

Critical perspectives on changing media environments in the Global South

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Abstract

The main aim of this article is to give a general overview and theoretically discuss how significant changes in the media landscapes in Global South countries alter existing spaces and create new spaces for political and socio-cultural exchange, thus changing the complex interrelationship between media and society. Knowing that media is only one of many aspects in current societal changes, the focus will be more on the interrelationship between media and society and less on other aspects like globalization, education and political reforms. At the macro level, the article will discuss how the changes in the media landscape continuously alter the power balance between state, civil society and market. At the meso level, these changes will be discussed in relation to the development of the different media and of a variety of new locally specific media environments, which create new spaces for political and socio-cultural exchange. Finally, at the micro level, the changing patterns of every day media use by ordinary people will be discussed.

Introduction

Within the last two decades, countries in the Global South have experienced a significant spread of new media technologies like mobile phones and satellite television, and new ways of exploiting old technologies, as is the case with a current surge of local radio stations in countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Benin. In rural areas, local people are experiencing rapid transitions from periods of limited access to mediated communication to a new multi-faceted access due to the sudden and often simultaneous introduction of private and community radio stations, cable and satellite television, as well as high penetration of mobile phones and, increasingly, access to the Internet mainly through smart phones. Likewise, in urban and semi-urban areas people are experiencing dramatic changes in their access to mediated communication, going from mainly having access to state-controlled electronic media and printed press for the literates to having access to 'hypermedia spaces' (Deibert, 1997). This explosion of electronic mass media and new ICTs - especially the Internet and social media- has created new forms of social and political communication.

Media and society - theoretical frameworks

In transitional and Global South countries the interrelationship between media and society and processes of political and social change has often been discussed within two significantly different normative frameworks: either as democratization processes towards liberal democracy,

or development communication, which historically has come in a variety of forms, from communication for development to communication for social change. Both paradigms have been relevant in specific contexts, though limited in focus and increasingly losing sight of the complexity in the current interrelationship between media and society.

In a narrow political sense, the democratization framework was highly relevant in the wave of democratization processes in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, but the approach lacks political and socio-cultural sensitivity towards processes of political and social change in the African, Asian and, most recently, Arab countries. In relation to the current transitions in the Arab countries, Valbjørn maintains: "Instead of perceiving the new Middle East as either in a 'transition to democracy' or in a 'transition to nowhere,' against this background it might be more useful to perceive the Arab uprisings as having produced, so far at least, a re-politicized Arab world in a transition to somewhere." (Valbjørn 2012, p. 31)

In many countries in transition like Nepal, Myanmar and Egypt, the direction in which the transition processes are heading remains to be seen, and the same applies to how the media interrelate with these processes: "[t]he issue of whether mass media lead or follow change, whether they mirror or mould society, and whether they should be conceptualized as agents of change or of the status quo have yet to be resolved." (Jakubowicz 2002, quoted from McConnell and Becker 2002, p. 2)

The question of whether the media support or hinder democratization processes cannot be resolved universally as an either-or. The role of the media is a both-and, and has to be studied in context. In a political and economic analysis of the Mongolian media situation, Nielsen concluded that the media reflected Mongolian society at large: "The overall political and financial power structure in the society is mirrored in media ownership and control of the media. The defective separation of powers has a serious impact on the media, because violations of media freedom are rarely taken seriously by the police and the court system, this lack of protection quells journalists' urge to engage in investigative and critical reporting that discloses serious wrongdoings. The cultural acceptance of petty corruption and clientelism is mirrored in the 'paid for' stories in the media. This is not to argue that a simple causal relationship exists between media and society, the situation is much more complex and ambivalent than that." (Nielsen, 2009 p. 32)

The media and democratization framework give rise to some significant problems. First of all, the underlying universal assumption that free and independent media in a pluralistic media system will lead to liberal democracy and a deliberative public sphere more or less by default is at best naive and creates blind spots. Secondly, the idea of truly free and independent media is utopian, and so is the assumption that free and independent media will solely contribute to the general benefit of society. Independent media might as well be harmful to the common good, attend to specific interests and promote undemocratic opinions. Thirdly, the media and democratization framework tends to focus on politics, the role of the state and civil society, and more specifically on different forms of political or state interventions conducive to legal and financial environments for free and independent media.

It is obviously important to analyze the role of the state and the regulatory framework. But since global, national and local market-driven media and ICTs increasingly dominate the media landscapes, it is vital to develop new analytical frameworks for studying media systems in transitional countries, useful to comprehend public, civil society and private media in a 'glocalized' socio-cultural, political and financial context².

Furthermore, at the meso and micro levels, it is important to avoid a deterministic understanding of media and communication technologies: "Rather than reifying modern mass media as cultural entities that have universal characteristics transcending any given context of use, they are seen as the tools and techniques through which social actors make their agency manifest in practice. Local context does not then just provide a limiting framework within which actors are able only to accept those elements of mass media that are deemed by either community insiders or outsiders to be appropriate. Instead, mass media are one means amongst many other facets of culture through which local contexts of action are constituted." (Wilmore 2008, p. 6)

These actors might be civil society organizations, political parties or private individuals fighting for a broadcasting license, journalists producing news, local businesses presenting commercials, collective listeners' clubs discussing radio programs, young people going to the cinema, a farmer calling a migrant son, and/or a young student using the mobile phone to update her Facebook or Renren profile. However, new technologies provide new features, and these features are both individually and collectively negotiated in local contexts.

The above-mentioned development communication paradigm has been less concerned with the general interrelation between media and society, and instead focused on planned communication strategies and civic engagement orchestrated in a variety of ways by the state, international donors and civil society organizations. Historically, taking as its point of departure a strong belief in the modernizing role of mass media, communication for development did focus on top-down communication initiatives largely aiming at individual behavioral changes through persuasion or the education of the receivers of the information. Currently, the dominating approaches have increasingly concentrated on supported and self-organized participatory communication initiatives aiming at social change through discussion and dialogue among citizens.

In general, the increased access to community radio, mobile phones and ICTs provides a vast array of new opportunities for citizen engagement and collective action, promoting avenues for social change. These processes of social change are definitely worth studying within a communication for social change framework, but it is important to recognize that, besides catering to civic engagement and collective social change, the new media environments influence all aspects of people's livelihoods in more profound ways through entertainment, consumerism and social communication.

Consequently, the current dramatic changes in media environments call for new and less normative research paradigms that address the complexity and ambiguities in the interrelationship between media and society at the macro, meso and micro levels.

Conceptual clarifications

In the following I would like to make a few conceptual clarifications. The concept *media* is used in an all-encompassing way, to include all information and communication technologies, from indigenous forms of communication like songs and theatre and traditional mass media, to mobile telephony, the Internet and social media. However, the primary focus here will be on electronic media, mobile phones and the Internet.

The term *new media* is likewise used in a comprehensive way, to include on the one hand all new communication technologies (satellite communication, smart phones, Internet, social media etc.), and on the other new ways of using old technologies (local radio) in a specific context. Thus, 'new media' means *new* in a specific media environment. The concept *media environment* is used to describe the configuration of media available and used in a given specified and limited environment. Media environments should be seen not only as constituted by geographical space and the availability of media, but also as constituted by the actual use of media in different socio-economic, cultural, gender and age groups. In a globalized world, satellite television is technically available everywhere, but if people do not have access to power or cannot afford to buy a television set, then satellite television is not part of the given media environment, in the same way that newspapers are not part of their media environment for illiterates. Finally, despite the normative connotation of the concept of social change, not least in the expression 'communication for social change', I intend to use social change as a descriptive concept. Social change can rarely be seen as good or bad: it is usually ambivalent and complex.

Community radio - a local and potential democratic medium

As a medium, radio has significant advantages in the Global South, for many reasons. First of all, radio is an inexpensive and easily available technology, both on the production and the consumption side. Secondly, the technology makes the radio signals widely available, and although not perfect, radio can reach otherwise marginalized groups in remote areas even in areas with poor infrastructure. Finally, radio is easily accessible for all, even illiterate people, as long as language barriers are taken into consideration. Consequently, as a medium radio is inclusive, at least potentially, since programs are available for all people with access to a radio set. Radio reception does not make any distinction in terms of gender, age or class.

Despite the obvious advantages of radio as a medium, its potentials have rarely been fully exploited. As has been the case in the Global North, in most Global South countries the nation states have maintained the monopoly on local and national electronic media for decades for political, not technical reasons. Since the 1980s, and increasingly in the last two decades, many Global South countries have accepted to open up the airwaves as part of decentralization and democratizations processes or general liberalization of the media due to political and financial pressure and new technological opportunities.

In Nepal, changing regimes maintained the state monopoly on electronic media until 1997, when first a community radio station, and soon after a few independent commercial stations were launched. However, despite the fact that civil society and commercial actors as well as donors immediately embraced the medium and were ready to launch a host of stations, the development

came almost to a standstill because the then government impeded the spread of independent radio, due to a very restrictive license policy and bureaucratic obstacles. Furthermore, the few existing independent radio stations were barred from broadcasting news. The radio medium was a battlefield, where the government was reluctant to give up control of the airwaves, obviously afraid of losing political power, while new significant political and societal actors fought for the liberalization and/or democratization of the medium. Slowly, this struggle between the state on the one side, and political parties, civil society and the market on the other, resulted in dramatic changes in policy. In 2012 a plethora of more than 200 community radio stations, and an additional 100+ commercial radio stations, were launched, covering most parts of the country. Hence, in rural areas local community and private radio stations have recently created and genuinely transformed and reconfigured -although not replaced- previously existing non-mediated and often segregated local public spheres in the tea-rooms and around the water pumps. These reconfigured local public spheres continuously change traditional social and cultural patterns of communication and flows of information. This does not mean, however, that these newly created public spaces provide equal access for all; quite the opposite.

Many Global South countries have experienced a comparable liberalization of their airwaves, although rarely with the proliferation characteristic of Nepal. Although there is no generally accepted definition of *community media*³, many of the community radio stations in the Global South strive to relate to local civil society activities and have statutes that directly address socio-cultural issues like gender and social inclusion in relation to ownership, board members, management, staff and programming policy⁴, while other community stations are driven by specific political interests. The private stations are mainly driven by financial interests, but might have political interests as well. While some community radios succeed in fulfilling their mission and oppose existing local power structures, several studies have documented (Manyozo et al. 2012, Banda 2003, Thorsen 2013, and ACORAB 2011 to mention a few) that many community radios fail to obtain equal representation in boards, in management and among staff. Likewise, when it comes to programming practices -voices heard, topics covered and framing- through their daily social practice many community radios end up, reinforcing the social and culturally inherited power structures in society, often unintentionally (Thorsen). Hence, community radios have often failed to fulfil the high expectations expressed by the communities, civil society groups and donors.

However, seen in a macro perspective, community and private radio stations are significant political, social and cultural forces in current societal changes, in Nepal and elsewhere. This is especially the case in rural areas where local radio challenges existing power hierarchies in different ways, but also the power balance between political elites in urban areas and local hierarchies in rural areas -between centre and periphery- and on a more general level between state, civil society and market.

At the micro level, access to local radio interrelates in various ways with people's daily lives. New local radio stations have provided important, unprecedented access to mediated information⁵ in general, and specifically for marginalized groups previously excluded from, or with only limited mediated access to, the outside world. The impact and relevance of local radio is dependent on the existing media environment, the organizational set up and the station's specific

programming. Does the local station provide relevant local, national and international news? To what extent does the station have financial and human resources and the political courage to provide genuine and critical journalism exposing local political and social wrongdoings? Does the station address social and cultural issues relevant for the different socio-cultural groups? To what extent can different social-cultural groups raise their voice and express their concern in the radio? And does the station address the listeners as subjects or citizens? The complexity and diverse magnitude of the impact of local radios can only be fully understood through comprehensive contextualised analysis of ownership, programming policy, production, specific programs and media use. However, it is important to stress that increased access rarely means equal access to information and power; that social and cultural processes of change are often slow and lengthy; and that existing local power structures tend to be quite stable.

Television - a national and transnational medium

From a technological point of view, television can be seen as ‘radio with pictures’, but it is in fact a significantly different medium both when it comes to distribution and consumption⁶. Historically, television has been available in the Global South for quite a long time. Just to mention a few examples: in Nigeria it was launched as early as 1959, in Kenya in 1962, and in Nepal as late as 1985. Due to lack of power in rural areas, poor coverage and the prices of hardware, television has been predominantly an urban phenomenon, with significant social differences in penetration. Hence, the national state-run broadcasters, who considered themselves important national institutions promoting national identity, sowed the seed of a semi-national public sphere in the capitals and main urban centers. Within the last two decades, three dramatic changes have taken place on the supply side. First of all, the above-mentioned liberalization of the media markets has resulted in the launch of many new terrestrial television stations. In several countries, a plethora of private stations have been launched and are struggling to get a foothold in the television markets in the capitals and major cities. These new stations have provided a wide range of nationally and internationally produced programming, including news and entertainment.

Secondly, satellite television, although available since the 1970s, began to play a role in the 1990s. In the new millennium satellite television has increased penetration in both in urban and rural areas. Even in remote rural areas without access to power, as is the case in hilly areas in Lao Pdr (Wassemann et al. 2003) and among nomadic herders on the Mongolian high steppe (Nielsen 2009), many families use solar panels or batteries as power sources for satellite dishes and television sets, thus connecting local spaces to global media, or more precisely predominantly to transnational media. Finally, a host of cable companies have mushroomed all over the Global South, providing 50+ channels, not only in urban areas, but also increasingly in small town and villages as well.

For obvious reasons related to infrastructure and financial limitations, historically television has been predominantly an urban phenomenon, but it is a very attractive medium, increasingly available and affordable. In some communities with limited access, as suggested by the above-mentioned survey from Lao Pdr, the few television sets available in remote rural areas are turned

into a key social institution, where the villagers gather and watch television together in the 'electronic village hall'.

As was the case with radio, states have lost significant power in relation to television. The state-run stations have lost substantial audience share and therefore lost influence in the new competitive television market, and except for controlling the licensing policy for the national spectrum, states have limited control over developments. Civil society is also a marginal actor in television: community television has not flourished, and the organizational set up of television has left limited space for advocacy. Instead, television has been governed mainly by market principles, and several types of private actors have influenced developments. The private semi-national stations are owned by big national or international media companies, and predominantly financed by advertisement. Likewise, cable networks are privately owned, either by big corporations or by small local entrepreneurs. Finally, satellite stations are owned by big transnational and global media corporations. Some of them, like BBC World, CNN, Al Jazeera and MTV, are global, often with regional editions, while others are regional, like some of the Arab channels in the Middle East, and Star TV in Asia. Others are national channels distributed by satellite, reaching national and cross-border audiences.

While radio is to a large extent a local and national medium, in that it is owned and produced locally and nationally and the listeners mainly listen to local and national stations, television is a semi-national and transnational medium, only partially owned and produced nationally and the viewers watch a mixture of national and international programs. While radio is governed by local and national politics, television is governed mainly by an interrelationship between national politics and global market principles.

Mobile phones - a revolution in connectivity and mobility

So far the article's focus has been on traditional mass media, that is, media produced from a local, national or transnational powerful center and broadcast to a mass audience. In this section I will focus instead on decentralized, mediated interpersonal and asymmetrical communication via telephony and the Internet. Everybody who has a phone is at the same time a provider and receiver of information, and communication related to the Internet, particularly the web 2.0, makes possible new patterns of communication: among others, a new form of decentralized 'one to many' communication.

The unprecedented spread of mobile phones worldwide is often considered a technology-driven development, but in my view that is a narrow and problematic interpretation. The radically different diffusion of landline and mobile technologies brings attention to other interesting aspects. Landline phone technology has been around for decades, and the basic function of landline and mobile phones is similar: connecting people. Moreover, both technologies are symbolically easily accessible for all. It is obvious that both landline and mobile phones cater to the human need for connectivity. However, landline phones, introduced a century ago, never reached mass penetration in the Global South, despite extremely long queues in front of public phones, which revealed that there was an unfulfilled demand for connectivity. The limited

penetration was partly due to socio-economic reasons and a general lack of infrastructure, but also because it was a convenient way for states and elites to control information. Hence, the popularity of mobile phones must be analyzed in context, from the perspective of the interaction between technology, legislation, ownership and socio-cultural phone usage. The increased availability of mobile phones in most Global South countries has been determined by political and financial interests, and negotiated through license policy and investments in infrastructure. Besides the above-mentioned similarities, there are differences between the two technologies, particularly in terms of their usage. While landline phones are bound to a specific place -a shop, an office or a residential home- and thus predominantly used by businesses, public administration and residentially in limited circles in the Global South, mobile phones are detached from place, in such a way that connectivity and mobility go hand in hand. Further, mobile phones are increasingly attached to individuals, and the pattern of usage is fundamentally an integrated part of daily social life. Mobile phones are extending and maintaining social networks, and their unprecedented spread worldwide reveals that the demand for connectivity and mobility is enormous⁷. Finally, mobile phones have some additional features such as SMS, radio and camera, and smart phones have Internet access if proper networks are available.

Consequently, the appropriation of the new technology differs significantly within Global South countries (as it does between the Global South and the Global North). An example is the popularity of mbanking in many African countries, while mbanking has not even been introduced in Nepal and was only recently launched in Denmark. Further, people's appropriation of mobile phones differs within generations, gender, class, and among individuals. Global developments are modified in local contexts as 'glocalization' processes.

Seen from a macro perspective, the spread of mobile phones and increased access to the Internet have taken place in a context of more liberal communication policies, and been driven by market forces in the context of extensive supply and high demand. The national spread of mobile phones has only been possible because of the quick expansion of mobile coverage spurred by the competition between major transnational and often global telecommunication companies, and because flexible price structures have increasingly made mobile phones affordable for most families. The high demand has also been spurred by changes in the socio-cultural context related to increased mobility, due to improved infrastructure and internal and external migration. Seen from a meso- and micro level, mobile phones have a unique democratizing potential, in that they can facilitate dialogical as well as asymmetrical 'one to many' communication, a feature in-between interpersonal and traditional mass communication. This feature has been adeptly exploited by social movements, as exemplified by the Arab uprisings, named by many the 'twitter and Facebook revolutions', even if probably wrongfully so. The new technologies can be used for many other functions beyond social and political mobilization, like mbanking and mhealth. Consequently, we have to consider mobile telephony as a new medium, both in the sense that it is a new communication technology adding significant features compared to landline phones, and in the sense that previously only very few people had access to landline phones, cameras, the Internet and even radio. Mobile phones imply at the same time a new technology, and a new way of using old technologies. The technology provides the potential for the decentralization of power, empowerment, security, crime prevention, information sharing and much more, but at same time the potential for the centralization of power, surveillance,

information control, cybercrime and so on. It is only specific contextualized studies that can reveal the complex interrelationship between technology and society.

Changing media environments foster individual and social changes

So far I have looked into the significant changes that can be observed for the different media forms, and although these changes are interesting in themselves, the most important aspect of on-going developments is that these changes take place simultaneously and make for dramatically changed media environments for almost all people around the world, not least in the Global South.

In the Global South, these new media environments are characterized by significant national, geographical, socio-economic and generational divides. The rural-urban divide is probably the most significant. In rural areas, local people are experiencing unprecedented multi-faceted access to new media due to the sudden and often simultaneous introduction of private and community radio and the high penetration of mobile phones, as well as incipient cable and satellite television, while in urban areas most people have access to a variety of 'hypermedia spaces'. Furthermore, due to increased mobility, many people move seamlessly within different media environments. People appropriate these new media environments locally, either individually or collectively, through their everyday use of the available media. Examples abound: listening to the local news as a citizen in a reconfigured local public sphere provided by a local private or community radio; watching Bollywood movies in Nepal, Nollywood movies in West Africa, or Korean movies in Mongolia as entertainment in a transnational cultural sphere; watching advertisements as a consumer in the market place; calling a migrant family member as a social activity; or calling a local media outlet to inform about police violence; searching for information on the Internet as a student in the knowledge society; and/or updating a Facebook, Orkut or Renren profile as a youngster maintaining social networks. The different media provide different kinds of new spaces for the diffusion of information and communication, civic engagement, socio-cultural relations, consumerism and entertainment, but the individual user appropriates the specific media environment as a complex totality. The appropriation of these new media environments challenges and re-negotiates both existing individual and group identities among the users, and existing socio-political power structures. The appropriation of new media environments does not take place in a vacuum: it is closely related to simultaneous societal developments, not least changes in education, gender, and the increased mobility that results from internal and external migration.

Reconfiguration of the power balance between state, civil society and market

One main point to be considered is that the dramatic changes the different media currently undergo, from local radio and cable and satellite television to new ICTs, take place simultaneously and in quite diverse forms in varied media environments all over the Global South. But, no matter if we analyze emerging media in remote rural areas, or the plethora of new media in urban centers, there are complex interrelationships between changing media and individual and social changes, and these interrelations and changes point in many different directions. Another

main point is that, at the macro level, the interrelation between media and society has undergone a comprehensive reconfiguration affecting the power balance between state, civil society and market. Recently many states have lost their broadcasting and ICT monopolies due to the liberalization of the mass media first, and telecommunication afterwards. Consequently, state-run broadcasting has lost its privileged position, and now features among a wide range of stations in a new competitive media environment.

In some countries like Nepal, Kenya and Bolivia, in the last decade civil society has had significant influence on the development of community radio, and thus been quite powerful in setting a rights-based agenda aimed at providing better -although not equal- access to information. Especially in rural areas, community radio has given space for a variety of voices, and new issues have been raised. Further, civil society groups have been able to exploit the new possibilities provided by the Internet and social media - not least in the Arab countries.

However, in most countries the main recent change has been the increasingly powerful position of the market. The liberalization of media and communication policies has initiated powerful processes. Markets have provided local and national radio stations a plethora of commercial television stations especially in urban centers, an abundance of transnational and global satellite stations, and an unprecedented spread of the new communication technologies, i.e. mobile phones and the Internet. The markets have been and still are the driving forces in the current dramatic changes in access to media and communication tools. The market-driven development has increased access to media and communication tools in general, but the increased access for poor and marginalized people has not bridged the 'digital divides'. Because the appropriations of new ICTs in the different media environments are worlds apart, the 'digital divides' are reproduced in new forms.

The private media and ICT companies are mainly motivated by profit. This is not to argue that private media always follow market principles, which is not precisely the case: often political and (local and national) business interests are intertwined in various ways, from clientelism and corruption to biased news and political communication. However, when the licenses to broadcast or telecommunication networks have been acquired in more or less legitimate ways, business logics tend to take over. Telecommunication companies might find it desirable to provide mobile coverage to remote areas for social reasons, but they do roll out mobile coverage for short or long term profit, and not for altruistic reasons⁸. The cable companies might find it desirable to provide access to national and foreign television, but they are in it for the money.

Changes in modes of address

The dominant position of the markets points to what is probably the most fundamental change in the media environments seen from a user perspective. Due to the underlying market principles, the private companies are concerned with the communication needs of the consumers, and therefore address the public as individual consumers, for better and for worse. Previously, the privileged state-run broadcasting monopolies addressed the public as subjects, focusing on persuasion and education. In the new competitive media market, the state-run media have lost

their privileged position, and struggle to find new appropriate ways to address the public. Civil society media tend to address the public as citizens, with a focus on civil rights, democratization, enlightenment, development, participation and collective action, and communication for development.

Both state and civil society are driven by a wish to indoctrinate subjects or citizens, either individually or collectively, to change their behavior. But this is not the case with private media, which are less concerned with specific content and generally address the public as consumers. Cable operators do not care about what viewers watch – be it national or international news, entertainment or enlightening programs, Nollywood and Bollywood movies or local movies, as long as they pay the subscription fees. Likewise, advertisers do not care about programs as long as they sell their advertised products, and telecommunication companies do not care if users call relatives abroad, update Facebook or send political messages on SMS as long as they pay for the services. The expanded media environments and the changes in mode of address have fundamentally changed the power relation between medium and users. Users now have the freedom to choose between the available media, and can choose whether and when they prefer to be addressed as subjects, citizens or consumers.

Concluding remarks - changing media environments call for changing research paradigms

The dramatic changes in media environments challenge the dominating *democratization and communication for social change* research paradigms. Although in very different ways, media environments are changing in almost all countries regardless of current political system. When it comes to countries in the midst of transition processes, it seems more adequate to extend abovementioned notion on the Arab World 'in a transition to somewhere' to include non-Arab transitional Global South countries like Nepal where ten years of civil war have been followed by six years of social and political instability with no clear vision of where the ethnic diverse country is heading. Yet most Global South countries seem, at least for the time being, to be absorbing the dramatic changes in media environments without going through a substantial political transition, and therefore, as mentioned earlier, the question of whether the media support or hinder democratization processes cannot universally be resolved. However, it is beyond any doubt that the changing media environments interrelate with significant socio-cultural changes, but not necessarily substantial political changes. The democratization paradigm is probably not the appropriate framework for analyzing the current complex interrelationship between the new media environments and society in general.

Likewise, at the meso- and micro levels, it seems that the main focus on civic engagement and collective action in the communication for social change paradigm is too limited in scope, and not productive to comprehend the complexity visible in daily media use, where the new media address the public in various ways and the new ICTs opens for new dialogical and asymmetrical communication forms. Consequently, the new media environments call for new research paradigms at the macro, meso and micro levels. The main questions are: How do we investigate the technological, financial, political and socio-cultural dynamics behind the development of the

locally specific but globally influenced media environments? How do the users appropriate the locally specific mixture of available media individually and collectively?

These are challenging questions with no easy answers, but it is important that research projects reflect on the field of study. Because the changes in media environments take place simultaneously, the very common and popular single-medium studies might be increasingly off target. Of course, it might be worthwhile to study the implementation of community radio in Nepal, or the use of Facebook and twitter during the Arab spring, but the knowledge created is fragmented unless it is analyzed in context – as a piece in a jigsaw puzzle. On the other hand, it is not possible to study the whole jigsaw puzzle at once with any reasonable depth. Instead, more exploratory empirical studies of specific media environments in different socio-cultural settings might be rewarding stepping stones towards a more genuine understanding of the interrelationship between media and individual and social change processes. These studies might use different methodologies in exploratory ways, some ethnographically inspired, and others drawing on the experiences from media studies in relation to media system analysis, media use and textual features. Last but not least, it is important that the studies are theoretically informed in relation to power, agency, identity, aspirations and social justice.

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² In an increasingly globalized world, global political, financial and technological developments have far-reaching impact, but the media situation at the national and local levels always implies locally specific forms of 'glocalization' where the global and the local are negotiated in relation to legislation, ownership, production, media output and not least media use.

³ The concept *community radio/media* is contested for good reasons. Here it is used as a generic and broad concept, not distinguishing between alternative, citizens', local radio/media. For an extended conceptual discussion on alternative, citizen and local media see Downing (2001), Rodríguez (2001) and Thorsen (2013).

⁴ The Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) states in its "Lobby and Advocacy Strategy For Separate Community Radio Policy in Nepal": "Community and independent radios of Nepal have an important role to play in fostering local development, community empowerment, women's rights, political and democratic awareness, issues of social inclusion and lasting peace since they reach a large part of the population, including those in isolated areas and the illiterates who are difficult to reach through other means." (ACORAB 2011)

⁵ Only limited reliable data on penetration and ratings is available. However, a few local baseline surveys (Banjade 2006, Thorsen 2013, Wassemann et al. 2005) suggest that, although it does not provide equal access for all, radio penetration is quite high in all socio-demographic groups, even in remote rural areas.

⁶ For an extended discussion of television in a global perspective see Straubhaar (2007).

⁷ According to the International Communication Union in 2013 the penetration of mobile subscriptions in the Global South (Developing Nations) is 89% and in Africa specifically 63% (<http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2013.pdf> accessed July 4, 2013). Mobile subscriptions refer to SIM cards in use not the number of people using mobile phones.

⁸ The expensive rollout of mobile coverage in remote areas might not be profitable in itself, but the telecommunication companies are in it for the long run and they often make strategic decisions to demonstrate corporate social responsibility and position themselves to receive new 4G licenses in the future.