

Gender and Media- A situation analysis of the Asia region - Key highlights

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1. Emerging media landscape

- Asia presents a huge diversity, and yet, shares many trends in the media and gender landscape. The models of growth in the developing countries of the region reflect what has come to be seen as 'a colonisation from within'. With the emergence of a class of super-rich people, on the one hand, and a new flow of uprooted, very poor people, on the other, social inequality is increasing.¹ Gender based inequality and violence are highly critical concerns.²
- The region is also in great flux in terms of telecommunications connectivity. Globally there are as many mobile-cellular subscriptions as people in the world, with more than half in the Asia-Pacific region (3.5 billion out of 6.8 billion total subscriptions). Uptake of high-speed broadband (at least 10 Mbit/s) is highest in some Asian economies, including the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong (China) and Japan.³

1 UNESCAP. 2014. “Growing inequality challenges sustainable Asia-Pacific growth”. *UNESCAP*, August 6.

<http://www.unescap.org/media-centre/feature-story/growing-inequality-challenges-sustainable-asia-pacific-growth>

2 Stanton. Caitlin. 2012. “Breaking Through: The Global Fund for Women Impact Report: Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific”. Berkeley: Inkworks Press. <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/gender-equality-in-asia-a-the-pacific>

3 ITU. 2013. “The World in 2013: ICT Facts and Figures.” Geneva: ITU. <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2013-e.pdf>

- Research by UNESCO⁴ reveals that there has been a predominant trend away from state-monopolies to market-based media systems amid the privatization of state-owned media in much of the Asia and the Pacific.
- While this may technically be seen to augur well for pluralism, the vertical and horizontal integration of media industry speaks to the rise and rise of corporate power and its control over news and views. The concentration of media ownership defines mainstream media today. Media critics, such as Robert W. McChesney, have noted that the current trend within the entertainment industry has been toward the increased concentration of media ownership into the hands of a smaller number of transmedia and transnational conglomerates⁵. Horizontal integration, that is the consolidation of holdings across multiple industries is a key business strategy.
- In countries like India, media monopolies oppose all regulation, raising the bogey of ‘press freedom under attack’⁶. The collusion of media and state powers has seen an oligarchic nexus that undermines pluralism. Research undertaken by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in Asia⁷ shows that alongside lack of progress in support for independent public service broadcasting, (except in some countries of South-East Asia), a new era marked by political censorship in countries that enjoyed a free media is emerging. Increasing Chinese influence in the media in Hong Kong, Macau

4 UNESCO. 2014. “World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development”. Paris: UNESCO https://www.unesco.de/fileadmin/medien/Dokumente/Kommunikation/World_Trends_in_Freedom_of_Expression_and_Media_Development.pdf

5 Wikipedia, s.v. “Horizontal Integration”. Last modified May 14, 2015.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horizontal_integration#cite_note-rethinkingpp283-2

6 Madhok, Sujata. 2015. “Country Report: “Media and Gender in India””: Part of the IFJ Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific Research Project”. IFJ Asia-Pacific. http://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/images/Asia_Pacific/IFJ_AP/reports-etc/Gender_and_Media_in_India

7 Media and Gender in the Asia Pacific Region , See various country reports at <http://www.ifj.org/regions/asia-pacific/reports-handbooks/situationalreports3/>, edited by Ammu Joseph, Laxmi Murthy and Jane Worthington.

and Taiwan is a case in point.⁸

- Radio in general and community radio in particular, continues to be an important space for local media in many Asian countries. 24 out of 207 community radio stations in the region are run by women.⁹ This is the region that demonstrates the greatest amount of activity with respect to women's capacity building and this was the first region to discuss, develop and write up gender policies for the broadcasting entities; these policies, with their contextual differences, have been adopted in other regions or countries, such as Mexico, a country that has greatly furthered the adoption of gender policies in the network's internal regulations. Yet, recent policy directions in countries like India, suggest that gains from the community radio movement are sliding back.¹⁰
- The media and telecommunications landscape is also witness to cross industry ownership. Grameen Bank's Grameenphone started its operation by relying on microcredit, offering borrowers mobile phone as a commodity form of microcredit, on condition of paying back in installments. Today Grameenphone has become the largest company in Bangladesh with 90 per cent of its subscribers being non-poor urban people. Grameenphone is actually an entity of Telenor, Norway.¹¹
- Reliance, an Indian multinational, is a corporate giant with its activities

8 *World Press Freedom Index*. 2014. Paris: Reporters Without Borders. https://rsf.org/index2014/data/index2014_en.pdf

9 Chavez, Maria Eugenia. 2014. "Scheherezades: a thousand and one stories of women in community radio." In *Media and Gender: A Scholarly Agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender*, 47-49. Paris: UNESCO. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/media_and_gender_scholarly_agenda_for_gamag.pdf

10 Jain, Mayank. 2015. "From forced Mann Ki Baat broadcasts to ban on politics, community radio in India is choking." *Scroll*, May 12. <http://scroll.in/article/725837/from-forced-mann-ki-baat-broadcasts-to-ban-on-politics-community-radio-in-india-is-choking>

11 Pegu, Manoranjan. 2010. "'Development', capitalism, NGOs and people's movements in Bangladesh: an interview with Anu Muhammed. December 28. *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*. <http://links.org.au/node/2075>

covering everything from defence, spectrum and telecom to gas and retail. The corporate house acquired Network 18, of which CNN-IBN is a part. A news article reported recently that Reliance is already interfering with editorial content, with directions on how not to cover scams it is implicated in.¹²

- In keeping with neo-liberal business logic and models of revenue generation that thrive on high pitched drama, media coverage of gender based violence also follows a journalistic path of 'more heat than light'. In India for instance, serious, concerned and gender-sensitive representations of the issue go hand in hand with sensationalised reporting and confrontational panel discussions. The style and substance of news coverage in large sections of the print media are inspired by television.¹³

2. Women in Media

- The “Research Study on Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific”¹⁴- a project undertaken by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and supported by UNESCO and UN Women in seven countries in the Asia-Pacific region (South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific): Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu shows that media companies are largely led and governed by men – most editors are male, as are owners of news media, with women more likely to be in mid-level rather than top management. Managements in countries like Malaysia often take recourse

12 KK, Sruthijith. 2014. “Reliance is telling CNN IBN journalists how to cover the Aam Aadmi Party.” July 16.

<http://qz.com/235235/reliance-is-telling-cnn-ibn-journalists-how-to-cover-the-aam-admi-party/>

13 Joseph, Ammu and Kalpana Sharma, eds. 1994. *Whose News? The Media and Women's Issues*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, quoted in Ammu Joseph. 2014. “Action, reaction, introspection, rectification”. In *Media and Gender: A Scholarly Agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender*, 62-65. Paris: UNESCO.

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/media_and_gender_scholarly_agenda_for_gamag.pdf

14 Joseph et al 2015, op. cit.

to sexualised packaging of gender for saleability. The trends are similar in regional language media such as Urdu media in Pakistan, both print and electronic where sexist images of women and derogatory language are more prevalent compared to English media. Cases of sexual harassment at the workplace are often buried, and those that come to light are usually the more serious ones. There is no law against sexual harassment in the workplace in countries like Vanuatu, where violence in the private sphere, is normalised. Unions in the countries of the region mostly represent interests of male journalists and women do not see utility in the unions for raising issues with respect to their working conditions. Conflict in many parts of the region has meant that the reality of women in these areas is very hard to cover. Impunity has reigned in Sri Lanka, with several unresolved murders, abductions and assaults, targeting Tamil journalists and media workers. One key trend in the region has been the increasing tendency to hire journalists on a freelance basis, without access to paid leave and other entitlements.

3. New media, new trajectories

- The diffusion of the mobile phone and use of virtual space for resistance politics opens up new trajectories for political action. Activism arises in spontaneous actions – cascading events in network geographies of dissent. The blogger, the journalist and the “contingent activist”¹⁵ who pushes an SMS or writes a blog – are all part of a complex public sphere, influencing the course of gender debates.
- Interestingly, while the online media have erased some censorship barriers, they have erected others which are a new sphere of violence characterised

15 Punathambekar, Aswin, Srirupa Roy, Tarik Sabry and Sune Haugbolle. 2013. "Media, Activism and the New Political: 'Istanbul Conversations' on New Media and Left Politics". Round table discussion. Istanbul: Transregional Virtual Research Initiative of the Social Science Research Council. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/19261/media-activism-and-the-new-political_istanbul-conv

by privacy invasions and the stripping away of women's choices and freedoms.

- Crucially even as women's freedom of expression may be seen as theoretically enhanced by the opportunities offered by digital media, a repressive patriarchal order in the network society has seen the use of sexualised privacy invasions perpetrated against women, by platforms that seek to capitalise on sexualised desires. In the online platforms of the information society, we witness the struggle over gendered forms of self expression and control. Even as these battles in the sphere of sexuality and women's bodies acquire intensity, what is evident is that the law is behind reality and violations of harassment, stalking and trolling and more, continue unabated. One in five female Internet users live in countries where harassment and abuse of women online is extremely unlikely to be punished.¹⁶ Israel is the only country in Asia where revenge porn is outlawed.¹⁷
- APC's End violence project, 2014¹⁸ observes how internet intermediaries like FB, Twitter and YouTube are reluctant to engage directly with technology related VAW, until it becomes a public relations issue. YouTube has no public stance that directly addresses these issues; Twitter and Facebook only took steps once high profile campaigns had emerged. Lack of transparency around reporting and redress processes and failure to engage with perspectives of non-North American/ European women was also reported. The lack of public commitment to human rights standards (apart from the encouragement of free speech) is also telling; selective interpretations of

16 The Web Index Report. 2014. World Wide Web Foundation. Available at <http://thewebindex.org/report/>

17 Ibid.

18 Nyst, Carly. 2014. "Internet intermediaries and violence against women online: Executive summary and findings." Part of the *End violence: Women's rights and online safety* project. Association for Progressive Communications. <http://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/flow-cnyst-summary-formatted.pdf>

rights is part of the marketing repertoire of these new age platforms.

- The tussle between state power and gendered self expression has been a historically recurring theme in the public sphere. The Web Index Report 2014¹⁹ states that blocking of politically or socially sensitive web content to stifle dissent has increased. In 2011, 40 women in Saudi Arabia defied the ban on female driving, based on online mobilisation, and posted their pictures on Twitter. One of the women was convicted by the court and her sentence was revoked later thanks to international pressure.²⁰ We are witness to tensions between repressive governance and networked resistance across many countries and contexts.
- For instance, South Korea's requirement that citizens register with their real names for certain Internet services is an attempt to reduce their ability to surprise the state with the kind of coordinated action that took place during the 2008 protest in Seoul. The Iranian state uses Facebook and Twitter pages to identify regime opponents the authoritarian state can thus benefit as well as suffer from the pervasive effects of new media. Arab intelligence agencies have actively used the Internet to identify their adversaries and trace their networks.²¹ In 2012, an amendment to the 1950 Evidence Act in Malaysia made owners and editors of websites accountable for information published to their sites – a move that angered press freedom advocates and bloggers as evidence of a further constriction of freedom of expression by shifting the burden of proof to the accused.²²

19 The Web Index Report 2014, op. cit.

20 Agarwal, Nitin, Merlyna Lim and Rolf T. Wigand. 2012. "Online Collective Action and the Role of Social Media in Mobilizing Opinions: A Case Study on Women's Right-to-Drive Campaigns in Saudi Arabia". In *Web 2.0 Technologies and Democratic Governance: Political, Policy and Management Implications*, edited by Christopher G. Reddick and Stephen K. Aikins, 99-123. New York: Springer Science+Business Media.

21 Shirky, Clay. 2011. "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change." *Foreign Affairs*, January/February Issue. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-12-20/political-power-social-media>

22 Jun, Wern. 2015. "Country Report: "Media and Gender in Malaysia": Part of the IFJ Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific

- Meanwhile the state, in some countries like China, continues to use public management techniques to ostensibly create spaces for women's participation.²³ Rather than for dissent and debate, these are ways by which GONGOs reproduce visions of state-sponsored feminisms.
- The public sphere will evolve based on how state institutions and the legal and justice apparatus adapt to democracy in the network society; and if women's citizenship can find a new moment for emancipation. In countries like Indonesia, matters of gender and sexuality, and the female body itself, have become key battlegrounds on which contests over democratization as well as Islamic morality are waged, especially between conservative and liberal Muslims.²⁴
- The sobering reality, in countries of the region, especially in South Asia, is that online organising and mobilising has not always been accompanied by “old fashioned” consciousness raising and sustained collectivisation. The latter spaces are increasingly shrinking. This means ICTs have created pockets in the public sphere in which gender rules dividing the public and private are different, but these spaces have done little to address meso level power structures that regulate women's lives such as patriarchal religious institutions and their diktats that often include chilling instances of gender based violence and murder.²⁵ Pakistan for example, has one of the highest murder rates for journalists.²⁶ Women activists and bloggers in the

Research Project.” IFJ Asia-Pacific. http://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/images/Asia_Pacific/IFJ_AP/reports-etc/Gender_and_Media_in_Malaysia

- 23 Chong, Ip Iam and Oi Wan Lam. 2013. “Two paths to civic engagement: A study of women NGOs and ICTs in China.” in *Feminist Visions of the Network Society: Forthcoming publication consolidating insights from the CITIGEN-Asia programme*. Bengaluru: IT for Change and Zubaan Books (forthcoming).
- 24 Brenner, Suzanne. (2011) “Private Moralities in the Public Sphere: Democratization, Islam, and Gender in Indonesia.”, in *American Anthropologist*, 113 (3): 478- 490. DOI:10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01355.x
- 25 Farida Shaheed. 2013. “Digitally breaching gender frontiers in Pakistan: boon or bane.” in *Feminist Visions of the Network Society: Forthcoming publication consolidating insights from the CITIGEN-Asia programme*. Bengaluru: IT for Change and Zubaan Books (forthcoming).
- 26 Ashraf, Gibran. 2014 “In the line of fire: Another violence filled year for journalists in Pakistan.” *The Express Tribune*,

South Asian region are increasingly being targeted by retrograde social forces. Activists writing against religious extremism face multiple challenges to justice – they cannot approach the police due to fear of blasphemy charges. (as blasphemy is defined very loosely in Pakistan); and they may not be able to / have the wherewithal to initiate legal action where harassment originates across national borders.²⁷

- Platform logic in the network society has also paved the way for dissent to be marketised. Change.org for instance, is an online platform for putting out petitions. Petitions on the platform peddle homophobia and anti-abortion sentiment alongside rights of the LGBT community. What we see is a pecking order among petitions based on advertising revenue; some social change is more marketable than some others, and will hence be given more visibility on change.org's online campaigning. Political agency is thus reappropriated by media structures as choices for political participation supposedly get democratised.²⁸

4. Critical themes for gender equality in media and communications

- Looking back at the past two decades, Kalyani Menon Sen observes that in India, gains on the social policy front have more often than not been neutralized by economic policies. The neoliberal consensus she avers, is also a patriarchal consensus.²⁹ One could well argue that patriarchal capitalism – constituted as it is by the highly adaptive and agile mutations

December 23. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/811163/in-the-line-of-fire-another-violence-filled-year-for-journalists-in-pakistan/>

27 Padte, Richa Kaul. 2014. "A Case Study from Pakistan: When Women's Human Rights are Deemed 'Blasphemous'". Part of the *End violence: Women's rights and online safety* project. Association for Progressive Communications.

28 Mahabal, Kamayani Bali. 2012. "India- Open letter to Ben Rattray, CEO, Change.org- 'Et tu Brutus'". *Kractivist*, October 28. <https://kractivist.wordpress.com/2012/10/28/ben-rattray-ceo-change-org/>

29 Menon-Sen, Kalyani. 2015 "Twenty years after Beijing: Time to Re-evaluate Policy Engagements with the State?" *UNRISD*, May 7. <http://www.unrisd.org/beijing+20-menon-sen>

of neoliberal ideology, is a structural characteristic of contemporary media globally.

- The overlapping forms of communication - with face-to-face publics, Internet-based publics and mass mediated publics - call for a unified theoretical framework that can explain how this hybrid public sphere can promote a feminist politics. The urgent task is to look at Foucault's 'meta power' - power that is diffuse and everywhere - locked in the discursive spaces constituted by new technologies and their dialectic with society. The pervasive "regime of truth" legitimised by this dialectic requires to be unpacked. Research undertaken by IT for Change shows how contemporary informational and communicative environments (neo-liberal data and media regimes) are mediating 'truths' that displace with impunity situated narratives of the most marginalised women.³⁰ How their realities can be made visible and valuable to discourses of democracy and global justice is core to feminist endeavour.
- The recent protests in India over "Zero Rating" or "sponsored data", where carriers and services subsidize access to some products is a telling case of deep distortions in emerging media structures. The project has been launched in Tanzania, Kenya, Colombia, Ghana, India, Philippines, Guatemala and Indonesia by FB. Free access to select websites, to those who don't have Internet yet, segments the public sphere into one that is for the poor and another for the rest. In 2012, LIRNEasia, in their study, found that people walk into phone stores and say "I want Facebook"; 11% of Indonesians who said they used Facebook also said they did not use the Internet.³¹ As campaigns against zero rating have asserted, letting American

30 Gurumurthy, Anita and Nandini Chami. 2014. "How digital pathways can work for inclusive local governance: Insights from the Women-gov project of IT for Change." Bengaluru: IT for Change.

31 Mirani, Leo. 2015. "Millions of Facebook users have no idea they're using the internet." *Quartz*, February 9. <http://qz.com/333313/millions-of-facebook-users-have-no-idea-theyre-using-the-internet/>

internet giants in charge of connectivity is not only risky, but almost imperialistic.³²

- As new media increase public access to speech and assembly, the informational state is becoming extraordinarily repressive. State responses have ranged from technical ones, designed to limit or shape access to the Internet, to selective repression and overt intervention in online communication flows. The political repertoire of the informational state is really vast – from torture and abuse to the military and security apparatus and enforced social compliance.³³
- The pervasive surveillance of the state and its complicity in patriarchal capitalism requires new imaginaries of self expression and assembly. For every woman who is out there publishing her views and challenging patriarchal power, several are condemned to self-censorship.³⁴
- The increase in the numbers of women journalists in the north-eastern region of India, marked by decades of insurgency, for example, reflects the courage women as leaders in the civic public. Women's media networks – in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka – are being nurtured to share information and resources, exchange ideas, uphold media standards and ethics, and promote gender equality within the media as well as society.³⁵ Such solidarity and platform building is painful work – but very necessary.

32 Sojet, Andrea Alarcon. "4 Questions for Internet.org as Internet for the Poor". 2015. *ICTworks*, May 8.

<http://www.ictworks.org/2015/05/08/4-questions-for-internet-org-as-internet-for-the-poor/>

33 Cyrill, Melissa M. "Networked Activism and the Arab Uprising."

http://www.academia.edu/11727175/Networked_Activism_and_the_Arab_Uprising

34 Jensen, Heike. 2013. "Big brother is earning: Gendered dimensions of digital spaces and their exploitation." in *Feminist Visions of the Network Society: Forthcoming publication consolidating insights from the CITIGEN-Asia programme*. Bengaluru: IT for Change and Zubaan Books (forthcoming). CITIGEN, IT for Change

35 Joseph 2014, op.cit.

- It is not as if the spaces of the network society are not subverted for feminist strategising. These are to be celebrated no doubt. But the structural aspects of globalised media and its regimes of truth need us to think about institutional-political transformation – policies and laws for a public goods approach to connectivity; media, data and informational capabilities that promote women's citizenship online and offline; and democratic governance of the internet that allows everyone the inalienable and indivisible rights to social, economic, civic and political participation and to development.