

Developing Afghanistan Media And Possibility Of Citizen Journalism

Gelişen Afganistan Medyası Ve Vatandaş Gazeteciliğinin Olasılığı

Osman Köroğlu

Asst.Prof.Dr., Fatih University, Vocational School, Public Relations Department

ABSTRACT

Afghanistan has witnessed the activities in the field of journalism since 1900. However, the country's media sector, during the wars, political crises and uncertainty, did not show a consistent growth and development until today. With the government of Hamid Karzai, rapid and large-scale freedom and progress in the media can be seen. However, Afghanistan must put forward its own style of the media and original reporting practices. For this purpose, she should take support of other countries and civil society organizations at least for now. In this context, one can hope to assume that educational institutions in the country will have important roles in shaping the present and future of developing media in Afghanistan. Similarly, if the basic technological infrastructure and education is provided, new communication technologies can provide the rapid development of alternative types of journalism in Afghanistan like participatory journalism and citizen journalism.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, journalism, media, civil society, social activism, citizen journalism, new media*

ÖZET

Afganistan 1900'lerden itibaren gazetecilik alanında etkinliklere sahne olmuştur. Ancak ülkedeki medya sektörü günümüze kadar savaş, siyasi bunalım ve belirsizlikler esnasında istikrarlı bir büyüme ve gelişme gösterememiştir. Hamid Karzai hükümetiyle birlikte medyada daha önceki dönemlere göre hızlı ve büyük çaplı bir özgürleşme ve ilerleme görülmektedir. Ancak ülkenin kendi medya tarzını, orijinal habercilik uygulamalarını ortaya koyması için en azından şimdilik başka ülke ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarının desteğini alması gerekmektedir. Bu bağlamda ülkedeki eğitim kurumlarının gelişen Afganistan medyasının bugünü ve yarınını biçimlendirmede önemli roller üstlenmesi umulabilir. Aynı şekilde, temel teknolojik altyapı ve eğitim sağlanırsa, yeni iletişim ortamları Afganistan'da gazeteciliğin katılımcı gazetecilik ve vatandaş gazeteciliği gibi alternatif türleri ile birlikte hızla gelişmesini sağlayabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Afganistan, gazetecilik, medya, sivil toplum, sosyal eylemcilik, vatandaş gazeteciliği, yeni iletişim ortamları*

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is located in the major routes such as the Silk Road since the ancient times. The first human settlements in the country are around B.C. 50.000. Urbanization has started in the B.C. 2000 (Griffin, 2002). The country has been the scene of many battles to date from the time of Alexander the Great (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2002). Because of the ongoing wars in Afghanistan, country is among the world's most dangerous countries (Olson, 2010).

Journalism Faculty of Kabul University was founded in 1965. In a long time, theoretical studies have been conducted only. Since 2002, faculty is actively focused on practical education. While most state institutions have inadequate technological infrastructure, computer labs of the faculty has been established. A radio broadcast on the FM band and a monthly magazine of the faculty begun to be published. 19-person staffs of the faculty are taught 560 students. 65 percent of the students consist of men. In faculty, print, audio and visual journalism courses are given since 1986 (Jawad, 2010).

Printed, audio-visual and digital media in Afghanistan has begun to follow the development of journalism in the world. Pashto and Dari dialect of Persian spoken in Afghanistan are the dominant languages in the media. The Taliban administration has been tightly controlled media between 1996 and 2001. However, restrictions of state decreased step by step and private media also began to develop quickly. According to the ranking in 2011, among 179 countries in terms of media freedom Finland ranked first, Eritrea last, while Turkey ranks 148th, and Afghanistan 150th (Reporters Without Borders, 2011). Afghanistan is one of the most complex and challenging information environments for journalists. In the country, sometimes the lines between propaganda, intelligence and journalism are blurring. Journalists who are reporting the activities of the Taliban, even accused by international forces sometimes. In fact, they are subject to physical violence, kidnapping, imprisonment (Gezari, 2011 and 2010; Reporters Without Borders, 2010).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFGHAN MEDIA

Sirac-ul-Ahbar, (news lamp) the first newspaper in the country begins publication in 1906, in Dari language. After its first day, publisher stops printing the newspaper. Critical of the friendship between Britain and Afghanistan, Mahmud Tarzi starts broadcasting again in 1911. Mahmud Tarzi is therefore considered in the pioneers of journalism in Afghanistan. In 1919, King Amanullah Khan, giving the name Eman-i-Afghan (Afghan Peace), makes Sirac-ul-Ahbar a government publication. At the same time, special magazines begin publication by different ministries (Saikal et.al, 2006). Radio Kabul begins broadcasting in 1925. 1964 Constitution of Afghanistan and the 1965 Press Law provides freedom of the press in appropriate behavior. During this period, media is free from editorial perspective. But

protection of public order, interests of the state, constitutional monarchy and Islam is required. Afghan media, developed in the 1950s to 1970s in certain limits. 1973 coup overturned the government of King Zahir Shah, 19 newspapers closed and ending a period of relatively free media, and media restrictions begins (Press Reference, 2002). The first color television broadcast takes place in 1978. In the period of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), between 1979-1992 media influenced by the USSR (Potichnyj, 1988).

During the Taliban, Afghanistan media are managed with strict laws. Television and music are prohibited because they are seen as morally corrupt (Press Reference, 2002). In 1998, Taliban encourages the destruction of the TV sets in households (Dartnell, 2006). People caught with TV sets, imprisoned and whipped. For these reasons, the media often tries to work in foreign countries. Outside the influence of the Taliban, in northern Afghanistan, Badakhshan Television provides news and movie broadcasts for 3 hours every day around five thousand audience (World of Information, 2004; BBC, 2012). This television also closed in 1996 and publishing comments, pictures and reader letters prohibited in printed media (Press Reference, 2002). The only radio station that 70 percent of the people listening, broadcasts only religious content and propaganda, and does not broadcast music (Dartnell, 2006). Government begins publishing a newspaper in English in 2000, called The Islamic Emirate. The goal of the newspaper is the struggle against the enemy information (ibid.). At that time, because of instability, only Russia, the Czech Republic and Serbia has newsrooms in Kabul (Press Reference, 2002). Kabul TV center converted into a military base and journalists are not allowed to operate with their foreign counterparts (Dartnell, 2006). Status of the media remains the same until the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001.

In Hamid Karzai administration, the media in the country changes greatly. Media is growing rapidly in post-Taliban Afghanistan. But quality cannot be expected at the same speed in the broadcasts and publications. Government, has been registered media companies and organizations (Gezari and Flynn, 2010; Gezari, 2011). With the Taliban's fall, television broadcasts began and many restrictive laws removed. As a result, the Afghanistan media boycotts to publish news about Taliban in April 2007 (Pajhwok Afgan News, 2007). Media flourishes in Afghanistan. However, difficulties are experienced the following issues: self-censorship, sanctions for discrediting individuals, and publishing content contrary to Islam (BBC, 2012). Some government officials, with using their positions, maintaining their own communication facilities in units of local government. It is claimed that the same people are controlling some newspapers and electronic publishing organizations (Library of Congress Federal Research Division, 2006). Issued in 2004, a media law prohibits censorship. But the periodical publications, has to be registered to the Ministry of Information and Culture. Only in 2005, around 250 publications completed the registration process (Library of Congress Federal Research Division, 2006). International agencies are training new journalists since the fall of the Taliban (World of Information, 2004). However, instability is continuing in

Afghanistan. Journalists are also exposed to kidnapping and death threat dangers like military forces (Kamalipour and Snow, 2004). 2009 presidential election in Afghanistan, there have been some alleged attacks on press freedom (Cross, 2009).

The largest independent Afghan news agency Pajhwok Afghan News is found in 2004 and has 55 journalists around country. The founders of the agency were Afghan journalists working for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, a London-based NGO which trains journalists in developing countries and conflict fields (Gezari and Flynn, 2010b). Pajhwok has reporters almost in every area of Afghanistan and broadcasts online news in Dari, Pashto and English (Gezari and Flynn, 2010). Official agency of Afghan government is Bakhtar News Agency. Afghans in exile established Afghan Islamic Press and Sahaar News agencies in Pakistan. Both before the public and media, Internet and mobile communications are gaining popularity (Siddiqi, 2005).

Majority of Afghan journalists are men. However, voices of women reporters and editors began to be heard. Women journalists formerly used to make news on only education and health, which are often considered feminine issues. Nowadays, they are working on issues such as modernity and traditions affecting Afghanistan (Gezari, 2011b). For example, Şükriye Barakzai is advocating women's rights, in weekly magazine Aine-i Zen (Women's Mirror) which is published in two languages. Barakzai is a parliament member selected for the parliament (Wolesi Jirga) at the same time. She is working for a better and free press to achieve a strong democracy and a civil society (Tooth, 2006).

Publishing And Broadcasting In Afghanistan

Literacy rate in Afghanistan is 28.1 percent and newspapers are also affected from this (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Throughout the history, most of the newspapers in Afghanistan live in financial difficulty and censorship. Newspapers supported King Zahir Shah until his death. Currently they are supporting the President Hamid Karzai (Pigott, 2007). State-supported main newspapers in the country are Enis, Arman-i Milli, Eslah and Kabul Times. Daily Outlook Afghanistan is the first and only independent private ownership English-language newspaper in the history of Afghanistan, owned by Afghanistan Group of Newspapers. Publications in local languages include: The Daily Afghanistan, Īrade, Çerağ, Hewad, İttifak-ı İslam and Şeriat.

Circulations of independent printed publications are usually limited to Kabul region (Library of Congress Federal Research Division, 2006). 300 printed publications operate in country (Freedom House, 2011). Other newspapers and news agencies in Kabul include the following: Taglara Information & News Agency, Afghanistan Times Daily, Bakhtar News Agency, Weekly İktidar-ı Milli, Kabul Weekly, Pajhwok Afghan News, The Outlook Afghanistan, Wakht News Agency, and Khaama Press.

At the end of 2011, Afghanistan has 75 terrestrial television stations, 175 FM radio stations (BBC, 2012). But old and traditional communication media for the entire world is considered new for the country. Radio and television dominates Afghan media. In the country, eight out of ten people have radio sets; four have television sets (Auletta, 2010). The most common information source in country is radio. Private radio stations broadcasts in AM, FM and SW bands, in Pashto, Dari, Urdu and English. Radio Afghanistan begins broadcasting in Kabul in 2001 again (Europa Publications Staff, 2002). In 2003, 37 percent of the population of urban centers in general, can listen to local radio stations. Private Arman FM in Kabul, are popular among the younger generation (Siddiqi, 2005). In the early 2000s, the international non-governmental organizations supported the establishment of over a dozen new radios. 220 local radio stations are operating in the country (Freedom House, 2011). In Afghanistan, BBC World Service, Voice of America, Radio Free Afghanistan, and others are additional sources of news in Pashto and Dari language (ibid.).

Tolo TV is Afghanistan's most watched TV channel. It offers political and news programs, reality TV shows, Bollywood movies and series from the U.S. such as 24. Moby Media Group is the company behind the Tolo TV, and it has about USD 20 million revenues (Auletta, 2010). In 1996, the Taliban shut down the state television, Afghanistan National Television and in 2002, is begins broadcasting again. After the fall of Taliban, four cable TV channels begin broadcasting offering programs of India and the U.S. However, Afghan Supreme Court prohibits cable broadcasting on moral reasons in 2003. In 2010, a total of 50 television stations in the country as regional and state-run channels and 150 private radio stations are live (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Radio Television Afghanistan has the strongest infrastructure. Al Jazeera television in the country is seen as a source of uncensored information (Poole and Richardson, 2006). Afghan government aims to wean the Bakhtar news agency and Radio Afghanistan (Great Britain Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2004). Most of the global news channels like CNN, BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera have offices in Kabul. Another important Kabul-based private television station in Afghanistan is Aina TV. Other TVs on Afghanistan include: 1TV, Afghan TV, Afghanistan National Television ANTV, ARZU TV, BTN, Hewad TV, Lemar TV, Negaah TV, Noor TV Afghanistan, Noorin TV, Rah-i-Farda (Farda TV), RTA Radio Television Afghanistan, RTA Nangarhar, Saba TV, Saba World, Sada-i-Afghanistan, Sepehr TV, Shamshad TV, Tamadon TV, Watan TV, Zhwandoon TV.

Telecommunications Infrastructure And Internet Media In Afghanistan

Telecommunication services in the country are given by Afghan Wireless, Etisalat, Roshan, MTN Group and Afghan Telecom. In 2006, Afghanistan Ministry of Communications approves a project amounting to USD 64.5 million, for laying optical fiber cable across the country. At the end of 2011, there are 17.5 million GSM subscribers, over 1

million internet users, 80 thousand fixed telephone lines and 134 thousand CDMA users in the country (Afghanistan Ministry of Communications, 2011).

Afghan Telecom Corporation (ATC) has been serving under the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, since April 2006 (Afghan Telecom, 2010). Telecom sector began to develop in 2002, after an agreement envisaging the creation of a temporary administration in Afghanistan signed in Bonn. At that time, telephone prevalence was less than % 0.05. Infrastructure in general is damaged, services have begun to disappear. For the newly established government, to bring telecom services to residences and businesses is very difficult. With a pragmatic approach of the government, state monopoly ended in this area and the door opened to private investment. Regulations are kept at the lowest level. Currently, the country has 12.5 million telephone subscribers. This figure is comparable to other countries in the region. Telecommunications investment at the end of 2009 exceeds 1.3 billion USD. Telecom services are accessible to the 80 percent of the country's population. The remaining people living in remote rural areas. They also planned to be served under the Universal Access Program. There are five national, one regional, a total of six licensed mobile operators and 23 small and medium-sized Internet service providers addressing 1 million users in the country (ATRA, 2010).

Afghanistan provides internet access via satellite and fiber optics. With fiber optic networks, the country is linked to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Pakistan. Satellite Internet access price is high, but quality of access is low in country. There are many jammer equipments in Afghanistan and this disrupts the health of satellite communications. Fiber optics is not affected by jammers and reduces access prices 80 percent (Gurban, 2009).

Digital media is developing in Afghanistan as in other countries. There are 1 million Internet users in the country and it ranks 98 among 216 countries in the world (CIA World Factbook, 2009). Internet access in Afghanistan by 4 percent of population in 2010. Other than constant war, insecurity, and low technology environment in the country, low rate of literacy is also effective in this situation. Insecurity in the country has also delayed the installation of a fiber optic infrastructure. Afghan bloggers and web pages are a developing group of people but they are few in number (Freedom House, 2011).

Internet access is possible with Internet cafes and public Internet telekiosks in Kabul. Best known online news site is Pajhwok Afghan News website Pajhwok.com. Pajhwok, established in 2003 to give news about the Loya Jirga. Site has eight regional offices in the country. The site every day publishes 30 news items in English, Pashto and Dari. Audio, video and photo services are also provided to international news networks.

Following sites are also important news sources in the country: Afghan Islamic Press (afghanislamicpress.com) daily news site, established during the Soviet occupation in 1982 as

an agency in Peshawar. AIP continues to broadcast in Pakistan and offers its contents with subscription. Bakhtar News Agency (bakhtarnews.com.af) is the state news agency. Daily Outlook (outlookafghanistan.net) is an independent newspaper. Kabulpress.org was founded in 2004 in Kabul. It is a special news and commentary site. The Kabul Weekly, an independent newspaper, published until 2011. However, for various reasons, it has been closed (Dashty, 2011). Khaama Press (Khaama.com), founded in 2010, and it is an independent news site.

The Possibility Of Citizen Journalism Or Participatory Journalism In Afghanistan

Citizen journalism is referred as public journalism, participatory journalism or in some cases, street journalism (Witschge, 2009). As a concept, individuals play an active role in the process of news and information collection, making news, analysis and dissemination (Bowman and Willis, 2003). Citizen journalism is different than civic journalism. Because it is not performed by professional journalists, but by amateur citizens. Producers of the news content are not journalists, but citizens.

Expansion of new communication environments, social networks, media sharing sites and increase in the number of users of mobile communication equipment, has led to increases in examples of citizen journalism. Because ordinary people can transfer news more quickly and impartially than traditional journalists. Among the best-known examples of the Citizen journalism, there are news related to the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements (Pichon, 2011; Townsend, 2011). According to Glaser (2006), the basic idea is this: People who has no traditional journalism education or experience can achieve citizen journalism. They can produce news with using modern technology. For example, in a meeting, in a news item, a photo or video they captured may contain newsworthy information. But citizen journalism has been criticized by traditional journalists: Its lack of regulation, subjectivity, amateurism and low quality. Nevertheless, organizations have emerged resounding all over the world, like Avaaz.org and Ushahidi.com by citizen journalists who perform social activism (Land, 2009).

Ushahidi is a not-for-profit software organization. It develops free and open source software about information collection, visualization and interactive map production (Ushahidi, 2012). Ushahidi word means testimony or witness in Swahili language. The organization has developed an online software system after the disputed 2007 presidential election violence in Kenya. Legacy.ushahidi.com web site gathered witness information from SMS and e-mail messages and published in Google Maps (Baree, 2008). Ushahidi is working on social activism and public accountability with the method of crowdsourcing. In this way, it reveals a model on activist in mapping, i.e., on the combination of citizen journalism, social activism, and location information. Ushahidi offers software products and internet services

for local observers, who can transmit status messages over mobile phones or internet and system archive them according to time and place.

Ushahidi software and services are used in following countries: During disasters such as severe winter conditions, storms, earthquakes, floods, forest fires and tsunami in Haiti, Chile, New Zealand, Washington DC, Russia, Japan, the Balkans, and Australia; demonstrators' actions and communications activities in Libya and some Middle Eastern countries; observing corruptions in Macedonia; observing the elections in Mexico and India; during Gaza War by Al-Jazeera television (Wanjiku, 2009; AlJazeera, 2009; Ekine, 2009; Mackey and Corasaniti, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Afghan journalists played a vital role announcing developments together with the international media while Afghanistan is experiencing hard days. This is important for the development of freedom of media and expression. However, freedom of expression can develop quickly only where democratic professional institutions and open media works are supported. Therefore, support on public and private media and publishing by government of Afghanistan is important.

In the short run, Afghanistan should continue to benefit from training and support programs for the media sector of international organizations. However in the long term, media in the country must be seen as independent and standing on their feet by the international community. Requirements for this include: government must support and strengthen journalism and media education institutions, educational institutions must put all of their efforts in order to let students practice journalism before they graduated, employees in Afghanistan media must be encouraged for continuing education and lifelong learning.

Citizen journalism or participatory journalism practices in Afghanistan is likely to be seen in this case: If the required hardware, software and training infrastructure is provided, and users in a certain level of consciousness are trained. Given the prevalence of mobile phones, organizations such as Ushahidi can be examined in this regard.

In this context, whether in university or primary school level, following conclusions can be drawn efficiently in educational institutions taking these steps: Courses in media literacy and critical thinking can be given; news agency, magazine, newspaper, news web site, radio and television station can be opened and performed in the educational institutions. Especially new communication media requires less infrastructure investment than traditional broadcasting or publishing. Orientation of world media outlets is towards the new communication media. Therefore, training and educations on the digital

broadcasting/publishing in electronic media can be increased and sustained. Thus online media practices can be performed.

Content and publications of Afghan media nowadays are usually originated from overseas. The country needs more visual and audio programs, print and online publications which reflect and transmit their culture and values than existing content and programs. To provide this, it is required to train individuals who have knowledge in media field. Educators share the responsibility in this regard.

In Afghanistan, environment, conditions and relationships are challenging in terms of free broadcasting. Even so, using the advantages of the new communications media, content, can be transmitted to audience. Individual preferences of journalists, determine the quality and accuracy in the news. Individuals can focus on journalists. Thus, improve free and democratic properties in them like finding and publicizing the truth.

Human beings are creatures of habit and they live in past. However, the future inevitably will occur. Therefore the most appropriate time starting to prepare for the future is now.

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