed, identifying some underlying arguments (i.e. broader and narrow perspectives). The broader perspective referred to amateur news reporting, which ranged from practices such as reposting, linking, tagging, rating, or commenting to providing a range of news articles from personal narratives,

political opinion, and first-hand news reports. On the other hand, the narrow perspective referred to reporting newsworthy news events, typically using new technology, such as the Internet, by independent individuals (Goode, 2009). The difference between the two was that the former was more closely associated with the professional newsroom and that ordinary people maintained some form of relationships with the mainstream media. On the other hand, the latter was relatively more independent from the influence of the mainstream media.

Rosen's (2008) definition was discussed in more depth, as it provided a more precise definition of citizen journalism for this thesis. How citizen journalism evolved over time was also discussed. In addition, how media policy imposed by the state impacts on citizen journalism was discussed using an example from the suggestion of Professor Bromley cited in Sinclair (2009), in which the author discussed three different political environments in which citizen journalism takes place: soft authoritarian regime, repressive regime, and more liberal democracy in the West. This provided grounds for discussions. Also, how the mainstream media, particularly in the Western countries, is incorporating the concept of citizen journalism in its newsrooms was discussed.

Modern technology has been seen as the driving force behind the evaluation of citizen journalism. Thus, citizen journalism is seen as an integrated (although not necessarily simultaneous) presentation of news story package through different media, such as websites, a Usenet newsgroup, e-mail, SMS, MMS (Deuze, 2004). A review of five different models of journalism, in which ordinary people take part in one way or the other, was then provided in order to distinguish citizen journalism from other models of journalism.

After a review of journalism, the historical dimension of citizen journalism was discussed. The aim was to provide an insight into how citizen journalism has come a long way as a news provider since it first emerged and how ordinary people utilised the platform in different ways, facilitated by the modern technology of the time. This was followed by a review of citizen journalism from international perspectives, providing insights into the roles played by citizen journalism in social and political changes across the world. South Korea's OhmyNews.com was used to discuss to what extent citizen journalism may be politically biased. On the other hand, the use of user-generated content by the mainstream media, such as the BBC, provided a different example of the convergence of media practice in the West. The last section of the chapter discussed the criticisms surrounding citizen journalism, providing various arguments by media critics.

Overall, the concept of citizen journalism focuses on the capacity of ordinary people, who produce and distribute news articles from their own perspective and at the same time, avoiding any form of professional links with traditional media outlets. In the history of media practices, citizen journalism might be one of the more novel concepts added to the vocabulary used to define the practice. In the past, as ordinary people practised citizen journalism for a variety of purposes, it has been tagged with various terms. It has been called 'underground press', 'alternative media or journalism', 'public journalism', or 'participatory journalism'. In recent decades, it has also been called 'open-source journalism', 'hyper-local journalism', 'distributed journalism', or 'networked journalism'. These varieties of terms suggest that citizen journalism has come a long way from the one-way news process that existed before the invention of the Internet. Although citizen journalism has adopted business models found in the mainstream media in

recent years, the concept of citizen journalism incorporates a substantial risk because of its detachment from the organizational component of media production. In addition, it promotes individualisation avoiding the traditional value of media practice.

On the other hand, mainstream media organizations, such as CNN and the BBC, are seen as eager to incorporate the concept of citizen journalism in their newsroom, with ordinary people becoming part of news crews. These findings clearly suggest that the boundary line between citizen journalism and traditional media practice is becoming increasingly blurred.

2.10 The public sphere: A process of forming public opinion

The concept of the public sphere is at the centre of participatory approaches to democracy. To elaborate, the public sphere is the arena where citizens come together, exchange opinions regarding public affairs, discuss, deliberate, and eventually form public opinion [on issue of public concerns]' (Communication for Governance & Accountability Program, 2009, p. 1). It may take place in a specific arena, such as a town-hall meeting, or a communication infrastructure (e.g. the media), through which citizens are able to exchange information and opinions that may critically guide political systems. The concept of the public sphere is thus seen as central to democracy (Young, 2002) and the concept is increasingly being employed in empirical research to evaluate the democratic quality of the everyday communicative practice through which it is constituted (Dahlberg, 2004).

The concept of the public sphere is normative, and its requisites are the free flow of information, free expression, and political debates (Communication for

Governance & Accountability Program, 2009). However, contemporary understanding of the concept of the public sphere has been mainly based on the work of German sociologist Jurgen Habermas, who provides a comprehensive analysis of the nature of political debates and its historic transformation over time. By examining bourgeois social life that existed in eighteenth-century Western Europe, Habermas describes the public sphere as a sphere of 'private people [coming] together as a public, [who] soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor' (Habermas, 1989, p. 27). This means that the public sphere is all forms of communicative infrastructure, which allows a free exchange of ideas and information, deliberation on issues of public concern, the formation of public will, and the transmission of the public will to official authorities (Arnold, 2008). In other words, the public sphere is a discursive space where individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest, and, where possible, to reach a common judgment (Hauser, 1999).

Describing bourgeois social life, Habermas (1989) discusses communicative processes in which the public sphere is seen to mediate between the 'private sphere' (i.e. citizens or civil society in the narrower sense) and the 'sphere of public authority'. The private sphere is a certain sector of social life in which an individual enjoys a degree of authority, unhampered by intervention from governmental or other institutions. Examples of the private sphere are family and home. The sphere of public authority, on the other hand, represents the state or the realm of the ruling class and the state security apparatus including soldiers and police (Awasom, 2008).

The public sphere is described as having emerged through the growth of coffee houses, voluntary associations, literacy and the press in liberal democracies in Western Europe, although one may argue that the vision of participatory communication to pursue better lives for humankind has always existed. According to Habermas (1989), from the time of Middle Ages to the rise of the bourgeois public sphere, representative publicity – a form of the public sphere that preceded the literary public sphere – existed as a way of discussing issues of common concerns. Representative publicity involved the king or lord representing himself before an audience; the King was the only public person, and all others were spectators.

However, with the rise of the bourgeois public sphere, rulers gradually became public entities and professionalism bore the first signs of the rule of the bourgeois, which became autonomous in relation to the government. The representational publicity (pre-bourgeois relationship in Habermas' sense) was pushed over by a public force that formed around national and territorial sentiments, and individuals struggling with public power found themselves outside its collective power. By the late eighteenth century, feudal institutions were finally disappearing along with the church's rule, making way for public power, which was given autonomy (Fisher, 2011). In other words, the public sphere became akin to what is known a 'public theatre' in modern society, where political participations are enacted through the medium of debates or discourses and public opinions are formed (Livingstone and Lunt, 2013).

Habermas (1989) stipulates that the rise of the public sphere was driven by a need for space, where news and matters of common concern could be freely exchanged and discussed, and this new form of civic society was accompanied by

growing rates of literacy, accessibility to literature, and a new kind of critical journalism. According to him, literary journalism was on the rise in the second half of the eighteenth century, and it was no longer just a supplier of news but rather a weapon in the politics of parties, taking on a new journalistic vocation: editing. This means that information trade was now the name of the game, trading public opinion – the quintessential symbol of the public sphere. The public sphere as we know it today was formed when journalism became a public institution with the aim of promoting public debate. Only after the establishment of a democratic-bourgeois constitution could newspapers deal with public opinion for the purpose of commerce and not only for taking sides in a social-political debate (we are talking 1830's onwards) (Fisher, 2011). However, private interest in newspapers and mass media journalism began to play a vital role in the process of public debates, taking shape in areas such as ideological content, advertisements and so forth. In other words, a certain group of people began controlling the public sphere through the media for their own political and commercial goal.

With the rise of literacy and a changing political environment, the contemporary public sphere is characterised by the weathering of its critical roles and capacities (Habermas, 1989). In the past, the public sphere was used to subject people or political decisions to public scrutiny. Today, the public sphere is recruited for the use of hidden policies by interest groups. According to Habermas (1989), the principles of the public sphere have weakened since the twentieth century. The public is now no longer made out of masses of individuals, but of organized people that institutionally exert their influence on the public sphere and debate. The liberal model of the public sphere does not sit well with the modern industrialised democratic state, since the ideology involved with this model of the

public sphere is tied to values that have changed since the eighteenth century (Habermas, 1989).

Journalism and propaganda have further expanded the boundaries of the public and the public sphere. The public, on the other hand, has also lost its cohesion due to the high standards of meritocratic education, which have created classes, gaps and conflicts which once resided in the private sphere but have now migrated to the public sphere (Fisher, 2011). The public sphere gradually began to be dominated by the media and special interests. As a result, the private and public spheres have mixed with each other, and social and political organisations are now invading each other (Zarhani, 2011).

2.10.1 Habermas's public sphere: Criticisms

Although Habermas's theory of the public sphere has been extensively discussed in the account of the public sphere as being highly influential, it has also been sharply criticised in numerous ways including being too left-wing. Critics argue that Habermas (1989) idealises the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century by presenting it as a forum of rational discussion and debate when in fact certain groups were excluded and participation was thus limited (Kellner, 2011). Moreover, in Habermas's (1989) sense, only a few Western European bourgeois societies developed the public sphere. In other words, Habermas (1989) fails to examine the non-liberal and non-bourgeois public sphere and excludes various classes, such as ethnic minorities, public officials and students, who are part of public political life. Therefore, Habermas's public sphere may be described as being only an analysis of the public debates in bourgeois society on Western Europe. Whilst the public sphere was conceived to build models of an

ideal society to help people realise agreed democratic values, one may argue that universalising the account of Habermas's public sphere in modern globalised society is a mistake (Kellner, 2011).

Critics also argue that the public sphere itself shifts with the rise of new social movements, new technologies, and new spaces of public interaction. Thus one of the criticisms is that Habermas (1989) deliberately undermines women's participation in political debates, marking the decline of the public sphere precisely at the moment when women were beginning to get political power and become active actors (Fraser, 1990; Kellner, 2011). Therefore, Habermas's (1989) public sphere may need to undergo some critical interrogation and reconstruction if it is to yield a category capable of theorising the limits of actually existing democracy (Fraser, 1990).

Despite these criticisms, Habermas's (1989) concept of public sphere continues to be influential, having major impact in a variety of disciplines and providing the most systematically developed critical theory of the concept presently available in academic studies.

2.10.2 Virtual public sphere: The Internet as a public sphere

With the invention of new technology, the Internet has further expanded venues for personal expression, promoting citizen activities in cyberspace, enabling discussion between citizens and offering information and tools that may extend the role of the public in the social and political arena (Papacharissi, 2002). More specifically, citizens might publish their political opinions online, for example, in a blog or a video parody on YouTube that challenge public agendas determined by other people, such as elite groups (Chadwick and Howard, 2009). Thus citizens

are reinventing their private and public lives whereby they are able to express their political opinions and views on public issues. However, it should be noted that information-access inequalities and new media literacy have compromised the representativeness of the virtual public sphere

Thus, the Internet has facilitated a new space for people to participate in political debates, and it continues to engage people in discourse. Publishing political opinions and views, they discuss issues of public concerns and organise political campaigns and rallies. For example, in the 2002 presidential election of South Korea, the supporters of presidential hopeful Roh Moo-Hyun published news articles on OhmyNews.com, criticising the government and the media. This mobilised a large network of Koreans across the country in support of their candidate. The victory of Roh was largely credited to the contribution of his online supporters. For a candidate with limited coverage in the mainstream media, the Internet represents an alternative platform for reaching out to potential voters. The Internet may not make as much of a difference for ruling party candidates, who enjoys continuous media coverage, yet it has proven to be a blessing for candidates who can't afford advertising campaigns or are being ignored by the media.

The most plausible manner of perceiving the online public sphere consists of several culturally fragmented cyberspaces that occupy a common virtual public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). People from diverse backgrounds are brought together online by their common interests to discuss a range of issues. Much of the political debate taking place on the Internet may not be different from the one taking place in formal face-to-face interaction. The gaps between politicians, journalists, and the public may still not be bridged, unless they want

them to be. Still, people who are not able to come together to debate matters offline are now able to do so on the Internet. In addition, people from any part of the world may involve themselves in virtual political discourse in a matter of minutes, expanding each other's horizon with culturally diverse political viewpoints, reflecting the dynamics of social movements that struggle on a cultural, rather than a traditional political terrain.

However, scholars are divided on the potential of the Internet: the proponents of the Internet suggest that online discourses may increase political participation among ordinary citizens and pave the way for a democratic utopia. The Internet may also extend our channels for communication, without radically affecting the nature of communication itself (Papacharissi, 2002). Central to these arguments is the fact that the dominant social-liberal ideology would demean even the fundamental concept of democracy. On the top of other types of illusory democracy (e.g., representative 'democracy', radical 'democracy', social 'democracy') that are upheld by politicians and governments, we are seeing a virtual 'democracy' on the Internet celebrated by bloggers and liberal writers, with considerable number of supporters of the reformist Left (Fotopoulos, 2008). Given that anyone can now create and publish content on the Internet, scholars such as Takis Fotopoulos praise the Internet as the greatest democratic conquest in history, which has made a real democratization of the media 'from below', i.e., grassroots levels. Ample evidence may be found in online political newsgroup discourses, which often mirror the arguments and conflicts of mainstream politics (Papacharissi, 2002). Therefore, it is argued, a virtual public sphere does exist in political debates in the tradition of the public sphere, but in different form (i.e. on the Internet).

Opponents, on the other hand, suggest that, whilst the Internet can be used as a tool for communications, it is still uncertain whether the Internet may change the traditional form of political discourse in the long run. Gerhards (2009) suggest that there is only minimal evidence to support the idea that the Internet may be a better communication space as compared to the print media. In other words, the Internet itself may not bring any fundamental change of the relationship between political information and political participation. At the same time, it may not bring people who are politically indifferent into politics since they don't have any reasons to do so (Park, 2007).

Chapter Three

3. Conceptual and theoretical framework: From the democratic functions of the media to ordinary people as a content creator

This thesis on citizen journalism investigates citizen journalism in its contemporary context focusing on the SAARC countries. Therefore, as a way of structuring the conceptual framework in this study, it is useful to begin by reviewing some of the key strands in theoretical debates concerning the role of the media and its perceived crisis. Thus, the five main functions of the media will be discussed first to highlight how the media performs its role in democratic society.

After a review of the role of the media in democracy, the chapter will discuss some of the arguments concerning the crisis of the media, highlighting Herman and Chomsky's (1994) arguments of how the media is influenced to produce news content that eventually fits into the ideologies of interest groups, such as political and military elites. Moreover, it is helpful to discuss how the traditional media is struggling to perform its democratic roles in various models of media business environments, mainly the free-market model of the media business environment.

In addition, it is helpful to discuss the theory that positions the rise of citizen journalism as an alternative media in response to some of the problems with the traditional media, how ordinary people produce news content from the different perspective, and how an active citizen becomes a content creator.

The main purpose of this chapter is to discuss the role of the media and citizen journalism in political debates.

3.1 Democratic functions of the media

Modern politics is largely mediated politics, experienced by the great majority of citizens at one remove, through their print and broadcast media of choice (McNair, 2000). Thus, in normative formulations of the functions of the media in a democratic society, the media is seen to play an important role in supporting the democratic process. The media has the 'power to set the dominant political agenda, as elaborated over weeks, months and years, in editorials, columns and other forms of pro-active, opinionated journalism, amounting to extended narratives of unity and division, success and failure, rise and fall' (McNair, 2000, p. 30). By covering ongoing political events, the media ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. The actions of government and the state, and the efforts of competing parties and interests to exercise political power, are underpinned and legitimized by critical scrutiny, and informed debate is facilitated by the institutions of the media (Kuhn, 2007). Thus, the media provides a platform for the public and politicians to discuss ideas or issues and resolve disagreements.

Bro (2008) suggests that most studies on the media, regardless of the approach they take, begin with a normative assumption that the media should serve the public by explaining current developments in ways that arm them for vigilant citizenship. However, differences emerge when consideration is given to what exactly the media is and what it should do so that it can serve society. Therefore, it is useful to discuss how the media performs its functions in a democratic

society. In traditional liberal theory, the following assumptions are widely discussed in terms of the democratic roles of the media.

3.1.1 Information provision

The first and most obvious function performed by the media is the provision of political information. The media furnishes audiences with a range of news information ranging from political information to comments about issues and events in local, regional and global arenas. It acts as a 'conduit, platform, and forum and fora for the transmission of all sorts of political messages, providing a convenient means of communication among political elites (horizontal) and between political elites and the citizenry (vertical)' (Kuhn, 2007, p. 22). The public and politicians may use the media as a platform to discuss their ideas in order to make informed decisions. For example, the op-ed page and letters-to-the-editor sections of a newspaper gives people a place to share their ideas on how the government should address issues of concern to them. The page may be useful for the government to monitor its performance, and at the same time, for the public to become aware of how the government is performing its duty.

With the development of modern technology, there is now an unprecedented amount of political news information made available to audiences via the news media: newspaper articles and editorials, radio and television news programmes, political interviews, investigative documentaries, party political broadcasts, audience access programmes, rolling news channels and a proliferation of online news services. The competitive media environment has resulted in an increase of news outputs. As a result, there has been an increase in political news in liberal countries, where the media is relatively free. For example, the volume of national news on the five main UK channels in the UK increased by 80% between 1994

and 2003, mainly due to more daytime and weekend news. In addition, news and current affairs programmes on generalist free-to-air channels are supplemented dedicated rolling news channels, such as Sky News and BBC News, and by specialist political news outlets, such as BBC Parliament, all of which create voracious appetites for news materials (Kuhn, 2007). Between 2006 and 2009, news consumption in general in the UK was reported to have increased by 20% over the previous three years (News and Journalism Research Group, 2010).

In addition, with the increasing use of the Internet, the supply of information has extended into cyberspace, making the instantaneous availability of news delivery from anywhere around the world possible. The events of September 11 in 2001 in the US were a perfect example of this. Within minutes of the terrorist attacks, media organizations from around the world broadcast 'live' feeds, keeping the audiences up to date with news developments as they happened and, at the same time, creating debates worldwide.

However, the function of democracy relies on informed citizenship, and not all media systems may provide the same kinds and levels of information. For example, newspapers may be politically partisan in their support of a political party or policy option, and political information is often considered a matter of personal resources and motivation, like education and political interest (Esser et al., 2012, p. 248). This may result in the exclusion of less educated or disabled people from political discourse. In addition, inequalities of access to the Internet have further increased imbalances between the information-rich and information-poor, creating a digital divide which risks further marginalizing already disadvantaged social groups (Gennaro and Dutton, 2006).

3.1.2 Agenda setting

The second democratic function of the media is that of helping to set the agenda for public debate (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The agenda-setting hypothesis argues that the visibility of an issue in the news influences the perceived importance of that issue by the public: the more visible an issue is in the news media, the more salient it is for the public purpose (Dearing and Rogers, 1996, cited in Kuhn, 2007). Thus, by including some news issues and excluding others, the media makes an important contribution to deciding what news issues are more relevant for public discussions than others, and by covering some news issues in priority, the media may draw the attention of the public to certain issues. Focusing on the agenda-setting function of the media, McCombs and Shaw (1972) observed:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues- that is, the media may set the 'agenda' of the campaign (p. 176).

In its basic sense, the media's agenda-setting function may be described as the creation of public awareness of salient issues by the media. Its basic assumption is that the media doesn't reflect reality with evidence but filters and shapes it. An example of the media's agenda-setting function was the Fox News report of a poll regarding the US President Barack Obama's birthplace. According to the

reports, 37% of Republican respondents thought that Obama was not a natural US-born citizen, compared to just 12% of Democrats, and only 67% of Americans believed that Obama was born in the US.

It is suggested that the news sets the public agenda by telling [the public] what to think about, although not exactly what to think. Therefore, the result of the survey report may have been as a result of repeated media coverage by Fox News of the birth certificate issues, an issue that was not covered as much by other networks (Freeland, 2012, p. 4). Thus, media concentration on a few issues and subjects may lead the public to perceive those issues as more important than others. However, the perceived importance news means that politicians and elite figures may constantly try to shape the media agenda for their own purposes and exploit the media by manipulating the public opinion. On the other hand, the coverage of news by the media may give a new issue an angle that may direct the public to a certain interpretation of events as newspapers.

3.1.3 A public watchdog

The third function of the media has been seen to be that of a watchdog, acting on behalf of the public and monitoring the behaviours of elites and politicians. The media gives the public enough information to be able to understand an issue and draws a reasonable conclusion that might impact on the community. In its watchdog roles, the media informs the public with information about the issues the public does not know. This may take the form, for example, of a newspaper exposing ministerial duplicity or a television programme highlighting governmental incompetence (Kuhn, 2007, p. 27). The media documents what happens in the government and asks questions of elected officials about their

decisions and behaviours. This watchdog role gives elected officials an extra incentive to be ethical and act in the best interests of citizens. By performing its watchdog role, the media can make elites and politicians more accountable to the public and empower citizens. Moreover, at times, the media may act more as bloodhounds than as watchdogs, rooting out improper behaviours of elites and politicians through investigative journalism.

A good example of the media's watchdog function was the revelations by the UK's *The Guardian* newspaper and Granada TV in 1995 of the former Conservative Member of Parliament the UK and cabinet minister Jonathan Aitken's story. Aitken was accused of amassing a fortune by corrupt arms dealing, procuring prostitutes for Arabs and spending at the Ritz Hotel in Paris at the expense of one of his Arab friends. Aitken took an extraordinary risk by suing for libel, contending that the story demonstrated incredible malice from some journalists, and as a high-profile celebrity in disgrace, an unrelenting, unethical pursuit of him and his family by the paparazzi. In the end, however, the media secured a famous victory, culminating in Aitken's conviction for perjury in 1997. Aitken's political career was effectively ended by the media investigations and his injudicious public contestation of their allegations (Hicks, 2005).

Although the media's watchdog function is often described as an integral part of its civic responsibilities, it is arguable that the critical coverage of a particular personality may be a media strategy designed to boost circulation or rating figures. The balance to be struck between public interest and the protection of privacy has not only featured prominently on the media policy agenda in recent years, but continues to remain an issue of political and legal debate, particularly

with regard to tabloid newspaper coverage of leading politicians, show business and sports celebrities, and members of the Royal families (Kuhn, 2007, p. 29).

3.1.4 Political mobilization

The fourth function performed by the media is that of political mobilization. Once the media provides the public with facts about an issue, members of the public may use these facts to make decisions as to what course of action to take and advocate for it in society. This function has been seen taking place more often for political purposes.

For example, public meetings featuring party candidates, local party canvassing and constituency-based campaigning have been largely superseded by national election campaigns fought out in the media. Moreover, the Internet has widened the scope for political mobilization by the media, and this function is widely used by political parties and other pressure groups for various purposes (Kuhn, 2007, p. 29). The Internet has further increased the scope for political mobilization by the media, particularly of protest groups such as anti-government protesters demanding political changes. No accident illustrates this like the Arab Spring revolution that swept across the Middle East and North Africa in early 2011, where the Internet and its tools of social media were heralded as instrumental in facilitating the uprising. During the Egypt uprising, for example, political activists used social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs as tools for organizing and generating awareness of political mobilizations toward regime change and pro-democracy movements (Khondker, 2011). Although the media serves the public to mobilize for greater democracy, Narris (2000) argues that the media, in fact, plays a dual role by reinforcing activism, or even damaging civic engagement.

3.1.5 Regime legitimization

The last democratic role performed by the media is regime legitimization, in which the media informs and educates the public with political information. Along with other agencies of civic socialization, such as family, peer groups, the education system, voluntary associations and religious bodies, the media plays an important role in helping to shape public attitudes, values, norms and beliefs with regard to the functioning of society in general and the operation of the political process in particular (Kuhn, 2007, p. 29). The media helps the public become educated about an issue by providing the facts of the matter, and the public can then use these facts to make up their own minds about what should and should not be done. By educating the public, the media socializes the public perception into acceptance of prevalent social norms and practices (Baetens and Bursens, 2005). If the media becomes successful in educating the public, the function of the media may be considered to have contributed to the legitimization of the political system. Although the promise to deliver accurate information is at the heart of the media, negative media coverage of political processes may turn the public off politics, contributing to the increased levels of political activism and voter apathy (Kuhn, 2007, p. 29).

3.2 The traditional media: In crisis or constant?

Throughout its history, the media has accomplished important functions in democratic societies (Andersen, 1991 cited in Siles and Boczkowski, 2012). It has provided valuable knowledge about various affairs that help individuals to make informed political decisions, offered a space of deliberation among people, and investigated the concentration of power by various institutions (Schudson, 2008). Thus, the role of the media is seen to be very important in the formation

of an active citizenship. However, scholars in media studies suggest that the media is now failing in its democratic roles. A prominent line of argument asserts that the media has grown to be an institution of a few interest groups, who control the media for their own political and economic interests rather than for the public interest.

Although a section of the commercial press in most advanced countries, such as in the West, is seen as more politically independent, partly as a consequence of the growth of advertising, most of the largest media firms across the world are still owned by the government, wealthy individuals, families or syndicates closely linked to a political party (Djankov et al., 2001). For example, newspapers in the UK are owned by a small number of press groups, and it is extremely difficult for a newcomer to enter the market, attract advertising and build up a viable circulation because of very high start-up costs (Kuhn, 2007). Moreover, media policies in most countries are still heavily influenced by normative and political considerations, and it is argued that more than a mere economic approach to regulation is needed (Puppis, 2008, p. 406). In a way, private interests have invaded the public sphere, thereby allowing a small group of elites to control the media (Curran and Seaton, 2002).

Criticisms have also drawn attention to the consequence of a range of media regulation developments, such as 'cross-media ownership' and 'concentration of media ownership' that allows a small group of elites to control the public voice (Hamdy, 2009; Salman et al., 2011). Despite the use of competition policy — policies intended to prevent collusion among firms and to prevent individual firms from having excessive market power — in regulating media ownership in most countries, concerns have been raised that it fails to control media concentration

adequately due to problems of market definition and issues of pluralism — in such cases, large cross-media mergers fall short of General Dynamics (GD) Inventory Turnover ratio threshold — (Harcourt, 1998). Thus, it may be suggested that such a policy led to the impoverishment of media content.

One line of criticism that has long historical roots concerns the influence of media owners on content. An illuminating account of such interference by media tycoons is offered by Kuhn (2007). He notes how the British media openly proclaim their support for a specific political party to achieve their own goals. More specifically, the national newspapers of the UK markedly became more partisan between 1974 and 1992. This was partly in response to the growing polarization of British politics, but also reflected the cumulative impact of a new generation of partisan, interventionist proprietors. Rupert Murdoch's *The Sun*, for example, switched from Labour — one of the UK political parties — to support for an all-party coalition in October 1974 and became strongly Conservative thereafter, despite the fact that over half of its readers were Labour supporters (Curran and Seaton, 2002). Thus, *The Sun* promoted subjective political views.

The most severe criticisms of the media perhaps come from Herman and Chomsky (1994), who suggest that media environments in countries, such as the US, cause news content to be heavily biased. They suggest that news production processes are shaped by a range of factors encapsulated by a set of 'filter elements', including 'anticommunism' (for discussions of the filter elements, see Herman and Chomsky, 1994). News materials are sourced from powerful sources of information in such a way that the published content eventually fits into the ideologies of political, economic, and military elites, ultimately serving their interest. The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that

results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that news media people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret news 'objectively' and on the basis of professional news values (Herman and Chomsky, 1994, p. 2).

On the other hand, some scholars blame the various models of free newspapers for the failure of the media in performing its role. After the successful establishment of *The Metro* in Stockholm in 1995, publishers in many countries successfully launched free newspapers (Picard, 2009). The appearance of free newspapers caused considerable concerns for traditional newspapers, as the free model seemed to be further eroding news circulations, affecting the advertising base of existing newspapers. For example, seven years after the launch of *The Metro* in 1995, there were at least eighty free newspapers in twenty-six different countries across the world. Sixty of them were at least in existence up until 2009; some were closed down or merged with competitors (Bakker, 2009). In 2009, Italy led in circulation with 1,529,000, followed by the UK, where 837,000 copies were distributed (Kabber, 2009).

Although the strategy adopted by free newspapers may rarely change the market dynamics or force their competitors out of the market (Picardo, 2009), traditional newspapers see the free model as a challenger and have even sued on almost every possible issue: unfair competition, cartels, the right to carry the 'Metro' title or using the term 'newspaper', the right of non-EU firms to own publication, and littering. However, most of the legal cases have been lost by the traditional media (McMullan & Wilkinson, 2000, cited in Bakker, 2009, p. 185). In addition, free newspapers have been challenged in some nations by refusals to allow them to join newspaper publishing associations and blocking advertising networks. In

other cases, their staffs have been blocked from joining press clubs or efforts have been made to limit their ability to acquire press credentials (Picard, 2009).

Whilst the free model showed a steady growth in its first fifteen years, free newspapers in some European countries began experiencing circulation decline since the global economic crisis of 2007-08. In 2008, free newspaper circulation in Denmark dropped by more than 50% to less than 600,000 after the closure of *The Nyhedsavisen*. In 2012, *Urban*, one of the Danish free newspapers, was closed down, while *24timer* (acquired by Metro International in 2008) shut down in 2013. Similar declining patterns and closures of free dailies have also been seen in other European countries, including Austria (Bakker, 2013).

Given that the free model of newspapers provide little original news content or news analysis but reach readers who do not currently read paid newspapers (Bakker, 2008), there is a possibility that a co-existence and no-response strategy may help both models to exist alongside each other.

The last strand of criticism suggests that the media, particularly newspapers in the Western countries, is facing an uncertain future due to technological changes, most notably the Internet. Although the media has tried to improve its market condition in recent years by altering content and its presentation, improving customer services and slightly changing its business model (e.g. going online), these actions have been quite limited and relatively weak efforts to woo readers and soothe investors. Consequently, newspapers in particular are facing challenges in creating values for readers and investors, and these problems have resulted in a capital crisis in the industry.

In its 2014 report, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers suggested that print advertising worldwide declined by 6% in 2013 from a year earlier and 13% over five years while digital advertising increased by 11% year-over-year and by 47% over five years. These changing patterns of advertising and news circulation has led some media outlets to slash their newsroom resources, make staff reductions and even led to the closure of newspapers in some countries (Siles and Boczkowski, 2012).

However, some major news organizations, such as the BBC and CNN, are expanding their news distributions, particularly in developing countries such as in Asia, through various models, including 24-hour international channels to provide a vast quantity of political news from around the world. On the other hand, some countries are now operating their own television channels to reach the outside world. For example, the English version of the Arabic-language news network *Al Jazeera* now provides 24-hour news, reaching more than 270 million households in over 140 countries across the globe (aljazeera.com/aboutus, 2014). Since August 2013, the network has also launched its new US-based news channel, providing both domestic news and international news for US citizens.

Thus, some developing countries — such as India, China, and Brazil — are seeing the media industry booming, and with the increase in household income per capita, public attitudes towards the news media have gradually changed in recent decades. In 2011, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) suggested that the value of the Indian newspaper industry had grown by two-thirds in the past six years and the trend continues to date. In 1979 the total number of newspapers in India was 929. There are currently

116,531 periodical titles, and 373,839,764 copies of newspapers are sold daily, making Indians some of the world's largest news consumers (Pandita, 2013).

According to the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (2014), over five years, newspaper circulation rose 6.67% in Asia, 6.26% in Latin America and 7.5% in the Middle East and Africa, and print newspaper advertising increased 3.3% in Asia and the Pacific, 49.9% in Latin America during the same period.

One of the most recent media scenes in developing countries is the unprecedented growth of radio and television channels (Thussu, 2007). In addition to Cable and Satellite television channels, which now run 24/7 news network and entertainment programmes, local television channels and local FM stations are growing every year. More and more governments in the Asia and Pacific regions are recognizing the need to open up the airwaves to community broadcasting, although legislation often comes with strings attached. In the last decade several countries, including Nepal, have legitimized community radio (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008). There are currently more than 360 FM radio stations in Nepal alone (The Ministry of Information and Communication of Nepal, 2013)

Thus, although some parts of the world see a declining trend in news productions and consumptions, the media continues to boom in other parts of the world, enhancing public awareness, and engaging audiences in political discourse. These patterns suggest that media productions and consumptions in the world are diverse. Thus, as Siles and Boczkowski (2012) suggest, how the media functions in a country may depend on what the economic, technological, social and political environments of society are like.

3.3 Ordinary people as content creators

Since the invention of the printing press, ordinary people have shared news and information, and highlighted perceived injustices through various forms of publications, including pamphlets (Jurrat, 2011). However, these early forms of publications could be shared with only a limited number of people and were often used for a specific political purpose. For example, in the 1770s, the English writer Thomas Paine published his pamphlet *Common Sense*, setting forth his arguments in favour of American independence, and challenging the authority of the British government and royal monarchy. The plain language that Paine used in his pamphlets spoke to the common people of America and his pamphlet was the first work to openly ask for independence from Great Britain (The Independent Hall Association, 2014). Although little used today, such pamphlets were an important and alternative medium for the spread of ideas of political and social change amongst ordinary citizens.

Bolin (2012) suggests that ordinary people are capable of creating their own meaning of media content and of using it for a variety of purposes. Because the media tends to focus on a certain group of people, marginalising the rest, the marginalised people engaging in the news media often emerge as social activists, illustrating the performance of resistance to the rational media (Atkinson and Dougherty, 2006). Such resistances initiated by activists — who use alternative media to express their views — often lead to social justice movements — movements that work to advocate for people who are economically, socially, or politically marginalised in their own communities and global societies (Frey 1998, cited in Atkinson and Dougherty, 2006). Therefore, the media itself is seen as the cause of encouraging ordinary people to be an alternative content creator.

With the improvement of technologies over time, ordinary people have used different ways of sharing their experience and opinions. One of such approaches is the audiences' interaction with the media directly through the participation in public debates by sharing their experience and opinions through letters to the editor (Pedersen, 2010). By writing letters to the editor, ordinary people may play the role of a watchdog, informing the public of the activities of the government, and encouraging other people to engage in political discourse. As readers often express their personal and political views on important news issues, readers' letters to the editor have long been a much appreciated section in most newspapers and a valuable tool, improving feedback procedures for the traditional media, and placing topics that occupy the public at large on the public agenda. Although readers' letters to the editor may be seen as an endeavour by the traditional media to include the voice of the public in its content, letters written to the editor by readers are usually subject to strict editorial moderation and control (Raeymackers, 2005, p. 199), thus limiting interaction between media organizations and audiences. This means that the media still filters the opinions of people.

In addition to readers' letters to the editor, the other way in which the mainstream media traditionally, and still commonly, endeavours to include the voice of the public in its media content is vox pops and polls. However, as vox pops and polls are seen as a useful source of information that is used to test public opinion and reaction, forecasting the result of future events, some critics argue that the 'voice of the people' is vulnerable to abuse by sponsors, who may manipulate the results to address their own needs (Daschmann, 2000, p. 177).

However, with the invention of the Internet, citizens' engagement with the news media has added an online dimension. One of the major changes brought about by the Internet is the globalization of online journalism (Halsall, 2012). The Internet and its features facilitate 'peer-to-peer' exchange of news and information, enabling people to interact about a wide range of news issues with each other. As most of the media now has an online presence, ordinary citizens not only write letters to the editor or participate in vox pop or polls to express their views as in the past, but also engage themselves in the creation and distribution of news on the Internet. As a result, millions of ordinary people are now sharing their experience and political views online, bringing issues to the news agenda that are not — or could not be — covered by the mainstream media.

At the international level, this has been most apparent during times of crises. For example, in the aftermath of the 2004 Asian tsunami, ordinary people on the scene became an immediate source of news information about the catastrophe for the outside world. The remarkable range of first-person accounts, camcorder video footage, mobile and digital camera snapshots — many of which were posted online through blogs and personal webpages — being generated by ordinary citizens on the scene (holiday-makers, in many instances) was widely heralded for making a unique contribution to mainstream journalism's coverage (Allan, 2009, p. 18). The mainstream media frequently used footage taken by people at the scene. The coverage of the tsunami and its aftermath by ordinary people represents a tipping point in so-called 'citizen journalism' (Outing, 2011).

Some advocates of citizen journalism — in which ordinary people are seen to be creating and publishing news content — hail it as an opportunity to improve

journalism, making it more transparent and democratic as the audience can check the facts presented and easily correct or add to the original news (Gillmor, 2006). On citizen journalism sites, readers can also decide which stories will be investigated and where they will be placed on the site. During the 2008 US presidential election campaign, for example, a citizen journalism TV channel called *Current TV* partnered with Twitter during the candidates' debates so that viewers could tweet their comments, which were shown live on screen (Jarrat, 2011). In times of crises, such as the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, some mainstream media, including the BBC, encouraged ordinary people who witnessed the unfolding drama to post messages on micro-blogging sites. Although the initial circulation of news included little detail, the tweets provided a wide array of perspectives and gave a strong sense of what was going on during the attack (BBC, 2008). Footage captured on mobile phones by guests trapped in the hotels was shown on national news channels (Sonwalker, 2009).

There are a variety of opinions for and against this new emerging media practice. On the one hand, a number of studies suggest that citizen journalism poses a challenge to the traditional media (Salman et al., 2011). Problems that have been identified with the mainstream media — particularly in the West — include a lack of credibility, e.g. soft and sensationalized news (Chyi et al., 2012), and a growing trend of media concentration (Hamdy, 2009; Salman et al., 2011). In addition, readership habits are changing as consumers turn to the Internet for free news and information, which has led some major newspaper chains to a closure or heavy debt loads because ordinary people themselves are able to create a venue for alternative viewpoints (Kirchhoff, 2010; Salman et al., 2011).

On the other hand, other studies suggest that, whilst there is evidence that there is a growing participation of ordinary people in the news media, citizen journalism is not likely to replace the mainstream media. Rather, it will be complementary to the media (Newman, 2009). This is partly because the media has now realised the potential of the Internet and significance of the presence of citizens in the news media. As a result, comment features in the media have now become one of the most common practices.

3.4 Conclusions

The first part of the chapter discussed an overview of the debates about the roles of the media in a democracy. The primary aim was to describe the role of the media in a democracy by focusing at first on the normative theory of how the media should play its democratic roles in our society. Thus, the chapter covered how the role of the media is perceived and what roles the media should play in the construction of an active citizenship when looked at from a political economic perspective.

The second part of the chapter identified several arguments that discuss how the traditional media is failing and how the media is controlled by a few interest groups for their own political and economic goals. A range of developments in media and communication regulations, such as cross-media ownership and concentration of media ownership, were seen as contributing factors in the failure of the media in its role. Herman and Chomsky's (1994) criticisms of how the media produces news that fits into the ideology of interest groups were discussed. Furthermore, how the traditional media is struggling to perform its democratic roles in various business models of the newspapers market was discussed.

The rise of the alternative media, which coincided with the introduction of the Internet that enables ordinary people to create and distribute news articles from their own perspective, is seen as a result of the media focusing on a certain elite group of readers. As a result, the marginalised groups emerge as active audiences or even activists challenging the mainstream media. With the emergence of the Internet, these active audiences in the guise of citizen journalists are seen to be using the Internet to share information and interact between themselves, often promoting alternative perspectives.

The last section dealt with ordinary people acting the role of watchdog by using modern technology and also how the mainstream media is trying to incorporate the voice of ordinary people into its news coverage.

Chapter Four

4. An overview: South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation

This chapter discusses the political and media environment of the SAARC countries, in which citizen journalism is increasingly seen as an alternative to the mainstream media. The chapter begins with a discussion of the SAARC countries as a political and economic association, after which it discusses the media system of the SAARC countries. Each section is followed by a summary providing a brief account of the discussion.

4.1 South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation as an Economic and Political Organization

The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation is an economic and geopolitical organization of eight countries that are primarily located in South Asia. The Association was established in 1985 when its charter was formally adopted by the heads of state or government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan joined the association in April 2007. There are currently nine observers: Australia, China, the European Union, Japan, Iran, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea, and the United States.

Basically, the SAARC countries can be defined on the basis of geographical proximity and cultural and historical ties. A set of countries in close geographical proximity with each other can be categorised as a 'region', when they share a certain commonality of (national) interest. The SAARC region is where people from all races and religions have co-existed over a long period of time. The layering of different cultures has given it a unique identity that is unparalleled

anywhere in the world. Geographers such as Sir Dudley Stamp have called the SAARC region the Indian subcontinent because of its separation from the rest of the Asian landmass by a continuous barrier of mountains in the north. This geographical position has enabled the development of a unique civilization in relative isolation through its history.

The SAARC countries have made enormous contributions to world literature from ancient to modern times, have major accomplishments in the arts, and have maintained a distinguished musical tradition. The people of the SAARC region speak at least twenty major languages, and if one includes the more important dialects the count rises to over two hundred. In addition, the SAARC region is the source of two of the world's great religions: Hinduism and Buddhism. The majority of the population of the SAARC countries is Hindu (64%), but there are also adherents of Islam (29%), Sikhism (2%), Buddhism (2%), Christianity (2%), and other faiths (1%). According to the World Bank (2014), the SAARC countries house 1.65 billion people, which is about 24% of the world population. The World Bank's most recent reports on poverty estimates that about 571 million people in the SAARC countries survive on less than \$1.25 a day, making up more than 44% of the developing world's poor.

Given the market size in terms of population, the SAARC countries are one of the largest economic blocs in the world, although it faces a plethora of challenges in terms of reducing poverty, sustaining future growth, and minimising economic and non-economic inequalities. Flourishing electoral democracy coexists in the region with deep strains of authoritarianism, often within the same countries. With the testing of nuclear devices by India and Pakistan in the 1990s, the SAARC region is strategically a vital part in world politics. However, relationships

between SAARC members are often a source of discord rather than unity, lacking co-operation between members in terms of their shortcomings as a region. Thus, the SAARC countries are still in the process of evolving as a region due to perpetual preoccupation with intra-state conflicts and crises and a myriad social, economic and political problems. A very basic overview of the government and politics of each member country of the SAARC association is offered below.

4.1.1 Afghanistan

With an electorate of 20,845,988 (electionguide.org, 2014), Afghanistan is putatively a democratic country. As a constitutional requirement, general elections are held every five years. However, for most of the time since it became independent from Britain in 1919, Afghanistan has been plunged into political crises. The outbreak of civil war in 1929 forced King Amahullah Khan to abdicate the throne. Different warlords contended for power until a new king, Muhammad Nadir Shah, took over power. However, he was assassinated four years later and was succeeded by Muhhamad Zahir Shah, who was to become Afghanistan's last king. In 1973, the king was overthrown and a republic was declared.

Mohammed Daoud Khan declared himself the first President of the country in 1973. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan seized power from Daoud Khan through a military coup in 1978. However, the policies of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, such as the reform of bride purchase and land reform programmes, were widely criticized by both the opposition and the deeply religious population.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and handed power over to Babrak Karmal, who was the leader of what was considered to be the more moderate faction of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. This led to a civil war between Soviet-led forces and multi-national insurgent groups called Mujahideen, the majority of whom were members of one of two alliances: the Peshawar Seven and the Tehran Eight. In 1989, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, leaving the government to fight for itself. The Mujahideen faction continued to fight until 1992 when it toppled the government. The collapse of the government led by People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, however, did not mark the end of civil war.

Different Mujahideen warlords occupied different cities and regions of the country. The civil war intensified after one of Mujahideen groups took Kabul in April 1992. At the same time, an Islamic fundamentalist movement, the Taliban, also emerged as a powerful force when it captured the capital city of Kabul in 1996, forcing the Mujahideen faction out of the city. The Taliban controlled nearly 80% of the country (Johnson and Mason, 2007). However, the September eleven attacks in 2001 led to US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, primarily aimed at destroying Al Qaeda as well as removing the Taliban from Afghanistan. The so-called War on Terror led by Western forces in the country continues to this date. However, the Western alliance NATO forces ended combat operations after thirteen years leaving the Afghan army and police in charge of security in December 2014. After nearly thirty years of continuous war, Hamid Karzai was the first popularly elected President of Afghanistan in 2001, and he also won a second five-year term in the 2009 presidential election.

4.1.2 Bangladesh

With a population of 154,695,368 (World Bank, 2014), Bangladesh is the third most populated country in SAARC. The history of Bangladesh combines Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic, Mughal, Arab, Persian, Turkic and British influences. Modern Bangladesh including its surrounding territories (the present day Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura), was historically known as Bengal, which was part of the Mughal Empire for more than five centuries and then the Bengal Presidency (originally comprising east and west Bengal), and finally part of the British Empire.

The election of 1970 played a significant role in liberating the country from military rule. When the military rulers of Pakistan enforced oppressive measures on the leaders of Bangladesh (then known as East Pakistan), including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the people of this country organised civil movements against the military regime. This resulted in a mass uprising leading to a general election in 1970.

On March 26, 1971, after a brutal crackdown, Bangladesh declared itself independent from Pakistan, which had achieved its own independence from the British Empire in 1947. In the intervening months, an estimated three million people were killed and about ten million people were forced to take refuge in India (Barman et al. n. a.). However, Bangladesh plunged into political crisis after its independence from Pakistan. After the assassination of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, Ziaur Rahman became the seventh president of the country in 1977, but he was also assassinated by a faction of officers of the Bangladesh Army in 1981.

Since its independence in 1971, its successive governments have defined Bangladesh as a secular democracy. Bangladesh has a multi-party parliamentary political system. The parliament is known as *Jatiyo Sangshad* (National Parliament) and has three hundred forty-five members, of whom three hundred are directly elected by the people. The remaining forty-five seats are reserved for women elected through a process of proportional representation. The president is the head of state, but in practice executive power rests with the office of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister and the cabinet are answerable to parliament.

Bangladesh is divided into seven administrative divisions: Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, and Rangpur. There are over hundred political parties in the country but only a small number of political parties dominate the political scene; namely, Bangladesh Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiya Party (JP), and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). Among these parties, AL and BNP enjoy the majority support of the people and have alternatively formed the government since democracy was restored in 1991 (Chattarjee, 2011). The AL came into existence in 1949 and is one of the oldest political parties in Bangladesh.

4.1.3 Bhutan

Bhutan is the second smallest country in SAARC with an electorate of 381,790 (electionguide.org, 2014). Its capital, Thimphu, is the centre for Bhutan's parliament, where forty-seven directly elected and five monarch-appointed representatives debate the future of a population of 741,800. Bhutan's early history is steeped in mythology and remains obscure. It may have been inhabited as early as 2000 B.C., but not much was known about the country until

the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism in the nineteenth century when turmoil in Tibet forced many monks to flee to Bhutan (Malhotra n. d.). In the twelfth century, the Drukpa Kagyupa School was established and remains the dominant form of Buddhism in Bhutan today. The country's political history is intimately tied to its religious history and the relations between the various monastic schools and monasteries.

The political consolidation of Bhutan occurred in 1616 when Ngawanag Namgyal, a lama from Tibet, defeated three invasions, subjugated rival religious schools, and codified an intricate and comprehensive system of law, establishing himself as ruler. However, his death in 1651 was followed by infighting and civil war for power for the next 200 years. In 1885, Ugyen Wangchuk was able to consolidate power, cultivating closer diplomatic relations with the British in India.

The hereditary monarchy of Bhutan was established in 1907 after years of dual theocratic-civil government. Ugyan Wangchuck was elected as the first hereditary ruler of Bhutan and was installed as the head of state on December 17, 1907. Bhutan recognized the suzerainty of the British in exchange for political autonomy in 1910. However, it chose to remain independent after India gained independence from Britain in 1947. After Ugyen Wangchuck died in 1926, Jigme Wangchuck became the next ruler and signed the country's first Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India in 1949. Bhutan became a member of the United Nations in 1971.

In 1972, Jigme Singye Wanchuck ascended to the throne at the age of sixteen. He is widely credited with modernizing reforms such as modern education, the decentralization of governance, the development of hydroelectricity and tourism, and improvements in rural developments. He is perhaps the best known for his

development philosophy of 'Gross National Happiness'. It recognizes that there are many dimensions to development and that economic goals alone are not sufficient. However, the philosophy of 'Gross National Happiness' created political instability in the country: in the late 1980s, over one hundred thousand Bhutanese people were forced to flee the country, seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, including Nepal.

His son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, became King upon his abdication in 2006. There are currently two political parties in Bhutan: the Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party led by Lyonchen Jigme Yoser Thinley and the All People's Party led by Tshering Tobgay. Lyonchen Jigme Yoser Thinley became the first prime minister of Bhutan in the 2008 National Assembly election. Tshering Tobgay became prime minister in the 2014 election.

4.1.4 India

With an electorate of seven hundred fourteen million, India is the most populous and largest democracy in the world. By constitutional requirement, general elections are held every five years, or whenever Parliament is dissolved by the President of India. For most of the time since it became independent in 1947, the federal government has been led by the Indian National Congress. Politics at state level have been dominated by several national political parties, including Indian National Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and various regional parties. From 1995 to 2014, barring two brief periods, the INC enjoyed a parliamentary majority. However, the Indian National Congress was out of power between 1977 and 1980, when the Bharatiya Janata Party won the election owing to public discontent with the state of emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In 1989, a

Janata Dal-led National Front coalition in alliance with the Left Front coalition won the elections but managed to stay in power for only two years. As the 1991 election gave no political party a clear majority, the Indian National Congress formed a minority government under P.V. Narasimha Rao, which completed its full five-year term.

In the 2004 Indian elections, the Indian National Congress won the largest number of seats in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and formed a government in coalition with various left-leaning political parties. In 2009, the Indian National Congress won the election, this time with a clear majority to form a new government. However, in the 2014 election, the Bharatiya Janata Party won a landslide election victory and Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister.

Since its independence from the British ruler, India has faced several challenges from religious violence, casteism, Naxalism, terrorism and regional separatist insurgencies, especially in Jammu, Kashmir and the Northeast of India. It has unresolved territorial disputes with China, which in 1962 escalated into the Sino-India War. It has also fought wars with Pakistan in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999. India is a founding member of the United Nations (as British India) and the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1974, India conducted its first underground nuclear test and five more in 1998, making the country the first nuclear state in the SAARC countries.

Since the 1990s terrorist attacks have affected India. On December 24, 1999, an Indian Airlines Airbus A300 en route from Kathmandu to New Delhi was hijacked by a Pakistan-based Islamist group known as Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. The Mumbai attacks, also known as 26/11, killed 166 people, and injured hundreds of others.

4.1.5 Maldives

With an electorate of only 240,652 (electionguide.org, 2014), the Maldives is the smallest country among the SAARC countries. On March 15, 1968, a constitutional referendum was held in the Maldives on the question of whether to convert the state from a constitutional monarchy into a presidential system. The referendum approved a constitution, making the Maldives a republic with executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The constitution was amended in 1970, 1975, and 1997. Ibrahim Nasir became the president of the country and held office from 1968 to 1978. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom replaced him in 1978 and was then re-elected in 1983, 1988, 1993, and 2003.

Even though governments are formed through the process of democratic elections in the country, the governments have been accused of suppressing the fundamental rights of people. An Amnesty International report (2004) revealed that people arrested during a peaceful demonstration in 2004 were held blindfolded and handcuffed for up to 19 hours at a time, made to sit still on a chair or in one spot for several hours at a time, and subjected to physical assaults and food deprivation. However, no one has been prosecuted for these abuses.

Since 2008, Maldives has gone through considerable constitutional changes, ending a period of thirty years of authoritarian rule by President Gayoom. However, President Gayoom was eventually forced to introduce a reform process in 2004, which later led to the enactment of a new constitution in 2008. The latter guaranteed the full separation of power, as well as the creation of independent institutions to monitor the three branches of power — the judiciary, the legislature and the executive bodies — and safeguard human rights. The

country's first ever multi-party presidential elections were held on October 2008. However, no candidate won 50% of the vote in the first round, so the two candidates with the most votes, President Gayoom (40% of the first round votes, Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party, DRP) and Mohamed Nasheed (25% of the first round votes, Maldivian Democratic Party) entered a second round in October in the same year. Mohamed Nasheed won the second round, with 54% of the votes.

On February 5, 2011, the Maldives held its first ever multi-party local council elections. The ruling MDP won 44% of popular votes, including nine out of eleven council seats in the capital city, Male.

4.1.6 Nepal

The history of Nepal is characterised by its isolated position between two giant neighbours, China in the north and India in the south. Even though Nepal was independent throughout its history, its territorial boundaries have varied greatly over time. Due to the arrival of desperate settler groups from outside, Nepal is now a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-lingual country. Nepal was split into twenty-two municipalities from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, after which it was unified as a nation.

After the unification of the country, the Rana dynasty ruled the country from 1846 to 1951, reducing the Shah monarch to a figurehead, and making the Prime Minister and other government positions hereditary. On February 24, 1951, King Tribhuvan declared an end to Rana dynasty rule, establishing a democratic system. His son Mahendra succeeded him on May 2, 1956 and staged a coup, dissolving parliament and imprisoning the Prime Minister and other cabinet ministers on December 15, 1960. This led to the emergence of

underground political parties, mainly Nepal Congress and Nepal Communist Party. The monarch continued to rule the country until the people's movement, led by the Nepal Congress and Nepal Communist Party, brought an end to the absolute monarchy in 1990.

However, Nepal experienced a failed struggle for democracy. From 1996 to 2008, the country plunged into a civil war that claimed at least 13,000 lives, according to a UN report (2012). In 2001, the royal massacre wiped out the entire family of King Birendra Shah. On May 4, 2001, Gyanendra Shah, next in line to the throne, became king. The country underwent a radical political transformation after 2006 when political parties and the Maoist guerrillas signed a 12-point agreement in New Delhi. On May 2008, Nepal was declared a Federal Democratic Republic. In a historic election for a constituent assembly, the Nepalese voted to oust the monarch. Gyanendra vacated the royal palace in June 2008, two weeks after the 601-member Constituent Assembly abolished the monarchy.

A total of seventy-four political parties contested the 2008 election and the Maoist party emerged as the largest party. On August 18, 2008, former Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal became the first Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. However, he resigned from his post on May 25, 2009 over a dispute relating to his call for the dismissal of the former Chief of Army Rookmangud Katawal. There have been four Prime Ministers since Prachanda resigned in 2009. Currently, Shusil Koirala of Nepali Congress is the Prime Minister of Nepal. The task of drafting a constitution is still under discussion.

4.1.7 Pakistan

With an electorate of 70,755,379 (electionguide.org, 2014), the history of Pakistan as a modern country began when it became independent from British rule in 1947. Pakistan became independent as a Muslim-majority state with two wings to the east and northwest of India respectively. Independence resulted in communal riots across India and Pakistan, as millions of Muslims moved to Pakistan and millions of Hindus and Sikhs moved to India (Malhotra, n. d.). Disputes arose over several princely states, including Kashmir and Jammu whose ruler had acceded to India following an invasion by tribesmen from Pakistan. This led to the first Kashmir War (1948), which ended with India occupying roughly two-thirds of the state and Pakistan occupying the remaining third. Economic grievances and political dissent in East Pakistan led to political tensions and army repression. In 1971, East Pakistan became the independent state of Bangladesh.

Pakistan was declared a republic in 1965, but internal instability led to frequent changes of governments, often via coup by the military. Muhammad Ayub Khan, a general officer, staged a coup in 1958 and ruled the country until 1969. In 1965, India and Pakistan fought a second war over Kashmir. Civilian rule in the country resumed from 1972 to 1977 under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto until he was disposed by General Zia-ul-Haq, who became the country's third military president through a military coup. The Zia-ul-Haq era marked several changes: Pakistan's secular policies were replaced by an Islamic legal code that increased religious influences on the civil service and the military.

In 1988, the Pakistan People's Party won the election and Benazir Bhutto became the first female Prime Minister of the country. She alternated power with Nawaz Sharif over the next decade. In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf staged a coup,

assuming executive powers, and served as the country's tenth president until 2008. Musharraf was the key ally of the West in the War on Terror, receiving billions in military aid from the US. During his rule, Pakistan launched attacks on militant groups in the country's border with Afghanistan. In the 2008 general election, he stepped down and Asif Ali Zardari, a civilian, was elected as the country's new president.

For the first time in Pakistan's 66-year history, the General Elections of May 11, 2013 provided the opportunity for the democratic transfer of power from one full-term civilian government to another. One hundred forty-eight political parties contested the National and Provincial Assembly elections. The main parties were: the Pakistan People's Party - which contests elections as the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians, the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz, the Awami National Party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, the Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl, and the Jamaat-e-Islami. PML-N won the 2013 election and Sharif was re-elected as the country's new prime minister.

4.1.8 Sri Lanka

With a population of about twenty million, Sri Lanka is an island nation located 31 km off the southern coast of India. After over two thousand years of rule by local kingdoms, parts of Sri Lanka were ruled by Portugal and the Netherlands before the control of the entire country was ceded to the British Empire in 1815. During the Second World War, Sri Lanka served as a strategic base for Allied forces in the fight against the Japanese forces. A nationalist political movement arose in the early twentieth century, and it became an independent country on February 4, 1948.

The government of Sri Lanka is made up of a mixture of the presidential system and the parliamentary system. The President is the head of state and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, as well as head of government who is elected for a six-year term. The President appoints and heads the cabinet of ministers, who are elected from the Members of Parliament. The Prime Minister serves as the deputy of the president, sharing some executive power, mainly in domestic affairs. There are two hundred twenty-five members in the parliament. On July 1, 1960, the people of Sri Lanka elected the first ever female head of government as Prime Minister Srimavo Bandaranaike. Her daughter, Chandrika Kumaratunga, served multiple terms as prime minister and president from 1999 to 2005.

After its independence from Britain in 1948, Sri Lanka plummeted into ethnic tensions between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil communities. These conflicts were escalated by the introduction of the Citizenship Act of December 1948 and the Parliament Election Amendment Act of 1949, which effectively deprived minority Tamil labourers (who then formed about 10% of the national population) of voting rights. As the tension increased in the Tamil-dominated north and east, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was born, setting out to fight for an independent state for the Tamil people. Between 80,000 and 100,000 civilians were killed during the twenty-six year long civil war and at least three hundred thousand people were internally displaced (UN report quoted in Rawat, 2012). In May 2009, government forces declared victory with the killing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam leader Thiruvankadam Prabhakaran, thus bringing an end to insurgency.

Since 1948, Sri Lanka has been a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations. Through the Cold War era, Sri Lanka followed a foreign policy of non-alignment but always remained close to the US and Western Europe. In April 2010, Sri Lanka held the first presidential election in which Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected as the country's president.

4.2 Summary

On the whole, the SAARC functions as an economic and political union of eight member states, located primarily in South Asia. Inspired by the common objectives of all member states, the Association promotes the welfare of people, sharing a commitment to the rule of law, liberty, and equal rights of citizens. It operates through a system of inter-governmental negotiated decisions by the member states. However, the SAARC countries constitute one of the politically 'critical regions' or 'security complexes' in the world, primarily due to a varying degree of inter-state disputes and internal conflicts in the region. The disputes between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, between India and Sri Lanka over the nationality of Tamil plantation workers in Sri Lanka, and the war in Afghanistan are a few examples in this regard.

The governments of the SAARC countries may be classified into three different categories: authoritative, soft authoritative, and semi-theocratic. Authoritative government may be characterised as the form of government where citizens are denied their fundamental rights, such as electing their representatives through democratic processes. Bhutan falls under this category. Although Bhutan adopted the electoral system when it first held National Assembly elections in 2008, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck still holds most of the executive power. The so-called first democratic election was held in 2008 while over one hundred

thousand Bhutanese people were in exile. Secondly, soft authoritative government may be characterised as a form of government where civilian government rules the country. India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka fall under this category. The civilian governments are formed through the process of democratic election in these countries. Thirdly, there is semi-theocratic government, which may be characterised as a form of government where religion or a local deity partially influences social and political systems. Afghanistan, Pakistan, Maldives, and Bangladesh fall into this category. Although Western models of general elections are held to form new governments, a god or deity is also often recognised as the supreme ruler in these countries and thus the rule of law is subject to religious authority.

4.3 South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation: The history of media development, media policy and the media

The history of modern media in the SAARC countries begins with the launch of various news journals by European and Anglo-Indian journalists during the second half of the eighteenth century. The first newspaper in the region was the English language *The Bengal Gazette*, which James Augustus Hicky, an Irish expatriate, started as a weekly in 1780 from Kolkata (then Calcutta) in India (Singh, 1980). The publication of *The Bengal Gazette* contributed to the emergence of a series of other publications from various parts of the SAARC countries, mainly from India where the East India Company was based.

In 1782, *The Calcutta Gazette* was published by Francis Gladwin, an East India Company officer. This was followed by *The Bengal Journal* (1785), *The Oriental Magazine or Calcutta Amusement* (1785), *The Calcutta Chronicle* (1786), *The Madras Courier* (1788), and *The Bombay Herald* (1789). The vernacular press

came into being when *The Bengalee* and *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* from Bengal, India, and the *Khabar-e-am* from Lahore, Pakistan, were first published in 1857.

However, various factors, including lack of advertising, impacted on the development of the media. Press Acts introduced over time to regulate newspapers protected the governments and subsequent governments continued to impose severe censorship on newspapers with new press regulations: The Licensing Regulation Act (1823), The Liberation of the Indian Press (1835), The Licensing Act (1857), The Registration Act (1867), The Vernacular Press Act (1878), The Newspaper Act (1908), The Indian Press Act (1910), The Indian Press (Emergency Provisions) Act (1931), and The Press (Objectionable Matters) Act (1951) (University of Calicut, 2011).

All of these regulations imposed severe censorship on the press, and the Vernacular Act (1878), in particular, curtailed the freedom of the non-English press by preventing the vernacular press from expressing any criticism of British policies – in particular, the opposition that had grown with the onset of the Second Anglo-Afghanistan War (1867-80). This added to resentment against the British among Indian people. As a result, underground pamphlets were produced in the mid-1890s as alternative local newspapers in several different parts of the SAARC countries, particularly India (Gandhi, 1927). Soon, several privately owned newspapers with no advertising emerged and, with the formation of political associations, Indian owned newspapers sprang up in various parts of India in both vernacular languages and English. At the time when the Indian subcontinent became independent from the British in 1947, there were 3,533 publications (330 dailies and 3,203 periodicals) in India alone (University of Calicut, 2011).

The years that followed independence from the British in 1947 witnessed an unprecedented turn of events in the socio-political climate of the SAARC countries that brought about corresponding changes in the character of the media system, particularly the freedom and independence of the press. Privately owned media, initially tabloids in local languages, emerged as alternatives to the English press, but governments imposed severe censorship on such media on various excuses including border conflicts (Sino-India wars in 1962, Soviet war in Afghanistan in 1979-1989, several Indo-Pakistan wars 1947-1991), civil war and terrorism. However, the early 1990s saw an unprecedented growth of the media - first in India and then other member states of SAARC - which coincided with the introduction of a commercial model of television. Rupert Murdoch, whose Satellite Television Asian Region has transformed news and entertainment on television, introduced the first music television channel in India (Channel [V]), the first 24/7 news network (Star News), and the first successful adaptation of entertainment game shows, such as *Kaun Banega Karodpati?* – an Indian version of the British show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (Thussu, 2007), and other reality TV series, such as *Nepal Tara* – a Nepalese version of *American Idol*.

Recent years have been tumultuous for the SAARC countries, with a visible media boom coupled with the concentration of media ownership and increasing restrictions on the press. Growing literacy and economies have expanded the scopes of the press in different directions. In October 2013, the publisher of *The Hindu*, a one hundred and thirty-five year old English language newspaper from India, launched its Tamil edition. All the SAARC countries except Bhutan now have BBC services in their national languages, which played significant roles in providing news analysis during the civil wars of Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In June 2011, Nepal Republic Media and *The International Herald Tribune* entered into a publishing alliance to publish an Asia Pacific edition of the *Tribune* in Kathmandu. *Himal Southasian*, a magazine published in Nepal, covers South Asia's regional news issues. With the introduction of modern technologies, online media is now seen as an emerging model of media in the SAARC countries. The journalists of the SAARC countries are united through an umbrella association called 'South Asian Free Media Association' (SAFMA), which is dedicated to strengthening the process of freedom and peace, addressing media-related issues in the SAARC countries.

On the other side, the SAARC countries continue their well-deserved reputation as one of the most unsafe places in the world for journalists. The governments of the SAARC countries continue the crackdown on democratic rights and press freedom in the name of tackling terrorism and insurgencies. Journalists continue to face violence when covering renewed political turmoil. At least one hundred and fifty-three journalists have been killed in the SAARC countries since 1992, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (2014). Apart from the attention paid to the regional or local press in vernacular languages and live images of terrorist attacks or video evidence filmed by eyewitnesses on their mobile phones (e.g. Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008), less spectacular news events and happenings are frequently ignored in each SAARC country. Corrupt officials, insurgents, fundamentalists of different religions, and politicians and gangsters with their own violent methods of silencing the media, carry on their work with impunity.

According to Reporters Without Borders (2014), the freedom of expression in the SAARC countries in recent years has sharply deteriorated. While the history and

development of the media are characterised by colonialism, internationalization, technological convergence and new multimedia, interactive services, and entertainment, the media in the SAARC countries continue to struggle hard to maintain a free and lively press. As a result, the media is unable to foster relations of trust between citizens and the state. This means that, despite shared histories, languages, religions, cultures and traditions, the media in the SAARC countries often function differently in their national interest. This chapter presents a nation-by-nation introduction of the historical development, media policies, and media practices in the SAARC countries.

4.3.1 Afghanistan

Although historians often date the beginning of Afghanistan media to the publication of the *The Seraj-ul-Akhbar* of the 1906s, the country's first experiment with an independent media began only after the 1940s when Prime Minister Shah Mahmud allowed the launch of several newspapers, most of which were in opposition to the government (Tarzi, 2006). Afghanistan has had legislation regulating the mass media since the promulgation of the 1964 constitution and the Press Law of 1965, which guaranteed the independence of the media from the government, but at the same time required the media to respect and safeguard the state, the religion of Islam, and public order. In modern Afghanistan, the media enjoyed some periods of relative independence from the government. However, the media fell under the control of Soviet influence after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and subsequent Soviet-installed Afghan governments between 1979 and 1992, and again of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001, which even banned television. With the defeat of the Taliban in 2001, a new constitution was promulgated in 2004, which guaranteed

the right of freedom of expression and the right to publish media content without censorship. According to Reporters Without Borders (2014), Afghanistan ranks 128th out of 180 countries in terms of freedom of information.

Media outlets - private TV stations in particular - have mushroomed in the post-Taliban years. By the end of 2010, Afghans living in Kabul were able to access thirty terrestrial television channels, of which more than ten were also available on satellite, and forty-two radio stations, five of which broadcast from outside Kabul.

By early 2014, there were sixty-eight private TV stations operating alongside national state TV and twenty-two state owned provincial channels. There are one hundred and seventy-four radio stations, forty-seven of them were based in the capital Kabul. There are currently more than eleven news agencies and hundreds of print publications, including at least seven daily newspapers (Cary, 2012). According to the Killid Group, a publishing company, *The Killid*, a weekly magazine with a circulation of 25,000, is one of the most read magazines in Afghanistan.

In addition, foreign-based or foreign-funded media outlets, particularly radio, including the BBC, Radio France International, Deutsche Welle and US-backed networks Radio Free Afghanistan and the Voice of America, play a significant role in shaping political discourse. The BBC World Service, one of the most listened to foreign radio services, is also available on Frequency Modulation (FM) in other major cities and on shortwave across the countries. The media of Afghanistan can be roughly divided into three categories: government-run, private, and political. The political media is thriving (Cary, 2012).

Recent years have seen a surge in foreign funding for the development of the media in Afghanistan. In 2009, the Obama administration provided twenty-two million US dollar for an USAID project called the Afghan Media Development and Empowerment Project to enhance and build on the media development work done in the past. With the media industry booming, some aspiring journalists are also taking vocational journalism training. According to Nai Supporting Open Media (2012), a journalism training centre founded in 2004 with a grant from the EU, at least 3000 media professionals (2300 men and 700 women), from across the country have taken journalism training in subjects ranging from basic reporting to investigative reporting, media management, business development, and computer literacy. In addition, the Centre states that it has trained over one thousand two hundred Afghan youths so far. In addition, UNESCO has had some programmes in the past set up to develop media in Afghanistan.

After the fall of the Taliban, there has also been a huge growth in the use of mobile phones. Mobile phones are being used as an alternative tool for phone calls, checking emails, sending text messages, listening to music and playing games. At least twenty internet service providers in Afghanistan provide internet services. However, internet access is limited due to technical difficulties as well as low literacy rates in the country. As of 2012, internet access in Afghanistan was 5.45% (World Bank, 2014). A 2008 study counted at least twenty thousand blogs in Afghanistan (cited in Cary, 2012). With the introduction of the Internet and foreign funding, Internews, a non-profit organization aiming to empower local media, is working to establish multimedia production in various parts of the country, with the idea of increasing citizen journalism by providing people with access to computers and the Internet, and training on social media and blogging (Internews.com, 2014). However, the media continues to cope with chronic

political instability and unrest that impact on the development of the media, and on working journalists in particular.

4.3.2 Bangladesh

The People's Republic of Bangladesh has less than fifty years of press history. The country published its first daily newspaper, *The Azadi* (Dainik Azadi), on March 26, 1971 – the next day the country officially separated from Pakistan. There were already several publications in circulation during the nationalist movement in the 1960s but these publications were inspired by a combination of pro-nationalist and anti-establishment sentiments and were used only as a tool for political protests against repressive governments (Ali, 2006).

However, the post-1971 media continued to function as a political tool for political parties. As a result, several small underground newspapers emerged as an alternative press from several parts of the country. Even today, media outlets are extremely polarised, aligning themselves with one or other of the main political factions. The main broadcasters – Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television – are state-owned and government-friendly, and they are quite popular, mainly in cities. Cable channels and Indian TV stations dominate the entertainment industry in the Bengali-speaking country.

After the introduction of new liberal media policies in the 1990s, the media industry has flourished in Bangladesh. According to BBC Media Action (2012), the daily newspaper, *The Prothom Alo*, the most popular—Bangla and English language newspaper, had more than five million readers in March-April 2011 and at least 74% of the total population had access to TV. Private FM radio stations and newspapers are also on the rise, although they often face commercial

pressures. As a result, international news outlets, such as the BBC and Al-Jazeera, play an alternative role in the absence of domestic media for an English-speaking middle class.

Some of the press regulations of Bangladesh stem from British legislation that regulated media in the Indian subcontinent before 1947. The 2002 Constitution guarantees press freedom in the country, but these rights are subject to 'reasonable restriction'. Libel, sedition, and reporting on national security issues, including anti-religion, are subject to criminal prosecution, and reporters – like other Bangladeshi citizens – can be held for up to ninety days without any trial under the 1974 Special Powers Act.

In 2010, the Government took a step forward by scrapping the provision for courts to issue arrest warrants on media professionals, including publishers, in defamation cases. Despite constitutional guarantees of press freedom, media outlets continue to face restrictions while individual journalists can suffer physical harassment from the authorities, police, and paramilitary forces.

In 2008, the government closed down two private TV stations, Channel I, a diaspora television channel operated by some Bangladeshis from the UK, and Jamuna TV, citing licensing issues. In June 2010, the pro-opposition newspaper *The Amar Desh* was forced to close down by the government and its editor, Mahmudur Rahman, who owned the newspaper, was arrested. The Press Council of Bangladesh, which is controlled by the state, usually issues codes of conduct for journalists and publishers. In 2014, Reporters Without Borders ranked Bangladesh 146th out of 179 nations in terms of the press freedom.

Journalism courses at university level were introduced at the University of Dhaka in 1962 (Press Institute of Bangladesh, 2014). Today, most universities offer journalism courses, which address the changing media environment. In addition, different foreign donors provide support for the development of the media in the country. The key foreign donors providing media support to Bangladesh are the British Council, the UK Department for International Development, the European Commission, the Goethe institute, Swiss Development Cooperation, UNESCO, UNICEF and USAID (BBC Media Action, 2012).

Bangladesh entered the world of the World Wide Web in 1996. Community blogging is now a common media practice among the Bangladeshi people (Choudhury, 2011). By the end of December 2012, there were more than 3.3 million people who had a Facebook account, according to Internet World Statistics (2014) and use of social media is on the rise. However, the privilege of internet access often comes at the cost of freedom of expression. Ahmed Rajib Haider, a prominent atheist anti-Islamic blogger, was killed in 2013 for posting content on the Internet that, in the eyes of the authorities, was offensive.

4.3.3 Bhutan

People in remote Bhutan lived in relative seclusion for decades. Thus, the media in the Himalayan kingdom is a new development. The introduction of the media in the country began in 1967, with the establishment of *The Kuensel*, which was initially published and circulated as an internal government bulletin, and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, a national radio service, which commenced broadcasting in November 1973.

Both the national television and the Internet were introduced in 1999. Bhutanese television programmes are now available in more than forty Asian countries - from Turkey in the West to Indonesia in South East Asia. Since the liberalization of media licensing policy in 2006, two years before the introduction of parliamentary democracy, the Bhutanese media scene has changed rapidly, and the number of media outlets in recent years has grown considerably in all formats: print, broadcast, and online.

There are currently eleven newspapers (seven in English and four in Dzongkha) and five radio stations, including a community radio operated by Sherubtse College in eastern Bhutan. Radio is the main source of information for the majority of Bhutanese people in all twenty districts, although television penetration has also increased in recent years, giving the rural population more access to both local and international news and entertainment content. The *Bhutan Times*, which was published on April 30, 2006, is the first privately owned newspaper in Bhutan. The country ranks 92nd out of 179 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom rankings (Reporters Without Borders, 2013).

Bhutan is a fairly small-scale economy in terms of the advertising industry and the government is still the biggest advertiser in the country. A 2007 survey revealed that the government places more than 80% of advertising in national newspapers that are loyal to the government (Wood, 2007), while private sector media struggle for survival. Several media outlets, including *The Bhutan Youth*, a weekly newspaper, and Radio High, a local FM station, were closed down recently after suffering huge losses. *The Bhutan Observer*, the country's second private

newspaper, suspended its print edition and went Web-only edition in 2013 for financial reasons.

Even as Bhutan's private media is in dire straits, it continues to perform its role as a watchdog, criticising the policies of the government and investigating corruption and malpractice in the government. In 2012, the media exposed several corruption issues, notably the Gyelpozhing land case, the Bhutan Lottery and Education City scams involving influential and powerful people, including the former prime minister and a few of his cabinet ministers. The 2013 general election was fiercely fought and the former ruling party's (The Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party led by Jigme Yoser Thinley) defeat was seen as a result of media coverage on corruptions.

The impact of media in Bhutan is also visible in the lifestyle of Bhutanese people, although access to the media and the interests of people vary between the rural and urban populations, the rich and the poor, and the old and the young. With the introduction of the Internet, citizen-media initiatives are emerging as a new and alternative model of media practice in the country. Various internet and social-media outlets are now giving Bhutanese people an alternative platform to exercise free speech at home and abroad.

According to the World Bank (2014), internet users in Bhutan by the end of 2013 were 30% of the total population, with 4% having landline and 76% mobile phone. While the Media Act (2006) regulates the media, the government and its agencies usually implement appropriate provisions of press acts and guidelines for media organizations. Bhutan ranked 82nd out of 179 in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom rankings (Reporters Without Borders, 2013).

4.3.4 India

Private sector media in India began flourishing after independence from the British in 1947, although several different newspapers in the country had already been in existence at the time. For the purpose of this thesis, the Indian press can be classified into two different broad categories: those published during the pre-independence era and those published after independence. Pre-independence newspapers ranged from weeklies published by English expatriates to underground political pamphlets inspired by nationalism. The pre-independent press primarily published and disseminated government announcements and advertisements focusing on a particular elite class.

However, the post-independence Indian press witnessed an unprecedented turn of social and political events, which brought about corresponding changes in the Indian mass media system. Today, India is the world's largest newspaper market after China. In 1979, the total number of newspapers in India was 929, with the English press having a slightly higher circulation than the Hindi. In 2010-11, the number of registered newspapers in India exceeded eighty thousand: of these, nearly thirty-three thousand were Hindi language publications while the number of English publications was more than eleven thousand (Banerjee, 2013).

According to the University of Calicut (2011), there are three hundred ninety-eight major newspapers with an overall circulation of nearly thirty-one million copies across the country. The media business of the country is estimated to be worth five billion US dollars (Thussu, 2007). Until 1991, India had just one television channel - *Doordarshan*. Now, there are more than two-hundred digital channels covering most genres of television - from sports to comedy and from children's programming to news and documentaries (Thussu, 2007). An

estimated one hundred twelve million households in India own a television, with 61% of those homes having cable or satellite service (National Readership Studies Council, 2006, cited in Jensen and Oster, 2008).

Despite these encouraging developments, the Indian media has had to struggle hard to maintain a free system throughout its history. Ever since the publication of *The Bengal Gazette*, governments have introduced strict press regulations imposing severe censorship on all newspapers. The Vernacular Press Act (1878) was particularly designed to better control the vernacular press from disseminating news content against the British and to empower the government with more effective means of punishing and repressing seditious writings.

Even after independence, subsequent governments continued to impose severe censorship on the press. In the summer of 1975, the Gandhi government took control of the press for a year and a half, prohibiting journalists from covering national and international news and expelling foreign journalists from the country. As time passes, however, the Indian media is experiencing relatively more freedom and is overwhelmingly in private hands, running on self-regulation, which gives it enormous 'soft power' to set the agenda. However, the Indian media often practices self-censorship (Stahlberg, 2006).

In the first thirty years since independence, 80% of governments were voted back into power. In the next twenty-five years after 1977 (when press freedom was reinstated), 60% of governments were thrown out. In the last ten years, half of governments have been voted out, while half have been voted back (University of Oxford, 2013). In addition, the Indian press has the experience of covering issues of national interest and wars fought with China and Pakistan.

With rising literacy and household incomes, the Indian press, particularly tabloids, is growing fast. Unlike national English-language newspapers that earn a large part of their revenue from brand and product advertising by private companies, non-English newspapers in states like Chhattisgarh depend much more on government advertising. On the other hand, not only does the state government distribute nearly half the advertising spend in the state, it also pays regional channels for favourable coverage by sponsoring news and programmes without any overt disclosure (Sharma, 2013).

Like elsewhere in the world, online citizen-media initiatives are commonplace in India. From independent news sites exposing corruption and malpractice to matrimonial websites arranging matrimony, online publications are widely distributing media content across the world. Although the mainstream media make little use of user-generated content, most of the Indian traditional press have started an online edition.

The country also has an Online News Association, which represents the voice and concerns of more than one thousand seven hundred members from across the country whose principal livelihood involves gathering or producing news articles for digital presentation. In the last three quarters of 2009, mobile and Internet advertising recorded a growth of 18.1% and 9.2% respectively (University of Calicut, 2011). By the end of December 2012, at least sixty-two million Indians had a Facebook account (Internetworldstats.com).

4.3.5 Maldives

Although the Maldives became independent from the British in 1965, the Maldivian press was under state control for years. From 1978 to 2008, Maumoon

Abdul Gayoom ruled the country, suppressing alternative voices. During this period, reformist groups started their own informal forms of media, including blogs and other social media.

However, the country did not recognize freedom of expression as a correct way of discussing political issues and put an effort to discourage the media. Following public outrage over the death of a prisoner in 2003, allegedly due to torture by prison officials, the Gayoom government faced heavy pressure from local and international communities to introduce more democratic reforms into his regime in the later years of his administration. This was when a door opened for the Maldivian media to establish itself in a better form. In 2006, an International Press Freedom report found clear examples of harassment, intimidation, and attacks against media practitioners and dissenting voices in the country. However, according to a Commonwealth Observer report (2014), there was extensive reporting of the 2014 parliamentary campaign by all forms of media, including social media, and journalists were able to record election proceedings from an appropriate distance.

Although the constitution of the country guarantees freedom of expression, it also places curbs on content that is deemed 'contrary to the tenets of Islam'. The reporting and ethical guidelines are usually issued by the fifteen members of the Maldives Media Council, eight of whom are from the media and the rest from the public sector. The media is free to criticise the government; however, officials can use their power to close outlets.

In 2007, the government announced four main pillars of the media reform process, namely confidence-building measures, introducing private media, creating a legal framework for the media and the encouragement of training.

There has been some progress in all four areas, although some, including training and a legal framework, remain incomplete. In short, the country still has no specific legal systems to regulate the media. However, the private-sector media has flourished following the relaxation of the rules regarding the registration of newspapers in 2005.

There are currently two private television stations, six private radio stations, one public broadcaster and over a dozen newspapers and magazines. However, all of these private media sources are either owned or indirectly associated with influential political players, which leads to further doubt regarding the editorial independence of the media entities (Naeem et al, 2011).

Recent years have seen an increasing trend of online publication in the Maldives. Prominent online writers regularly write about political issues. Use of social-networking services, such as Facebook, is also on the rise. However, the government continues to discourage online writers, particularly bloggers, from criticising the government and writing against the religion.

In 2011, Ismail Rasheed, a human rights activist and blogger, was targeted by officials on the grounds that his blog contained anti-Islamic material, and his website was shut down by the state in November 2011. Self-regulation means that little official action may be taken against media outlets or journalists. In 2010, the Maldives ranked 52nd out of 179 countries in terms of press freedom, but it was ranked 108rd in 2014 (Reporters without Borders, 2014).

4.3.6 Nepal

The modern history of the Nepalese media started with the publication of *The Gorkhapatra* in 1901 during the period of the Rana regime that ruled the country for 104 years. Initially, *The Gorkhapatra* was published as a weekly with fewer than two-hundred copies in each issue (Nepal Press Institute, 2014). Some historians suggest that the Ranas published the newspaper primarily to enhance diplomatic relations with the British ruling India rather than to inform the public (Devkota, 1980). The publication of *The Gorkhapatra* followed the launch of a radio station from the eastern part of Nepal in 1950.

However, poor capital structure, the lack of competent human resources and the curtailment of civil rights affected the development of the Nepalese media. Following the fall of the Rana regime in 1951, a few newspapers were published in several different languages including English, Newari and Hindi. The first English-language magazine was *The Nepal Guardian*, which was published in 1958.

However, the press soon became a mouthpiece of the government that strived to justify the necessity of a single party system in the country after King Mahendra staged a coup, dissolving the parliament in 1960. This marked the beginning of partisan journalism and the Nepalese media became divided into two different broad missions: pro-government and anti-government. This led most newspapers to become mouthpieces of political parties and the government rather than independent sources of news information. This continues to date.

The Nepalese media has also played a significant role in political changes in the country. After the people's movement in 1990, the new government undertook

some initiatives for the overall development of the media. Soon, private-sector media began to flourish as a result of the introduction of liberal policies that allowed the operation of independent media in the country. Currently, privately-owned media with commercial interests dominate the media industry of Nepal. In addition, non-profit organizations and local community groups are promoting programmes in local languages.

According to the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal (2014), community radio stations are at the forefront in promoting local language programmes. This does, however, mean that the Nepalese media is divided linguistically, with a series of media in vernacular languages, such as Kirant, Tharu, Maithali and many others. Thus, the current media demographics of Nepal reflect a multi-linguistic, ethnic, and stratified class society with a clear divide between the Nepalese and English media. The rural population mostly consumes the Nepalese media, while the English media targets the urban population, including the elite and liberal professional population.

Until 1997, there was one radio station and one television station in the country. In 2012, there were over three thousand registered newspapers, including one hundred sixty-five dailies, four bi-weeklies, five hundred fifty-nine weeklies, and thirty-six fortnightlies, according to a UNESCO summary report (2013). There are currently three hundred forty-two local FM radio stations, of which two-hundred twenty-one are community radio stations. By 2012, fifty-one licenses had been issued to different individuals for television operation. The High Level Media Commission formed in 2006 recommended allowing 49% foreign ownership of newspapers and other media (UNESCO report, 2013).

Although the Interim Constitution of Nepal (2008) guaranteed freedom of expression, the media environment has often been violent and unsafe for media professionals. According to the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (2013) at least thirty-three journalists and media workers have been killed since 2001. The whereabouts of another three journalists still remains unknown. Illegal armed groups continue to threaten media freedom and the safety of journalists. This fear is shared by the newspaper distributors, who have been the target of intimidation by unidentified individuals. Nepal is ranked 118th out of 179 countries in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom rankings.

Nepal entered the world of information technology in 1971 with the use of IBM 1401 for a population census. Today, most Nepalese media houses operate an online edition. Independent online news sites, such as nepalnews.com, and independent blogs regularly provide alternative perspectives. Prominent bloggers write about political issues.

According to Internet World Statistics (2014), there were nearly 2.7 million Internet users in Nepal by June 2012. Facebook is a popular platform among the Nepalese people, who use the networking service for political and social activism and for organizing protests. By the end of December 2012, of twenty-eight million populations, nearly two million Nepalese had a Facebook account to interact with each other (Internetworldstats.com, 2014). The BBC World Service is a highly trusted foreign media among the Nepalese people.

4.3.7 Pakistan

Media in Pakistan first emerged in the form of newspapers when the country was under the control of British India. Several newspapers were published in the

country, mainly to promote a communal and political agenda. *The Dawn*, founded by Quaid-e-Azam and first published in 1941, was dedicated to countering 'anti-Muslim propaganda' and promoting an independent Pakistan (International Media Support, 2009). However, the media became a government tool after Pakistan gained its independence from British India in 1947.

In the years since independence, various military regimes in the country have had a special interest in controlling the media, and have been behind many of the media laws used to censor the press. The first step in introducing laws regulating the press was initiated by the then military ruler Field Marshal Ayub Khan, who promulgated the Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO) in 1962. This law not only empowered the authorities to monitor the media, but also allowed them to confiscate newspapers, close down news providers, and arrest journalists when it was deemed appropriate. During the reign of General Zia Haq in the 1980s, the media was widely used to promote Islamic teachings rather than provide news information. Censorship during the Haq era was direct and severe. To this day, the Pakistani media still emphasises Islam as a pillar of national identity.

However, the media in Pakistan saw a decisive development in 2002 when General Musharraf introduced more liberal media policies. These policies encouraged private sector investment in television and FM broadcasting operations. With this review of media policies, the Pakistani media has undergone significant change in recent decades.

There are currently more than one hundred and forty-two newspapers in Pakistan, published in more than eleven different languages including Sindhi and English. Television is the dominant medium in cities, and there are currently

more than forty television channels providing a variety of programmes, including 24-hour news, sports and entertainment. Pakistani viewers watch some of these channels via Cable network. There are no private, terrestrially-broadcast television stations in the country; the state-run Pakistan Television Corporation is the sole terrestrial broadcaster in Pakistan. More than hundred local FM radio stations broadcast a variety of programmes including traffic reports, horoscopes, sports, and weather updates. However, the state-owned Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation still has the biggest audience in rural areas (International Media Support, 2009).

The University of Punjab established the first Department of Journalism in 1941. Most universities now offer journalism programmes at university level. In addition, a number of private institutions offer journalism courses and training to address the increasing attraction of the media professions in the country.

The working conditions of professional journalists in Pakistan vary greatly depending on the form of the media (electronic/print), its readers (rural/urban), and size (local/national). The greatest divide is between print journalists and other electronic media workers. According to the general secretary of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (2009), up to 80% of print journalists work without employment contracts. Most rural journalists work part-time for a local paper or they freelance and provide local news for larger urban or national media outlets. Some local journalists join media even without having any formal journalism training. Many of the columnists are retired army officers, academics and intellectuals, who are financially well off and belong to the higher middle or upper class (International Media Support, 2009).

Pakistan is among the world's ten deadliest countries for media professionals, according to Reporters Without Borders (2012). Intelligence agents and members of banned militant organizations frequently kidnap or issue 'serious threats' to journalists. In addition, the government has the constitutional power to curb press freedom. In 2013, the government regularly imposed temporary blocks on social-networking services. Pakistan is ranked 158th out of 179 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

Nearly 16% of the Pakistani population have Internet access (Internet World Stats, 2012). The rapid growth of mobile phone use has boosted the delivery of online content and use of social media has become popular among Pakistani people in recent years. Active users of the service include senior politicians and sport and entertainment stars.

4.3.8 Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan press dates back to the early 1830s when the colony's British Governor – Robert Wilmot Horton - first published *The Colombo Journal* from British Ceylon on January 1, 1832. However, the newspaper was closed down the following year on the orders of British authorities in London (Gunawardene & Ariyawansa, 2012).

In 1835, *The Observer and Commercial Advertiser*, edited by the Irishman Christopher Elliot, was published in Ceylon, but *The Observer* was too critical of the Horton government and thus was soon met with a rival publication, the *Ceylon Chronicle*, which was sponsored by the Horton administration. This led to the emergence of numerous other newspapers, including *The Ceylon Chronicle* and *The Ceylon Times*, which later became *The Times of Ceylon*. At least five

newspapers had been published during the first half of the nineteenth century from British Ceylon (Brady, 2005).

The early years of the Sri Lankan media thus saw many newspapers, but only a very few of them survived for a long time. Within two decades of the launch of *The Colombo Journal*, vernacular newspapers, mainly in the Sinhala and Tamil languages, emerged as alternative newspapers for the non-English speaking population. However, some of the Sinhala-language newspapers were published by Christian missionaries to promote Christianity rather than provide independent news (Brady, 2012).

The Sri Lankan press entered a new era after Don Richard Wijewardene, who established Lake House newspapers, acquired *The Observer* in 1923. However, Lake House was soon taken over by the government and continues to be under the control of whichever political party forms the government in the country. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Sri Lankan vernacular newspapers started promoting religious ideologies, mainly Buddhism and Christianity, to secure a dominant position at a national level. Buddhist monks launched at least ten periodicals, while there were more than twelve Christian newspapers in circulation (Brady, 2005). On the other hand, a Tamil-language bimonthly had been in publication since 1941. A Sinhala-language newspaper emerged the following year.

Sri Lankan newspapers saw a shift in the creation of content after the publication of the vernacular *The Lak Mini Pahana* in 1962, which focused on publishing news, avoiding the advocacy of religious ideologies. However, the growth of assertive Sinhala nationalism after independence fanned the flames of ethnic divisions, which led to civil war in 1983. Following the eruption of the civil war,

the Sri Lankan media became divided along language and ethnic lines. This divide was seen even in The BBC World Service, which broadcast news in both Sinhala and Tamil from London (Thiranagama, 2011).

The conflict compelled the government to impose a variety of restrictions on constitutionally guaranteed fundamental freedoms including freedom of the press. Journalists were physically assaulted, and a few were even killed. At the height of the civil war, Sri Lanka was described as one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists (Reporters Without Borders, 2013). The government continues to impose severe censorship on the press, including online, blocking access to some independent news websites critical of the government. In May 2014, the government blocked two more websites — srilankamirror.com and theindependent.lk, according to rights groups. Sri Lanka has the lowest level of the Reporters Without Borders press freedom and ranked 162nd out of 179 countries in 2013.

Many of the current media outlets in Sri Lanka are still controlled by the state, including two major TV stations and radio networks operated by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and newspapers in Tamil, Sinhala, and English. There are currently over a dozen private radio stations and a handful of privately-owned TV stations. The web is a popular and growing medium for news in Sri Lanka. There were more than 3.2 million internet users by June 2012, and more than 1.5 million people had a Facebook account by December 2012 (Internetworldstats.com, 2014). Independent news websites, including blogs, are used as alternative sources of news information and prominent bloggers write about politics.

4.4 Summary

On the whole, the modern history of media in the SAARC nations goes in parallel with the modern political history of the SAARC nations themselves. Although the British first started the press, the emergence of the independent press was inspired by nationalism, and India may be described as the main epicentre of media development in the SAARC countries. The early press may be seen as an important tool of the freedom movement, which played an active role during the process of independence and political reform. However, the early press, particularly the vernacular, played dual roles, on the one hand, fighting for independence, and on the other, attacking indigenous religion and culture to promote Christianity through various missions.

The introduction of journalism and mass communication courses at university and college levels reflects the growing scope of the news media in most SAARC countries. The rise of vernacular media in recent decades also supports this assertion. The English-language media continues to dominate international news and entertainment content, reflecting the fact that the English-language media continues to play an important role in shaping public opinions. With some SAARC countries, including Pakistan practising a traditional concept of journalism that emphasises Islamic values as a pillar of national identity, and other countries, such as India and Nepal adopting a more Western model of commercial media, the SAARC countries demonstrate a diversity of media practices.

Overall, the media in the SAARC nations is thriving as a result of rising literacy and the introduction of more liberal media policies. Online publications, such as blogs, are emerging as an alternative model of media platform and social media is changing journalism. Like elsewhere in the world, most media outlets in the

SAARC countries now produce an online edition. This demonstrates that the media in the SAARC countries has come a long way from its beginning as a means of circulating government announcements and advertising during British rule through severe media censorship at times, to the 1990s liberal media policies that adopted modern technology. In other words, the media in the SAARC countries is experiencing a gradual development, although poor working conditions, including violence and attacks on professional journalists, remains one of the main problems facing the media.

4.5 Journalistic freedom: A perspective from the SAARC countries

Despite a growing number and diversity of media outlets, there are indications that journalistic freedom in the SAARC countries continues to be a serious concern (The Committee to Protect Journalists, 2014). Media persons, journalists in particular, remain vulnerable to punitive actions, including threats and violence across the region. Journalists are often targeted in the deadly power struggles on which they report. Whilst arguments in editorial offices are often on topics such as 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' – meaning the media should act independently – journalists often find themselves practising advocacy journalism (i.e., promoting non-objective points of view to bring about changes in existing systems) (Stahlberg, 2006).

In general, journalistic freedom in the SAARC countries may be classified into two broad categories based on journalism practices: journalism under 'soft authoritarianism' and journalism under a 'repressive regime'. India and Nepal fall under the first category, where the media emerged through anti-regime struggles (e.g., British rule in India from 1858 and 1947, in Nepal – the Rana regime from 1846 to 1951, monarchism from 1960 to 1990, and the Maoist war

from 1996 to 2006). The media in this category enjoys a relatively greater journalistic freedom than those in other SAARC countries, and new political systems in both countries have laid the grounds for prosecution against culprits. Recent years have seen some positive developments – for example, the court conviction by Nepal’s Dailekh District of five accused in the abduction and murder of the local journalist Dekendra Thapa by the Maoists in 2004. In 2003, the verdict of India Supreme Court – which halted an order to arrest six journalists for writing articles critical of the Chief Minister, J. Jayalalitha, was hailed as ‘good for democracy’. However, commercial pressures continue to threaten basic journalistic values, as the media often relies on government subsidies due to the lack of commercial revenues. Even in countries such as India the media face financial difficulties to survive (Stahlberg, 2006).

Countries that practise journalism under more ‘repressive regimes’ include Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, where journalistic freedom is limited due to political systems, religious norms, and elite values. Although journalists often criticise politicians and governments’ policies, writing on religion remains almost taboo.

Recent years have seen a rise in religious extremists brutally murdering journalists, particularly, bloggers in their homes or on the streets. In countries, such as Bangladesh and the Maldives, which are very religious, professional journalists and bloggers are hesitant to write articles critical of the government and religion. In Pakistan and the Maldives, media laws empower the authorities, requiring the media to promote Islamic teachings. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are the worst offenders in this category, where journalists often provide the coverage of news at the cost of their own life. Thus,

the governments have gained their reputation of suppressing alternative voices by discouraging media houses, including online news portals, and harassing journalists in response to growing reports on the actions of governments. As a result, whilst the SAARC countries have the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech, journalists still feel hesitant to express their political opinions and views freely and confidently.

On the other hand, the media of the SAARC countries has a long tradition of being divided along party political lines, promoting the political ideology of political actors. Like the SAARC governments, each political party in every SAARC country owns its own newspaper. As a result, the media is used as a tool to promote the political views of political parties or the government rather than as a tool to provide independent news. Thus, despite relative press freedom in recent decades, political ideologies, religious values, and commercial pressures pose threats to journalistic freedom in the SAARC countries.

4.6 The prevalence and usage of English language in the SAARC countries

All the SAARC countries are linguistically diverse, with two major language families, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan, a shared cultural and political history, common literary and folk traditions, and pervasive literature in the Sanskrit, Persian, and English languages (McArthur, 1998). However, the English language is frequently used as a link language in most of the SAARC countries, largely as a result of British colonial and Western educational and cultural influences. Because of the prevalence of great ethnic and linguistic diversity, the English language also acts as an indispensable 'link' language within a few countries, mainly in India where English is commonly used for inter-state and intrastate

communication. In fact, English is the most commonly used language after Hindi, and probably the most read and written language in India (Vijayalakshmi and Babu, 2014). The English language also serves as the main language to communicate with the outside world.

The use of the English language in the SAARC countries may date back to the seventeenth century when the British trading company, the East India Company, sailed forth in search of new trading posts in the Indian subcontinent and first arrived in Gujarat in India in 1608 (Raju, 2013). With the exception of Bhutan, Maldives, and Nepal, which remained out of direct English rule, all member states of SAARC began to use English as an official language after the British Empire formally started ruling India in 1858. As a result, the English language became more prevalent in areas such as government administrations, law and the media. However, the use of English was limited to urban areas, becoming the language of elite groups who worked with the British, dividing the population into an elite class and lower classes. It is therefore safe to suggest that India was the epicenter of the English language in the SAARC region.

The English language began to gain momentum in other SAARC countries after the independence of India in 1947. Educated and English-speaking Indians filled the posts once occupied by British administrators. This happened in all areas, from administrative services, the army, and the railways to other public sectors, such as banks (Raju, 2013). After its independence from India in 1947, Pakistan also adopted English as the *de facto* official language, which was formalised in the Constitution of Pakistan of 1973, when Urdu and English became the official languages of the country. Since the creation of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971, English continues to be in constant use in spite of national

policy directions favouring Bengali (Banu and Susex, 2001). Thus, although Bengali was used as the national language, the English language continued to be one of the languages in government offices and business enterprises, and thus the *de facto* co-official language in Bangladesh.

Realising the importance of English, other member states of SAARC gradually adopted the English language to communicate with the outside world. Nepal's Tribhuvan University has given high priority to the English language in its curriculum since 1959 (Bista, 2013). To give high priority to the English language meant to gain outside knowledge through English-language materials from around the world. In 1959, Sri Lanka also adopted English as its second language. As in India, the English language was limited to the elite population in urban areas; however, it played an important role in acting as a link language between the Sinhalese and Tamils, who used their own native language (Allan, 1993).

Introducing social, political, and judicial reforms in the country, Bhutan followed suit by adopting the English language for education reforms in the mid-1960s. Public schools based on Indian models of Western education were established, with English as a medium of instruction in all academic institutions in the country. In some cases, the young generations of Bhutan today learn and speak English better than their own native language (Thinely and Maxwell, 2013). Afghanistan, which remained a battlefield for decades, is also slowly reopening itself to the outside world and the English language has been key, particularly after the fall of the Taliban insurgents in the 1990s, and arrival of international non-governmental organisations, which are involved in the process of the reconstruction of the country. The English language may also be seen to be

playing a vital role in the success of the Maldivian tourism industry, which is largely dependent on the outside world.

The rise in popularity of the English language in the region is also influenced by the growing dominance of Western culture. The English language is present in every part of national life in the SAARC countries. Whilst the English language is not so important for religion in the region, it hugely impacts the cultural preferences of the younger generation. Even in the days of LP (long play) records, affluent people would appreciate Western music and hum along with the Beatles or Elvis Presley. The English actors and actresses dressed stylishly, and the young Indians of the 60s and 70s watched, wanted and got all of this (Raju, 2013). Many Hindi film songs are still copied from English music.

In addition, the desire to attain an English education has contributed to the rise of English usage in the region. Hundreds of private English-language schools teaching tens of thousands of students are mushrooming across the SAARC region, including in countries such as Bhutan that once had little contact with the outside world. Thousands of students from the SAARC countries today go to English-speaking countries for their higher education. For example, there were 39,150 students from the SAARC region at higher education institutions in the UK in 2012/13 – undergraduate 16,260 and postgraduate 22,890 (GoStudyUK.com, 2015, 20). Therefore, the English language remains a key factor in the development of the SAARC countries even today, and is much in demand in all areas. The status of English language in the SAARC countries continues to grow.

Economic activities in private enterprises and international business companies carried out in the region also require use of the English language due to the

globalized economy. In addition, employment opportunities at foreign aid agencies make an ability with English even more valuable. The SAARC countries have a large number of displaced people who are living in different parts of the world for political reasons. Over one hundred thousand Bhutanese people now live in different parts of the world as refugees. Hundreds and thousands of Afghans have been displaced from their homeland and are living in several countries in the world. These people often receive support and vocational training in the English language – for example computer-operating skills – that will be needed for life after returning to their homeland.

The most visible dimension of English usage is perhaps the ways in which the diaspora people from the SAARC countries use the language for communication. According to Southasianconcern, (2015), over twenty million people from the SAARC countries are now scattered around the world. They make up 7.5% of the total population of England and Wales alone, making them the largest ethnic-minority category in Britain (Rajpal, 2015). These people not only use the English language to communicate in their daily lives, but also to discuss their cultural and national identities, sharing their knowledge and experience. Through their writing in various genres, including poetry, in English, these diaspora people express the voice of the immigrant professionals, writing of lost homelands (Wong and Hassan, 2012).

News websites, such as bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), continue to play an important role in raising the voices and concerns of Bhutanese refugees living out of their homeland. Through their writing in various genres, including critical political views, these diaspora people express their own voices and concerns. By sharing knowledge and experience on the Internet, they remain connected with

friends and family members back in their home country and elsewhere in the world. In addition, they try to understand cultural richness in terms of language, normative expression and proverbs in their host nations. This way, through the use of English language, the people of the SAARC countries are able to articulate the diverse cultures of the SAARC region, facilitating intercultural communication, understanding and empathy within and without the SAARC countries. Thus, the English language in the SAARC countries plays an important role not only for communication but also for developing the nations, exploring opportunities around the world.

4.7 Diaspora development and democracy

The notion of diaspora – which was used first in the classical world – has acquired a renewed importance since the late twentieth century (Cohen, 1996). The notion continues to be widespread in academic and political discourse. 'Diaspora', a word of Greek origin, designates the dispersal throughout the world of a people with the same origin. A descriptive notion, dispersion is often given religious or ideological connotations such as in the Hebrew token of *galut* (exile) that is imbued with messianic aspirations of 'Return' (Ben-Rafael, 2013). Thus the term 'diaspora', at its simplest, refers to a scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographic location.

However, the term has been defined and understood in several different ways both within and between diasporas. For the Greeks, the term was used to refer to the citizens of a dominant city-state, who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonisation, for example, Asia Minor and the Mediterranean in the Archaic period between 800 and 600 BC (Cohen, 1996). Although there was some displacement of the ancient Greeks to Asia Minor as a result of poverty,

over-population and inter-state war, the term essentially had a positive connotation. Expansion through plunder, military conquest, colonization and migration were the predominant features of the Greek diaspora at the time (Cohen, 1996).

On the other hand, the term is also often seen most closely related to the dispersion of the Jewish people, despite evidence of historiographies in the Armenian, Greek, and African diaspora (Butler, 2001). This is partly because the Jewish people have been conquered and sent into exile several different times throughout the history of Israel. What it means is that the term applied principally to Jewish people and less commonly to other populations, such as the Greeks, Armenians, and Africans. However, not all Jewish people were victims of diaspora; some of them left Israel seeking a more comfortable life and profitable lands, and therefore were successful trade persons.

Since the 1980s, usage of the term 'diaspora' has become widespread enough to force a reassessment of its meaning, and to lead to increased study of dispersed ethnic populations (Butler, 2001). The term is now being used in a broader sense by scholars to refer to historical mass dispersions, such as the expulsion of Jews from Judea, the fleeing of the Greeks after the fall of Constantinople, the African trans-Atlantic slave trade, the southern Chinese or Hindus of South Asia during the coolie trade, the deportation of Palestinians to the exile and the deportation of Circassians in the course of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus (Gehlot, 2015).

In fact, the term is being used to describe migrants of every kind (Kenny, 2013), and thus it carries the connotation of forced settlement due to expulsion, slavery, racism, or war, especially nationalist conflict. This means that the notion of

'diaspora' is now understood as a scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographic area and the movement of the population from its original homeland due to political and economic reasons.

4.7.1 Proliferation of contemporary diaspora

Since the World War II, the idea of diaspora has proliferated to an extraordinary extent, (Kenny, 2013), changing the directions and trends of the world. One of the reasons for this proliferation is the acute labour shortage in many countries that became apparent in the aftermath of the World War II. For example, Japan – once known as an emigrant country in the early twentieth century – became an immigrant country in the second half of twentieth century, with the settlement of Korean immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It had to meet its labour demand through increases in labour productivity and greater use of untapped labour (Mori, 1997 cited in Pillai, 2013).

Some Western countries, including the US and the UK, were major nations of destination for emigrants and took a substantial share of the total immigrant population after World War II. Between 1968 and 1975, some 83,000 immigrants, mainly from the Commonwealth, settled in the UK (BBC, 2015). The US has seen similar trends, and the foreign-born population has continued to grow in size since the 1970s. According to the US Census Bureau (2010), about one of four children in the US has now at least one foreign-born parent.

There are now 215 million first-generation migrants around the world: that's 3% of the world's population (The Economist, 2011). If they were a nation, it would be a little larger than Brazil. There are more Chinese people living outside China than there are French people in France. Some twenty-two million Indians are

scattered all over the globe. Small concentrations of ethnic and linguistic groups have always been found in surprising places — Lebanese in west Africa, Japanese in Brazil and Welsh in Patagonia, for instance — but they have been joined by newer ones, such as west Africans in southern China (Free the Children, 2011).

Kenny (2013) offers two broad reasons for the increased number of diaspora in the world. The first reason for this development is decolonisation, which forged transnational bonds of solidarity among globally scattered populations. Decolonisation also led to the expulsion and forcible remigration of many groups, especially those of Asian origins (e.g., ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and Vietnamese or South Asian and East Africans). However, unlike at the time Jewish, not all of these people left their homelands involuntarily; some of them, especially Chinese, moved to a new location just to explore their fortune in more developed countries (Choi, 2004).

The second reason for the increasing number of diaspora is the international recognition of refugees. Whilst wars (e.g., the scale of World War I and II) between countries have almost ceased to exist, some countries continued to engage in domestic conflicts. During the civil war in Sri Lanka (1983-2009), thousands of people were forced to leave the country. Over one million Iraqis fled their homeland during the 1991 Gulf war (Fawcett and Tanner, 2002). More than 2.5 million Syrians (i.e., 11% of the population) are now living in neighbouring countries, with over 1 million in Lebanon alone. According to the World Bank (2014), the number of asylum applications rose by 32% (i.e., 484,560) in 2013, and the vast majority of asylum applicants are from Syria, Russia, Serbia and Kosovo.

Furthermore, terrorism continues to challenge global peace, forcing thousands of people to flee their homelands. By the end of 2014, there were 19.5 million refugees worldwide, in addition to 38 million internally displaced persons and at least 10 million stateless persons (UNHCR, 2014). On the other hand, rising poverty, mainly in the African continent, also contributed to the rise of migratory flows (Wakati, 2014). In addition, it may be suggested that a surge in academic interest since the 1990s has enhanced the growth of diaspora in the world.

4.7.2 Diasporic activities and national identity

With the spreading of democracy and increased regional and global interdependence, recent decades have seen some important changes in diaspora networks. Most notably, remittances remain the key activity within diaspora networks, partly because remittances are an important source of foreign exchange for many developing countries. For example, in Nepal, remittances are nearly double the country's revenues from exports of goods and services, while in Sri Lanka and the Philippines they are over 50% and 30%, respectively. In Uganda, remittances are double the country's income from its main export of coffee. India received USD 70 billion in remittance in 2013 (World Bank, 2014). The opening of China to investment – mainly from overseas Chinese – has led some analysts to estimate that the combined equivalent GDP of the Chinese diaspora was perhaps as large as that of China itself (Vertovec, 2006).

People living in diasporas are not only making a contribution to their homelands and to the everyday life of their fellow country people through remittances, they are also promoting trade and foreign direct investment, changing trends within the world. Governments are now, more than ever before, seeking meaningful ways to engage their diasporas in areas of mutual interest. Dozens of countries

have set up high-level governmental bodies, or even full ministries, to interact with their diaspora networks abroad to establish programmes and implement diaspora-engagement strategies. In 2013 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – a leading global organisation for migration, working with migrants, governments and partners in the international community in the UK – held the first global conference of diaspora ministers, recognizing the importance of a policy arena that is new to many governments, in which over 500 delegates attended and more than 30 governments were represented at the ministerial level (Newland and Plaza, 2013).

In 2015, the government of India reviewed its policy on investment by Non-Resident Indians (NRI) with the primary intention of providing Non-Resident Indians with an investment option for the utilization of any domestic resources that were not freely repatriable. The Ethiopian, Kenyan, and Ugandan embassies in London and Washington support business and trade forums to attract diaspora investors and to match suppliers with exporters (Ratha and Plaza, 2011). Whilst diaspora networks have a number of good aspects, experts are also beginning to believe that the loss of skilled workers has an upside. As a result, some countries have begun efforts to tap some of the skills and resources of emigrants and their offspring (International Monetary Fund, 2011).

Diasporas also help to spread ideas and knowledge as most of them are educated at Western universities. A considerable number go home, taking with them both knowledge and skills that they gained in their host countries (The Economist, 2011). Foreign-educated Indians, including the prime minister Man Mohan Singh (Oxford and Cambridge), for example, played a big role in bringing economic reform to India in the early 1990s (Shiva, 2011). In 2011, the China

Digital Times, an online Chinese news site, reported that some 500,000 Chinese had studied abroad and returned to their homeland – mostly in the past decade – and now dominate the think-tanks that advise the government, and are moving up the ranks of the Communist Party. The site further quoted Cheng Li of the Brookings Institution, an American think-tank, as predicting that 15-17% of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China would be foreign educated by 2012, up from 6% in 2002.

A new dimension of diaspora networks is perhaps the active involvement of diasporas in the political process, lobbying host countries to shape policies in favour of a homeland or to challenge a homeland government, and giving support to political parties for changes in homelands. An example of this was the 2013 Legislative Election of Guinea, in which some 123,000 Guineans living abroad, for the first time in history, participated in the election through eighteen different embassies and consulates (Laloupo, 2015). Following the 1999 capture of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, organized mass demonstrations among Kurds took place in several different countries around the world, bringing Kurdish issues to worldwide attention (Sertovec, 2013). The global networks of diaspora associations also often engage in mass protests to raise consciousness about homeland-related issues.

Diasporas' interest in the politics of their host countries has also impacted on election results, changing the nature of power. This was evident in the US where one of the reasons that the Republican candidate for the White House, Mitt Romney, lost is suggested to be because his party had little appeal to burgeoning numbers of voters from minority communities (The Caribbean Council, 2014). In October 2014, speaking on a panel relating to the Caribbean question, a senior

British MP (Liberal Democrat) suggested that the Sikh and Muslim communities lobbied his party every year in the British parliament (Surtees, 2014).

However, scholars see some implications for such diasporic activities for both homelands and host countries. For host countries, the dual political loyalties of diasporas may raise fears of mobilized fifth columns, "enemies within," and terrorist sleeper cells. Such suspicions can feed into racism and other forms of discrimination. A further question with social and policy importance arises in host countries: does diasporic attachment — passive or active — hinder immigrant integration? Some argue that immigrants will never truly integrate if they are constantly looking "back home" (Sertovec 2013).

On the other hand, they suggest, whilst homelands certainly want remittances from their diasporas and may appreciate lobbying, they may resent too much political involvement. Most diasporas — whether based on ethno-linguistic or national criteria — include opposing factions and dissenting voices. These, however, are often muffled by better organised, networked, and financed actors, who are often the ones pushing nationalist or ethnic agendas.

When focusing on the SAARC countries, the diaspora adds a new dimension to the phenomenon: the members of diaspora representing the region not only contribute to the development of their home countries, but also participate in various voluntary activities, including relief campaigns. An example of this was observed during the 2015 devastating earthquakes of Nepal, where people at the scene posted live footage of victims on social-networking sites, such as Facebook, appealing for help worldwide. The Nepalese living in different parts of the world responded to the appeal by collecting millions of dollars in support.

Similar voluntary activities had been observed in the region during natural crises, including the 2001 Gujarat earthquake and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

However, these people face problems both in their host nations and home countries. On the one hand, small in size, they frequently face discrimination due to their cultural and racial backgrounds (Nangia, 2013). Linguistic differences also pose a major challenge to the development of the diasporic community. For example, a census report of 2013 found that 138,000 migrants in England and Wales could not speak English, whilst some four million people reported speaking a different main language other than English (BBC, 2013). In 2014, *The Washington Times* reported a similar finding, suggesting that one-fifth of the people in the US did not speak English in their home. These findings are an indication that diaspora people in host nations form their own community, creating a sense of their own belonging (Sales, 2011).

Thus, one of the problems of these diaspora people is associated with nationalism or patriotism (a sense of belonging to a particular nation). To be patriotic means having or expressing devotion to support for a particular nation. However, the diaspora people from the SAARC countries often consider themselves to be from another country and remain more connected with the culture and people of their own homelands than that of host countries (Gautam, 2013). They practice their own culture, although their everyday existence must focus on their host countries.

On the other hand, the governments in homelands are becoming increasingly skeptical about the patriotism of their diaspora, despite its considerable contributions to the national development. Some SAARC governments have introduced new rules to control the autonomy of the diaspora. For example,

nearly one-sixth of the Bhutanese diaspora still lives in third countries, facing restriction in the homeland. Afghanistan offers similar political environments to its Hazara diaspora.

Furthermore, the emergence of a new generation of the diaspora from the SAARC region explains the declining proportion of people's income being invested in remittances. Garbin (2005) suggests that, whilst many young Bangladeshi in the UK still values Bangladesh as the 'ancestral home' where their cultural 'roots' are, it appears that very few of them are willing to invest, send money regularly, or stay for a long term. On the other hand, there is a new trend among members of diaspora of becoming a citizen of their host country, although some countries, including Nepal and India, have no provision of dual citizenship, and dual citizenship is frequently discussed within the diasporic community.

Thus, there is a contradiction in the national identity of the diaspora representing the SAARC countries. On the one hand, they are determined to contribute to the economic development of their home countries through remittances, preserving their own culture and language in their host countries. On the other hand, they are raising their new generation in host country environments and encouraging them to participate in the national politics of host nations. Within these complex cultural, linguistic, and political environments, the diaspora representing the SAARC countries continues to face problems, and at the same time, is emerging as a force both in their homelands and their host nations.

Chapter Five

5. Research design and methods

This chapter describes the methodology employed for this study, providing a rationale and other relevant information concerning the research context. Whilst the methodology employed was briefly discussed in Chapter One, this chapter aims to build on this and to offer assurance that appropriate methodological procedures were applied while conducting this study.

In addressing the concept of citizen journalism, use was made of literature that provided theoretical tools to analyse citizen journalism from various perspectives. Thus, research into alternative media (e.g. Atton, 2004; Kim and Hamilton, 2008; Lievrouw, 2011), media activism (e.g. Hackett and Carroll, 2006; Joyce, 2007; Kern and Nam, 2008), user-generated content (e.g. Paulussen and Ugile, 2008; Thurman, 2008; Wardle and Williams, 2010), and participatory and citizen journalism (e.g. Gillmor, 2006; Allan and Thorsen, 2009) were identified as valuable for the analysis.

Two main underlying themes ran throughout this study, which needed to be taken into consideration in the light of empirical evidence. The first was the dichotomy that tended to be drawn between traditional and online citizen journalism. The second was the perception of alternative media as being diametrically opposed to the traditional media (e.g. Atton, 2004; Kim and Hamilton, 2006). These categorisations were taken into consideration during the exploration of news values and journalism practices in this study. The chapter begins by discussing an overall approach to investigating citizen journalism in the sample.

5.1 Inductive: An approach to research

Goddard and Melville (2007) suggest that an inductive approach starts with observations of a specific subject and formulates theories towards the end of the research. In other words, researchers in this approach need to organize an empirical generalization, highlighting preliminary relationships as a framework through the study. This means that instead of reproducing a previous study and seeking to see if the same results are produced or not, an inductive approach necessitates researchers to conduct research with a completely open mind without any preconceived ideas of what will be found in the study, and to generate new conclusions or theories through the analysis. Through observations, researchers detect new patterns, formulate some tentative assumptions, and finally develop some general conclusions or theories (Tromchim, 2006).

Thus, this thesis adopted an inductive approach because such a research approach provides more flexibility than a deductive approach, allowing researchers to examine existing theories and position their findings within the discipline. In addition, this approach necessitates researchers to move from specific observations to broader generalizations, supplying strong evidence and exploring a new phenomenon from a different perspective (Tromchim, 2006). In this case, it seems that the phenomenon of citizen journalism from the eight member countries of SAARC may be better explained and understood using an inductive approach.

5.2 Overall research design: Choosing a mixed-methods approach

Citizen journalists possess the ability to challenge the mainstream media, providing an alternative perspective and playing an important role in broadening the accessibility of the public sphere for civic groups (Kern and Nam, 2009). As the Internet enables ordinary people to create and distribute news articles online, these ordinary people may be able to express their views and opinions from their perspectives (Gillmor, 2006; Kim and Hamilton, 2006). Given the characteristics of citizen journalism in the sample, a mixed-methods approach is most suited to achieve the overall aim of this thesis.

More specifically, this thesis aims to explore the salient characteristics of citizen journalism by analysing news articles and supplementary materials published in the sample in the year 2012 in two ways. First, by conducting a quantitative analysis of data (i.e. news articles and supplemental materials such as the comments and images accompanying the news articles), the thesis aims to examine the practice of citizen journalism news in the SAARC countries, comparing and contrasting their basic news values, and determining overall news trends in the sample from a broader perspective.

Second, a qualitative case study approach was used to explore in more depth the phenomenon of citizen journalism in one SAARC member – Bhutan. Citizen journalism has been defined from various perspectives in different contexts (e.g. offline, online, Western perspective, revolutionary period) and thus the epistemological position in this study has been derived from the broad sense or understanding through the interpretive research tradition (Gillmor, 2006; Ross, 2011).

This approach was crucial in understanding the phenomenon of citizen journalism from the broader perspective, as the idea of interpretivism deals with subjective meanings already there in the social world, i.e. to acknowledge their existence, to reconstruct them, to understand them, and to avoid distorting them, to use them as building blocks in theorizing (Goldkuhl, 2012).

In addition to the centrality of text as a type of data to be analysed, the thesis aims to take into account the social, historical, and political context within which the texts have been produced to reflect the perspectives of their authors. Therefore, a choice was made to explore discourse in political forums, particularly focusing on alternative perspectives in the coverage of citizen journalism news, and a case study of Bhutanese citizen journalism was undertaken in order to achieve this.

This positioning led to a mixed-method approach (quantitative i.e. content analysis and qualitative i.e. discourse analysis) being adopted, as analysing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study expands an understanding from one method to another or to converge or confirm findings from different data sources (Creswell, 2003). In other words, a mixed-method approach combines the elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. the use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for a broader purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson et al., 2007). Thus, this approach may help bring together a more comprehensive account of the area of inquiry in which the researcher is conducting research (Lisle, 2011).

The following sections will discuss the process of research from the beginning, when choices regarding the research design were made, that is, the overall

approach to the study and the rationale behind the selection of cases. In addition, they will explain the sampling strategy, coding procedures, and provide an account of the challenges in the process of research study, highlighting key choices made concerning the conduct of research and reasons for them.

5.3 Content analysis: Choosing a quantitative method

In a broad sense, content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. It allows for a large sample population to be analysed in a systematic way. Through the systematic nature of the coding sheet and definitions, a researcher is able to look at many texts and establish trends and anomalies that are not possible when focusing solely on a few articles, as discourse analysis does (Krippendorff, 2004).

The central idea of adopting this approach is to classify a large portion of texts into smaller and more manageable categories to understand the text from a comparative point of view. Compared to other techniques, such as interviews, content analysis yields unobtrusive measures in which neither the sender nor the receiver of the message is aware that the message transmitted and received is being analysed. Content analysis is thus useful, especially in media studies, as it provides a tool for comparative as well as descriptive analysis and analyses similarities and differences between populations in a study (Weber, 1990).

Since, there is little danger that the act of measurement itself will act as a force for change that confounds the data, content analysis has largely been used in communication and mass media studies in recent decades. With its increasing use in media studies, various authors have proposed formal definitions of content

analysis in the past. For example, Berger (1991) cites George V. Zito's (1975) definition as follows:

Content analysis may be defined as a methodology by which the researcher seeks to determine the manifest content of written, spoken, or published communications by *systematic, objective, and quantitative* analysis ... Since any written communication (and this includes novels, plays, and television scripts as well as personal letters, suicide notes, magazines, and newspapers accounts) is produced by a communicator, the *intention of the communicator* may be the object of our research. Or we may be interested in the audience, or *receiver* of the communication, and may attempt to determine something about it. (p. 25).

Deacon et al. (2007) review a number of definitions of content analysis used by researchers and conclude the following in their *Research Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Culture Analysis*:

Content analysis is a directive method; it gives answers to the questions you pose. In this regard, the method does not offer much opportunity to explore texts in order to develop ideas and insights. It can only support, qualify or refute your initial questions — which may or may not be pertinent. Furthermore, it is better at providing some answers than others. (p. 199).

These definitions emphasise an indirect way of making inference to determine the patterns of message from a comparative perspective. Although content analysis often disregards the context that produces texts, as well as the state of

things after texts are produced, it looks directly at communication via texts and transcripts, and hence gets the central aspect of social interaction (Berger, 1991). Thus, content analysis can be seen as a research approach that utilises a set of techniques and procedures to make valid inferences regarding the content of communications.

However, content analysis is not free of criticisms, the most notable of which is that it is a superficial analysis of the texts in the communication. Bauer and Gaskell (2000) suggest that content analysis can only analyse manifest content and cannot hone in on details that may either be present or conspicuously absent. For example, individual researchers may draw their own sample without taking any scientific consideration and construct their own coding frame. 'The gap between potential and reality must be confidently bridged with parallel multi-method research design: coordinated longitudinal research including opinion, surveys, unstructured interviews and quantitative research on large scale. Conversation and writing are both manifestations of public opinion; and public opinion that is reduced to only one of its constituents is quite likely to be fake' (Gaskell, 2000, p. 149).

In addition, there have always been concerns with sampling as there are no scientific rules to find out what is the right amount of materials to study (Berger, 1991).

5.3.1 Sampling techniques

Broadly speaking, the approach to sampling in this study draws on the notion of purposive sampling, also called judgemental sampling, due to the unique characteristics of the study population, i.e. citizen journalism sites. This decision

to use purposive sampling was influenced by a short pilot project conducted between June and August 2012, which revealed that, although citizen journalists were participating in the process of media, there was no consistent practice of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries, with citizen journalists from the SAARC countries creating and using citizen journalism sites for various purposes.

In purposive sampling, techniques involve a series of strategic choices in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by researchers, based upon a variety of criteria, which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue (Oliver, 2006). One of the advantages of this technique is that it allows researchers to select subjects based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study (Crossman, 2010).

This means that researchers are responsible for taking a decision about the individual participant that would most likely contribute to appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth. In other words, researchers make a decision about the subject being analyzed based on what they think would be appropriate for the study. These suggestions draw two implicit qualities: first, the way that the researchers' sample has to be tied to their research objective.

Second, there is no 'best' or 'alternative' sampling strategy to a purposive sampling approach. In addition, this technique allows researchers to reach a targeted sample quickly and thus researchers are likely to get the opinions of their target population (Trochim, 2006).

That said, purposive sampling is not free of criticism. The technique has often been criticised for its inherent bias (Lunsford and Lunsford, 1995), yet researchers find this approach more useful as they usually hand-pick subjects

from the accessible population because they believe that certain subjects are likely to benefit or be more compliant. Thus, a purposive sampling technique seemed more useful in this study, as this technique allows the researcher to sample with a *purpose* in mind, with one or more specific predefined subjects related to the study.

In addition, this thesis adopted a momentary sampling method due to its relationship with the research subject. The momentary sampling technique allows researchers to study ongoing events, such as reading or writing, by observing whether or not specific behaviours occur during specified time periods (The University of Kansas, 2015). Considering the number of sampled sites and the amount of news articles and supplemental materials being published every day in the sample, it was decided to analyze news articles and supplemental materials published during the first week of every month in 2012, as the momentary time sample technique does not require researchers to observe or analyze data published throughout the entire interval. Researchers may measure the behaviours of the research subject at the end of each time interval in which behaviours occur (Tieghi-Benet et al., 2003; see Deacon et al., 2007 for more).

5.3.2 Sampling period

The overall aim of this thesis is to investigate the phenomenon of citizen journalism from the perspective of the SAARC countries. Thus, it was decided to analyse the coverage of citizen journalism news for the whole year 2012, as this year was special for the SAARC countries. For example, India conducted Legislative Assembly elections in several states in two phases in 2012. In addition, the country conducted its fourteenth presidential election on July 19,

2012. Similarly, senate elections were held in Pakistan for fifty-four of the hundred senate seats in March 2012.

Nepal and Sri Lanka were seen to be working towards the peace process after decades of civil wars during which thousands of people lost their lives. Afghanistan also offered a new hope of peace, with the Taliban insurgents agreeing for the first time to hold peace talks with the Afghan government.

On the other hand, the Maldives continued to see a series of political protests — which had begun in the middle of 2011 — that led to the resignation of President Mohamed Nasheed in disputed circumstances in February 2012. In addition, there were several national crises in each of the SAARC countries. For example, Bangladesh's garment industry drew global attention after fires and the collapse of factories that supplied products to U.S. and European retail chains killed at least one hundred twelve workers in November 2012. Suicide cases in the Bhutanese community were widely debated by both citizen and professional journalists around the world during this year.

In July 2012, violence in the Indian state of Assam broke out with riots between indigenous Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims, killing over hundred people and displacing over four hundred thousand people. In addition, there was a sporting event, the 2012 Summer Olympics, in which a total of one hundred and thirty-four athletes represented one-fifth of the world population from the SAARC countries.

5.3.3 Sampling procedures

The eight member countries of SAARC — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka — were sampled for this study, thus offering the chance to investigate a non-Western model of citizen journalism practice. Boczkowski and Santos's (2007) sampling strategy was adopted by selecting three citizen journalism sites from each country from SAARC. The identified sites were: talikarimi.ca (Afghanistan), akidwithgreatambition.org (Afghanistan), hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan), bdnews24.com (Bangladesh), ebangladesh.com (Bangladesh), bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.co.uk (Bangladesh), tsheringtobgay.com (Bhutan), sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan), bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), merinews.com (India), kafila.org (India), ours-funarena.com (India), raajjenews.blogspot.co.uk (Maldives), hilath.com (Maldives), maldivesresortworkers.wordpress.com (Maldives), nepaliblogger.com (Nepal), sarojpandey.com.np (Nepal), sapkotac.blogspot.com (Nepal), pkhope.com (Pakistan), propakistan.pk (Pakistan), mybitforchange.org (Pakistan), groundviews.org (Sri Lanka), tamilnet.com (Sri Lanka), and dbsjeraj.com (Sri Lanka).

News sites that were owned and operated by people other than professional journalists were identified as citizen journalism sites. In this case, this thesis concentrated on the news sites that demonstrated the common characteristics of independent news sites (i.e. free from the influence of the government or corporate interests, providing alternative news and information to the traditional media, regardless of whether the mainstream media is commercial, public

funded, or government owned). The sampling was further narrowed by selecting citizen journalism sites which came into existence at least three months prior to the time of sampling to ensure that the sites were active. This decision was influenced by the fact that sometimes some citizen journalism sites or blogs cease to exist soon after they first emerge on the Internet (Carpenter, 2009).

To describe the citizen journalism sites briefly: they were all voluntarily-run news sites that were described as citizen journalism sites by their creators and focused on providing news. Basic criteria for the selection of the sites were based on the cross-media patterns including niche, relevancy, monthly reach, and quality (Walsh, 2014).

Only sites that identified themselves as citizen journalism sites or were created and operated by people who identified themselves as citizen journalists from the SAARC countries were sampled for the study. Citizen journalism sites or blogs that were associated with the mainstream media were excluded from the analysis, as it was found that some of such sites or blogs were owned and updated either by the mainstream media itself or by professional journalists associated with the mainstream media. The sites which were operated from outside of the SAARC countries by the SAARC diaspora, who identified themselves as citizen journalists of the SAARC countries, were also included in this study. This decision was influenced by the fact that, although citizen journalists write news articles from abroad, their target readers are back in their respective home countries, and thus the coverage of news was dominated by news issues from their respective countries.

Although the SAARC countries are home to a rich diversity of languages and dialects (Arredondo and Ballard, 2012) and citizen journalists practice journalism

in various different languages, including local native languages, only sites that were published in English were selected for this study. This decision was essential to understanding how citizen journalists from the SAARC countries communicate with the outside culture and also because of the language limitations of the researcher.

However, there were also a few sites which focused on both English and non-English readers and thus published news articles bilingually. In such a case, only the English- language edition was selected for the study and the non-English edition was excluded due to the nature of this study. This means that only the voice of relatively English literate and financially well off people were examined in the study as only those people who could read and write English and who had Internet access were able to participate in English-language citizen journalism. In other words, the scope of the thesis is limited only to the relatively wealthy urban population having access to the Internet from the SAARC countries, including those who were living in other countries, mainly in Western countries. Thus any conclusions from this study are not generalizable to larger populations.

5.3.4 Data collection procedures

University databases were used to undertake a literature review to identify existing research and other related information about the research topic. Google Scholar was also used to obtain additional relevant information. A use was largely made of journal articles, academic books, and other information sources related the research topic, such as government reports, or sources of statistical information. In addition, some relevant materials were obtained through the inter-library loan system, and when it was not possible, most needed materials were purchased from online commercial companies, mainly amazon.co.uk and

ebay.co.uk. The researcher, who manually collected data between January 2012 and December 2012, was solely responsible for data collection. In order to obtain a wider perspective, data were collected from interviews with the publishers and citizen journalists by phone conversations, in person, or e-mail, whichever was applicable.

Data collection is an important aspect of any type of research study, and inaccurate data collection can impact the results of a study and ultimately lead to invalid results (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 2015). Thus, to ensure that data were as correct and complete as possible, several procedures were instituted to maintain the integrity of this study. For example, data was classified into four different types, i.e. news content, comments, images, and hyperlinks. All data was double entered into Microsoft Excel, first by day and then by month, and verified. After data had been entered, the files were checked for impossible values. In addition, a number of cross-checks, especially focusing on demographic details, were carried out to ensure consistency across the data set. For example, files containing data were saved in several folders and were given different unique names to ensure that the latest files contained the updated data. The effectiveness of all data collection and data management processes depended, to a large degree, on the ability of the researcher during the process. Once the data collection task was complete for the day, Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) were properly saved for the next day to resume data collection tasks. If materials were incomplete or missing from the URL (e.g. if news articles appeared different from the previous day), data was recollected again.

Over the period of the process of data collection, several challenges had to be encountered and rectified frequently during the process to guarantee the quality

of the data collected. For example, if the sampled sites could not be opened properly with Explorer, Mozilla Firefox was used as an alternative web browser. In addition, technical support from the university IT Helpdesk had to be sought when the university Internet server was down or did not respond properly due to traffic.

Data was stored on the computer hard drive allocated to the researcher by the Robert Gordon University.

5.3.5 Data coding procedures

A total of 28,235 news materials (i.e. 3,469 news articles, 12,785 comments, 4,063 images, and 7,918 hyperlinks) made up the dataset for this analysis. A coding frame for content analysis normally has between about ten and hundred categories (Audience Dialogue, 2011). With fewer than ten categories, researchers may risk grouping dissimilar answers together simply because the coding frame does not allow them to be separated. On the other hand, with more than hundred categories, there is a risk that two near-identical answers will be placed in different categories (Audience Dialogue, 2011). Based on the quality, this research classified news articles into eleven different major groups for this analysis:

General news: general news covered a wide range of news issues that were published to reflect recent or current news events, news both in the homeland and abroad. This category of news articles were written to offer readers general information on what had happened in a local community (e.g., a car crash on a road) or what was going to take place in the near future in a local community (e.g., a community meeting in a city hall to discuss social issues or national

events, such as festive celebrations). The sites regularly published these types of news articles in order to provide local readers with a summary of news events or future programmes that might be of interest to them. The majority of these news articles was published without reference to any sources and often reflected the views of the authors. One example of such type of news stories was published on merinews.com (India) with the title '*Railways comes up with new rules for reserved tickets to check fraud*'. The story, which was coded as general news, read:

Come December and the traveling rules by the railways are set to see some significant changes in a bid to curb fraud related to reserved tickets committed by touts. Railways in a new rule applicable from December 1, has made it mandatory for passengers traveling in all reserved classes to carry original Id-proof with them.

THE MAJOR change will be felt by those who travel in sleeper class as they will now have to carry an Id proof with them. So far, the condition of carrying identity proofs was mandatory for only those travelers, who undertake their journeys on e-tickets, tatkal tickets and tickets booked in AC class through Passenger Reservation System. Regular passengers have given thumbs to the new changes made by the railways (2 November 2012).

In some cases, the sites published these types of news articles in only a few paragraphs – or even in one sentence. This was particular the case when they published an invitation (e.g. an invitation to a wedding) or a notice of upcoming public events in a local community or in the country (e.g., Deepawali festival of

Hindus). For example, tsheringtobgay.com (Bhutan) published an article wishing the queen of Bhutan happy birthday on her 22nd birthday:

We, in Bhutan, take auspicious signs seriously. And the more auspicious the sign, the better. Today is Duechen Ngazom, the most important day in the Buddhist calendar. Today, coincidentally, is also Her Majesty the Queens' 22nd birth anniversary.

Her Majesty the Queen's first birthday after being crowned the Druk Gyaltsuen falls on the most revered day of the year. How auspicious is that? Very auspicious. And that bodes well, very well, for the tsawasum – our monarchy, our country and our people. Happy birthday, Your Majesty! (4 June 2012).

Political news: political news referred to the coverage of all aspects of political news issues ranging from the state, government, political parties to policy-making both in the home country and abroad.

Business news: business news referred to the coverage of news that dealt with analysing and interpreting the economic changes that took place in society, both in the homeland and abroad. This included any type of news related to business, from personal finance to business at the local market, to the performance of well-known or even not so well known business companies.

Health news: health news included the coverage of health related news information, such as malnutrition and AIDS, both in the homeland and abroad.

Education news: education news referred to the coverage of news related to learning, teaching, knowledge, skills, values, and academic institutions, such as universities or colleges, both in the home country and abroad.

Sports and entertainment news: sports and entertainment news referred to the coverage of sports and entertainment events, such as films or football games both in the homeland and abroad.

Science and technology news: science and technology news referred to the coverage of science and technology, such as the Internet, both in the homeland and abroad.

Crime news: crime news referred to the coverage of news that was related to crime, such as murder or corruption, both in the homeland and abroad.

War and terrorism news: war and terrorism news referred to the coverage of news issues that was related to war and terrorism, such as the coverage of terrorist attacks or war between countries, e.g. bomb explosion by terrorists or boarder conflict between countries, both in the home country and abroad.

Religious and cultural news: the coverage of religious and cultural news related to religion and culture, such as annual festivals, both in the homeland and abroad.

Other: *other* included a wide range of news issues written in two main genres: fiction and non-fiction. Fiction articles described imaginary events and people while non-fiction offered the author's opinions or conjectures upon facts and reality, including biography and history.

In order to analyse in-depth the patterns of news, news articles were classified into three main types: national news, transnational news (i.e., the member of countries of SAARC), and international news. National news referred to the coverage of news from within a country by citizen journalists of that particular country. For example, if an Indian citizen journalist provided the coverage of news and published it on an Indian citizen journalism site, the news article was coded as national news. Transnational news referred to the coverage of news from one of the SAARC countries, which was published on sites from any of the other SAARC countries. For example, if a news article discussed the issues of Nepal but was published on a site from countries other than Nepal, the news article was coded as transnational news. International news referred to the coverage of news from any parts of the world outside the SAARC countries. However, there was a challenge: bdnews24.com (Bangladesh) relied fully on Reuters news for its international news throughout this study. Whilst the site sourced its international news from Reuters, it was decided to code all Reuters news published on bdnews24.com (Bangladesh) as citizen journalism news given the fact that the site officially introduced itself as a citizen journalism site (see <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2011/02/11/citizen-journalism-blog-starts-its-journey>).

The news articles were also classified into five main types: straight and soft news, news analysis and features, opinions, essays or reviews, and interviews. Straight news referred to an immediate reporting of news usually published within twenty-four hours after the event took place. Soft news referred to 'offbeat' news that was written about entertainment, arts, and lifestyles. News analysis and features discussed a wide range of contemporary issues, reflecting a short personal response of the author to the topic in question. News articles,

which quoted other sources to justify the stance of the author, were coded as news analysis and feature news. Opinion, essay, or review referred to the type of articles which were written from the subjective point of view of the author, without quoting any sources. Interviews referred to elicit facts or statements from an interaction with an interviewee on a specific topic.

5.4 Discourse analysis: Choosing a qualitative method

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a term that is used to describe a number of approaches to analyse written, vocal, or sign language or any significant event. It was initially developed out of a critique of structuralist approaches to language, which analysed language as an abstract system void of contextual consideration. Van Dijk (2008) gives an overview of the field of CDA, where the development of CDA is identified as occurring between the 1960s and early 1970s in closely related disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Despite their different disciplinary backgrounds and a great diversity of methods and objects of investigation, some parts of the new fields/paradigms/linguistic sub-disciplines of semiotics, pragmatics, psycho- and sociolinguistics, ethnography of speaking, conversation analysis and discourse studies all deal with discourse and have at least seven dimensions in common (Wodak and Meyer, 2009):

1. an interest in the properties of '*naturally occurring*' language use by real language users (instead of a study of abstract language systems and invented examples)
2. a focus on *larger units than isolated words and sentences* and, hence, new basic units of analysis: texts, discourses, conversations, speech acts, or communicative events

3. the extension of linguistics *beyond sentence grammar* towards a study of action and interaction
4. the extension to *non-verbal (semiotic, multimodal, visual) aspects* of interaction and communication: gestures, images, film, the Internet, and multimedia (p. 2).
5. a focus on dynamic (socio-) cognitive or interactional moves and strategies
6. the study of the functions of (social, cultural, situative and cognitive) *contexts of language use*
7. an analysis of a vast number of *phenomena of text grammar and language use*: coherence, anaphora, topics, macrostructures, speech acts, interactions, turn-taking, signs, politeness, argumentation, rhetoric, mental models, and many other aspects of text and discourse.

CDA as a scholarly tool has now become widespread in other social science disciplines, including communication studies, since the 1990s (Wodak and Meyer, 2008). Thus, it may be suggested that CDA is part of a wider strand in applied linguistics and other human and social sciences that indicate a profound shift in thinking about the relation between language and context and hence the role of language in social life. Over time, various authors have proposed formal definitions of critical discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that views language as a form of social practice. Van Dijk (2003) offers the definition:

critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted,

reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissent research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality (p. 352)

These descriptions suggest that critical discourse analysis primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by texts and talks in the social and political context. This means that an explicit awareness of their role in society is crucial for critical discourse analysts. Continuing a tradition that rejects the possibility of a 'value-free', they argue that science, and especially scholarly discourse, are inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction.

Thus, 'CDA is fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control when these are manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, and legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)' (Wodak, 2009, p. 53).

Thus, critical discourse analysis is by its nature always normative, committed and critical, although such a stance may not always be uncontested in the context of intercultural communications. This thesis adopts a critical discourse analysis approach, particularly the concept of social representation (van Dijk, 1998), in order to analyse the texts used to construct discourse in the context of Bhutanese political and social issues.

5.4.1 Sampling techniques

A purposive sampling was adopted due to the nature of this study. This decision was partly influenced by a short pilot project conducted between June and August 2012. Thus, of the eight SAARC countries, Bhutan was chosen for this case study as it offered some unique characteristics of citizen journalism: although the country has made a new transition from an absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy through its first general election in March 2008, discourses among the Bhutanese people on social and political issues continue both in homeland and abroad. In addition, the country was preparing for the second general election in its history in 2013, creating political debates.

As was the case with content analysis, three sites were sampled for this study: tsheringtobgay.com, bhutannewsservice.com, and sangaykhandu.com. These sites fulfilled the basic requirements for this sampling: they were published in the English language, owned and operated by people other than professional journalists, published from the member countries of SAARC, and published on the Internet. In addition, they were dedicated to providing news articles as regularly as possible.

5.4.2 Sampling period

Overall the aim of this thesis is to investigate the phenomenon of citizen journalism for the year 2012. Thus, the year 2012 was sampled for the period of study, as this period saw several important events, including presidential elections, in the SAARC countries. Bhutan being a small country, such political events in neighbouring countries impacts its national politics. In addition, the year saw several suicides among Bhutanese refugees in the West.

5.4.3 Data collection procedures

To ensure that data was as correct and complete as possible, several procedures were instituted to maintain the integrity of this study. For example, news articles were first thoroughly read before deciding whether they should be used for this analysis. Each individual news article was printed and stored in a separate index file. A total of eighty-three critical news articles — thirty-two from tsheringtobgay.com, eleven from sangaykhandu.com, and forty from bhutannewsservice.com — were identified as being written by ordinary people who identified themselves as citizen journalists. The researcher was solely responsible for collecting data.

5.4.4 Criteria for coding

As one of the aims of this thesis was to analyse discourses in the coverage of Bhutanese citizen journalism news, it was decided to analyse news articles that were published during the year 2012. This period saw several important events in Bhutan, and thus Bhutanese citizen journalists were engaged in a wide range of discourses. For example, Bhutan was preparing for its second general election since its transition from an absolute monarchy to a multi-party democracy in 2008, the Bhutanese refugees were experiencing new challenges in their new countries, with some committing suicide in host countries in the West, and the media of Bhutan often covered land corruption scandals involving some prominent politicians in Bhutan.

To ensure that data was as correct and complete as possible, several procedures were instituted to maintain the integrity of this study. In order to achieve this

objective, news articles were thoroughly read before deciding whether they should be used for this analysis.

Initial data collection from the sites in the sample produced a dataset with a total of six hundred eleven news articles during this period – four hundred ninety-three by bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), one hundred seven by Tsheringtobgay.com (Bhutan), and eleven by sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan). However, only eighty-three of these news articles were selected for further analysis due to their relationship with this study – forty from bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), thirty-two from tsheringtobgay.com (Bhutan), and eleven from sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan). News articles that were published in the English language were analysed due to the objective of this study (i.e., the focus of this study was on English language news articles).

Only news articles that provided critical views on issues being discussed in the coverage of news were selected for this analysis. Other types of news articles, including ones that could be coded as 'general news' (i.e., news articles offering readers general information on the public affairs), were excluded from the study, as these articles were published mainly to provide readers with news updates and thus offered little analysis. Therefore, the articles that were selected for this study involved the discussion of opinions, news analysis, and essays and reviews, as these types of news articles offered critical views and opinions on the issues being discussed in news coverage.

The analysis also revealed that the sites often re-published news articles taken from the mainstream media. Whilst these news articles were published on the sampled sites, they were treated as mainstream media news products and therefore excluded from the analysis. Each individual news article was printed

and stored in a separate index file. The researcher was solely responsible for collecting data.

Chapter Six

6. Citizen journalism: An analysis of news content from the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation

This chapter provides the pattern of citizen journalism news in the sample by analysing news articles and the accompanying images, comments, and hyperlinks (hereafter referred to as supplementary materials) from a quantitative perspective. The main aim of the chapter is to explore a general news trend in the sample. The first part of the chapter discusses an overall pattern of news, providing an overview of dataset made of a wide range of news and supplementary materials for this analysis.

The second part of the chapter discusses a content analysis of news as well as supplementary materials published by citizen journalists in the sample. The third part of the chapter provides some of the key characteristics of citizen journalism, which were identified through a cursory observation of the sites and formal communication with some of the prominent publishers and editors within the sample.

The last two parts of the chapter provide an overall pattern of citizen journalism news in the sample, reflecting a general news trend of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries.

The emergence of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is often seen to represent what Atton (2009) calls alternative media, which, according to him, allows citizen journalists to engage in the media, making spaces for democracy, thereby extending and transforming public sphere. The term 'spaces' here is understood to refer to the broader context, within which ordinary people as

citizen journalists can create and distribute news articles and other supplementary materials independently on the Internet. The sites in this study are considered as spaces as they facilitate citizen journalism as a mode of civic engagement. Because of the focus on the sites as offering a platform for ordinary people to provide coverage of news from their own perspective, the empirical evidence provided in this chapter derives largely from the primary data.

Table 2
(Basic prolific features of sampled sites)

Names of countries	Number of sites owned and operated by an individual	Number of sites operated by more than one individual	Numbers of sites originated from home country	Number of sites originated from foreign countries	Number of sites with unspecified origin of the country
Afghanistan	3	0	2	1	1
Bangladesh	2	1	2	1	0
Bhutan	2	1	2	1	0
India	2	1	3	0	0
Maldives	3	0	3	0	0
Nepal	3	0	2	1	0
Pakistan	0	3	3	0	0
Sri Lanka	3	0	3	0	1
Total	18	6	20	2	2

Table 3
(Social networking features)

Countries	Number of sites featuring Facebook	Number of sites not featuring Facebook	Number of sites featuring Twitter	Number sites not featuring Twitter	Number of sites with basic user guidelines	Numbers of sites without user guidelines
Afghanistan	3	0	2	1	0	3
Bangladesh	3	0	2	1	1	2
Bhutan	2	1	2	1	1	2
India	3	0	3	0	2	1
Maldives	2	1	2	1	0	3
Nepal	3	0	3	0	0	3
Pakistan	3	0	3	0	1	2
Sri Lanka	2	1	2	1	2	1
Total	21	3	19	5	7	17

6.1 An overview of news articles and supplementary materials

An analysis of news content in the sample demonstrated that the sites provided coverage of news on a wide range of news subjects. The dataset was made up of a total of 3,469 news articles collected over the year. The sampled sites also made a good use of supplementary materials (i.e. 4,063 images and 7,918 hyperlinks) to enhance these news articles. In addition, there were 12,785 comments, which were published about news articles on different subjects.

As Table 4 demonstrates, the sites provided coverage of news in four main types: straight news (35%), news analysis and feature (15%), essay and opinion (25%), and interview (1%). There was also a group of articles called *other*, which made up 24% of the total stories in the sample. The *other* articles may be divided into two main categories for this analysis: nonfiction and fiction. The nonfiction articles made up 15% of the total *other* articles while fiction articles made up the rest, i.e. 9%.

The greatest number of news articles was coded as political, which accounted for 24% of the total news articles in the sample while war and terrorism news made up less than 0.50%. Similarly, 61% of the total news content was coded as national, followed by international (14%), and transnational (1%). This finding is similar to one found in the coverage of national newspapers from the Netherlands, in which coverage of national news dominated the international news (Lynch & Peer, 2012).

When analysing the pattern at a national level (i.e. country by country), there were some differences between the sites in terms of news articles and supplementary materials. For example, the most prolific publishers of news articles were the Indian sites, which provided a total of 1,854 news articles, that

is, 53% of the total news articles in the sample. The sampled sites from Sri Lanka provided the second largest number of news articles (16%), followed by Pakistan (14%), Bangladesh (5%), and Bhutan (5%). On the other hand, the sampled sites from Afghanistan, the Maldives, and Nepal provided just 7% of the total news articles, which is an average of 0.80% of the total news articles for each site.

No evidence emerged clearly describing these patterns, but it may be suggested that the Indian sites provided the greatest number of news articles as India is seen as the epicentre of media development in the history of South Asian media. In addition, the India media is flourishing in recent decades, and TV and radio outlets are seen proliferating in recent decades (Thussu, 2007). With increasing literacy rate, India has also the world's second largest newspaper market after China (Barathi, 2011; Roy, 2011). On the other hand, governments and political environments, literacy rate, as well as under-developed media systems may be described as contributing factors in the smallest number of news production from Afghanistan, the Maldives, and Nepal.

The analysis revealed that the sampled sites used a variety of supplementary materials to enhance news articles. However, the pattern was different from that of news articles. For example, the sites published more political news articles in their coverage of news but used more images to illustrate local news articles, which made up 20% of the total images in the sample. A similar pattern was seen with hyperlinks, with local news publishing 20% of the total hyperlinks. On the other hand, the least number of images was used with the coverage of war and terrorism (0.5%). This pattern suggests that the sites used more

supplementary materials with local news as citizen journalists had greater access to local news events, providing more relevant supplementary materials.

Although each of the SAARC country offered common characteristics when providing an introduction of South Asian history and the region's unity, the analysis revealed that the sampled sites pay little attention to SAARC-related news issues. SAARC-related news articles made up the least number of news while national news made up the greatest number of news articles. Similarly, straight news articles made the largest number of news while interview represented the least (see Table 4).

Table 4
(News article hierarchy by news subject)

News category by subject	Total articles	National	Transnational	International	General and straight news	News analysis and feature	Essay, opinion, and review	Interview	Total news by individual subject	Accumulated news by national, transnational international	Total news by subjects
Society & public news (National)											
General news	340	340			9.80%				9.80%		
News analysis and feature	99	99				2.85%			2.85%		
Essay, opinion, and review	181	181					5.22%		5.22%		
Interview	15	15						0.43%	0.43%		
									18.30%	18.30%	
Society & public new (Transnational)											
General news	1		1		0.03%				0.03%		
News analysis and feature	3		3			0.09%			0.09%		
Essay, opinion, and review	1		1				0.03%		0.03%		
									0.15%	0.15%	
Society & public news (International)											
General news	10			10	0.29%				0.29%		
News analysis and feature	9			9		0.26%			0.26%		
Essay, opinion, and review	11			11			0.32%		0.32%		
									0.87%	0.87%	
										19.32%	19.32%
Political news (National)											
General news	198	198			5.71%				5.71%		
News analysis and feature	192	192				5.53%			5.53%		
Essay, opinion, and review	327	327					9.43%		9.43%		
Interview	13	13						0.37%	0.37%		
									21.04%	21.04%	
Political news (Transnational)											
General news	5		5		0.14%				0.14%		
News analysis and feature	4		4			0.12%			0.12%		
Essay, opinion, and review	7		7				0.20%		0.20%		
									0.46%	0.46%	
Political news (International)											
General news	38			38	1.10%				1.10%		
News analysis and feature	18			18		0.52%			0.52%		
Essay, opinion, and review	45			45			1.30%		1.30%		
									2.92%	2.92%	
										24.42%	24.42%
Business news (National)											
General news	144	144			4.15%				4.10%		
News analysis and feature	57	57				1.64%			1.64%		

Essay, opinion, and review	35	35			1.01%		1.01%		
Interview	2	2				0.06%	0.06%		
Business news (International)							6.81%	6.85%	
General news	14		14	0.40%			0.40%		
News analysis and feature	10		10		0.29%		0.29%		
Essay, opinion, and review	12		12			0.35%	0.35%		
							1.04%	1.04%	
								7.90%	7.85%
Health news (National)									
General news	14	14		0.40%			0.40%		
News analysis and feature	6	6			0.17%		0.17%		
Essay, opinion, and review	5	5				0.14%	0.14%		
Interview	1	1					0.03%	0.03%	
							0.74%	0.74%	
Health news (Transnational)									
Essay, opinion, and review	2		2			0.06%	0.06%		
							0.06%	0.06%	
Health news (International)									
General news	8		8	0.23%			0.23%		
News analysis and feature	14		14		0.40%		0.40%		
Essay, opinion, and review	17		17			0.49%	0.49%		
							1.12%	1.12%	
								1.92%	1.92%
Education news (National)									
General news	32	32		0.92%			0.92%		
News analysis and feature	7	7			0.20%		0.20%		
Essay, opinion, and review	21	21				0.61%	0.61%		
Interview	1	1					0.03%	0.03%	
							1.76%	1.76%	
Education news (Transnational)									
General news	1		1	0.03%			0.03%		
							0.03%	0.03%	
Education news (International)									
General news	4		4	0.12%			0.12%		
News analysis and feature	2		2		0.06%		0.06%		
Essay, opinion, and review	2		2			0.06%	0.06%		
							0.24%	0.24%	
								2.03%	2.03%
Sports & entertainment news (National)									
General news	129	129		3.72%			3.72%		
News analysis and feature	39	39			1.12%		1.12%		
Essay, opinion, and review	60	60				1.73%	1.73%		
Interview	3	3					0.09%	0.09%	
							6.66%	6.66%	
Sports & entertainment news									

(Transnational)									
General news	1			0.03%				0.03%	
Essay, opinion, and review	4		4			0.12%		0.12%	
								0.15%	0.15%
Sports & entertainment news (International)									
General news	77		77	2.22%				2.22%	
News analysis and feature	19		19		0.55%			0.55%	
Essay, opinion, and review	24		24			0.69%		0.69%	
								3.46%	3.46%
									10.27%
									10.27%
Science & technology news (National)									
General news	52	52		1.50%				1.50%	
News analysis and feature	7	7			0.20%			0.20%	
Essay, opinion, and review	10	10				0.29%		0.29%	
								1.99%	1.99%
Science & technology news (Transnational)									
Essay, opinion, and review	1		1			0.03%		0.03%	
								0.03%	0.03%
Science & technology news (International)									
General news	57		57	1.64%				1.64%	
News analysis and feature	6		6		0.17%			0.17%	
Essay, opinion, and review	29		29			0.84%		0.84%	
Interview	2		2				0.06%	0.06%	
								2.71%	2.71%
									4.73%
									4.73%
Crime news (National)									
General news	32	32		0.92%				0.92%	
News analysis and feature	11	11			0.32%			0.32%	
Essay, opinion, and review	25	25				0.72%		0.72%	
								1.96%	1.96%
Crime news (Transnational)									
General news	7		7	0.20%				0.20%	
								0.20%	0.20%
Crime news (International)									
General news	6		6	0.17%				0.17%	
								0.17%	0.17%
									2.33%
									2.33%
War & terrorism news (National)									
General news	6	6		0.17%				0.17%	
News analysis and feature	3	3			0.09%			0.09%	
Essay, opinion, and review	2	2				0.06%		0.06%	
								0.32%	0.32%
War & terrorism news (International)									
General news	1		1	0.03%				0.03%	

Essay, opinion, and review	3		3	0.09%		0.09%		0.12%	0.12%
								0.44%	0.44%
Religious & cultural news (National)									
General news	20	20		0.58%		0.58%			
News analysis and feature	12	12		0.35%		0.35%			
Essay, opinion, and review	28	28			0.81%	0.81%		1.74%	1.74%
Religion & culture news (Transnational)									
General news	3	3		0.09%		0.09%			
Essay, opinion, and review	1	1			0.03%	0.03%		0.12%	0.12%
Religious & cultural news (International)									
General news	24		24	0.69%		0.69%			
Essay, opinion, and review	12		12		0.35%	0.35%			
Interview	3		3			0.09%		1.13%	1.13%
								2.99%	2.99%
			2129	41	477				
Total			61.37%	1.18%	13.75%	35.28%	15.02%	24.85%	1.15%
Other									
Nonfiction	513	14.79%						14.79%	
Fiction	309	8.91%						8.91%	
									23.70%
	3469								100%

6.2 A content analysis of news and supplementary materials

A review of the coverage of news by the sampled sites suggests that there is no uniformity in the distribution of news. Proportional differences were found between the sampled sites, even within the same country. To fully understand the news pattern, it was decided to analyse the news articles from various perspectives. Broadly speaking, news articles in this study were classified into two different groups: those that were given 'high priority', and those that were given 'low priority'. The first category included coverage of local news, political news, and sports and entertainment news, which made up more than 10% of the total news articles in the sample in each news subject coded.

The second category of news included news articles related to business, health, education, science and technology, crime, war and terrorism, religion and culture. This category offered less than 10% of the total news articles in the sample in each subject coded. In addition, a content analysis of the *other* articles and supplementary materials has been provided for a broader understanding of the citizen journalism phenomenon in the SAARC countries.

6.2.1 Analysing news articles given high priority

As Table 5 demonstrates, this category of news subjects (given high priority by the sampled sites) made up 54% of the total news articles in the sample. With the exception of sapkotac.blogspot.co.uk (Nepal), which provided no news articles at all, the majority of the sampled sites provided coverage of news on most of the news subjects coded in this category.

The analysis revealed diversified news patterns, with some of the sampled sites providing more news articles than others. Local news was the most regularly

covered news subject, which made up 20% of the total news articles in the sample. However, the largest number of news articles were coded as political, which accounted for 24% of the total news articles in the sample.

Overall, the Indian sampled sites provided the largest amount of news coverage by publishing 47% of the total in the sample while the Nepalese sampled sites offered less than 2% of the total news articles in the sample. It was not possible to analyse this pattern at an individual level to investigate reasons for such differences, but it is probably not a coincidence that sampled sites providing the larger number of news articles are based in India, where the Internet is relatively most advanced (Rangaswamy, 2007), which is important when offering the coverage of news on the Internet. It might also be a connection with the comparative age of journalism as a whole in the country.

The analysis revealed that there were striking similarities between the sampled sites inside a country, giving an impression of national news trends, and suggesting that the sampled sites inside a country had more or less similar news values. However, they differed considerably when considered from country to country. For example, the Afghan sampled sites provided more local news articles but published fewer political news articles. On the other hand, the sampled sites from Sri Lanka provided more political news articles but published fewer local news articles. A similar pattern was observed in the coverage of business news by the sampled sites from India whereby they provided business news articles more frequently.

On the other hand, the Bhutanese sampled sites offered no coverage of business news at all. While each site differed from the other when providing the coverage of news, there was a pattern of national news trends demonstrating similar news

values in the coverage of news from the same country. No evidence emerged clearly describing this pattern, but it may be suggested that there is some form of correlation between the sites inside a country, which may have been influenced by the media system, such as media rule or political environments, of the respective country.

It is interesting that fifteen of the sampled sites devoted more than one-fifth of their total news articles to local news, but some of these proportions were made up from a small number of news articles. For example, sarojpandey.com.np (Nepal) provided a total of sixteen news articles during the study, but ten of them were coded as local, making 63% of its total news articles being local news. In fact, this figure is significantly small given the number of news articles in the sample, which may provide a reasonable description of an overall news pattern from the country. A similar pattern emerged in the coverage of news by some of the sites, with local news being given more priority.

This finding suggests that providing the coverage of local news is more important to the sampled sites because local news perhaps speaks about things that directly affect the lives of local readers and readers read more local news, as it has a strong reputation for providing voices and support to local campaigns and resident concerns (Metykova et al., 2010). This pattern echoes the findings of the content analysis of citizen journalism and online newspaper stories by Carpenter (2009), which suggested that citizen journalism focuses more on local news.

On the other hand, the coverage of political news offered a somewhat different pattern. Although political news was the second most regularly covered news subject in the sample, only twenty of the sampled sites provided the coverage of

news on this subject. The analysis also revealed more differences between individual sites, but, with few exceptions, these differences were partially inside a country. For example, groundviews.org (Sri Lanka) devoted roughly 50% of its total news articles to politics. A similar pattern was seen in the coverage of dbsjeyaraj.com (Sri Lanka).

On the other hand, hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan) devoted less than 3% of its total news articles to this subject, indicating that political news was less significant. This proportion is significantly small considering the political environments of the country, which has been a deadly battlefield for war and terrorism in recent decades. As a result, the political stability in Afghanistan has been threatened by political crisis and insurgent groups such as the Taliban.

However, it may be suggested that the site provided fewer political news articles, as the site was solely dedicated to a group of ethnic people, known as Hazara, who have been subjected to genocide, forced displacements, slavery, and systematic discrimination for decades in their own country (www.hazarapeople.com/2012/04/21/hazara-protesters-letter-to-ministers-of-foreign-affairs/). As a result, Hazara citizen journalists had little access to participate in debates of national politics.

What is more interesting is that the majority of the sampled sites reflected specific political events in their coverage of news by following political news closely, just like the mainstream media. This was particularly the case in the coverage of the 2012 presidential election in India. The Indian sampled sites not only updated their political news more regularly during the election campaign, but also provided more political news articles during this time. At the end of the campaign there was particularly intensive coverage of political news by the

Indian sites. Between July 1 and July 7, 2012, a total of forty news articles on merinews.com (India) were coded as political. This figure was an increase of 100% compared to the same period in June 2012.

However, there was a decrease of political news articles by 68% in the following month when election campaigns were over. A similar pattern was found in the coverage of political news by the sampled sites from the Maldives during the political crisis that led to the resignation of President Mahamed Nasheed in February 2012.

These findings suggest that covering local and political news is the main and high priority of citizen journalism in the sample. By focusing more on local and political news events, the sites not only offer news on these subjects, but also actively engage in debates by following political events in the country. It may also be suggested that the sites aim to supplement the coverage of news by providing additional or not covered local news by the mainstream media. In addition, it may be suggested that the sites provide the coverage of news from alternative perspectives.

Although mainstream media outlets, such as television, provide a wide range of news coverage ranging from local news to war and terrorism in the world, this pattern of news echoes the research report of Ngo (2014) that suggested that the coverage of French television was dominated by political news, although local news events were covered more frequently.

On the other hand, the coverage of sports and entertainment news provided a different pattern in which only fifteen sampled sites provided news articles on the subject. Most notably, merinews.com (India) provided the largest amount of sports and entertainment news (76%) while akidwithgreatambition.org

(Afghanistan), badnews24.com (Bangladesh), and hilath.com (Maldives) provided less than 0.30% of the total each. In fact, two of the Indian sampled sites — merinews.com and ours-funarena.com — alone provided more than 83% of the total sports and entertainment news. No other studies have been undertaken into the coverage of sports and entertainment in citizen journalism, so it was not possible to make any comparisons, but this finding gives us an impression that the Indian sampled sites reflect the continuing contribution of the Indian entertainment industry (Bollywood) by providing the largest number of news articles on the subject.

Table 5
(Distribution patterns of news subjects given high priority)

Names of news subjects	alika rimi.ca	akidwith greatambition.org	hazara people.com	bdnews 24.com	ebangla desh.com	banglades hwatchdog.blogspot.co.uk	tshering tobgay.com	sangayk handu.com	bhutan news service.com	merinews.com	kafila.org	ours- funarena.com	raajnews.blogspot.co.uk	hilath.com	maldives resortworkers.wordpress.com	nepalib logger.com	sarojpan dey.com.np	sapkotac.blogspot.com	pkhope.com	propakista ni.pk	mybitfor change.org	ground views.org	tamilnet.com	dbsjeyaraj.com	Total	Percentage
General news	1	4	19	30	9	20	6	1	72	255	48	13	1	26	7	1	10	0	8	42	9	22	11	63	678	19.54
Political news	0	0	1	10	13	23	13	10	24	278	31	5	22	17	3	2	1	0	161	0	4	51	25	147	841	24.20
Sports & entertainment news	0	1	2	1	0	10	0	0	0	271	2	26	0	1	0	8	3	0	8	2	0	4	3	14	356	10.26
<i>Other</i> articles	0	12	10	6	2	19	0	8	20	431	29	4	0	12	2	4	1	10	0	82	3	15	96	55	821	23.70
Total	1	17	32	47	24	72	19	19	116	1235	110	48	23	56	12	15	15	10	177	126	16	92	135	279	2696	77.70

6.2.2 Analysing news articles given low priority

As Table 6 demonstrates, this category of news subjects (given low priority by the sampled sites) made up 22% of the total news articles in the sample. Although a few of the sampled sites regularly provided the coverage of news on most of the news subjects, often in a large amount, three of the sampled sites — alikarimi.com (Afghanistan), sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan), and nepaliblogger.com (Nepal) — provided no coverage of news in the low priority news subjects, suggesting that news subjects in this category were insignificant for coverage.

The analysis revealed that business news was the most covered news subject in this category. Sixteen of the sampled sites provided coverage of business news, making up 8% of the total news articles in the sample. However, the distribution of such news articles was not uniform. For example, three sites — merinews.com from India (51%), sapkotac.blogspot.com from Nepal (13%), and propakistani.pk from Pakistan (22%) — provided 86% of the total news articles on this subject whilst 13 of the other sampled sites provided just 14% of the total, which is an average of 1% by each sampled site.

Overall, war and terrorism news was the least covered news subject on which only five of the sampled sites provided less than 0.50% of the total news articles in the sample. Most notably, merinews.com (India) dominated the coverage of news by providing 53% of the total news articles on the subject whilst bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.com (Bangladesh) and kafila.org (India) offered just 7% of the total each. This proportion is significantly small given the SAARC countries' long experience of dealing with war and terrorism from the hijacking of Indian Airlines by terrorists in 1999 to the civil wars of Sri Lanka and Nepal in

recent decades. Moreover, the presence of terrorists continues to threaten peace and stability in the SAARC countries.

It was not possible to examine why war and terrorism made up the least amount of news coverage, but it might be suggested that citizen journalists are hesitant to cover war and terrorism, as Islamic militants in the SAARC countries are numerous and powerful and they frequently target reporters for reporting negative news about their actions. According to Reporters without Borders (2014), the SAARC countries are one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists due to the presence of terrorists.

A similar pattern was seen in the coverage of crime news, which made up 2% of the total news articles in the sample. What makes this pattern so important is that some of the sampled sites demonstrated a particular news trend within their respective countries, meaning that the sampled sites from the same country gave the same level of priority to their news coverage. For example, all of the sampled sites from Sri Lanka provided coverage of crime news, indicating that crime news was important to them.

On the other hand, all of the sampled sites from Nepal and Pakistan provided no coverage of crime news, despite regularly providing news articles on other news subjects. There was also another pattern in which only one of the sampled sites from Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, and the Maldives offered a minimal coverage of news on this subject (i.e. an average of 1% of the total crime news by each sampled site).

Overall, these findings suggest that the sampled sites give less priority to crime news. No evidence emerged suggesting that the sampled sites were abandoning the coverage of crime news, but this finding is in sharp contrast to the research

report by Balachandran (2008), which argued that crimes in the SAARC countries are on the rise due to the existence of dangerous criminal organizations and flourishing drug trades. In addition, although citizen journalism is growing in the SAARC countries, the media is often controlled by political parties and elite groups for their own purposes (Thussu, 2007).

Moreover, in some countries, such as Bangladesh and the Maldives, citizen journalists are often harassed or even killed for writing negative news articles, especially about crime. Similar patterns were found in the coverage of health, education, and religion and culture, in which only a few sampled sites provided any coverage of news. Overall, with the exception of merinews.com (India), the majority of the sampled sites in the category overall provided coverage of news less regularly.

Table 6
(Distribution patterns of news subjects given low priority)

Names of news subjects	alika alika alika	Total	Percentage																							
Business news	0	2	0	1	1	9	3	0	5	140	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	36	0	61	1	2	0	8	274	7.90
Health news	0	2	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	56	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	67	1.93
Education news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	59	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	5	3	70	2.02	
Science & technology news	0	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	53	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	101	0	0	0	1	163	4.70	
Crime news	0	0	9	0	1	0	0	0	1	55	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	81	2.33	
War & terrorism news	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	15	0.43
Religious & cultural news	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	82	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	8	2	0	5	103	2.97	
Total	0	10	12	6	2	14	3	0	7	453	2	6	1	5	5	0	1	37	0	164	9	8	8	21	773	22.3

6.2.3 Diaspora news

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, there were five sites in the sample which focused on providing the coverage of diaspora news from different parts of the world and made up 6% of the total news in the sample. Although the sites regularly provided the coverage of diaspora news, this proportion may be considered small given the number of news articles in the sample.

When analysing this pattern, it became clear that hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan) and bhutanewsservice.com (Bhutan) did not cover any general local news (e.g. local council meetings) in their homelands. In fact, both of these sites gave the greatest priority to news about diaspora people and diaspora community activities abroad. As can be seen from Table 7, bhutanewsservice.com (Bhutan) devoted 59% of its total news articles that discussed news issues about diaspora people abroad (e.g. discussion about what was going on in refugee camps in Nepal and what was happening in newly settled Bhutanese communities in different parts of the world), but there was not any coverage of local news from Bhutan. A similar pattern was seen in the coverage of news by hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan), which devoted 43% of its total news articles to general news about the Hazara people and their community activities abroad, but there was not any coverage of local news issues from Afghanistan.

It may be suggested that the citizen journalists from these two sites had only limited access to the news on local issues from their respective countries, as both groups of these people, Hazara people and Bhutanese refugees, face persistent discrimination in their home countries. Thus, the sites were unable to publish any general local news from their home countries.

What was common between these two sites was the coverage of cultural and religious news on which both of these sites devoted less than 3% of their total news articles. It is interesting to note that hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan) devoted 20% of its total news coverage to crime news, while bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan) devoted the same proportion of its total news articles to political news. Similarly, war and terrorism news was seen as important for hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan) and the site devoted 5% of its total news articles to coverage of these issues while this news subject was insignificant for bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan). However, the site devoted 4% of its total news articles to business news on which hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan) published no news articles at all.

On the other hand, the other three diaspora sites demonstrated different patterns from those discussed above. Overall, ebangladesh.com (Bangladesh) seemed a more political site in comparison to alikaarimi.ca (Afghanistan) and nepalibloger.com (Nepal), both of which devoted a small number of news articles to political news. In fact, ebangladesh.com (Bangladesh) devoted 50% of its total news articles to political news followed by general news (35%). In addition, the site devoted 4% of its total news articles to business news and crime news. On the other side, nepalibloger.com (Nepal) gave the greatest priority to sport and entertainment news, on which the site devoted 79% of its total news articles but did not provide the coverage of business news and crime news which was covered by ebangladesh.com (Bangladesh). There was also a small number of general news items from Nepal, which made up 2% of its total news articles.

However, a different pattern emerged in the coverage of alikaarimi.ca (Afghanistan) whereby the site devoted 100% of its total news articles related to

local news and this proportion derived from a small number of news articles, indicating that the site in fact paid little attention to the coverage of any news.

These proportional differences in the coverage of news by diasporic sites may be seen as a result of the ability of citizen journalists providing news coverage. For example, citizen journalists writing on bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan) and hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan) – who face persistent discrimination in their home countries and are living in different parts of the world due to political reasons – provided relatively a small number of news articles perhaps due to their limited access to news events, particularly in their own homeland. As a result, they focused more on covering news from their host nations than from their own homelands. On the other hand, citizen journalists writing on nepaliblogger.com (Nepal) enjoy relatively better access to news events in their homeland and thus provide more coverage of national news. Similar patterns were observed in the coverage of news by the two other sites, suggesting that citizen journalists from the diasporic community have in fact diverse news focus.

In general, all of the sites in this category enhanced news articles with a large number of supplemental materials and created news interactive activities between readers and editors by allowing them to post their comments about news articles. However, with few exceptions, the overall pattern of supplemental materials was similar to the one found in the general pattern of news in this study.

Overall, the pattern of diaspora news in the study echoes the findings of Ranganathan (2009) that suggested that members of a diaspora primarily participate in the media to tell their stories or express their opinions, which means diaspora citizens establish and maintain active national and family

connections on the Internet. In the case of political activists fleeing their nations in fear of persecution from an oppressor and seeking refugee status in countries that are sympathetic to their cause, citizen journalism serves as an alternative platform for these people to raise their voice and continue their activism safely in foreign lands.

Table 7

(Distribution of news articles and supplemental materials on the *other*)

Names of news subjects	Alikarimi.ca (News content)				Hazarapeople.com (News content)				Ebangladesh.com (News content)				Bhutannewsservice.com (News content)				Nepaliblogger.com (News content)			
	Image	Comment	Hyperlink	News	Image	Comment	Hyperlink	News	Image	Comment	Hyperlink	News	Image	Comment	Hyperlink	News	Image	Comment	Hyperlink	
General news	3	5	0	19	74	19	16	9	10	10	16	72	85	243	705	1	1	0	0	
Political news	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	13	11	22	11	24	21	56	249	2	2	0	5	
Business news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	4	5	4	6	50	0	0	0	0	
Health news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Education news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Sports & entertainment news	0	0	0	2	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	37	35	33	
Science & technology news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Crime news	0	0	0	9	16	14	2	1	1	7	2	1	0	12	10	0	0	0	0	
War & terrorism news	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Religious & cultural news	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Other</i> articles	0	0	0	10	83	5	3	2	2	5	14	20	92	58	193	4	7	3	20	
Total	3	5	0	44	184	39	24	26	24	46	47	123	202	385	1207	15	47	38	58	

6.2.4 Other articles

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, there was also a group of fiction and nonfiction stories that could not be placed into one of the news categories in the sample. Thus, as Nikolaev (2009), the *other* category was created in order to fully comprehend the variety of stories in the sample. The creation of the *other* category was essential, as although nonfiction stories are often classified as newspaper stories, the writer can make false assertions in his work, providing his fabricated personal accounts, which may not be considered as news articles (Kurland, 2000). Furthermore, Nip (2007) argues that [citizen] journalism needs to include some original interviewing, reporting, or analysis of events or issues, and none of the articles in this category demonstrated these qualities.

Thus, fiction and nonfiction stories were classified as *other* category stories for the purpose of this thesis, as this thesis aims to analyse citizen journalism in which a citizen or a group of citizens play an active role in the process of 'collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information, with the intent of providing independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires' (Bowman and Willis, 2003, p. 9). However, it should be noted that fiction and nonfiction stories were analysed together, as the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is increasingly blurring in recently years (Kurland, 2000).

As Table 8 demonstrates, with the exception of four, the majority of the sampled sites provided the *other* stories as part of citizen journalism, making up 24% of the total stories in the sample. However, the distribution of the *other* stories was diverse. The analysis revealed more differences between the individual sites — but these differences were only partially within a country. For example, the

sampled sites from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Nepal carried fewer *other* articles than the sampled sites from India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In fact, nearly 80% of the total *other* articles were published on three different sampled sites — merinews.com (India), tamilnet.com (Sri Lanka), and propakistani.pk (Pakistan). On the other hand, eight of the sites devoted less than 1% of their total stories in this category.

Although the *other* articles made up nearly one-fourth of the total news articles in the sample, this pattern may not necessarily suggest a shift in the interest of readers (e.g. from journalistic news articles to fiction), but may rather reflect the media practice of the sampled sites. Thus, this pattern does not suggest a standard set of media practices in the sample. Therefore, the meaning of this finding lies in the local context of the sampled sites, as citizens practice journalism in three different situations: witnessing — when ordinary citizens document and disseminate reports and images of the events they encounter — activism, and strategic media output and contribution of political activists and dissidents whether videos, images, or social media participation (Al-Ghazzi, 2014).

As in the previous case, it was not possible to discern why the majority of the sampled sites paid little attention to this category, but it may be suggested that this is perhaps partly due to the English language not being the first language in the sample. It may also be due to the media system of the respective countries. For example, in countries such as Bhutan and Sri Lanka, the media is expected to work alongside the government and in some countries, such as Bangladesh and the Maldives, governments frequently discourage citizen journalists.

It might not come as a surprise — as citizen journalists are not trained journalists and thus they often express views from their personal point of view — that the sites in the sample were fairly subjective, particularly in this *other* category, which reflected the more personal views and opinions of the authors. This assertion may be made on the fact that the majority of the authors in this *other* category used the first-person narrator, reflecting personal views and opinions of the subjects they discussed.

While it is difficult to distinguish between opinion pieces and *other* news articles in this *other* category — both of which often used the first-person narrator — the *other* articles reflected more emotional expression of the author. For example, an article in akidwithgreatambition.org (Afghanistan) was coded as *other*, which read:

I woke up to a glorious morning today. The skies were clear. And the heavens promised a warm, sunny day (12 May 2012).

On the other hand, opinion articles reflected more critical views about news issues being discussed. An example of this was an article that was published on tsheringtobgay.com (Bhutan) which read:

About two years ago, I'd written about a group of residents in Hejo, Thimpu. Their land had been taken over the government. But they had not accepted the government's compensation for their land. They claimed that the government's compensation rate — set by the Property Assessment and Valuation Agency, PAVA — was too low (11 October 2012).

Some of the authors also used images, often quoting their sources and giving photo credit to the specific copyright owner. In addition, the sites made good use of supplementary materials in this other category. Overall, one fifth of the total supplementary materials (i.e. comments 19%, images 24%, and hyperlinks 23%) were used on this other category. These two examples illustrate that, although the focus of the coverage of news is centered on local issues, the ways in which they are presented varied. The first example discusses the fantasy of the author. By referring to 'heavens', the author describes his complex understanding of an imagined world. The second article, on the other hand, discusses the author's personal observation of Heju residents. By discussing the action of the government, the author also attempts to justify his arguments in his articles.

Table 8

(Distribution Patterns of *other* articles and supplementary materials)

Names of news feature from the other theme	talikarimi.ca	akidwithgreatambition.org	hazarapeople.com	bdnews24.com	ebangladesh.com	bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.co.uk	tsheringtobgay.com	sangaykhandu.com	bhutannewsservice.com	merinews.com	kafila.org	ours-funarena.com	raajjnews.blogspot.co.uk	hilath.com	maldivesortworkers.wordpress.com	nepaliblogger.com	sarojpandey.com.np	sapkotac.blogspot.com	pkhope.com	propakistani.pk	mybitforchange.org	groundviews.org	tamilnet.com	dbseyaraj.com	Total	Percentage
News articles	0	12	10	6	2	19	0	8	20	431	29	4	0	12	2	4	1	10	0	82	3	15	96	55	821	23.70
Comment & feedback	0	21	5	2	5	21	0	0	58	131	168	2	0	0	4	3	0	1	0	1745	12	170	0	115	2463	19.26
Images	0	5	83	6	2	17	0	0	92	280	32	4	0	8	2	7	0	8	0	116	5	126	132	45	970	23.87
Hyperlinks	0	2	3	0	14	0	0	0	193	400	96	14	0	9	12	20	0	41	0	94	4	102	805	0	1809	22.85

6.3 Comments

Readers' comments on online newspaper articles represent a relatively new forum for discussion between citizens and possess – at least in theory – the necessary characteristics to function as venues for democratic conversations (Strandberg and Berg, 2013, p. 134). By allowing readers to post comments about news articles, they may raise new issues about news articles in question, offering new and additional information in areas in need of improvement for publishers and writers who pay attention. The ability of the Internet to allow citizens to become more creatively involved in the political process, often providing more or additional spaces for democratic discussions has changed the ways in which readers understand news. In other words, readers' comments about news articles are often seen as an alternative way of conversation, although demographics and impact of news-interactive activities are hard to determine (Pantelidis, 2010).

A thorough review of the data suggests that readers in the sample participate in news-interactive activities by posting comments on news articles published on the sampled sites. With the exception of three sites — sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan), raajjenews.blogspot.co.uk (Maldives), and tamilnet.com (Sri Lanka) — the sampled sites published a significant number of comments stimulating debates between readers as well as readers and editors. As Table 9 demonstrates, a total of 12,785 comments were posted on 3,469 different news articles published on several different news subjects. This is an average of 3.67 comments per news story and 152.20 comments per day. Given the number of comments and ways in which readers engaged in news debates, it may be

suggested that providing additional information through comment posts is part of citizen journalism in the sample.

The analysis revealed that political news articles were the most debated news subject, on which 29% of the total comments in the sample were posted during the study. This is an average of 4.45 comments per political news story. However, readers' comments were limited on some of the sampled sites. In fact, 76% of the total political comments were published on three of the sampled sites — pkhope.com (Pakistan, 25%), groundviews.org (Sri Lanka, 25%), and dbsjeyaraj.com (Sri Lanka, 26%) whilst five of the sampled sites provided less than 1% of the total political comments. On the other hand, ten of the sampled sites offered no political comments at all, despite providing both — the coverage of political news and possibility of commenting about the news.

This finding suggests that political news-interactive activities are centred on the Sri Lanka and Pakistani sampled sites. This is perhaps because readers' comments in some of other countries, such as the Maldives, were subjected to 'gatekeeping' practices by filtering content and often making it consistent with narratives presented in news articles. For example, hilath.com (Maldives) often discouraged readers from posting comments by disabling its comment option. A similar pattern was seen in the sampled sites from Bangladesh and Afghanistan. This finding suggests that not all of the sampled sites offer readers full involvement with citizen journalism by creating news debates between readers. The coverage of local news also demonstrated a similar pattern.

The last finding relating to readers' comment relates to the coverage of health news, in which three of the sampled sites published readers' comments: akidwithgreatambition.org (Afghanistan), merinews.com (India), and

maldivesresortworkers.wordpress.com (Maldives). Although health news made up 2% of the total news articles in the sample, readers' comments on this subject accounted just for 0.12% of all comments. It may be surprising that this subject attracted so little discussion when we consider the health systems in the SAARC countries, where shortfalls in health services, compounded by systemic poverty and malnutrition, result in the death of approximately 185,000 women during childbirth every year, the highest maternal mortality rates in the world (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010). A similar pattern was seen in the coverage of war and terrorism, crime, and education news, where public discussion on these news issues was minimal.

Although the rhetorical aspects of comments were not systematically analyzed, as this analysis was purely quantitative, it was observed that, at least on a few sampled sites, readers openly expressed their dissenting views on news articles published in the sample. In some cases, they even challenged the authority and integrity of authors by providing more relevant information on news articles. This finding echoes the research report of Milioni et al. (2010), who reported that online readers usually post comments on news articles to express views from their personal perspective. What is more interesting is that there was some form of relationship between readers' comments and other supplementary materials, such as images, added to news articles, suggesting that readers tend to post more comments on news articles that are accompanied by supplementary materials. As can be seen from the tables 9, the more the supplementary materials were added to news articles, the more comments the readers were likely to post, stimulating debates, thus suggesting the importance of comments in news articles.

Overall, there was no uniformity in the distribution of comments. Although the majority of the sampled sites allowed readers to post comments, a few of them constantly monitored news-interactive activities and disabled the comment option when the news articles in question were deemed more sensitive. This was particularly the case in the coverage of political and religious news in the sampled sites from Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Pakistan.

Table 9
(Distribution pattern of comments)

Names of news subjects	talikarimi.ca	akidwithgreatambition.org	hazarapeople.com	bdnews24.com	ebangladesh.com	bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.co.uk	tsheringtobgay.com	sangaykhandu.com	bhutannewsservice.com	merinews.com	kafila.org	ours-funarena.com	raajjnews.blogspot.co.uk	hilath.com	maldivesresortworkers.wordpress.com	nepaliblogger.com	sarojpandey.com.np	sapkot.ac.blogspot.com	pkhope.com	propakistani.pk	mybitforchange.org	groundviews.org	tamilnet.com	dbseyaraj.com	Total	Percentage
General news	5	2	19	14	10	23	131	0	243	80	242	6	0	49	11	0	6	0	31	583	108	272	0	389	2224	17.40
Political news	0	0	0	4	22	8	342	0	56	73	226	1	0	52	4	0	0	0	939	0	92	945	0	984	3748	29.32
Business news	0	4	0	0	2	5	108	0	6	39	0	0	0	7	7	0	0	11	0	1293	4	19	0	0	1505	11.77
Health news	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0.12
Education news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	21	0.16
Sports & eentertainment news	0	0	1	1	0	7	0	0	0	148	26	9	0	0	0	35	0	0	34	6	0	14	0	108	389	3.04
Science & technology news	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1659	0	0	0	0	1694	13.25
Crime news	0	0	14	0	7	0	0	0	12	29	0	5	0	51	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	301	0	0	419	3.28
War & terrorism news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	106	120	0.94
Religious & cultural news	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	10	32	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	91	5	0	46	187	1.46
Other articles	0	21	5	2	5	21	0	0	58	131	168	2	0	0	4	3	0	1	0	1745	12	170	0	115	2463	19.26
Total	5	38	39	21	46	65	581	0	385	578	673	23	0	161	31	38	6	13	1004	5297	307	1726	0	1748	12785	100.00

6.4 Images

The notion that photography is a universal language remains strong, as an image's content seemingly stands on its own. Thus, images are being used by the media all over the world and they remain a crucial part of reporting today, even in many Muslim countries where figurative imagery is discouraged (Kim and Kelly, 2008, p. 155). As a result, images are generally recognized as the product of cultural forces and are therefore particular to the culture that creates the imagery (Sontag, 1977). When analysing the data, it became clear that images were used to provide more information about the news story in question. Thus, images were seen an integral part of citizen journalism, reflecting the cultural norms of news in the sample.

With the exception of sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan), the sampled sites made use a large number of images in their coverage of news. However, it should be noted that the majority of the sites made use of images in less than five news subjects, indicating that images are not so important in all news subjects.

As Table 10 demonstrates, a total of 4,063 images were used with 3,469 news articles during the sample period. This is an average of 1.17 images per news story and 48.37 per edition (i.e. every day). The analysis revealed that the highest number of images (20%) was used to illustrate local news articles, despite political news dominating overall news articles in the sample. Sports and entertainment news dominated overall news coverage, providing an average of 3.63 images per news story whereas crime news provided an average of 0.89 images per news story.

Overall, war and terrorism news received the least attention, whereby only five of the sampled sites made use of images, making up less than 0.50% of the total images in the sample. This figure is remarkably small given the national and global importance of such issues, as all of the SAARC countries are facing terrorism, militancy and Maoist insurgents, separation and other destabilizing political activities. In addition, the SAARC countries continue to face challenges from domestic issues, including a significant number of internally displaced people, who have been forced to flee their place of habitual residence, particularly as a result of armed conflicts (World Bank, 2010).

The analysis also revealed that the sampled sites operated from abroad illustrated news articles with more images than those based in the homelands. However, this pattern was limited to four of the sites in the sample — alikarimi.ca (Afghanistan) hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan), bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), and nepaliblogger.com (Nepal). For example, 96% of the total images from Bhutan were published on bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan) while tsheringtobgay.com (Bhutan) offered just 4% of the total Bhutanese images.

A similar pattern was seen in the sampled sites from Afghanistan, with hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan) providing more images than its two counterparts from homeland. One possible explanation for this finding is that diaspora people from the SAARC countries may find themselves relatively well equipped with technology in the Western world. It is also likely that they see their home countries from a different perspective, possibly one of nostalgia, and thus use more images to illustrate their opinion and experience through news articles.

However, this rule did not apply to ebangladesh.com (Bangladesh), which published fewer images in most of its news articles. Although ebangladesh.com (Bangladesh) was operated by diaspora citizen journalists from abroad, the site provided more news analysis, on which the majority of the sampled sites used a relatively small number of images (see appendix 1 for more details).

The evidence also suggested that the sampled sites tended to use generic, frequently making use of stock images related to news articles. This was particularly the case when providing the coverage of special news events, such as elections. For example, Indian citizen journalists repeatedly published the same image of presidential candidates when covering the fourteenth presidential election campaign in July 2012. This is perhaps because citizen journalists were not able to provide real-time images, yet considered providing the coverage of election campaign was important. Similar examples were observed during the senate election campaign of Pakistan in March 2012.

Although the use of images in the sample was one of the key characteristics, the majority of the sites more often relied on other publications for images, indicating that they were not self-reliant but dependent. An example of this may be examined in a news analysis entitled '*A disappearance every five days in post-war Sri Lanka*', which was published on groundviews.org (Sri Lanka) 30 August 2012. The article accompanied two images, which were originally published on World Socialist Web Site (WSWS), a website maintained by the International Committee of the Fourth International. Whilst the site used these images from outside sources, it gave a photo credit to the rightful copyright by referring to its sources as 'Photo courtesy WSWS'. In addition, the site provided a short caption.

Similar examples were observed throughout the sample. However, not all sites gave photo credit to owners. Nor did they provide a caption to the images, leaving readers uncertain about the provenance of materials. For example, on 29 April 2012, *dbsjeyaraj.com* (Maldives) published an article entitled '*If hand of politics had not deprived team of 'full strength' in Manila, Lanka would have been 2012 Asian Rugby Champions*' in which the site provided three supplementary materials – two images and a video. The site gave photo credit only to the owner of images but mentioned nothing about the 2 minutes and 36 seconds long video. Neither did it provide any caption on the video. While making use of newsworthy images from other sources is a common trend in today's digital age (Alejandro, 2010), this type of journalism practice challenges the dominant notion of citizen journalism, in which citizen journalists are expected to provide real-time images due to their acute access ability to news events.

The study also discovered that the pattern of images was similar to that found in the pattern of news in the sample. In other words, the largest number of images (20%) was published with political news, which made up the largest proportion (24%). On the other hand, a use of images in war and terrorism news made up the least (0.44%). This proportion was in consistent with the coverage of war and terrorism news, which made up the least (0.43%).

Amid public discussions of how the mainstream media distorts its coverage of news (Roth et al., 2008), impacting on the public's understanding of news, the sampled sites can be seen as offering alternatives to the mainstream media, and providing newsworthy images, playing a crucial role in how readers understand news. However, there is an enormous gap among the sampled sites when practising journalism, even inside the same country, when using images. There

was no consistent pattern reflecting the national trend of image, yet it was clear that making use of image in the sample was a way of offering more information about news articles in question.

Although the majority of the sampled sites made good use of images, more often relying on other news outlets, including the mainstream media, there was no evidence that the sampled sites used captions or credits for such images, leaving readers uncertain about the provenance of the images. Overall, the pattern of images was similar to that found in the pattern of news in the sample.

Table 10
(Distribution patterns of images)

Names of news subjects	alikirimi.ca	akidwithgreatambition.org	hazarapeople.com	bdnews24.com	ebangladesh.com	bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.co.uk	tsherringtobgay.com	sangaykhandu.com	bhutannewsservice.com	merinews.com	kafila.org	ours-funarena.com	raajjnews.blogspot.co.uk	hilath.com	maldivesresortworkers.wordpress.com	nepaliblogger.com	sarojpandey.com.np	sapkotac.blogspot.com	pkhope.com	propakistani.pk	mybitforchange.org	groundviews.org	tamilnet.com	dbsjeyaraj.com	Total	Percentage
General news	3	2	74	36	10	10	3	0	85	137	16	30	3	23	5	1	8	0	0	209	15	44	12	74	800	19.69
Political news	0	0	1	10	11	5	2	0	21	130	38	5	46	9	5	2	0	0	1	0	6	79	42	97	510	12.55
Business news	0	3	0	1	0	5	4	0	4	58	0	2	3	2	1	0	0	60	0	319	1	2	0	13	478	11.76
Health news	0	1	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36	0.89
Education news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	48	1.18
Sports & entertainment news	0	1	7	1	0	6	0	0	0	187	2	41	0	1	0	37	21	0	1	20	0	4	1	54	384	9.45
Science & technology news	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	557	0	0	0	1	591	14.55
Crime news	0	0	16	0	1	0	0	0	0	19	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	1	1	72	1.77
War & terrorism news	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	18	0.44
Religious & cultural news	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	37	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	11	0	98	156	3.84
Other articles	0	5	83	6	2	17	0	0	92	280	32	4	0	8	2	7	0	8	0	116	5	126	132	45	970	23.87
Total	3	13	184	57	24	47	9	0	202	952	91	87	52	46	15	47	29	69	2	1230	34	293	188	389	4063	100.00

6.5 Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks are technological capabilities that enable one specific website (or webpage) to link with another, pointing to a specific element within a document containing more information. They offer the possibility for news sites of linking to relevant news information available on other websites. Researchers have found that some online websites, particularly citizen journalism sites, are highly dependent on external sources, including parent media outlets, for more reliable news (Quandt, 2008). This means that hyperlinks are the backbone of webpages as they lead readers to new resources on the Internet.

The analysis revealed that a total of 7,918 hyperlinks were added to the 3,469 news articles that were published on several different news subjects in the sample (see Table 11). This is an average of 2.28 hyperlinks per news story. Although the majority of the sampled sites made good use of hyperlinks, there was no uniformity in the distribution of this technological capability. In other words, some of the news articles were enhanced by more than one hyperlink, whereas other news articles were given less attention. In addition, there was a group of news articles that did not use any hyperlinks at all.

In order to better understand how hyperlinks are utilised by the sampled sites, it is more useful to review the patterns of hyperlink by classifying the pattern into two different categories. The first category includes the coverage of local news, political news, business news, sports and entertainment news, and science technology news, with which nearly 75% of the total hyperlinks in the sample were used.

A thorough review of this category revealed that talikarimi.ca (Afghanistan), bdnews24.com (Bangladesh), and sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan) made no use of hyperlinks at all, although the majority of the sampled sites used hyperlinks in nearly every individual news story. A few of the sampled sites even linked within their news articles — this was the case if they offered very long background information about news articles in question. The highest emphasis was placed on local news, with which 22% of the total hyperlinks were used, whilst sports and entertainment news received just 11% of the total. What is more interesting is that the largest number of hyperlinks was used in the coverage of national news.

This pattern reflects the news value of the sampled sites, with more important news articles being illustrated with more hyperlinks. This is also evidence that the majority of the sampled sites are more dependent or over-reliant on other sources for news articles, although they aim to offer more perspectives by linking to more documents with relevant and additional information.

The second category includes the coverage of health news (0.33%), education news (0.96%), crime news (1.76%), war and terrorism (0.29%), religion and culture (1.30%), making less than 5% of the total hyperlinks in the sample. This proportion is significantly small given the number of hyperlinks used in the sample and may be less productive and effective considering the increasing possibilities of searching and reusing information on the Internet that benefits people, although it may also mean that the sampled sites aim to become more self-reliant and independent by providing news articles without hyperlinks. With the exception of merinews.com (India), the sampled sites in this category used most of the news articles without any hyperlinks.

Overall, the pattern emerging from hyperlinks suggests that there are considerable differences between the sampled sites at an individual level, with some of the sites using more hyperlinks than others. These differences may reflect the news values of the sampled sites, suggesting that the more important the news issues are, the more the sampled sites are likely to make use of hyperlinks in news articles. In this study, local news and political news were the most important news subjects given the number of hyperlinks added to news articles.

There was an interesting pattern, in which more than one hyperlink was used with news articles that needed more relevant background information for a better understanding of news. For example, mybitforchange.org (Pakistan) used an average of 5.75 hyperlinks per political news story. On the other hand, it used an average of one hyperlink in every two local news articles, suggesting that local news needed less background information. A similar pattern was observed in the news coverage of most sites, demonstrating more hyperlinks with more important news articles. However, this rule did not apply to all of the sites as a few of the sites made no use of any hyperlinks at all.

It was also found that a few of the sites tended to provide links to partner websites. This was particularly the case with merinews.com (India) and nepaliblogger.com (Nepal), both of which used links for cross-promotion: linking to other sites which the site owned. Although hyperlinks were primarily used to provide additional information about news articles, providing links to partner websites suggests that some of the sampled sites have commercial goals. This may mean that there is a blurred boundary line between editorial and commercial content in the sample, although citizen journalism so far has no

standard form of editorial practice. However, an increasing use of news materials from other online sources suggests that hyperlinks are an important integral part of citizen journalism in the sample. This evidence gives us an impression that the majority of the sampled sites aim to offer objective news – at least from the perspective of citizen journalists – by providing hyperlinks as source of news despite being more dependent on other sources. The frequent use of hyperlinks and images in the coverage of news by citizen journalists may be described as an attempt to provide objective news. Thus, it is relevant here to discuss the concept of subjectivity and objectivity in journalism.

6.5.1 Concepts of subjectivity and objectivity in journalism

The concept of subjectivity in journalism refers to a belief on a subject from someone's point of view, which is based on the person's judgment. Subjective journalism includes presenting news with a journalist's personal opinions, which may describe his or her intentions in composing news with a set of unconnected facts into a cohesive and persuasive narrative. In a subjective text, at least some of the author's value judgments are explicitly revealed in the language (Iedema et al, 1994). This means that bias may manifest itself in all forms of communication, some that are within control of the journalists preparing news and some that may be a reflection of their employer's values.

In journalism, a journalist, who gathers and presents news, is responsible for making decisions about what facts should be shared and what sources should be used in the coverage of news and how to present it. All of these processes involve some degree of bias. For example, if a journalist covering a news issue chooses to quote a police report, giving scant space to an eyewitness on the scene for some reasons, his or her decision may be described as an act of bias,

although not all these acts may be a purposeful choice. Therefore, the degree of bias in news may differ between journalists from different countries, [even] within different news organizations and with different professional values (Patterson and Donsbach, 1996 cited in Donsbach, 2004, p. 135).

However, some journalism practices, particularly those re-branded as advocacy journalism, report news from an intentionally biased perspective to promote a news agenda or the voice of a particular group. That voice may be influenced by political ideology, social values or positions that directly benefit the journalists or news agency (Burns, 2015). Scholars, such as Makoto Sakai, suggest that the media, particularly newspapers, does not always maintain its neutrality in reported news. With multimodality, it manipulates reported news for interactional purposes (Sakai, 2011). Thus, the media has often been criticised for its biased news presentation.

In contrast, the concept of 'objectivity' in journalism is linked to the belief that people should remain detached from the news events they cover or discuss. Therefore, the notion of 'objectivity' has been used to describe journalists' reporting of news events based on facts and with measureable or quantifiable components for analysis and interpretations. In other words, the concept of 'objectivity' implies producing and sending information to the readers examining facts and only using unbiased and verifiable facts that may establish some forms of understanding of social reality (Sakai, 2011).

Journalistic objectivity is primarily concerned with the way in which news is created and reported, in the selection of facts, their arrangement, their framing and formation of a public agenda with or without relationship to values. Therefore, objectivity in journalism is conceived as a journalistic virtue, which

involves several dimensions, including accuracy, truthfulness, fairness and balance, and moral neutrality in news reporting. Thus, in journalism, providing accurate, truthful, fair and balanced news reporting is a professional norm.

However, evidence suggests that journalists are sometimes not objective and they intentionally prefer biased news (Sakai, 2011). There may be a particular angle that they want to highlight for their own or corporate reasons, although they are expected to present facts in their news whether or not they agree with them. Therefore, the influence of journalists' *subjective beliefs* on news decisions has been a subject of argument between members of the profession and communication researchers and media critics (Donsbach, 2004), and journalistic objectivity has often been at the centre of debate, particularly in relation to the future of journalism.

Whilst 'objectivity' in journalism is described as one of the fundamental principles of journalistic professionalism, its definition, which emphasises the relationship between facts and values, is deficient. The point is not that the distinction between "objectivity" and "subjectivity" is meaningless. Rather, there are clear language differences associated with these two categories, and it is important to redefine the "objectivity-subjectivity" opposition, at least as it applies to media texts (Iedema et al., 1994). To conclude, objectivity is one of the fundamental components of journalism. However, journalists are biased in their news, as the very act of reporting is selective and thus reflecting subjective values. Thus, it is hard to draw a boundary line between 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' in journalism. In other words, journalistic objectivity as defined may be impossible to achieve in practice.

Table 11
(Distribution patterns of hyperlinks)

Names of news subjects	talikarimi.ca	akidwithgreatambition.org	hazarapeople.com	bdnews24.com	ebangladesh.com	bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.co.uk	tsheringtobgay.com	sangaykhandu.com	bhutannewsservice.com	merinews.com	kafila.org	ours-funarena.com	raajjnews.blogspot.co.uk	hilath.com	maldivesresortworkers.wordpress.com	nepaliblogger.com	sarojpandey.com.np	sapkotac.blogspot.com	pkhope.com	propakistani.pk	mybitforchange.org	groundviews.org	tamilnet.com	dbsjeyaraj.com	Total	Percentage
General news	0	0	16	0	16	0	8	0	705	333	76	41	1	41	1	0	0	0	5	380	5	101	5	1	1735	21.91
Political news	0	0	0	0	11	2	37	0	249	337	191	14	0	28	1	5	0	2	0	23	201	84	59	1244	15.71	
Business news	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	50	178	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	206	0	547	4	9	0	0	1002	12.65
Health news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	0.33
Education news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	76	0.96
Sports & entertainment news	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	667	13	75	0	1	0	33	19	0	0	15	0	9	0	1	833	10.52
Science & technology news	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	88	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	826	0	0	0	0	928	11.72
Crime news	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	10	63	0	27	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	139	1.76
War & terrorism news	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	0.29
Religious & cultural news	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	65	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	15	0	0	103	1.30	
<i>Other</i> articles	0	2	3	0	14	0	0	0	193	400	96	14	0	9	12	20	0	41	0	94	4	102	805	0	1809	22.85
Total	0	11	24	0	47	2	46	0	1207	2230	384	174	1	84	14	58	19	252	7	1878	58	467	894	61	7918	100.00

6.6 Findings: Publishers and citizen journalists

Non-professional journalists, collaborative content creation, continuous update of stories, volunteer news contributions, and strong focus on news interactive activities were the central characteristics of citizen journalism in the sample. All of the sites in the sample identified themselves as an independent news site and that they were not dependent on any individuals, political party, or government and the main aim of these sites was to act as a news agent, offering news articles on the Internet. The sites also provided a mission statement depicting the overall aims and objectives of the sites.

There were two different types of sites in the sample – those that used blogging software and that resembled blogs, and those that were operated by a person or a small group of people, whose sites looked and worked much more like mainstream news sites. The layout of the sites was designed in two different styles: the first style of layout featured 'blog layout' with header and left sidebar while the second style of layout featured 'multiple sidebars' in news style templates.

The first type was owned and operated by an individual, who identified himself as a citizen journalist. The majority of the sites in this category were supported by free Web-hosting services, such as blogspot.co.uk and Wordpress.com. They published news articles in a reverse chronological order. There were eighteen sites in this category.

The second category of the sites was those owned and operated by the people who identified themselves as citizen journalists or described their sites as a citizen journalism site. The majority of the sites in this category provided several

different options, including the ability to subscribe to the sites. The sites also had a set of terms and conditions for readers in order to maintain ethics and to protect the privacy of others. All of the sites were usually operated by more than one individual and had several different departments, such as advertising or editorial department. Two of the sites updated news articles in more than one language. There were six sites in this category.

Five of the total sites were operated from abroad — three based in Europe and one each in the US and Canada. Bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), which was based in the US, demonstrated unique journalism practices. For example, Bhutanese citizen journalists base in the US and Norway were responsible for news updates while site maintenances were provided by Bhutanese citizen journalists based in Australia (Khatiwada, 2015). Hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan) also demonstrated similar characteristics but journalists were less cooperative in terms of providing information.

There was also a site that did not provide a full description of its operating location, but clearly mentioned the country it belonged to: Sri Lanka.

Every site provided at least one general e-mail address, mainly in the form of automatic contact form, to contact the newsroom. The main reason to use the automatic contact form was to ensure that the sites were communicating with the right persons. In other words, the automatic contact form helps avoid or reduce spams (Singh, 2015). Apart from the e-mail address, four of the sites provided telephone numbers of several different departments (e.g. advertising enquiries, newsrooms, or front desk), fax numbers, and postal addresses. In addition, they provided an alternative e-mail address, mainly the personal e-mail address of the person responsible for editorial affairs.

All of the sites provided some basic information about the sites, such as 'about us' or 'who we are', describing their news objectives and missions. Two of the sites provided the professional history of the owner of the site. One of them was described to be a full-time politician while the other was described as a retired professional journalist with more than three decades of work experience with the mainstream media.

While mainstream newspapers are often seen giving a space for politicians and experienced writers or journalists to publish their articles, this finding suggests that politicians and retired journalists in the SAARC countries see citizen journalism as an alternative platform to publish their news articles. It was not possible to examine if they were also acting as contributors to mainstream newspapers, but this finding echoes the report of (Steele, 2009) that revealed that professional journalists often publish news articles on citizen journalism sites when their news articles are rejected by the publishers or editors of the publication they are working for.

Overall, the majority of the sites indicated that they were alternative media, suggesting that they offered news articles that were not covered by the mainstream media and that they provided ordinary citizens a platform to express opinions and feelings from their own perspectives. For example, groundviews.com (Sri Lanka) suggested that the site was more powerful than the mainstream media by asserting 'What no media dares to report, Groundviews publicly exposes'. In fact, similar statements could be found in all of the sites in the sample. In addition, one of the sites offered journalism training and internships to aspiring citizen journalists, indicating that the site was regarded by its owner as more professional than any other site in the sample.

A set of user guidelines was seen to be one of the most common features in the sample, whereby an ordinary citizen was required to become a member to the site before he or she could publish any news articles. However, not all of the sites offered this option. While there were no restrictions on who could provide news articles, some sites had special editorial policies, particularly when covering sensitive issues, such as religion. Merinews.com (India), for example, clearly stated that its editors would go through the posts by writers and edit them (if required) before they were published. In addition, editors could contact writers if any clarification was required at this stage. This means that citizen journalists were restricted from writing news articles that were deemed to be defamatory, abusive, threatening or violating the legal rights (e.g. right of privacy and publicity) of other people. This finding is in sharp contrast to the dominant concept of citizen journalism in the West, where citizen journalists may express their views without any editorial constraints (Kern and Nam, 2008; Thurman, 2008).

All of the sites provided an interactive feature by allowing readers to post comments and feedback about news articles. In fact, the majority of the sites encouraged readers to comment on news articles published on the sites. With the exception of hilath.com (Maldives), the sites named the authors or sources of their news articles in nearly every case. The sites implied that, if not otherwise indicated, news articles had been contributed by some (unknown) contributors or sourced from elsewhere. This was particularly the case with bdnews24.com (Bangladesh), which relied heavily on Reuters for international news.

It was clear from the study that bdnews24.com (Bangladesh) published some news articles without the author's name, although it did name authors in every

news article it sourced from Reuters. The site also displayed the logo of Reuters on a header that read 'Partnership with Reuters', asserting that it had a professional relationship with Reuters and published international news articles from Reuters only. An official source, who identified himself as Mohammad on the phone in January 2015, stated that the site had an agreement with Reuters at the editorial level, whereby the site could publish Reuters news articles as its news, and there was no evidence that the site had ever published international news articles written by its own network of journalists during the study.

What is obvious is that, by sourcing news articles from Reuters, the site aims to provide a more accurate and in-depth coverage of news and wider perspectives in terms of international news. However, this hybridity form of journalism is also an indication of the changing relationship between the traditional media and citizen journalism, which challenges the common perception that citizen journalism makes regular use of non-professional contributions, addressing issues largely ignored by established news organisations (Kim and Hamilton, 2006).

What is remarkable is that, whilst all of the sites demonstrated characteristics of an alternative media, relying on their networks of citizen journalists for contributions, bdnews24.com (Bangladesh) demonstrated a hybrid journalism practice by exhibiting facets of both: mainstream media and alternative media. On the one hand, the site relied extensively on its volunteer contributors, who provided the coverage of news on society, politics, the economy and culture and religion that resembled the traditional format of commercial newspapers. This participation of citizens in the news media may be described as a new dimension of news production process beyond the norms of the mainstream media.

On the other hand, the site limited citizens' voices by not publishing international news written by citizen journalists. Because of this complexity, making sense of bdnews24.com (Bangladesh) as a citizen-journalism site may require a more nuanced approach than simply measuring an ideal set of news characteristics that define the dominant notion of citizen journalism. In other words, the inclusion of Reuters news in bdnews24.com (Bangladesh) implies that the site is committed to adopting the traditional model of news practice, relying on and promoting the mainstream perspective – at least in terms of Reuters news. This finding challenges the Western concept of citizen journalism that encourages ordinary people in the news process, promoting the alternative perspective.

The majority of the sites generated revenues through two different modes: through the sales of advertising online and through donations from various individuals. What was clear from the analysis was that the majority of the sites survived with a small amount of or no advertising. A few of the sites, including merinews.com (India), published commercial advertisements featuring the banner of academic institutions, such as universities, and international business companies, including Argos, one of the UK's leading digital stores. However, not all of these adverts were directly published by the sites. Most were automatically delivered by Google AdSense (a program run by Google that allows publishers in the Google Network of content sites to serve automatic text, image, video, or other media advertisement) targeting readers on the sites. This finding suggests that some of the sites maintain commercial relationships with giant search engines, such as Google, when it comes to advertising.

The use of popular free social-networking services, such as Facebook and Twitter, were the most common features in the sample. However, these services

were used differently from those found in mainstream news sites. For example, unlike mainstream news sites, most of which place links to Facebook and Twitter at either the top or bottom of a news story, enabling readers to share news articles within their networks, the majority of sites in the study placed these services either at the header or in the sidebar. By placing these social-networking services at the header or sidebar, they encouraged readers to promote the sites, not specific news articles. This finding may be an indication that the goal of the sites is not limited to providing news articles but also to promoting themselves to the outside world through readers. However, two of the sites, bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan) and tamilnet.com (Sri Lanka), offered no social-networking services at the time of data collection, despite regularly updating news articles on their sites.

These patterns are not clear as there is no standard set of characteristics that unify the sites. That said, while ways to contact the sites for interactions were provided by most, this may not guarantee required responses. As has been noted elsewhere (Guandt, 2005) e-mails are often filtered by editorial assistants who preselect and respond to some users' online queries. Furthermore, more direct ways of contact and interaction with citizen journalists were missing in some news articles. With the exception of merinews.com (India), the sites overall provided the coverage of news less regularly.

Overall, the sites exhibited the facets of hybrid media practice. On the one hand, they had developed a set of editorial guidelines, adopting the norms of commercial publications in the West, and survived through the sales of commercial advertisements on the Internet. On the other hand, they exhibited the characteristics of alternative media by relying extensively on their own

network of citizen journalists for news contributions, and extending a dimension of participation in the news production process beyond the norms of commercial news organizations.

6.7 Discussions

The content analysis of citizen journalism showed a number of differences as well as similarities. With a few exceptions, the analysis revealed that there were similarities among the sites in terms of their layout. There were two different types of sites: those that used blogging software and that resembled blogs, and those that were operated by a person or a small group of people, whose sites looked and worked much more like mainstream news sites. Each of these groups differed from the other in terms of its news values. What unified them was that they provided interactive options, made use of multi-media content, and added a good number of hyperlinks in news articles. The majority of sites covered a fairly standardised repertoire of article types with a general trend towards the coverage of local and political news. In some cases, no attention was paid to the source and author of news articles, and none of the sites offered the option of direct interaction with news contributors.

With the exception of merinews.com (India), the sites did not publish news articles on every subject. Some of the sites frequently sourced news articles from mainstream newspapers, but there was no evidence of any incidence of one sampled site quoting another in the sample. Use of supplementary materials, such as images and hyperlinks, were seen as a news strategy of the sites to offer evidence to support their news articles. The news values in the sample resemble that of the traditional media, in which the sampled sites gave the highest priority to local news and political news. The lack of investigative journalism was evident

in the coverage of news in the sample: overall, straight news made up (35%) followed by news analysis (15%), essay and opinion (25%), and interview (1%). A few of the sampled sites did provide investigative news articles, but not regularly, and there was a clear indication that the sampled sites were more focused on the coverage of national news.

There were at least five sites in the sample that were owned and operated by diaspora citizens from the SAARC countries. Despite being operated from abroad, the patterns of news in these sites were similar to those of being operated from their home countries, e.g. the coverage of news was largely dominated by national news and news articles were presented in the form of straight news. This pattern of news echoes the suggestion of Halsall (2012) that electronic media brings people together, making nations less relevant and thus overcoming nationalism.

The interactive option was the most common characteristic in the sample. By providing news-interactive opportunities, the sampled sites encouraged readers to participate in political debates and contribute to media content. However, participation in political debates did not come free of charge. A few of the sampled sites had introduced registration obligations, whereby users were required to leave their contact details, mainly an e-mail address, before they could post any comments about news article stories. In fact, posting comments and feedback about news articles was a way of offering additional information about the news story in question. In addition, the sampled sites featured social-networking services, such as Facebook and Twitter, expanding their global reach. However, the potential of these tools was not fully utilised — these features were not available in every news article as is seen in the mainstream media. In other

words, the sampled sites had not yet fully exploited the emerging platform facilitated by the Internet, especially the Internet. Yet there was a clear indication that a media revolution in the sample was taking place, with ordinary people actively engaging in citizen-media initiatives, providing both additional and alternative news content.

Media censorship by the state and poor technological infrastructures were the main barriers in the development of citizen journalism in the sample. In countries such as the Maldives and Bhutan, where the government directly controls the media, citizen journalism was relatively less developed in terms of creating and distributing news information — they provided far fewer news articles in comparison to other countries, where the flow of news information is relatively free. On the other hand, in countries, such as Afghanistan and Nepal, where technological infrastructures are poor, the sites had limited options in order to play journalist roles. Against these backgrounds, the sampled sites in the more advanced countries, i.e. India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan provided more news articles than their other counterparts in the sample.

One identified trend was that the sampled sites focused more on national news but paid little attention to what was going on elsewhere, particularly within the SAARC countries. This may be a concerning finding in the sense that, if one thinks of the current political economic dimensions of the world, the concept of 'globalization' has brought about economic and political interdependence between the countries across the world, and the media is seen playing an important role in educating people. However, the sites in the sample were more limited to news set within their national boundaries, although the global flow of news information has become 'fluid with the emergence of social media, which

have contributed to the liberalization of sourcing, disseminating, and gatekeeping of news via online and digital platforms' (Ekeanyanwu et al., 2011, p. 137). This pattern may also affect the process of 'free and balanced flow' of news information between the SAARC countries and the rest of the world.

An even more concerning discovery was that the majority of the sites hardly discussed any transnational issues, even though they were dedicated to comprehending the complexity of contemporary news issues. A negligible presence of war and terrorism news represents a weakness in the quality of journalism given the records of civil wars and terrorism in the region. However, the majority of the sites offered coverage of local news more regularly. This finding largely echoes Carpenter's (2009) finding that, although the Internet facilitates online publication that potentially has a global reach, citizen journalism actually provides the news content equivalent to that of local community newspapers.

There were also other news patterns that reflected the national news values of the respective countries (i.e. some news sites from a country give a high priority to some news issues that receive less priority in other countries), which may be attributed to differing journalistic trends and audience interests in the respective countries. For example, all of the sites from India provided the coverage of sports and entertainment news. On the other hand, none of the sites from Bhutan provide news articles on this subject.

The discussion on supplementary materials is centred on the images, comment and feedback, and hyperlinks that were used to enhance news articles by the sampled sites. Most of the sites added hyperlinks to other websites in their news articles, encouraging newsreaders to find additional information about the news

information. This was the case particularly when they offered very complex or long background news articles. The use of hyperlinks and images to the news articles is certainly linked to achieving greater news objectivity, as hyperlinks have now become the essence of the World Wide Web (www), as they provide readers of a website with access to a wealth of related information which, if well chosen, can be of high value and strengthen their appreciation of that particular site (Baggio and Carigliano, 2009). Moreover, the use of a good number of images accompanying news articles demonstrated that images have a complementary role in understanding and contributing to news (Engel, 2006). A lack of advertising reflected the self-reliance pursuit of the sampled sites, which demonstrated some of the characteristics of alternative media.

6.8 Conclusions

This chapter explored some of the key characteristics of citizen journalism in the sample. The study shows that the Internet is vital for citizen journalists to engage in discourse. However, not all of the sites were able to provide such spaces for civic engagement due to the media practice and political system of the respective countries in the sample. Noteworthy with relation to sample was that some of the sites were more actively involved in the creation and distribution of news articles than others. Overall, the sites aimed to provide spaces for self and collective representation.

Although the sites stated that their primary aim was to provide independent news, it was clear from the pattern that the motive and objective of citizen journalists were varied. Hence, the sites were operated for various purposes. The majority of the sites placed local news on the greatest priority by offering the coverage of local news more regularly, although political news articles dominated

overall news. The greatest priority to the coverage of news from the perspective of the respective country suggests that citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is more national.

There was no clear pattern of citizen journalists, as most of the writers did not reveal their identity or other backgrounds. However, it was clear from the pattern of news that the majority of the writers were using the sites as a platform to express their views or eyewitness accounts. Thus, the most important source of the sites was the volunteers.

The use of supplementary materials by the sites was seen as a way of enhancing news articles to capture the essence of the news articles in question. In addition, hyperlinks were used with the primary objective of providing additional information about the news articles in question. Thus, the use of supplementary materials may be seen as a news strategy of the sites to provide more reliable and relevant news articles. In addition, the sites encouraged readers to post comments about news articles and engage them in political debates. However, each site overall differed from the other in terms of news coverage and supplementary materials.

All of the sites stated that they were alternative media, but the majority of the sites demonstrated the characteristics of the mainstream media by introducing editorial guidelines. The pattern of news selection was similar to that of mainstream newspapers and there was a clear indication that citizen journalists had certain news-reporting trends when producing and distributing news articles. That said, this might also be just a natural news culture that reflects the relevance for news audiences of the respective countries. In addition, the sites aimed to generate revenues by selling advertising online. However, there was no

evidence that the sites had ever become successful in their commercial pursuit. This finding echoes the research on alternative media and media activism, where shortage of financial sources is seen as a persistent problem for alternative media (Hackett and Carroll, 2006).

There was also a small pattern of news that reflected the national news trend of the respective countries, with all of the sites from the same country giving equal priority to a specific news subject. Given the overall stance of India as a dominant country in terms of population, democracy, and literacy in the region, it is not surprising that the Indian sampled sites are more mature. On the other hand, citizen journalism in relatively less developed countries, such as Afghanistan and Nepal, is still in its infancy due to a lack of press freedom, low literacy rates, and technological infrastructures.

Citizen journalists in this study may be classified into two different categories based on how they provide the coverage of news: advocacy and gratification. For the people in the advocacy group, motivation had something to do with bringing about changes in political systems and offering alternative perspectives. In this category, activist citizens were the key actors, who intended to consider themselves more as activists or reformists. In the latter group, the motivating factors were related to self-complacency, and writing news articles seemed more of a leisure pursuit about which they were passionate. In addition, enhancing their writing skills may be the main motivating factor. Thus, a passion for journalism, being able to publish news articles, and providing alternative perspectives were more important for citizen journalists.

Furthermore, the sites made use of the World Wide Web's potential for new types of writing, producing, linking, and interacting between people. Thus, it is highly

likely that they just want alternative news information, and citizen journalism addresses the needs of news audiences. It would be very interesting to see whether the same patterns apply to the traditional way of news production and distribution on the web. Even more interesting would be to see whether citizen journalism and traditional media have similar limitations in providing news articles. And do the news readers really care, if this is the case?

On the whole, it can be concluded that citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is basically good traditional journalism, which is similar to what we know from the 'offline' newspaper.

Chapter Seven

7. Citizen journalism: The discursive reproduction of news issues in the coverage of Bhutanese news

This chapter investigates the coverage of citizen journalism news in the sample. Adopting a social-cognitive framework of critical discourse analysis (i.e. trying to analyse and describe specific discourses), it analyses how news discourses are constructed in the coverage of Bhutanese citizen journalism news. Central to the analysis is the concept of 'representation' (Van Dijk, 1995). The term representation is socially shared forms of knowledge that are organised around ideas about group identities or group existences, which is often structured in ways that maximize the differences between 'us' and 'them' (Van Dijk, 2009). The analysis is critical in the sense that it seeks to investigate social inequality, focusing on the 'structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control' (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 10).

7.1 An introduction of Bhutan

Bhutan is a small and impoverished kingdom sandwiched between its two powerful neighbours — China and India. The country is also called 'Druk Yul', which means 'Land of Thunder Dragon' in the Bhutanese language. Over 60% of its lands are covered with forests and there are no large cities. The population of the capital Thimphu is projected to reach 116,012 by 2015 (National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2015). Almost completely cut off from the rest of the world for centuries, the country has tried to let in some aspects of the outside world in recent decades while also guarding its ancient cultures. As well as being a tiny nation, Bhutan is also the most sparsely populated country amongst the SAARC

countries, with the latest official figures suggesting a total population of 765,552 people (World Bank, 2014).

Bhutan does not have its own ethnic group that could be classified as the original inhabitants of the country, as the people of Bhutan are the descendants of people who have migrated from different parts of the neighboring countries, including Nepal, centuries ago (Chadha, 1982). As the population of the country is made up of different religions, cultures, and languages, Bhutan existed as a battlefield for warring chiefs until the first quarter of the seventeenth century when Ngawang Namgyal, a Tibetan monk and military leader fleeing religious persecution in Tibet, consolidated rival groups, unified all provinces and appointed himself as the ruler of the country in the 1630s (Rai, 2013). In addition to unifying various municipalities into one country, Namgyal also created a Bhutanese cultural identity distinct from the Tibetan culture from which it was originally derived whereby two different types of rulers were appointed to administer the kingdom: Dharmaraja, a spiritual leader, and Devraja, a temporal ruler.

After the unification of municipalities into a country, the name and fame of Namgyal spread far and wide, enhancing his relationship with neighbouring rulers, including those of Gorkha, now one of the districts of Nepal. It is since this time that Bhutan has had political, religious as well as cultural relations with the kings of Kathmandu and Gorkha. Diplomatic relationships between the rulers of Bhutan and Kathmandu and Gorkha grew stronger, particularly because of cultural and religious ties (Rai, 2013).

Between 1667 and 1680, the government of Bhutan imported some people from outside countries, mainly craftsmen from Kathmandu who were renowned for

their skills in metal work, to build and craft religious statues in the country (Thinley, 1993). This is perhaps when the new migrant population first started settling in Bhutan, becoming part of Bhutanese society. As there was no restriction on immigration, thousands of people from neighbouring countries, including Nepal, began migrating to Bhutan and settled in different parts of the country.

However, the country started experiencing political crises after the death of Namgyal in 1651, and several local governors engaged in infighting for power supremacy. After years of civil wars, Trongsa Penlop Ugen Wangchuk emerged as the most powerful leader in the country and, with the help of British India, he became the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan in 1907 (Rai, 2013). It was at this time that Bhutan came into contact with the outside world, establishing strong relationships first with the British Empire and then with India upon its independence. Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk, the present king, is the fifth in the line of the Wangchuk dynasty. However, the Bhutanese government excluded the new migrants from taking part in the political affairs of the country till the late 1950s.

Today, Bhutan has its distinct identity in the world. With the new millennium, Bhutan has introduced some new regulations aimed at improving the quality of life of its citizens. Plastic bags are banned nationwide to cope with climate change. Tobacco is virtually illegal in the country, and the country measures the wellbeing of its people by Gross National Happiness (GNH) instead of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2006, *Business Week* rated Bhutan as the first 'happiest country' in Asia (Choudhury, 2012) and the eighth in the world's

happiest countries in a study by Leicester University in the UK (Gross National Happiness, 2009).

Bhutan made a new transition from an absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy through its first general election in March 2008. The country now has a two-party parliamentary democracy, with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in power. As well as being one of the founding members of SAARC, Bhutan is also a member of the UN.

7.2 A complex national identity

'Nation occupies a singular status in modern politics defining the terrain, territorial and symbolic, over which political ideology ranges, and political concepts such as freedom, equality and fraternity are used in reference to particular sets of people and their meaning is related to discursive constructions of those people' (Finlayson, 2007, p. 101). For example, when the Indians demanded independence from the British rule, they put forward the demand for 'self-government' and justified their demand on the basis of Indian-ness — pro-Indian and developmental policies would be followed only by a regime in which Indians had control over political power. The British Indian administration was described as 'only the handmaid to the task of exploitation. Thus, self-government is the only remedy for India's woes and wrongs' (Chandra et al., 1989, p. 77).

When looking at Bhutan in the same way, there is evidence of historical work by Bhutanese scholars discussing the civilization of Bhutan as a national entity since at least the seventeenth century. However, most of the scholars were religious and discussed only the achievements of religious figures, as it would not have

been proper or even thinkable to write about the general population or non-religious subjects at the time (Pommaret, 2000). Thus, the majority of the work on modern Bhutan has been produced only after the second half of the twentieth century when the country emerged from its self-imposed isolation and started development activities under the leadership of the third king Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (Ueda, 2003).

Thus, with the exposure of the country to the outside world, particularly after the forced eviction of thousands of Bhutanese people from the country in the 1990s, scholars began discussing Bhutan from various perspectives. This is testimony to the nation's preoccupation with what it once was, what it is now, and what it may become in future. *'Bhutan and Its Agonised People'* by Rai (2013) provides an insight into the chronological history of Bhutan as a country dating from 840 A.D. to the present, which may be seen as a way of addressing contemporary debates about Bhutanese nationalism and history. Even social scientists have become involved in the study of Bhutan and its people in recent decades, describing Bhutan as one of the 'happiest' countries in the world.

Thus, the national identity of the Bhutanese is often pre-determined from a list of several different aspects that are linked to the origin of people, religion, geographic landscape, or even an indicator and concept that measures the quality of life or social progress of the country. Some examples include 'Indo-Burmese origin' (Schoubroeck, 1999), 'Buddhist or Buddhism' (Hutt, 1996), and 'gross national happiness' (Braun, 2009), or 'happy society' (Hisayoshi, 2013).

However, some of these terms are too superficial in that they assume the existence of a finite number of commonly accepted or agreed criteria that specify the national identity of the Bhutanese and thus are likely to be of little relevance

for a description of all Bhutanese people today. In contrast to this approach to determining the national identity of the people from Bhutan, Hutt (2007) expresses the complexity of studying the national identity of the Bhutanese people by stating:

It is possible, and indeed it is usual, to conceive of the Himalayan region as a frontier land where two very different cultural and demographic spheres converge. To the south lie the densely-populated agricultural lands and sprawling cities in North India, where Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Bangali, and Urdu are spoken, and most of the population professes either Hinduism or Islam. To the north is the thinly-populated Tibetan plateau where Tibeto Burman languages prevail and Buddhism persists despite Chinese Communist efforts to erase it. Much of the cultural history of the Himalayan peoples can be constructed as the outcome of interactions between these two spheres along the line where they overlap (p. 1).

In addition, multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity, as noted by Spring (2007) and Hisayoshi (2013), is now emerging as a new issue and is being discussed in the context of modern Bhutan and the Bhutanese people. Thus, both of these elements are becoming important in contemporary debates about the national identity of the Bhutanese people, as they strongly surface as themes in the context of modern Bhutan. It is helpful to understand social and political circumstances in relation to multi-ethnic and multiculturalism by discussing 1) ethnic groups or racism, and 2) population, religion, and culture.

7.3 Ethnic groups or racism

As has been suggested earlier, despite its small size, the population of Bhutan is ethnically diverse (Hutt, 2007). As Bhutan is a home to many migrants from neighbouring countries, the population of the country comprises a wide range of ethnic groups, ranging from the Yak herders in the northern part of Bhutan to the Lhotshampa — also called 'Nepalese Bhutanese' — people of the southern belt of the country (Rai, 2013). Thus, Hutt (2007) describes the division of the Bhutanese population into categories as problematic as its enumeration. However, most accounts of the publication identify three different broad ethnic groups in Bhutan: the Ngalong in the west and north, the Sharchop in the east, and the Lhotshampa in the south (Shappi, 2005). All of these groups have their own *lingua franca*, i.e. Dzongkha for the Ngalong in the north, Tshangla for the Sherchop in the east, and Nepalese for the Lhotsampa in the southern foothills. However, the Dzongkha language, which is derived from Tibet, has been promoted as the national language of the country since 1961.

Overall Bhutan is dominated by a group of Buddhist sects. Thus, the Ngalong, central Bhutanese, and the Sherchop are often collectively called Drukpa, meaning the branch of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. In fact, the term Drukpa is not only predominant in the west of Bhutan, but also is the one with 'statutory representation in the state's recommendatory and consultative institutions' (Schappi, 2005, p. 3).

The Ngalong are believed to have migrated from Tibet during the eighth and ninth centuries bringing Buddhism with them. They are in a minority overall, but they and the central Bhutanese occupy most senior positions in the government and the civil service (Hutt, 2007). In addition, the Ngalongs' cultural norms and

traditions have been declared by the monarch to be the standard or official for all citizens in the country.

The Sharchop in the eastern part of the country are considered to be descendants of the earliest groups to inhabit Bhutan. They are Indo-Mongoloid people who migrated from Assam or possibly Burma. They have their own distinct ethnic and cultural identity and speak the Tsangla language, which is part of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Unlike the Ngalongs in the north, the Sharchops are part of an agricultural society, who often use a slash-and-burn method of farming (i.e. cutting and burning of plants in forests to create farmlands).

The Lhotshampa, on the other hand, are the descendants of peasant farmers, most of them from the eastern part of Nepal as well as the Indian state of West Bengal, who started migrating to the southern part of Bhutan after the Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1865. Although the Lhotshampa are generally classified as Hindus, this may be an oversimplification as many groups, including the Tamangs and the Gurungs, are largely Buddhists. On the other hand, the Kiranti groups, such as the Rai and Limbu, are largely animist followers of the Mundhum.

Successive generations of Lhotshampa cleared the forests and formed agrarian communities that quickly became Bhutan's main producers of food (Hutt, 2007). In contrast to their northern counterparts, who are almost exclusively Buddhist, the Lhotshampa celebrate Dashai and Tihar, festivals superficially similar to the Indian Diwali. In addition, there is a small group of indigenous tribal groups who live in scattered villages throughout the country. They are culturally and

linguistically close to the population of West Bengal or Assam of India, and they practice the Hindu religion and speak the Hindi language.

7.4 Population, culture and religion

Following the introduction of a new form of government in 1974 by the King — the monarch maintained absolute power prior to this government, namely a constitutional monarchy based on a two-party parliamentary system — the country entered a tumultuous new era in national politics. However, the people of Bhutan neither spontaneously welcomed the changes introduced by the monarchy nor did they organise any protests to provoke these changes themselves (Mathou, 2008). Bhutanese society was essentially conservative at the time.

However, free education and health services, employment opportunities, highly government subsidised agriculture inputs, and generous rural credit schemes continued to attract outside people. Bhutan, which generally remained isolated from the rest of the world, experienced a vast influx of new migrants in the 1960s and the 1970s (Kharat, 2001). In order to control the influx of outside migrants, the government introduced a new law in 1977 whereby labours were required to possess a valid document allowing them to work in the country. In 1985 the government introduced a new citizenship Act that provided three avenues for the acquisition of Bhutanese citizenship: birth to a father who was a Bhutanese national at the time of birth, a petition to an official provided certain conditions of residence, and a petition to an official upon marriage to a Bhutanese national. According to the 1981 census, the Lhotshampa constituted the largest population of the country (53%), followed by the Sharchop 30% and Ngalong, the ruling class, 17% (The South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2001).

However, a more recent census by the government showed that only 28% of total citizen population, including those who fled Bhutan in the 1990s, was Lhotshampas (Bisht, 2008). This was due largely to the 1985 Act that barred a large number of Lhotshampa people from obtaining citizenship.

Driem (1994) suggests that there is no majority language in Bhutan, but at least nineteen different languages are spoken in the country. To a large extent the Nepalese language was used as the *lingua franca* in Bhutan until the late 1980s. The Sharchop, the largest Buddhist minority people in the east, often used the Nepalese language to communicate with the Ngalong in the north. However, the royal government adopted a 'one nation one people' policy in 1989, introducing Dzongkha as the national language. The English language has been recently adopted as the language of instruction in academic institutions.

The people of Bhutan are legally free to convert to any religion they like. However, they face social pressure not to do so, as the constitution of the country grants a special status to Mahayana Buddhism. Christianity is seen as a Western faith and converts are often looked on with suspicion due to the notion that missionaries provide monetary benefits and supports to converts from other religion. Thus, Bhutanese society and the government are more tolerant of the Hindus, whose existence in the country is legally acknowledged, than they are of Christianity. According to the 2014 Religious Freedom in the World report, 75% of the total population is Buddhist, followed by Hindu (23%), Christian (0.55%), Muslim (0.2%), and traditional religion (1.9%).

7.5 Bhutanese refugees

In 1958, the Lhotshampa people of the southern districts were granted Bhutanese citizenship and tenure of their lands. The government later pursued a policy of integration that met with considerable success: having allowed the south to run its own affairs for decades with minimal contact with the north, the government began to train the Lhotshampas for government service and for some years even offered a cash incentive for Nepali-Drukpa intermarriage (Rimal, 2005). As a result, the Lhotshampa population began to play an important role in the development of national life in Bhutan. In the 1980s, when the total population of Bhutan was stated to be 1,142,200, the six southern districts (each of which probably had a Lhotshampa majority) were said to have a total population of 552,800 people (Savada, 1993, p 361). However, the exact population of Bhutan was unknown as the government census was classified as unscientific because it had been conducted by a group of language teachers and students and errors had been subsequently discovered during a 'district-by-district recount' (Rose, 1977, cited in Hutt, 2007, p. 150).

This discrepancy is described as being due to the 1985 Citizenship Act that prevented a large number of Lhotshampa people of the southern foothills from obtaining Bhutanese citizenship. In 1988, citing concerns about an increase in illegal migrants in the country, the government carried out a census in southern Bhutan. Shortly after the census, the government of Bhutan announced a series of measures, including a 'one nation, one people' policy promoting a national language and dress, which did not coincide with those of the Lhotshampas in the south.

The Lhotshampas perceived that the government's new initiative was designed to attack their language and culture (Evans, 2012), eventually stripping them of the citizenship they had previously been granted and reducing the size of the Lhotshampa population of Bhutan (Hutt, 2007). So, they sought a system of equality under which they would be allocated what they needed as an equitable share of the country's polity and economy (Rizal, 2004). As a result, a series of political demonstrations took place in the southern districts of Bhutan in response to the government's new initiative.

The government perceived the Lhotshampa as a threat and started to introduce new policies aimed at the southern population and other groups that supported the demonstrations and reacted to the activism harshly (Rai, 2013). As a result, the months that followed saw widespread arbitrary arrests, ill treatment and tortures, followed by the eviction of a large number of Lhotshampas, who later moved to Nepal and settled in different refugee camps since the early 1990s. UNHCR (2008) recorded a total of 107,000 Bhutanese refugees living in seven different camps in eastern parts of Nepal in 2008.

Unlike in the West, Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are not legally permitted to work, leave the camps, or engage in any form of political activities (Muggah, 2005). Thus, international organizations, such as UNHCR and the World Food Program (UN food agency), have been supporting tens of thousands of Bhutanese refugees since they arrived in Nepal. The government of Bhutan and Nepal have held several bilateral talks since the refugee crisis to discuss the possibility of repatriating the Bhutanese refugees to their home country. However, the governments failed to reach an agreement, making the peaceful return of the refugees impossible.

In October 2006, a group of eight countries, including the US and the UK, announced their intention to offer resettlement places for Bhutanese refugees. The United States announced that it would take 60,000 refugees for settlement in the US, or even more if required. Other members of the group expressing their intention to take their share in the resettlement programme included Canada, Denmark, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Norway. Most refugees expressed their excitement at the possibility of employment, residence, and eventually citizenship rights in industrialised countries (Evans, 2012). However, some refugees strongly opposed the idea of resettlement in a third country and thus created political divisions between the refugees themselves. Nearly one-third of the total Bhutanese refugees are still waiting for dignified repatriation to their home country (Rai, 2013).

7.6 Understanding the institutional and social context

Fundamental to Critical Discourse Analysis is an understanding of the institutional and social context in which text production occurs (Tollefson, 2013). Thus, three sites in the sample from Bhutan are discussed below to make sense of how news issues are covered by the Bhutanese sampled sites.

7.6.1 Bhutanewsservice.com

Bhutanewsservice.com is a citizen journalism site operated by the Bhutanese refugees living in different parts of the world, including Nepal, which first came into being in 2006. In order to challenge the government-controlled media in the country, its founders, a group of young Bhutanese citizen journalists, created an online publication that would promote the voice of the tens of thousands of Bhutanese refugees living in different camps in Nepal. The site was initially

operated without a license as the law of Nepal restricted any foreign organizations operating news sites from the country. The site is now registered under the cyber Act of the US (bhutannewsservice.com, 2014).

In the space of nearly a decade, bhutannewsservice.com has become a news source for the people of Bhutan, donor agencies, and friends of Bhutan, promoting the voice of Bhutanese refugees not only in Nepal but also increasingly in the global sphere, and the site has achieved this through a series of innovations. First, the site has adopted the usual hierarchy of traditional media whereby a team of citizen journalists are responsible for editorial affairs. It also aims to generate revenues through commercial advertising in addition to donations from generous individuals.

Second, the site makes regular use of contributions, relying on its network of citizen journalists living in different parts of the world and has adopted the mode of online delivery. Thus, compared with the dominant form of online publishing in Bhutan, which merely reprints news content from paper editions, bhutannewsservice.com is a pioneer and the 'first independent citizen journalism site from Bhutan' (Bhutannewsservice.com, 2013).

In addition, the site aims to address issues that are largely ignored by the traditional media in Bhutan. As a result, the site has become an alternative platform for the Bhutanese to express views from their own perspective. Thus, the site helps bring the people of Bhutan together and encourages them to share their wide range of experience gained in home and foreign lands.

Overall, bhutannewsservice.com replicates hybrid news organizations by exhibiting the common characteristics of mainstream news organizations, such

as providing a wide range of news on society, politics, human rights, and culture, on the one hand, but extensively relying on its network of volunteers for news contributions and the Internet for news delivery, on the other hand. In addition, the site encourages readers to participate in interactive news activities, such as posting comments about news articles.

Because of its overall complex characteristics, making sense of bhutannewsservice.com may require a more nuanced approach than simply analysing a set of characteristics as alternative media. Yet, it is reasonable to suggest that overall the site has grown into one of the largest and most influential news sites reporting on Bhutan, Bhutanese people, and the Bhutanese refugees living in different parts of the world and providing spaces for alternative perspectives.

7.6.2 Tsheringtobgay.com

Launched in November 2008, tsheringtobgay.com is a blog site owned and operated by citizen journalist-turned-politician Tshering Tobgay. The site is dedicated to providing news commentaries as well as reporting on current affairs in Bhutan. However, the primary objective of the site is stated to be sharing news discussing contemporary issues of the country (tsheringtobgay.com, 2008). In addition, the site often provides coverage of international news.

With few exceptions, the site provides news updates nearly every day. While the site self-identifies as citizen journalism, it rejects one dominant practice of citizen journalism (i.e. giving space for outside contributions) and makes no use of contributions from its network of readers. Moreover, it does not sell advertising or seek donations from generous individuals. However, the site places high

emphasis on news-interactive activities, such as posting comments and feedback about news articles.

The site often publishes the plans and programmes of the government, promoting the political views of the author. Thus, the site may be classified as a platform to express alternative views, as it regularly promotes the political views of the author rather than provide independent news articles that are not covered by the mainstream media.

7.6.3 Sangaykhandu.com

Launched in October 2009 by Sangay Khandu, Member of Parliament of Bhutan, sangaykhandu.com is the third Bhutanese site in the sample. Again self-identifying as citizen journalism, the site primarily provides coverage of news focusing on the political affairs of Bhutan. Thus, the site offers more news updates when political events take place in the capital Thimbu.

In contrast to the other two sites, the site does not encourage readers to participate in interactive news activities, such as posting comments and feedback about news articles. Nor does it make use of supplementary materials, such as images. It aims to be self-reliant by not seeking commercial advertising or donations on the Internet. It also avoids making use of electronic documents, such as hyperlinks, that provide additional information about news articles in question.

In the context of Bhutan, the site may be classified as an alternative news platform to provide an insight into political developments of the country reflecting the perspective of the author rather than providing general news.

7.7 Findings and analysis

Initial analysis was followed by multiple readings and continuous revisions of themes in the texts published in the three sampled sites until they could be organised into meaningful clusters that recurred in multiple articles. As each site demonstrated distinct characteristics, findings are organised by individual sites as below:

7.8 Bhutannewsservice.com

Findings from bhutannewsservice.com are summarised within two broad themes related to the Bhutanese refugees and Bhutan — firstly, that all of the Lhotshampa people in southern Bhutan are Bhutanese and, secondly, that Bhutan is a country of all migrants. There are seven different discursive techniques by which bhutannewsservice.com articles construct their representation of the Lhotshampa as Bhutanese and Bhutan as a country of all migrants.

7.8.1 The discursive construction of the Lhotshampa people and their history

The central concern for the Bhutanese refugees in bhutannewsservice.com articles is the fear of becoming un-Bhutanese citizens — i.e. losing both homeland Bhutan and Bhutanese national identity — due to political and ethnic conflict in the country. Although some mainstream news articles regularly give updates on the high-level talks between officials, reviving hopes for a safe repatriation of the refugees to their homeland, the articles that are published on bhutannewsservice.com downplay any such hopes. Instead, they draw readers'

attention to the common traits and history of the Lhotshampa people — usually to demonstrate that they are the victims of racial prejudice in Bhutan — and the new challenges ahead of them. This process is accomplished using four main methods, which are summarised below with some examples.

Representing the common personality traits of the Lhotshampa: Articles that are published in bhutannewsservice.com describe the characteristics of the Bhutanese refugees living in different parts of the world, typically using language that focuses the readers' attention to the common traits of the Lhotshampa people. For example, the Lhotshampa people are described as 'brave, hardworking, loyal, obedient to masters' (21 October 2012), 'straightforward, less provocative, and the most loyal soldiers' (11 May 2012). Such language is used to suggest that the Lhotshampa people, who speak the Nepalese language, are loyal and law-abiding by nature and therefore make desirable citizens.

[Bhutannewsservice.com](http://bhutannewsservice.com) articles also describe the history of the Lhotshampa people in Bhutan, emphasising the legality of their presence there. For example, an article with the headline '*Bhutanese without Bhutan*' describes how, after unifying Bhutan as a country, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal visited Gorkha in 1616 and invited the Nepalese craftsmen to Bhutan with a promise of granting them equal rights and privileges in Bhutan (1 April 2012). A similar article describes the fourteenth Daga penlop 'Penlop Tsithus', popularly known to Nepalese speakers as 'Sethu Raja' or 'Daga Raja', who officially initiated the settlement of the Lhotshampa people in the cleared but uncultivated lands in Bhutan in the 1880s (9 October 2012). Some articles even routinely assert that the history of the Lhotshampa people in Bhutan is almost as old as that of modern Bhutan as a country (3 April 2012). These descriptions are an indication

that the Lhotshampa in southern Bhutan are true *bona fide* citizens of Bhutan, although the government of Bhutan reclassifies them as 'illegal migrants'.

New lives in a new country: Over 70,000 Bhutanese refugees are now hoping for new lives and a future in Western countries, according to the UNHCR (2014). For these refugees, a third country settlement came with a mixture of despair and hope in the rebuilding of their lives and the establishment of a new direction for the future. They are now experiencing mixed feelings — on the one hand, hopeful due to the freedom of movement across the world and, on the other hand, uncertain due to linguistic and cultural differences. Articles on this subject focus on the lifestyles of the Bhutanese refugees in their new country, discussing how they are learning new skills and local languages, adopting local cultures, and integrating into local society.

Some articles even describe their newly adopted country as one of the powerful nations in the world and compare the culture and system of that country with those of Nepal and Bhutan, encouraging their readers to look forward and not back. For example, an article headlined '*Immigration, expats and the Netherlands*', explains that, despite being a small country, Holland has had a history of colonization in the past, and power, business, shrewdness, and expatriates' income led to its rapid [economic] prosperity (24 August 2012). Another article describes life in Bhutan and the refugee camps as fearful and panic-inducing: it used to be a matter of fear and panic when some family members [did] not return home in late evening, which is not a worry in Holland (23 October 2012). At times, articles even try to assure readers that the Bhutanese refugees will soon be part of local communities, creating new jobs in their newly adopted countries (5 November 2012).

These descriptions are an indication that bhutannewsservice.com articles are optimistic about the Bhutanese refugees becoming citizens of a new country in future, adopting new cultures, contributing to the economy of their new country, although the refugees have big challenges ahead of them.

Reliving own experience back in home country: One of the important themes that frequently appears in bhutannewsservice.com articles is that the Bhutanese refugees constantly recollect their traditional cultures and the political treatment they have received in their homeland. Articles encourage readers to remember how government officials abused their power, killing or raping victims, and shutting down public facilities, such as schools in southern Bhutan in 1990-91. For example, one of the articles describes personal accounts of a refugee:

... Late on the third day, again I heard heavy boots running up the stairs. With a bang the door opened and again the guards ran out. A police officer entered a revolver in his hand, I trembled with fear. He pointed the gun at my head for a while and said, 'you wretch fellow,' and stormed out muttering profanities. ...I lost my self-respect and dignity. I lost all of my belongings. I lost the country of my birth. I lost my enjoyment and happiness (26 August 2012).

The discourse in this account focuses on how the ruling elites during the conflict used their excessive power to suppress the voice of those people who had been contributing to the nation's development as decent citizens in their country. Although the author of this article is now in the West, where he has greater freedom of expression than in Bhutan, he is emotionally attached to his own country where he was born. The article constructs discourse about the

relationship between his homeland and emotion, demonstrating that they are inseparable in one's life.

Another similar article constructs discourses from the cultural perspective, suggesting how cultural differences make life difficult in a new country:

It is hard to understand how anyone could see our new Bhutanese neighbour as a threat [in the US]. Go into just about any Bhutanese home in town [in Bhutan] and you will be welcomed, served *chia* (tea), and probably [even] offered a meal. You will be treated graciously and with the kind of hospitality many of us have forgotten in the rush our busy lives [in the US] (5 November 2012).

These descriptions suggest that, despite open society that welcomes immigrants from all over the world, local people in the US view 'other' new people as harmful to their social order. These descriptions are evidence that, despite freedom, the Bhutanese refugees often find themselves in difficulties in their new countries due to cultural differences. The refugees being seen as a 'threat' by neighbours in host countries and a culture of welcoming new people with '*chia* (tea)' in the homeland are an indication of cultural differences. Such experiences in their new countries leads refugees to think of their homeland, although their daily existence must focus on their host country and adopting new cultures.

Negotiating the political agenda in a hope for repatriation: In the context of a dignified repatriation of the Bhutanese refugees living in different parts of the world, bhutannewsservice.com articles often present concerns about the integrity of the Bhutanese government as well as the ability of the Nepal government, which is responsible for dealing with refugees in eastern Nepal. In particular, the

articles adopt terms such as 'bilateral talks' and a 'foul game' to refer to repatriation-related activities, as in an article headlined '*Repatriation drama*': 'At a time when most of the exiled Bhutanese in Nepal have lost their hopes for repatriation by choosing to resettle in the West, Bhutan has demonstrated yet another foul play against the actual sentiment of refugees' right to return home with dignity and honour' (30 March 2012).

When the mainstream Bhutanese media insists that the Bhutanese refugees should opt for the third-country settlement programme, bhutannewsservice.com articles criticises the Nepal government that 'it is due to Nepal's failure that these innocent Bhutanese [refugees] are compelled to choose resettlement when yourself [K. P. Oli, the leader of the Unified Marxist–Leninists in Nepal] and the governments of different parties [of Nepal] failed to convince Bhutan to accept citizens back home with dignity and honour' (17 July 2012). Although terms, such as bilateral talks, are used to describe positive actions (e.g. bilateral talks to find out refugee solutions), the meaning of 'bilateral talks' (positive) and a 'foul game' (negative) is blurred in much of the articles, as there are rarely positive reports for the refugees.

In addition, some articles suggest that there is a slim chance for dignified repatriation as the Bhutanese government has classified refugees as 'criminals' (28 August 2012). While bhutannewsservice.com articles try to find a permanent solution by negotiating on refugees' demands and other issues with the government of Bhutan, the articles also acknowledge that some of the Bhutanese refugees are less optimistic about finding solutions.

7.8.2 The discursive construction of Bhutan as a home to all migrants and the political system of Bhutan under Wangchuck dynasty

In response to the reclassification of some Lhotshampa people in southern Bhutan as 'illegal immigrants' by the government, bhutannewsservice.com articles bring some historical facts to light to legitimise their Bhutanese national identity. The articles argue that Bhutan itself has a short history as a country, and that the people of Bhutan are all immigrants who migrated from neighbouring countries, including Tibet. The articles cautiously legitimise some arguments while delegitimizing others, providing more relevant evidence for arguments. In addition, they bring the political system of Bhutan to light by describing the Wanchuck regime as 'undemocratic'. Three major techniques construct Bhutan as a 'country of all migrants' and its political system as 'undemocratic'.

Representing Bhutan as a country of all migrants: Isolated for centuries from the rest of the world, the Bhutanese people struggle to trace their own history and origin, as little is known of the history of Bhutan and Bhutanese people before the seventeenth century (nationsencyclopedia.com, 2015). Most historians agree that Bhutan is a country of all migrants from neighbouring countries, that the country followed a policy of self-imposed isolation, largely cutting off from the rest of the world as recently as the 1950s, that the country was ruled by exiled monks until 1907, and that Buddhism informed every aspect of Bhutanese life and culture.

However, when Gongsu Ugyen Wangchuck became the first king of modern Bhutan in 1907, the Bhutanese of Tibetan origin in northern and central Bhutan began enjoying greater political privileges than those Nepalese-speaking

Lhotshampas in southern Bhutan. In 1988, the Bhutanese government conducted a census which required each citizen to have the land tax receipt issued in line with the 1958 Act. Those who could not produce the land receipt or any proof of residency prior to 1958 were reclassified as 'illegal migrants' and thus were denied citizenship.

Bhutannewsservice.com articles counter such official claims by suggesting that the Lhotshampa people have over four hundred years of history in Bhutan (17 July 2012), suggesting that the history of the Lhotshampa people in Bhutan is older than that of the current monarchy itself. Some articles assert that today's Bhutan was a tutelage of Karmarupa, Assam (India) until 650 A.D., and that the northern Bhutanese, including the present dynasty, migrated to Bhutan from Tibet. Other articles even go on to claim that Tibetan monks encroached on what is called Bhutan today, ousting the Indians who ruled the territories at the time (3 April 2012).

Thus, the articles critical of official sources reconstruct the archaeological hierarchy of expertise and authority, classifying most of the official sources as 'untrue' or 'fabricated' stories. An article entitled '*Being of Bhutan*' describes how the names of places, villages, rivers and districts in the southern belt carry lingual, ethnic and cultural identity, which, the articles argues, is testimony to the historical facts of the existence of the Lhotshampa people in the country (8 April 2012). These names are presented as evidence of the presence of the Lhotshampa people in the construction of modern Bhutan, suggesting that the Lhotshampa people played a significant role in the development of Bhutanese culture, economy, and education (5 November 2012).

Representing the Bhutanese government as 'undemocratic' and 'ruthless': The first duty of the Government is to afford protection to its citizens (Heyman, 1991), and the function of the citizen is to keep the government from falling into error (Grosch, 2005). When government officials or their actions are quoted in *bhutannewsservice.com* articles, attention is often focused to the political system of the country, and readers are assured that the Bhutanese government is 'corrupt', 'ruthless' and 'biased against' the Lhotshampa minority in southern Bhutan. In addition, articles assure readers that all the political decisions that the government makes in the capital Thimphu are in favour of the Ngalongs in the north and west of Bhutan. For example, an article on Bhutan's Citizenship Identity Act explains that no Bhutanese could be registered for citizenship without the evidence of land tax receipts. The provision in the law is that, without the approval of the King, who rules the country ruthlessly, any person occupying a vacant land shall be seen as illegal and punishable by confiscation and imprisonment (3 September 2012). These descriptions imply that the King himself makes discretionary decisions as to who should own the land in the country.

Even if some people owned the land, that alone would not qualify them to obtain citizenship as the King has a final say. The law requires the Lhotshampa to produce some documentary evidence of their presence on or before 31 December 1958. The Bhutanese refugees describe this legal provision as a way of discriminating against the Lhotshampa minority in southern Bhutan (3 April 2012).

Delegitimizing the Bhutanese media: Most mainstream newspapers offer a general package of sports and entertainment, business, and national stories, with

editors signalling the importance of news by its placement in the physical paper (Kirchhoff, 2010). During the sample period, the Bhutanese media published numerous articles boasting that Bhutan was indeed fortunate to have been little known and left alone for most of its history and thus given the opportunity to reveal itself to the outside world through the 'Gross National Happiness' (kunenselonline.com, 29 December 2012). These descriptions are an indication that the Bhutanese media aims to introduce the country to the world with a positive message in the light of 'Gross National Happiness'.

However, bhutannewsservice.com publishes counter articles claiming that the Bhutanese media spread a 'lie' and a fabricated story. For example, an article titled '*Forgotten in the land of GNH*' claims that the media in Bhutan functions as the mouthpiece of the government (17 August 2012) by promoting government-imposed slogans, such as 'happiness', that lies on the shelves of newsrooms (15 May 2012). The site published several articles in 2012 claiming that the media of Bhutan was 'unreliable'.

Overall, bhutannewsservice.com articles construct discourses focusing on two broad themes — the Lhotshampa people as victims and Bhutan as a country of all migrants. When constructing discourses on the Lhotshampa people, the focus is on the personality traits of the Lhotshampa — that they are brave, obedient, and loyal, and that they are able to cope with new environments, facing new challenges. When constructing discourses on Bhutan as a country of all migrants, the focus is on history, democracy and the government and the role of the media in Bhutan. It is also evident that bhutannewsservice.com articles construct political discourses from the oppositional perspective, often criticising the political leaders and the governments of Bhutan and Nepal. On the other hand,

discourses about the Bhutanese refugees are constructed from the sympathetic perspective.

7.9 Tsheringtobgay.com

Findings from tsheringtobgay.com are summarised within a broad theme related to nation-building — that the government of Bhutan should live up to its task, i.e. nation-building. Two discursive techniques construct how the government should live up to its nation-building task.

7.9.1 The discursive construction of national development

Representing the performance of the government: Hailed as the happiest country in Asia, the government of Bhutan not only promotes the philosophy of 'Gross National Happiness' in the world but, as a Buddhist country, it also faces challenges in maintaining the distinct elements of Buddhism through its cultural preservation programmes. Thus, every citizen in Bhutan has an ethical responsibility to create the necessary conditions that enable citizens to lead the good life (Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations, 2015). Tsheringtobgay.com articles construct discourses about the government of Bhutan and the philosophy of GNH, focusing on the concept of nation-building. Often, the articles are critical of the government and politicians and criticise them for not living up to their task. For example, an article in tsheringtobgay.com read:

...the Chinese appear to threaten encroaching on our soil over now and then. In 2004 and 2009 they built roads inside our country; in 2008 and 2009 the Chinese army intruded deep into our country no

less than 17 times; they have built temporary huts inside our country; almost every year, Tibetans enter our country illegally....

So, I pointed out in the Assembly that the numerous meetings don't seem to be helping, that we have not made any significant progress in finalizing our northern border.

In response to my suggestion, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuck looked towards me, and declared that the government would welcome any alternative strategy that members of the Parliament might have in mind. His offer sounded more a challenge than a genuine invitation. Still, here's my view, my biggest alternative strategy: visit Beijing (17 January 2012).

The article not only reports on the presence of the Chinese army in the territories of Bhutan, but also provides advice to the government of Bhutan suggesting that the government needs to work on border issues at the government level, i.e. Beijing and Thimphu. By referring to debates in the Parliament, the article constructs discourses in a way that readers become aware of how serious the government is about the border issue and of how the author, as a leader of the opposition party, performs his role by questioning the government and holding them accountable to the public. In addition, it may be described as how the opposition party challenges the policies of the government, producing different policies where appropriate. By discussing the 'alternative strategy', the article positions itself as knowledgeable, although it does not discuss how as Bhutan has had no diplomatic relations with China for centuries.

A similar article criticising the government's approach to dealing with a natural disaster read:

...I questioned the government for not having a proper system in place to respond to natural disaster, a system that provides meaningful relief and offers adequate support for reconstruction.

... I criticised them (the government) for distributing 'dignity bags' when it was quite clear that victims did not need them. The earthquake had damaged thousands of houses...

...I can think of one reason: the government does not have a proper understanding of the ground reality... (26 January 2012).

The article draws the readers' attention to how poorly the government is handling the crisis. While the government is described as responsive to the crisis, the article criticises the inadequate support given to victims. The government is presented in a way that readers would think that the government is incapable of handling the crisis. These descriptions are an indication that the article constructs discourse from the oppositional perspective, often positioning itself as an expert. Although these criticisms are aimed at making the government more efficient and accountable, it may also be suggested that the site and its writer aims to improve his supporter base by criticising the government and promoting his own political ideology.

Representing social responsibility in national development: The second theme that appears in many tsheringtobgay.com articles is a constant attempt to persuade readers to bear their share of social responsibility in the development

of the nation. Although articles do not explicitly direct readers to bear their share of social responsibility, the central concern is that Bhutan is a small country with limited resources, and that the Bhutanese government is not capable of living up to international standards at a moment, although Bhutan is part of a global community, and therefore the Bhutanese people should support the government. For example, an article read:

Thimphu's main roads are fairly good. They are not necessarily beautiful, but, in spite of limited resources, they are, by and large, smooth, wide and well-managed.

... Most of them are narrow, riddled with pot holes, and have not seen any form of maintenance for years. Naturally, many local residents are frustrated. One such resident is Aum Thinley Lham. She lives in Taba and, for the longest time, has complained bitterly about the state of her road. But instead of continuing to grumble, she decided to take matters into her own hands; she has decided to repair the road herself.

Most of us, who live in urban areas, take public property for granted. We want the best. But unlike our farmers, we do not contribute to building them. We do not even contribute to their maintenance. This is not sustainable. If we want to enjoy good roads, good schools and good parks, we better learn, like Aum Thinley Lham, to contribute. Or we better be willing to pay our city corporation higher taxes (15 March 2012).

Although tsheringtobgay.com articles often praise voluntary services by citizens, they also direct readers to offer help to the government to avoid the prospect of

tax increment. By referencing 'Lham' and 'higher tax', the articles implicitly encourage readers to become involved in national development. The articles do not discuss any existing policy on national developments or tax systems of the country — for example, whether the government has any allocated budget for infrastructure developments, such as building parks.

However, by using the term 'higher tax', the articles issue a polite warning of tax increment, which may be avoided if voluntary services are offered. The articles also assure readers that voluntary services may enhance the prospect of 'good roads, good schools and parks' in the country.

Overall, tsheringtobgay.com articles construct discourse within a single theme — national building. Given the fact that articles are written by the leader of the opposition party, discourses are constructed from the oppositional perspective, criticising the government and politicians. In addition, the articles aim to build relationship by encouraging readers to take part in voluntary services proposed by the opposition party.

7.10 Sangaykhandu.com

As in tsheringtobgay.com, sangaykhandu.com findings are summarised within a broad theme related to public services — that the government should be responsible for public services. The articles employ two different discursive techniques to construct discourses on government responsibility in delivering public services.

7.10.1 The discursive construction of inept leaders and responsible citizens

Representing the poor performance of government: An important focus in most sangaykhanud.com articles is on the poor performance of government — that the government has failed to deliver services because leaders are 'corrupt' and 'inept'. For example, an article (headlined '*RTI in Bhutan; not the end but the beginning*') encourages the members of parliament to introduce the Right to Information Bill (RTI) for a parliament debate in the House, arguing that Right to Information is part of the fundamental rights of citizens. However, the article suggests that some members are hesitant to discuss the bill due to lack of confidence and knowledge on the subject:

While not many would refute [the] importance [of RTI] in democratizing governance, the concern really for many with who I have spoken [to] or interacted with, who have expressed reservations, seem to be one revolving around unpreparedness as a society (23 May 2012).

There were several appeals to consider... there are also concerns that voting [for the Bill] may result in unnecessary labelling and accusations against fellow law-makers of being seen as corrupt if not in favour of the Bill. Members felt that their inability to lend support to the Bill may be misunderstood as having corrupt intent and also being corrupt' (30 May 2012).

The article constructs discourse focusing on the inability of some MPs in supporting the bill in question. The central argument in the article is that, while

many MPs are democrats — in the sense that they see the importance of RTI in democratizing governance — they are hesitant to exercise their power to pass the bill for a parliamentary debate. The MPs' hesitation to support the bill may be understood in part as result of their lack of knowledge about future consequences rather than intention. However, these descriptions are an indication that the MPs are not living up to their task, and thus the article is critical of leaders and the government.

Bearing social responsibility: The responsibility theme constructs the people of Bhutan as law-abiding, hardworking, and happy people, who consider taking part in the creation of public awareness as their main national duty (16 March 2012). Sangaykhandu.com published several articles in 2012, including one, headlined '*Bhutan, Youth and Our Future*', urging that we should be responsible for guiding young people properly to achieve their dream (4 February 2012). By 'guiding properly' the article focuses on the public's tasks — that we should educate our young people in a way that addresses our social and national needs. This means, we are responsible for creating a better future which involves guiding youths properly.

Another article on the same theme constructs discourse in the philosophy of GNH, which the article claims was coined by Bhutan, suggesting that Bhutan achieved its national goal by becoming one of the happiest countries in the world. However, as a founding nation of GNH, Bhutan faces a huge responsibility ahead of it, that is, to act as a role model for the rest of the world. While the article does not assure readers that its efforts would transform the world into the happiest one, it argues that Bhutan is part of a global society and thus its

responsibility is to share its experience from its success. These descriptions are an indication that being responsible is important for any change.

Overall, sangaykhandu.com articles construct discourse focusing on the inability of politicians and the government in performing their role. The central concern of the articles is that politicians and the government need to focus on nation-building and that members of the public should bear their share of responsibility. Articles often criticise the government, reflecting the views of the author but offer no solutions.

7.11 Discussions

As this analysis reveals, the sites employ a wide range of techniques to frame the social and political experience of their writers, focusing on national identity, history, and social responsibility. More specifically, bhutannewsservice.com articles make two implicit claims about national identity and history in its coverage. The first claim — that the Lhotshampa people in southern Bhutan are brave, hardworking, adaptive, and have centuries of history in the country — is made through four discursive techniques: 1) representing common personality traits of the Lhotshampa people; 2) new lives in a new country; 3) Reliving own experience back in home country; and 4) negotiating political agenda in a hope for repatriation. The second implicit claim — that Bhutan is a country of all migrants — is made through three discursive techniques: 1) representing Bhutan as a country of all immigrants; 2) representing the Bhutanese government as undemocratic and ruthless; and 3) delegitimizing the Bhutanese media.

Particularly important in the bhutannewsservice.com articles is the representation of the national identity of the Bhutanese refugees. As the

Lhotshampa minorities are considered by the Bhutanese government as outsiders, the articles articulate a contrast between 'us' and 'them' and thereby position 'Tibetan immigrants' as those who live in western and northern Bhutan and hold most of the political and cultural positions in the country. Thus, the root of refugee crisis in the articles is described as inter-ethnic conflicts rather than a political crisis, as claimed by the Bhutanese government.

The construction of the argument that presents Bhutan as a country of all immigrants represents a historical description of different ethnic minorities, mainly the Lhotshampa, the Ngalong, and the Shar chop. Although official sources reclassify the Lhotshampa people as outsiders, bhutannewsservice.com articles legitimise their presence in Bhutan by providing relevant evidence. For example, articles frequently highlight the 1616 diplomatic relationship between Bhutan and Gorkha and thereby the movement of Nepalese craftsmen to Bhutan. In such articles, the Lhotshampa people, who first arrived in Bhutan, are described as professional or skilled, focusing on the Lhotshampa people rather than on Lhotshampa populations as a local community in Bhutan.

On the other hand, the ruling elites are described as Tibetan immigrants, implicitly describing them as 'unskilled' or 'unprofessional'. Although bhutannewsservice.com articles describe Bhutan as a country of different ethnic minority groups, they rarely discuss any other minority groups, such as Bhutia. The focus in the bhutannewsservice.com articles is mainly on two dominant ethnic groups: the ruling elite and the Nepalese-speaking Lhotshampa people. [Bhutannewsservice.com](http://bhutannewsservice.com) articles discuss a great deal on the origin and chronological history of the Lhotshampa people in Bhutan in order to legitimise their Bhutanese identity. However, the language of their reconstructions differs.

Articles that describe the Lhotshampa people are often characterised by personal narratives, and some articles are even emotive, reflecting personal experience. Articles usually do not use experts or other materials as the source. For example:

The brave, hardworking, loyal and master obedient the [Lhotshampa] were invited to Bhutan in two phases and history has clearly mention it (21 April 2012). The hefty, sturdy, fair looking, kind and the decent Lhotshampas have always maintained their place in the Bhutanese soil. The loyalty of the Lhotshampas had remained unchallenged throughout the periods of history and the question of loyalty of this race remains unanswered (11 May 2012).

In contrast, the articles that discuss the history of Bhutan, usually with experts and historians as the source, are diverse in their presentations and often challenge official sources using quotations or paraphrasing expert sources. For example:

No history can be written without the truth in it. And the truths cannot be misinterpreted by any hired writers to suit the interests of the rulers. However, we can derive the basic facts of history of Bhutanese people from its essence of origin. The Bhutia's, forefathers of Drukpas, from Tibet started migrating to this area; today's Bhutan then ruled by India Kooch rulers in seventh century A. D. and settled down here permanently (BHUTAN by Nagendra Singh, 1978:19) (12 December 2012).

Thus, the history of Bhutan is seen with the arrival of 'immigrants' from neighbouring countries, who discovered new lands, established hierarchy types of several municipal governments, and over time unified them into what is today known as Asia's happiest country.

Religion in bhutannewsservice.com articles is described as a way of Bhutanese life, and early rulers are often described as monks rather than a king or a Penlop (provincial governor) in the twentieth century. Articles discussing political and government issues often challenge official sources by reflecting perspectives held by their authors. Such articles usually criticise top-level politicians, especially Prime Minister Lyonchen Jigme Yoser Thinley and political leaders of Nepal. For example:

Dear Thinley, the Buddhist methods of atrocities must be brought to light as this will help the world to remain alert and safe from ambitious, rude and unfathomable cruel rulers like you since you pretend as savior and human friendly, but the realities are exactly opposite (21 April 2012).

When quoting politicians in relation to refugee-related issues, articles in bhutannewsservice.com mainly criticise the governments of Bhutan and Nepal, making their own assertions about the refugee crisis of Bhutan. Despite such discursive construction of politics criticising the leaders of both countries, Bhutan and Nepal, an appeal for long-term solutions for Bhutanese refugees continues in bhutannewsservice.com articles. In addition, through the selective use of various donors as sources, such as UNHCR, the articles articulate the interest of the donors while positioning the site as an objective transmitter of information, working on behalf of concerned readers.

Other important discourses in the study are featured in articles from two other sites: tsheringtobgay.com and sangaykhandu.com. As both sites are based in Bhutan — where the media has been under the regime's control for centuries — articles on both sites focus on national issues. More specifically, tsheringtobgay.com's articles focus on the concept of nation-building while sangaykhandu.com focuses on public services — that the government should pay more attention to developing policy and delivering services. More often, both sites' articles criticise the government and its policies reflecting oppositional views and perspectives. For example, one of the tsheringtopgay.com articles reads:

...our economy is in a crisis. And we, the people, are concerned — we are confused; we are anxious; and we are losing confidence in our economy. Yet our government has remained completely silent. The prime minister and elected government have still not addressed the people to explain what is happening to our economy (2 April, 2012).

In contrast to tsheringtobgay.com, sangaykhandu.com articles often use strong and direct language, such as 'corrupt' and 'inability', to criticise the politicians and the government.

When reconstructing the ideology of national identity, articles on both sites promote the philosophy of 'Gross National Happiness' as a legitimate voice. Thus, the reconstruction of the ideology of national identity extends to an effort by the government, and both sites' articles promote the effort as a moral obligation of every citizen in the country. For example, an article titled '*Are we practising GNH*

in Bhutan? This is a profound question and there can be no simple answer to it'
reads:

...we owe it to our great leader behind the philosophy [of Gross National Happiness] and idea to carry it forward for the Bhutanese people (29 January 2012).

A similar article with a headline '*GNH and Bhutan*' in tsheringtobgay.com quoted a cartoon published in '*The Bhutan Observer*':

Here's an insightful cartoon. The message is loud and clear. There's no need to elaborate. But one dangerous element is missing in the murky background: the rupee crunch and the growing economic crisis, about which the prime minister has not yet uttered a word (30 March 2012).

Although the article is more concerned about the 'rupee crunch' here, the ideology of Bhutanese national identity is still articulated in and around the philosophy of GNH, which is also being discursively represented as pride of nation.

Articles on both sites support the concept of social responsibility in nation-building; however, the language of their reconstructions differs. More specifically, tsheringtobgay.com articles urge the participation of both ordinary citizens and the government in the process of nation-building. On the other hand, sangaykhandu.com articles urge politicians to be more responsible for the matter.

7.12 Conclusions

While each sites' articles represent Bhutan, they differ from each other in terms of their discursive construction. For example, the articles that are published on bhutannewsservice.com focus on a wide range of topics and are more critical of official sources than those that are published on the other two sites. In order to assure the reader, bhutannewsservice.com articles often use quotations, paraphrasing sources to legitimise their claims, and discourses are constructed on the concept of nation and national identity. The central concern in discourses is that the Bhutanese government reclassified some of the Lhotshampa as 'illegal immigrants', or 'criminals', thereby ceasing their citizenship, and that the Bhutanese refugees face a big challenge ahead of them.

The articles construct political discourses from various perspectives, and their discourses keep shifting from one perspective to another in the wake of political changes. For example, some bhutannewsservice.com articles in 2012 urged for a review of refugee demands, as some of the demands, such as transformation of national politics in Bhutan, are 'unreasonable' in the changing context. This call for a review of refugees' demands may be understood as a result of political changes in Bhutan and refugee camps —Bhutan adopted constitutional monarchy in 2008 and more than 70,000 Bhutanese opted for a third country settlement programme rather than waiting for repatriation to homeland.

On the other hand, articles on the two other sites (tsheringtobgay.com, and sangaykhandu.com) construct discourses focusing on the concept of nation-building. Both sites construct discourse on national issues, focusing on collective efforts in nation-building. As both sites are operated by individual politicians, articles often reflect the views of the authors and are critical of the government.

However, tsheringtobgay.com articles are more supportive of the government and view the government's plans and programmes from a mostly positive point of view, although often pointing out errors and offering advice.

All of these sites often make reference to mainstream sources; however, they do not make any reference to each other. Although each site differs from the other in terms of its agenda, they share the same voice and concerns when it comes to the ideology of nation and national identity — the fact that our country is Bhutan and thus we are Bhutanese.

7.13 Citizen journalism: A Bhutanese perspective

As has been discussed earlier, with the country taking its first steps towards democracy, the Bhutanese media has grown considerably in all its forms in recent years — print, broadcast, film, music, and the Internet. Social media is gaining in popularity among the Bhutanese people, with an increasing number of people visiting popular networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, for news and information, interactions, and discussions (The Bhutan Media Foundation, 2015). Bhutan has the second highest national internet penetration after the Maldives among the SAARC countries — 30% of the total population of Bhutan has an internet connection (Internet World Stats, 2015).

However, when examining the Bhutanese sample, it becomes clear that Bhutan is the least developed nation among the SAARC countries in terms of citizen journalism — only a small number of people engage with news media online (i.e. creating and distributing news articles online). Those who are active in news media also do not provide news articles on a regular basis. This is perhaps because the government strictly controls the media and citizen journalism is a

quite new phenomenon in the country, and thus the Bhutanese people have not fully realised the potential of the citizen-media initiative. This is because the Bhutanese people lived with no television or the Internet until the government lifted a ban on television and the Internet in 1999.

However, with the introduction of the Internet, there are indications that citizen journalism in Bhutan is beginning to realise its potential to play the role of a watchdog, building relationships and establishing political dialogue for a better democracy.

Bhutanese citizen journalists come from a wide range of backgrounds, from politicians aspiring to promote their political ideology to refugees, who want to have their voice heard by the outside world. Thus, the main focus of Bhutanese citizen journalism is on issues such as nation, people, and the government. Criticism of government and politicians is central to debates in most of the coverage of citizen journalism news, although a group of Bhutanese citizens from abroad often provide a wide range of news coverage about diaspora.

Although citizen journalists criticise the government and politicians for their underperformance, they rarely use official sources to justify their suggestions. Thus, most of the news articles may be classified as biased as news articles often represent the subjective views of the author. For example, an opinion piece published on sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan) on 12 May 2012 criticised politicians for not supporting the *Right to Information Bill* in the parliament for a debate. The article discussed the opinion of the author from various perspectives, justifying why the author's argument was the best of all, but the official versions of why the *Right to Information Bill* was not presented for debate in the Parliament was not covered in the article. There was no reflection of the

government's views and stances. Thus, instead of providing independent news information, this citizen journalist often used citizen journalism to promote his own political views and to enhance his supporter base for his own political ends.

Based on its news characteristics, Bhutanese citizen journalism may be described from two different broad perspectives: first, it is a platform for people to offer alternative news and information, encouraging citizens to an active citizenship. An active citizen is an alert individual who represents different concerns of society. By giving spaces for readers to post comments about news articles published on the Internet, Bhutanese citizen journalism encourages readers to participate in debates on a wide range of issues.

By discussing the history and culture of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people, citizen journalism educates people, helping them construct their national identity. In addition, by engaging readers in the news media, citizen journalism not only promotes citizens' views, but also encourages people to play the role of a watchdog, providing alternative perspectives. For example, Sangay Khandu and Tshering Tobgay — both of whom run their blogs under their own names — not only publish news articles critical of the government and politicians, but also point out what they consider to be the government's wrongdoings.

Second, it connects people living in different parts of the world. Citizen journalism not only offers news and information, but also allows people from one corner of the globe to connect with another without leaving their country. By bringing people together, Bhutanese citizen journalism aims to revive the memories of the Bhutanese people of their country and cultures. By doing so, the Bhutanese people are able to share the knowledge and experience they have gained in their homeland and host nations. Thus, the Bhutanese refugees see

citizen journalism as the only way to tell their part of stories to the international community, putting pressures on the Bhutanese government.

Like elsewhere, the rise of citizen journalism in Bhutan is linked to the notion of active citizenship that needs to play a role in strengthening democratic governance, although the actual practice of citizen journalism in Bhutan coincided with the introduction of the Internet. While the citizen-initiative media has yet to achieve the status it has in the Western world, or even South Korea, there are indications that citizen journalism is rising as an emerging model of journalism in Bhutan. By enabling everyone to create and distribute news without practising the traditional ethics of journalism, citizen journalism is bringing together a diversity of views and voices. This may be seen as a promising scenario of breaking free from media bias as well as taking local news onto a global platform. This means that citizen journalism enables pressure groups, sparking public debates.

Overall, it may be suggested that Bhutanese citizen journalism offers a platform for the Bhutanese people living in and outside of the country, providing them an opportunity to participate in public affairs and fulfil the critical function of the media. By constructing discourse on political issues, Bhutanese citizen journalism also helps the Bhutanese people strengthen their sense of patriotism and national pride. More importantly, Bhutanese citizen journalism functions as an alternative media that fulfils the roles of a critical watchdog, gatekeeper, and agenda-setter.

Chapter Eight

8. Citizen journalism: A news perspective from the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation

This chapter discusses the phenomenon of citizen journalism, focusing on the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation. It discusses the phenomenon from two perspectives, i.e. broader narrower, and defines citizen journalism from the perspective of the SAARC region. The broader perspective discusses the empirical findings in this study in the light of the literature review of citizen journalism. The narrower perspective deals with the data that was analysed in this thesis.

8.1 The broader perspective

The rise of citizen journalism in [the SAARC countries] is linked to the notion of active citizenship and the need to strengthen democratic governance (Noor, 2012, p. 4). An active citizen may be described as a socially aware person, who is aware of the social and political issues of his or her society. While the earliest media initiatives by ordinary people in the SAARC region dates back at least to the late eighteenth century — James Augustus Hickey, an Irishman, published a two-page newspaper from Calcutta in the 1780s — actual citizen journalism may date back to the publication of Mahatma Gandhi's first pamphlet discussing the living conditions of Indians during the British rule in Africa in the early twentieth century. In his *Satyagrah in South Africa*, Ghandhi (1927) stated:

While in India, I wrote a pamphlet on the condition of Indians in South Africa. It was noticed by almost all newspapers and it passed

through two editions. Five thousand copies were distributed in various places in India (p. 46).

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a group of Hindu Sri Lankans published similar pamphlets to initiate awareness campaigns to win back those who had converted to Christianity. Although these pamphlets were religious, they also discussed other issues, such as politics and culture (Kailasapathy, 1979). In the early 1930s, when the creation of Muslim states in India was being discussed by Indian intellectuals and politicians, Chaudhary Rehmat Ali — a Cambridge-educated student and the founder of the Pakistan National Movement — published a pamphlet on the subject, which he had distributed in several places, including England. Similar pamphlets were sporadically published later in India, mainly with political news content (Global Security, 2011).

Pamphlets were thus among the first printed materials used by citizen journalists in the SAARC region in order to raise awareness among the people of their political rights and culture and religion. Citizen journalists continued to use such pamphlets until the early 1990s, primarily for political purposes. For example, during the 1990s People's Movement of Nepal, opposition political parties, mainly the Nepali Congress and the Community Party of Nepal, organised various social and political campaigns, including the publishing of sporadic pamphlets that claimed that Pampha Devi — the nick name given to the then Queen Aiswarya Rajya Laxmi Shahd Dev by the opposition — had millions of dollars in her secret Swiss bank account.

Although there has been no confirmation yet that any member of the Nepalese royal family has ever held a bank account with a Swiss bank, these sporadic pamphlets played a significant role in inciting protesters. However, such

pamphlets were used only for a specific political purpose and were therefore short-lived and ceased to exist upon the fall of the regime.

With the introduction of Internet technology, the people of the SAARC countries are now experiencing a growth in the use of digital media. From the 2008 Mumbai terror attack to the recent devastating earthquake in Nepal, we are witnessing citizens engage in the news media in many different ways. For example, mere moments after the Mumbai attack in 2008, ordinary people who were witnessing the unfolding drama posted messages — also known as 'tweets' — on the micro-blogging site Twitter. *The Telegraph*, a British broadsheet newspaper, reported that tweets were posted to the site at a rate of around 70 tweets every 5 seconds when the tragedy first broke. Although the initial circulation of news included little detail, the tweets provided a wide array of perspectives and gave a strong sense of what was going on during the attack (BBC, 2008).

Some mainstream media outlets, including the BBC, used first-hand accounts of the events, blog posts, twitter messages ('tweets'), and e-mails, in their news coverage. Footage captured on mobile phones by guests trapped in the hotels was shown on Indian news channels. While the television coverage of the crisis was soon criticised in both print and online news media for its lack of distance, jingoism, sensationalism, and for revealing the locations of security forces when the terrorists were being challenged, the online coverage of the crisis saw Mumbai emerging as the 'capital of citizen journalism in India' (Sonwalkar, 2009, p. 84).

However, the high-water mark in the history of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is perhaps the reporting of the recent (spring 2015) earthquakes in

Nepal, in which citizen journalists engaged in the news media in a variety of ways. As a result, the key source of breaking news about the earthquakes was no longer the radio, television, or newspapers; it was citizen journalism. Just hours after the 7.8 magnitude earthquake devastated the country, Nepalese citizen journalists posted live footage of the earthquakes and crying victims on Facebook and tweeted messages, coordinating volunteers and calling for friends to mobilise quickly to help the relief effort. Several citizen journalism sites, including mysansar.com (Nepal), published eyewitness accounts of aftershocks, updating their readers regularly with news and requests for help.

The coverage by citizen journalists also helped the Nepalese diaspora find out what was happening on the ground in their home country. Agency France-Press, an international news agency headquartered in Paris, reported that even the Nepalese government got in on the social media act, pushing communications online, tweeting updates and creating its own online portal. For those living out of the country, citizen journalism was the main source of communicating and seeking immediate information about the developing situation in Nepal. Some commentators even remarked that social media signalled the beginning of real citizen journalism in the country (Nagarik Daily, 23 May 2015).

Citizen journalism in the SAARC region has not only influenced the reporting of crises, but also intervened in social and human rights issues, exposed political corruption, highlighted malpractices in the mainstream media, and voiced issues of concern to women in male-dominated countries, such as India (Sonwalker, 2009). In 2013, for example, an Indian citizen journalist named Naresh, from a remote area of the central Indian state of Chattisgarh made a phone call to GGNe Swara, a community news portal dedicated to citizen journalism. The

conversation about how a local forestry officer had extorted a bribe of 99,000 Indian rupees from a local tribe was recorded in audio.

Naresh's report was no different from thousands of instances of corruption reports by the local, regional, and national media of India. However, what followed was different — soon after the message was posted on the site, an official inquiry was instigated, and within a month the officer was found guilty and the bribe money was returned to the victim (BBC Action Media, 2013).

In addition, citizen journalism has further widened the parameter of public participation in discourse on issues of public concern by using a range of genres and media, enabling social activism, sparking debates and highlighting critical perspectives on governance, democracy, and other issues. In 2011, Global Information Society released a report that revealed that a growing number of people both in Pakistan and in the diaspora had realised the potential of the Internet and had started to operate online news sites, such as blogs and video-sharing channels, in the last couple of years, informing other people of social and political developments in the country — even in the least developed places, such as Balochistan in the western province of Pakistan. The report also suggested that, despite the fact that Pakistan is one of the least developed nations among the SAARC countries in terms of internet penetration and has a low literacy rate, the country has now become home to one of the most successful uses of the Internet as a tool for advocacy, driving social and political campaigns for human rights and democracy. Citizen journalists frequently post shocking videos of human rights violence — such as illegal detentions, torture, and extra-judicial killings of journalists, lawyers, students, and political activists by the army (Ahmad and Dad, 2011). As a result, the Pakistani government blocked several

websites in response to growing reports about the actions of the government in 2006.

As citizen journalists do not ascribe to the codes of ethics and practice set down for 'professional journalists' (Burns, 2013, p. 21), citizen journalism has become an important tool for minority groups, such as the Lhotsampa people of Bhutan and the Hazara people of Afghanistan — who are living in different parts of the world as refugees — to raise their voice. By publishing news articles, they are able to tell their part of stories to the outside world, creating political discourse. For example, in 2006, a small group of refugees set up a citizen journalism site under the registration name bhutannewsservice.com.

Whilst the site initially published only news articles about Bhutanese refugees living in camps in Nepal, it soon grew into what some now consider to be an alternative media from Bhutan. The site not only publishes the stories of the Bhutanese refugees living in different parts of world, but also discusses the political affairs of its country. It now attracts readers from all over the world, creating pressure groups, sparking public discourse and often drawing the attention of the world in a way that the mainstream media in Bhutan has never done.

In an interview with the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, Sanjana Hottotuwa, the founder and editor of groundviews.org (Sri Lanka), suggested that citizen journalism in countries, such as Sri Lanka, could help create new forms of media that would not necessarily be subjected to the same censorship, the same violence, the same clamp down on freedom of expression that so many journalists and so much of the media had endured during the conflict in Sri Lanka. He further added that, during and after Sri Lanka's long civil

war, where people could not write freely in the mainstream media, citizen journalism offered spaces for people to express their political views, writing freely about news events that interested them (wan-ifra.org, 2013). These suggestions are an indication that citizen journalism in the SAARC countries has the potential of enriching the public sphere and enabling the expression of a wider range of opinion, thus empowering citizens.

One of the most visible dimensions of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is the participation of the diaspora in the news media from around the world. With an increasing trend in the world towards globalization, entrepreneurs from developed countries are involved in the SAARC region, making the region a lucrative space for capital, talent and ideas (Pillai, 2013), and the diaspora people from the SAARC region are now living in different parts of the world. Citizen journalism enables these people to engage in political debates, enhancing knowledge and sharing the experience they have gained in both their homeland and host nations. Moreover, citizen journalism is helping them to educate themselves about the culture and political system of their host countries while also forming their own community online (Srinivasan and Shilton, 2006).

Using a minimum of resources, these diaspora citizens are engaging in an activity that has the potential to create change in a restricted political environment in their home country. Tamilnet.com (Sri Lanka) illustrates this assertion. Established by a group of the Tamil diaspora in 1997, the site is dedicated to the cause of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. Articles on the site expose how the Sri Lankan government discriminates against the Tamil minority in their own country. In July 2012, the site criticised the Olympic Committee for allowing the Sri Lankan delegation to participate in the 2012 Olympics,

expressing its opposition to the legitimacy given to a Sri Lankan regime that is accused of committing genocide. The site also emphasized the presence of Tamils on the streets of Stratford in London, where Gobi Sivanthan, one of the Tamil protesters, had entered his sixth day of hunger strike in protest.

With increasing public participation in the news media in recent decades, the media is facing challenges from citizen journalism, and as Pedersen (2010) suggested, the media in the SAARC countries is trying to respond to this possible threat posed by alternative news sources, such as blogs, by increasing 'audience participation in the journalism process, particularly online' (p.34). As a result, most mainstream media appear to have realised the potential of the Internet features and have now gone online, embracing the experience of their audiences, sharing their views (e.g. comments), and using their knowledge and opinions. They are even encouraging their own trained journalists to act as both professional and citizen journalists. Kunda Dixit, the editor of *The Nepali Times*, for example, runs a personal blog, which is located at nepalitimes.com/blogs/kundadixit/.

Apart from editorial affairs, Dixit regularly updates his blog with posts reflecting his personal views. In response to an e-mail inquiry, Dixit suggested that, although he writes his personal views on his blogs, sometimes he converts some of his pieces to articles in the hardcopy edition of his newspaper. This finding echoes the work of Thorsen (2011) that suggested that some professional journalists are adopting alternative forms of news gathering and storytelling through the Internet, despite pressures to preserve traditional standards of journalism, such as the verification of information and sources.

This is evident that citizen journalism is steadily breaking through the limitations of the traditional media, offering ordinary people a new form of expression and empowerment. An example includes groundviews.org (Sri Lanka), which was awarded an Award of Excellence in New Communications by the Society for New Communications Research for Excellence in Journalism and Media in December 2007. Likewise, in 2014, Shubhranshu Chaudhary, the Indian citizen journalist and founder of CGnet Swara, won the Freedom of Expression Award organized by the UK-based Index on Censorship. On the other hand, Nepalese citizen journalists have recently established an Online Journalists' Association of Nepal, with the primary objective of providing professional leadership to citizen journalists and the citizen-media initiative in the country. These initiatives are an indication that citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is being recognised as a powerful force.

8.1.2 The SAARC governments and censorship

Whilst new technologies are opening up new possibilities for a free flow of information online, some of the laws relating to internet use in the SAARC countries threaten free speech. The main threat to free expression online stems from specific laws in individual countries. Governments are determined to strictly monitor online content, including citizen journalism, for a number of reasons — for example, defamation, the maintenance of national security, and communal harmony. Most of the restrictive laws and the technical means used to enforce online information restrictions have undermined freedom of expression. As a result, there have been several cases, in which some giant web host companies, including Google, Yahoo, and Facebook, have faced court cases and criminal

charges for failing to remove what is deemed to be 'objectionable' content in the context of India (Patry, 2013).

Due to the presence of terrorists and the experience of civil wars, the SAARC countries have introduced news regulations that may discourage citizen journalists from reporting news. The cyber law of India may be relevant here to highlight how online publications are being constrained in India. Indian cybercafés are regulated by the Section 79 of the Internet Technology Act, however, the provision is problematic from the perspective of news media – the Act limits citizen journalists from creating and distributing news content online by imposing administrative requirements for cybercafés to have the ability to retain the basic identity information of users for a period of at least one year.

In addition, the rules directly limit citizens' access as cybercafés cannot allow users to use computer resources without providing an established identity document, such as a ration card. Whilst this legal provision may have been designed in the national interest, it creates a barrier for people who are likely not to have the required identification. Such strict rules restricting online content have limited the ability of citizen journalists to create and distribute online news information in India, where one-fifth of the world's population lives.

From the broader point of view, internet content filtering in the SAARC countries remains both inconsistent and intermittent, mainly for political and religious reasons. In a case in 2010, Pakistan and Bangladesh made global headlines for blocking social media networking sites and other news sites in response to a contest popularised on social media to draw images of the Prophet Mohammad (Hossain, 2010). Although the ban on the sites was lifted later as a result of pressures from all sides, both governments continued to monitor online content.

In January 2015, Bangladesh's High Court again banned the media, including social media, from reporting speeches and remarks by Tarique Rahman, the eldest son of main opposition leader Khaleda Zia.

Sri Lanka may be described as one of the most dangerous places in the SAARC region citizen journalism, where the government not only strictly monitors online content but also bans online news sites without notice. In June 2012, the government raided the offices of two online news sites srilankaxnews.com and srilankamirror.com, both pro-opposition websites, and arrested nine members of staffs and confiscated equipment. Srilankaxnews.com no longer exists now. The government's attacks on freedom of expression were condemned worldwide. In 2014, it blocked again two more news sites critical of the government, a move which press groups described as intended to intimidate critics of President Mahinda Rajapaksha's administration. According to Reuters (2014), the government blocked at least eight online news sites since the end of the civil war in May 2009.

On the other hand, citizen journalism is still in its infancy in the SAARC countries, and some of the countries, such as Bhutan and Nepal, have no comprehensive cyber legislation to regulate the online media. In Nepal, for example, citizen journalists are required to comply with the Information Technology Act (2000) that provides the legal framework for collecting, storing, and disseminating electronic information in the global marketplace, which is unclear and insufficient to protect a free media.

Thus, arbitrary censorship is commonplace in the SAARC region. For example, in 2005, when King Gyanendra of Nepal took power, censorship and a clampdown on the media continued for several months (Pradhan, 2011). Army officers in

uniforms were deployed at news outlets and journalists were arrested or discouraged from writing about democracy. Although the ban was lifted shortly after the King was dethroned in May 2008, the new government continues to monitor online content. The arrest of editor Sushil Panta and website owner Santosh Bhattari in 2013 for writing an online news story about a girls' college in Kathmandu is one of a series of attacks on citizen journalism in recent years.

8.1.3 Challenges and limitations

As the SAARC countries are still underdeveloped in terms of the basic infrastructures required to practice journalism — electricity, computers, mobile phones, and the Internet — citizen journalism is limited to a small segment of population. Although the SAARC governments in recent years have prioritised digital access and cheaper smartphones are enabling millions more to access the Internet, with around 324.1 million web users — i.e. 19% of the total SAARC population (World Internet Stats, 2014) — internet penetration in the SAARC countries is relatively low by global standards. Because only a small number of users have a fixed internet connection most access the Internet via cybercafés.

In addition to infrastructure limitations, there are other obstacles, namely cost considerations, illiteracy, and languages. According to the World Bank (2013), the SAARC countries are home to many of the developing world's poor — about 571 million people in the SAARC countries survive on less than \$1.25 per day, and they make up more than 44% of the developing world's poor (World Bank, 2013). This is an indication that a large segment of the population cannot have internet access in the SAARC countries.

On the other hand, due to political instability and terrorism, citizen journalists frequently face criminal intimidation charges — or are even killed — for writing news reports. The watchdog organization Freedom House (2014) reported that journalists in South Asian countries face a variety of pressures, from legal action undertaken by governments to violent attacks and killings carried out by extremists, criminals and the police. One such violent act was the attack on Maldivian citizen journalist Ismail Khilath Rasheed in 2012, who was stabbed near to his death by a group of extremists for writing about religion. After recovering from his injuries, Rasheed posted an article on his blog, suggesting that he would not write about religion any more, and maintaining that he would continue to criticise the government's actions. It was clear from his posts that he did not feel comfortable with continuing to write his blog and instead updated his blog with news articles that had been published by the mainstream media.

A similar attack was reported in May 2015 in Bangladesh, where another prominent blogger, Ananta Bijoy Das, was hacked to death. *The Hindustan Times* reported Das's death to be the third time in the last three months that someone had been killed in Bangladesh for online postings critical of Islam. In 2009, *The Times of India* reported that the Supreme Court of India denied legal protection to a 19-year old computer science student, with the user name Ajith D, who was facing a lawsuit for comments critical of the militant right-wing political party 'Shiva Sena' that he posted on the Google-owned social network Orkut. As citizens are not yet recognised as professional, both governments and Islamic extremists frequently target citizen journalists in the SAARC countries.

Furthermore, citizen journalism faces a language problem. Despite having internet connection and an increasing use of smartphones by people, the

population of the SAARC countries speaks a diversity of languages. There are twenty-two primary languages in India alone (Patry, 2013). In Afghanistan, twenty-eight different languages, with two official languages and five national languages, are spoken. The Dari and Pashto languages are used as official languages in the country; however, the majority of the population speak their own local language, making the English language the fourth or fifth language (Bahry, 2013). Therefore, although the people of the SAARC countries are gradually realising the role and importance of their presence in the news media, language poses a major challenge — most online content is published in English. The lack of English language means limited options for citizen journalists to build relationships and participate in the public sphere, at least at the present.

8.2 The narrower perspective

When examining the sample, it becomes clear that the sites demonstrate a wide variety of news characteristics, from politicians acting as citizen journalists to the sites aiming to generate revenues through commercial advertising. The most common characteristic in the sample is that all of the sites identify themselves as independent news providers, and all of the people who engage in the news media call themselves citizen journalists.

There is also evidence that citizen journalists in the sample come from a wide variety of backgrounds, ranging from overseas students wanting to share the knowledge and experience they have gained in their homeland and host nations to politicians wanting to promote their political views for their own political ends.

It is interesting that the sites in the sample differ from each other in terms of their news preference and news presentation — some of the sites offer more

news articles than others and behave more like mainstream news organizations that provide a wide range of news articles. On the other hand, there were sites, which are less active and provide fewer news articles. This is perhaps because some of the SAARC governments more strictly control the media than others, and citizen journalism is a quite new phenomenon in some SAARC countries, such as Bhutan. Furthermore, the Internet has limited citizen journalism in some countries, such as Afghanistan, due to a lower penetration rate.

Although the sites are dedicated to providing news articles, a few of them — particularly those that are owned and operated by a group of people from abroad — are more dedicated to promoting their own political agenda than providing independent news articles, despite what they claim. As these sites are based in foreign countries, with greater freedom of expression, most of their news articles discussed the news issues related to people living abroad. For example, hazarapeople.com (Afghanistan), which is operated by a group of the Hazara ethnic group living in different parts of the world, rarely discuss any news issues that are not related to the Hazara people and their community and country. By publishing news articles on the Internet, the site not only promotes the voice of the Hazaras, but also brings the Hazaras living in different parts of the world together.

Thus, one of the objectives of such sites is to raise the issues of those people living outside of their home countries, and at the same time, pressurise their government to address their issues, rather than providing a wider range of news articles. In addition, the sites aim to share knowledge and experience that citizen journalists have gained in both their homeland and host countries.

On the other hand, a few of the citizen journalists describe their work as a hobby, regardless of where they are based in, and news updates on the sites are provided less frequently. This category of sites also does not seek any advertising at all. 'There are no economic incentives with engaging in the news media online in the country as people are not fully aware of the potential of online news. Therefore, publishing news articles on the Internet is part of my hobby', writes Saroj Panday, suggesting that he is engaging in the news media only during his leisure time to share his experience and feelings. This finding echoes the study of Pedersen and Macafee (2007) that suggested that some of the bloggers in the West tend to post blog content to vent their emotions or frustrations.

With the exception of bdnews.com (Bangladesh), which partners with Reuters for international news, the sites publish news articles written by their network of journalists. The majority of the sites publish news articles, often promoting the political views of the author or the publisher of the sites. For example, on June 8, 2012, sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan) published an article titled '*Reasonable vegetable & food prices – can FCB provide some relief?*':

Vendors buy these produce from India and bring them back to sell to us. While there is nothing wrong with vendors supplying produce that we want, one wonders if the price we pay here is a fair price. I have reasons to believe it could be cheaper, we could pay less for these produce.

I have learnt that [Food Corporation of Bhutan] had operated at the [Centenary Farmers' Market] but had to leave eventually. I was told that it was felt by the vendors that FCB supplying the produce in

competition was not fair. We also know that the Ministry of Agriculture could subsidize FCB if need be to supply these produce like they supplied so many essential commodities in the past, bringing good balance to prices, why should not FCB operate and bring the benefit of cheaper food to Bhutanese?

This article discusses the domestic vegetable market of Bhutan and is concerned with the closure of Centenary Farmers' Market (CFM) — a local vegetable market operated by a group of local farmers in Bhutan. In the article, the author positioned himself as an authority on the subject of why CFM was closed down — it is due to what the author describe as 'unfair competition' resulting from the import of vegetables from the neighbouring country of India. However, as an opposition leader in the parliament, the author fails to perform his role — he does not assure the farmers that he will raise the issues of the farmers in the Parliament for a discussion. By speaking for the Bhutanese farmers, the author promotes his personal views without discussing how to solve the problem. Although the author suggest that the Ministry of Agriculture could subsidize FCB if need be, he does not discuss in detail how. Thus, the article aims to maintain political relationships with readers rather than finding solutions of the vegetable market.

It is perhaps because the majority of the sites focus on local news issues, there is little evidence that they have similar coverage of news on the same topics, except national events, such as general elections. Neither do the sites source each other's news information, which is commonplace in the mainstream media. This is perhaps because citizen journalists have their own agenda to discuss and thus publish news articles focused on their own interests. For example, citizen

journalists writing for groundviews.org (Sri Lanka) more often publish news articles about Sri Lanka but do not discuss international news issues much. Nor do they discuss any news issues related to other SAARC countries. Similarly, citizen journalists associated with bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan) discuss issues related the Bhutanese refugees, but provide fewer news articles which are not related to Bhutanese refugees. They do cover national news issues but only those that are related to the Bhutanese refugees.

On the other hand, the coverage of merinews.com (India) resembles the mainstream media in terms of news coverage — it provides news articles on all news articles in several different forms — including interviews, news analysis, and even memoirs. As Pedersen (2009) suggested, there is a growing financial motivation for the ordinary people of the SAARC region to engage in the news media online, and some of the sites in the sample aim to sell as much commercial advertising as possible. However, there is little evidence that they are commercially successful, as the sites carry a limited amount of advertising.

Some of the sites even do not carry any advertising at all. Interviews with some of the publishers, who could be reached, suggested that they had been generating a limited amount of revenues from advertising online. Bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), for example, publishes a good number of news articles attracting readers worldwide; however, the site has been in financial difficulties throughout its life and has been surviving solely through its network of volunteers for both contributions and donations. Bhagirath Khatiwada, one of the citizen journalists associated with the site, suggested that more than 90% of the expenses incurred in the site are covered by the Bhutanese refugees themselves. Only 10% of the expenses are covered through

donations received from various donors. Tamilnet.com (Sri Lanka) demonstrates similar features. According to its official source, the site has been surviving on donations since its first operation in 1997, and it claims that it has collected a total of USD 115,000 donation so far.

On the other hand, a few of the sites generate revenues differently. One of such site is nepaliblogger.com (Nepal), which generates its revenues using Google technology. Unlike most other sampled sites, which aim to promote local products from their own respective native countries, nepaliblogger.com (Nepal) aims to sell online advertising through Google AdSense, generating revenues from international business companies. The publisher and editor Singh (2015) suggests that his site is legally bound by Google terms and conditions. However, there is a small amount of advertising from Google.

There is not any journalistic code of ethics or guidelines that unified the sites in terms of their news practice, although the majority of news articles are often published from the alternative perspective. This is perhaps because the sites are focused on their national news issues and each country has its own media system and journalism practice. However, the sites and their approach to news practices demonstrate the key characteristics of the alternative media, regardless of who citizen journalists are or how news articles are published on the sites — most of the news articles published on the sites are different from those of the mainstream media.

Although each site differ from the other in terms of its news agenda, all of the sites demonstrate a key common characteristic — they all place national news issues as a top priority, promoting their national identity. The sites in the sample overall demonstrate the key characteristics of alternative media, building

relationships and establishing a dialogue with audience from the different perspective. Overall, the sites from the more developed and free countries, such as India, provide more news articles than those from war-torn countries, such as Afghanistan, where political instabilities have severely affected public lives.

8.3 Conclusions

Citizen journalism aims to cover a wide range of news, writing about the issues deemed serious in society. With the availability of the Internet, anyone, irrespective of their background, is able to participate in the news media. Apart from articulating their personal views, citizen journalists aim to deal with issues such as corruption, terrorism, and human rights violations.

Thus, citizen journalism has had an impact mainly in situations of crisis, but it is slowly exerting influence in politics by exposing corruption, and in society by highlighting issues such as the sexual harassment of women and the problems of people on the margins (Sonwalker, 2009). Although it has not matured at the Western level, citizen journalism in the SAARC countries demonstrates how modern technology is helping to create a new form of media without going through the traditional editorial process. This means that, despite constraints and challenges, the rapid adoption of new technologies and an increasing participation of citizens in the news media are likely to reshape the public sphere, enhancing a democracy in the long run.

Chapter Nine

9. Conclusions

This thesis aims to define citizen journalism from the perspective of the SAARC region by analysing the characteristics of different genres in the coverage of citizen journalism news during the year 2012. Although citizen journalism and the ways in which ordinary people engage in the news media and produce news articles have attracted a great deal of academic attention in recent years, much of the research is either generic or focuses on Western media practice, such as how ordinary people engage in the news media (Glaser, 2006; Gillmor, 2006; Kim and Hamilton, 2006; Atton, 2009), how they produce user-generated content (Thurman, 2008; Paulussen and Ugille, 2008; Carpenter, 2010; Wardle and Williams, 2010), and how the use of user-generated content by the media is changing journalism (Thurman, 2008; Kperogi, 2010; Thorsen 2013). Such studies are rarely comparative and transcultural in scope from the global point of view. Therefore, a need was identified for a study that aimed to understand and define the phenomenon of citizen journalism from the perspective of non-Western media practice.

Therefore, this thesis focused exclusively on citizen journalism sites from non-Western countries. It was hoped to investigate the emerging practice of citizen journalism in non-Western countries, which impelled ordinary people out of their private lives and into the more public sphere of political discourse. In order to do this, a content analysis of news articles, including supplementary materials, and a discourse analysis of news articles by citizen journalists were undertaken.

The eight member countries of the SAARC were chosen for this study, as studies about citizen journalism focusing on the SAARC countries have received limited academic attention. There is evidence that there have been a few attempts to comprehend citizen journalism from the region, but they are more focused on a specific country, particularly India, than on the whole SAARC region (Sonwalker, 2009; Thomas, 2012; and Noor, 2012). In order to investigate how citizen journalism is practised in an entire region, as a comparison with the West, it is necessary to look beyond the notion of a specific country. Therefore, a study focused on a well-defined geographic region, i.e. the SAARC countries, offered the opportunity to examine the phenomenon of citizen journalism from a non-Western perspective.

Employing a purposive approach, twenty-four sites — three from each SAARC country — were sampled for this study. These sites were ideal for the research because they identified themselves as citizen journalism sites, and the people who provided news articles to these sites called themselves citizen journalists. In addition, the sites aimed to reach the culture outside their own country by publishing news articles in the English language. In countries, such as the member states of SAARC, where each of the major varieties of ethnic group speaks numerous dialects as a first language, the English language is a way of telling stories to the outside world as well as people speaking other dialects and languages in their own countries who understand English.

The period between January and December 2012 was chosen for this study because this period witnessed several important events in the SAARC region, including changes in government, social and political crises, and peace processes. This means that this period offered greater opportunities for citizen

journalists to engage in public discourse, providing their political views on these events. In addition, this period was important because athletes from the SAARC countries participated in the 2012 London Olympics, which offered an opportunity for citizen journalists to articulate their national identity through the coverage of news.

This final chapter of the thesis begins by discussing the key empirical findings in this study, focusing on four broad themes: citizen journalism sites as a news corporation, ordinary people as citizen journalists, news practices, and news values. The final section discusses the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

9.1 Citizen journalism sites as news organizations

As has been stated above, it was decided to study a sample of twenty-four sites based in the different contexts of the SAARC countries, representing both a voluntary and a commercial model of journalism. When examining the organizational basis of the sites, it became clear that, despite seeming similarities between the sites in terms of their organizational structure, there were several differences at a micro-level. For example, six of the sites provided news updates regularly while others provided news updates only sporadically. Similarly, although all of the sites identified themselves as an independent citizen journalism site, a few of them behaved more like a personal publication or were dedicated to a particular group of people.

Overall, the sites were maintained in three different ways. The first type was those owned and operated by an individual. This type of site was less active in comparison to other sites, presumably because there was only one author —

they provided news updates less frequently, aimed to survive with a small amount of or without any advertising, and published news articles written by their owners only. Thus, it may be suggested that the main purpose of this type of site was to promote the personal views of the owner rather than to provide independent news articles, as they claimed.

The second type of site was owned by a group of people with diverse backgrounds, who maintained their site in the traditional fashion of a news organization — they recruited editors and citizen journalists, maintained several different departments, and published commercial advertising online. For example, bdnews24.com (Bangladesh) maintained at least four departments — front desk, the newsroom, account department, and advertising department. Each of these departments had at least one telephone extension line with a common fax number in addition to an email address for communications. These findings suggest that the sites aim to achieve more than one objective through citizen journalism. For example, although the sites primarily aim to provide the coverage of news on a wide range of news issues, they also seek to generate revenues for their own survival through the sales of commercial advertising on the Internet.

The third type was owned and operated by a specific group of people for their specific purposes. Although this category of sites aimed to provide a wide range of news articles, they were more focused on and dedicated to their own political agenda. As they were more critical of their government in their home countries, this type of site was often based overseas. For example, bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), which is registered in the US, had its editorial office in the US, but the Bhutanese who were living in different countries across Europe provided its

technical support. Although they aimed to sell commercial advertising, they also generated revenues from donations from various generous individuals. The site also clearly stated that its main objective was to promote the voice of those ethnic groups who were marginalised in their own home countries.

In a way, the majority of the sites aimed to establish themselves as an independent news organization, fulfilling some of the basic requirements that were needed for a news organization, registering a domain name with a web host company and providing basic information about the sites. For example, all of the sites in this study clearly stated who they were and what their objectives were for operating their sites. However, some of the sites failed to negotiate conflicting interests or faced challenges at an organizational level that eventually resulted in either negative consequences, such as attacks, or the complete closure of the sites, as was the case with hilath.com (Maldives). As a result, some of the sites introduced strict policies whereby citizen journalists were required to become a member of the sites before they could publish any news articles on the sites. However, such regulations discouraged those people who chose to remain anonymous and thus were deprived of engaging in the news media and sharing their knowledge and experience.

When considering the characteristics that are typical of alternative media, the sites exhibited facets of both the mainstream media and the alternative media. On the one hand, compared with the dominant form of online news sites in the SAARC countries, which simply reprinted news content from their paper editions, the sites pioneered their own category as an independent news site, in which the mode of delivery is the Internet. They rejected the notion of professional codes and ethics of traditional journalism and aimed to survive on contributions from

their network of journalists, who often provided news coverage that was not covered by the mainstream media. In addition, they aimed to sell commercial advertising online.

On the other hand, although the sites self-identified themselves as voluntarily run independent news outlets, some of the traditional structures were still necessary for their continued existence online, such as the registration of the sites with a government department. In addition, a few of the sites replicated the commonplace characteristics of the mainstream media, such as placing rationalising limits on contributors — contributors were required to comply with the guidelines of the sites. This was particularly the case with the sites, such as merinews.com (India), which aimed to cover a wide range of news issues, generating revenues through the sales of advertising on the Internet — although the sites published only a few advertisements. Despite a small number of advertisements, the sites were able to sustain themselves because of collective and volunteer contributions and the low cost of running the site operation on the Internet without maintaining a mainstream, traditional model of news outlet.

However, a few of the sites, including alika.rimi.ca (Afghanistan), appeared to be an exception to these rules — they had no rules or guidelines for contributors, and the news contributors of these sites were usually the owners themselves. Because of these diverse characteristics, making sense of citizen journalism from the SAARC countries may require a more nuanced approach than simply measuring an ideal set of the prominent characteristics of news practices that define the sites as an alternative media.

9.2 Ordinary people as citizen journalists

Citizen journalists in this study came from a wide range of backgrounds, from politicians aiming to promote their personal political views to aspiring journalists wishing to enhance their existing knowledge and skills. Overall, two categories of citizen journalists emerged in this study — a news-provider group and an advocate group. Citizen journalists in the first group were motivated to provide the coverage of news that was perceived to support citizenship. For them, providing coverage of news was a social responsibility, and they provided news articles on an as wide range of news issues as possible. They even aimed to provide breaking news and subsequent news developments, offered additional news and information on the news events in question, using a range of tools, including mobile phones, and posted live footage and eye-witnessed accounts of news events on the Internet.

Citizen journalists were more active during crises, such as earthquakes or terror attacks, and important events, such as general elections, and provided more news updates about the news developments, as was the case with the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and recent earthquakes in Nepal. In addition, they were strongly determined to uncover political corruption and other wrongdoing by politicians and the government, and their coverage of news often led to official inquiries into those who were involved in such wrongdoings. This may be evidence that citizen journalists in this group seemed impassioned and driven by their determination to be good and informed citizens.

However, there was also a small number of aspiring journalists, who practised citizen journalism as a hobby. Their involvement in the news media was mostly to gain some experience, learn new skills and develop existing ones, with the

primary aim of enhancing their skills for a future career in the mainstream news media.

Citizen journalists in the second group primarily came from activist backgrounds, and therefore their involvement in the news media was either to advocate for social and political changes or to achieve satisfaction through the expression of self in the news media, as was the case with tamilnet.com (Sri Lanka). Thus, citizen journalists were mainly politicians and activists, including those who had been forced to leave their homeland for political reasons. In the process of news, they typically tended to be personally involved in what they were covering and their involvement was often revolutionary or activists rather than reformist. For example, citizen journalists from the Hazara community discussed their own experience in their news coverage, describing how they were treated by the regime and how they suffered socially and politically in their own homeland. Therefore, unlike the first group, they were not detached from what they aimed to provide in their news coverage — they were part of the news. Thus, it may be suggested that citizen journalists in this category were motivated to be citizen journalists by their own political agenda rather than with the intention of providing independent news, as they suggested.

For these citizen journalists, journalistic practices were one mode of civic engagement, although it may also be suggested that one of their aims could also be to provide news as they were writing and publishing news articles on the sites. Whilst they aimed to provide a wide range of news coverage, they were determined to ensure that the coverage of news was related to their own culture and national identity. At the same time, they also aimed to draw the attention of the outside world by raising human rights issues, publishing news articles critical

of their government and politicians. Thus, political expression was the key characteristic of citizen journalists in this category.

9.3 News practices

The empirical findings from the investigation into citizen journalism in the SAARC countries provide diverse news practices. However, the most prominent practice was online — unlike South Korea's OhmyNews.com, which provided both on- and offline editions (Kim and Hamilton, 2006), citizen journalists in this study relied heavily on the Internet and their network of journalists. As the Internet enabled people to engage with the news media online, these citizen journalism sites aimed to have a worldwide reporter base. Thus, knowledge and skills relating to technology were very important in order to make citizen journalism happen.

However, the specific technological knowledge or skills required for citizen journalism depended on what types of format the sites supported. For example, merinews.com (India) facilitated several different types of news contributions, from texts to audio, images, and video, allowing citizen journalists to focus on the content formats with which they were familiar, and some of its contributors regularly provided news articles in several different formats. It is perhaps because of these features that merinews.com (India) seemed to be more successful than other sites — it offered regular news updates, provided the largest number of news articles, and had the largest amount of commercial advertising. On the other hand, a few of the sites, including sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan), preferred the text format only and were less successful in terms of news varieties and advertising. Moreover, they were irregular in providing news updates.

The types of news articles that the different citizen journalist sites favoured were related to the aims and motivations of the sites in providing the coverage of news, and how they positioned themselves. For example, some citizen journalist sites provided mainly the straight reporting of news, describing the details of news events. However, others offered more opinion pieces and articles about the country, people, and their history and culture, often criticizing the politicians and government in their homelands, as in bhutannewsservice.com (Bhutan), where news articles about politics, people and their culture and history dominated the overall coverage of the site.

When analysing citizen journalism practices from a broader perspective, it can be seen that citizen journalists practised journalism for two main purposes: to provide alternative news — either to criticise the actions and decisions of the government or to provide additional news that was not covered by the mainstream media, and to engage in activism for change. It was also clear that the majority of the news articles reflected the political views of the authors, as was seen in the coverage of the fourteenth presidential election of India.

On the other hand, various activists engaged in the news media for their own political ends. For example, citizen journalists of tamilnet.com (Sri Lanka) explicitly advocated in their news coverage for freedom of expression in Sri Lanka. As a result, their coverage of news tended to be critical of the establishment press and the government, articulating their arguments of how the government and the media of Sri Lanka treated the ethnic Tamil minority in their own country. Such a focus on a specific ethnic group often led the citizen journalists on this site to lean heavily towards advocacy and activism rather than the provision of independent news analysis. However, some citizen journalists in

this category did draw on the traditional liberal journalistic values of 'neutrality' by cross-examining sources and facts and reported news independently — at least from the perspective of citizen journalists.

The sites also made a regular use of contributions from international writers who discussed their issues. This was more particular with sites, such as bhutannewsservice.com, which were based abroad. For example, bhutannewsservice.com advocated for political and human rights for an ethnic minority in Bhutan. A few of the staff at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees regularly wrote news articles about the situation of the Bhutanese refugees living in several camps in Nepal. As the site is based in a foreign country, citizen journalists could describe knowledge and experience of their lives without any fear of censorship — although there is also a prospect of rejection for news publication, as the site has introduced its own set of editorial guidelines for those wishing to publish their news articles on citizen journalism sites.

It was also found that there was a necessity for at least some degree of moderation, or perhaps even editing, if the site as a news organization was to survive the challenges related to news quality and credibility. More specifically, a few of the sites, including merinews.com (India), recruited a team of editors, who were responsible for filtering what did not fit or what was nonessential for the publication. Through such editorial processes, the editors exercised power over not only what type of news articles were to be published on the sites, but also how news articles were to be presented online. However, a few of the sites, including tsheringtobgay.com (Bhutan), provided no spaces for contributors at all. This is contrary to a common perception in the West that citizen journalism

allows ordinary people to produce and distribute news articles on the Internet without any editorial constraints (Gillmor, 2006).

It was also clear that, as in the mainstream media, interactive news activities, such as posting comments about news articles, were one of the most common practices in this study. With a few exceptions, the sites encouraged readers to post comments about news articles in question, and readers often engaged in discussion through comments. However, some news articles failed to receive comments from readers, perhaps because the news articles were not seen as relevant. In a way, these sites aimed to build relationships with their readers, establishing public discourse on contemporary issues. This finding echoes the study of Milioni et al. (2010) that suggested that online readers usually post comments on news articles to express their subjective views.

The sites also made use of supplementary materials, such as images, to enhance their news articles. As Engel (2006) suggests, by using images in news articles, the sites helped readers to understand the news articles more fully. In addition, they used hyperlinks that allowed readers to find more relevant information about news articles. The use of these supplementary materials in news articles can be seen as an attempt to achieve news objectivity through the use of supplementary materials.

Another interesting finding was the use of social-media services, mainly Facebook and Twitter. By providing a social-media platform, where people could interact with each other, sharing knowledge and experience, the sites encouraged readers to participate in two-way communication, e.g. exchange of information among people in a network. At the same time, the sites also aimed to promote themselves to the outside world through these services.

The analysis also discovered that diaspora citizen journalists from the SAARC countries added a new dimension in the field of citizen journalism. These diaspora people not only provided coverage of news focusing on the diaspora community around the world, but also used citizen journalism as a platform to raise their voices. Moreover, they aimed to relive the memories of their homelands, and share the knowledge and experience they had gained in host countries. For a marginalised group, such as the Hazara from Afghanistan, citizen journalism was the only platform where they could share their life experience and express their political views, drawing international attention.

9.4 News values

When analysing news values in the coverage of citizen journalism news, it was discovered that citizen journalists gave the highest priority to political news. This is perhaps because of the continuing political instability, poverty, and unemployment in the region, as the SAARC countries are some of the most politically unstable countries in the world. In addition, although the SAARC countries aim to unite for greater economic integration, one of the greatest barriers for SAARC has been recurring inter-state conflicts between member states, which have posed significant challenges, as the mandate of SAARC excludes debates about bilateral issues.

This analysis also discovered that political articles tend to have more readers, and this was evident in the comments posted about news articles — nearly one-third of the comments were posted on the coverage of political news. However, it was surprising that the least priority was given to war and terrorism news, despite growing threats from terrorist groups, such as Islamic militants. One of the reasons why citizen journalists paid the least attention to the coverage of

war news may have been because of security challenges, as citizen journalists usually risk themselves when reporting news in the SAARC countries.

What news is given the highest priority in South Asian citizen journalism was evident in their news coverage — the coverage of national news dominated the overall coverage of news. In fact, citizen journalists were more focused on news issues about what was going on in their own local community. Whilst news articles about the outside world were frequently published on the sites, citizen journalists paid the least attention to what was going on within other SAARC countries. This may be a concerning finding in the sense that, if one thinks of the current political economic dimensions of the world, the concept of 'globalization' has brought about economic and political interdependence between the countries across the world, and the media is seen playing an important role in educating people.

A lack of investigative journalism was also evident in the coverage of news — only a few of the sites provided investigative types of news articles on crime and corruption. Instead, opinion pieces were more regularly published on the sites, and a few of the citizen journalists were fully dedicated to providing opinion articles. For example, citizen journalists of sangaykhandu.com (Bhutan) rarely published any feature or investigative news articles during the sample period. However, the site gave the highest priority to political news articles and opinion pieces on social issues.

Another interesting finding was the publication of fiction work, although writers often provided fabricated personal accounts on a topic, which may not be considered as news articles (Kurland, 2000). By writing fiction articles, citizen journalists in this study expressed their experience and opinions about their life

and society. Although such articles were limited to a few sites, citizen journalists regularly published literary work, expressing their subjective opinion. This may be evidence that citizen journalists see the fiction work as a way of telling their stories, and thus it may also be suggested that the definition of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is different from that in the West, encompassing fiction as well as factual reporting and opinion.

9.5 Summary

The introduction of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is linked to the notion of active citizenship and the need to strengthen democratic governance. However, citizen journalism became a more integral part of media after the introduction of the Internet in the mid-1990s. Given that the SAARC countries were beginning to experience new political and economic transformation at the time, citizen journalism came into being as a consequence of new technologies, continuing crisis of audiences (poverty), business models (lack of advertising), the objectivity of journalism (media bias). In addition, there are some external factors, such as opportunities, that have sprung up in citizen journalism in the wake of the marginalising of the foreign correspondent. For example, Constable (2007) writing in *The Washington Post* observed that *Newsday*, which once had half a dozen foreign bureaus, [was] about to shut down its last one in Pakistan in 2007.

Citizen journalists in the SAARC countries now practise journalism for a variety of purposes — from political purposes to relief campaigns. While some of the citizen journalism practices are intentional attempts to provide alternative news and information, others may be merely a coincidental news practice that evolved in a variety of contexts, for example providing first-hand accounts of natural disasters

by eye-witnesses at the scene. Either way, citizen journalism has played a significant role in increasing public awareness and formation of public views towards certain issues in the SAARC countries.

Citizen journalists of the SAARC countries are driven to journalism by a sense of social responsibility and a wish to inform the general public about the current affairs of the country as well as the world. As a result, a handful of citizen journalists — who captured scenes and posted on the Internet with personal accounts, such as those of the 2008 Mumbai terror attack — have been often hailed by some scholars as 'semi-official stringers' reporting on major events (Thomas, 2012). However, this has by no means become an institutionalised aspect of journalism in any of the SAARC countries. Citizen journalists still remain in a marginalised role due to several different reasons, including the government.

Citizen journalists in the SAARC countries are a clear anti-authoritarian force and in opposition to the government policies and play the critical role of a watchdog. Although citizen journalism is reshaping the public sphere, some citizen journalists see themselves as subject to the same ethics that guide traditional journalism. Thus, the scope of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries is rather ambiguous — at least now.

However, citizen journalism continues to be a tool for a diversity of people to express their political views. For people from both advanced cities, such as New Delhi, India, to those marginalised tribal groups in a remote district of Afghanistan, citizen journalism is a way of building relationships, constructing political discourses, and thereby shaping the public sphere. On the other hand, whilst people in urban places may use their position as a scribe to maintain their

status, the very act of newsgathering, e.g. mobile-based newsgathering, by marginalised tribal groups, such as the Hazaras in Afghanistan, may produce their own news articles to inform the world. It is this diversity of possibilities made possible by the Internet that will ensure that citizen journalism will continue to enhance the public sphere, performing the critical role of a watchdog in the SAARC countries.

9.6 Limitations and recommendations

Whilst this study aimed to investigate the phenomenon of citizen journalism, focusing on the SAARC countries, the study was limited to a sample of twenty-four sites, which were published in the English language. More studies in local languages may be helpful to see whether people engaging with the news media in a language other than English behave in the same way as they do in English.

Video packages in this study exhibited a broad range of presentation techniques, from music posted on YouTube to live television news online. More research is needed to determine whether citizen journalists publishing video have a greater range of formats to draw audience.

Although there was no evidence that social media tools had empowered readers to influence editorial content, the use of social media services was one of the most common practices in this study. More research into the use of social media tools by citizen journalism may be helpful to see whether social media services influence the editorial content.

This study represents one attempt to investigate the emerging trends of citizen journalism in the SAARC countries, but many more studies are needed to

understand how citizen journalism is reshaping the boundaries of journalism and news storytelling in the SAARC countries.

Although the majority of the sites in this study aimed to sell commercial advertising on the Internet, there was no evidence of how they managed to survive financially as most of them published a small number of advertisements. Research into citizen journalism from the economic perspective is needed to see whether citizen journalism can be sustained financially in the long run.

Last, the majority of discussions in this study are drawn from the analysis of quantitative data, which were published on the Internet. Ethnographic studies may be helpful to understand how citizen journalists actually work in the field and in the newsroom, and what level of professional relationship there exists between citizen and professional journalists. In addition, research into how readers consume news content may be helpful to understand the strengths and weaknesses of citizen journalism.

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