

Kathmandu Conference on Communication and Media 2024

Camera Building, Balkhu-Kirtipur

December 22-23, 2024, Kathmandu



Jointly Organize by

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (CDJMC), Tribhuvan University

and

Center for Media Research – Nepal

Convener

Dr Kundan Aryal

Head of the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, TU

Co-convener

Deepak Aryal, Chairperson of CMR, Kathmandu

Members of Steering committee

Dr. Dev Raj Aryal, Dr. Ghama Raj Luitel, Shashi Marasini, Ujjwal Acharya, Tilak Pathak and Bhuwan KC

The two-day **Kathmandu Conference on Communication and Media 2024** concluded successfully at the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (CDJMC), Tribhuvan University on December 23. Held on December 22 and 23, the regional conference was co-organized by the CDJMC and the Center for Media Research – Nepal (CMR-Nepal).

The conference brought together more than 200 media educators, scholars, and researchers from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. It served as a vibrant platform for regional collaboration, addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by technological advancements and social media in mass communication. Dr. Kundan Aryal, Head of CDJMC, highlighted the shifting dynamics of media consumption in his remarks. “Today’s audiences are more active than ever, necessitating well-edited and verified news content. The conference aims to promote closer linkages between readers and audiences and academic activities,” he stated.



The first day featured three research presentation sessions, providing insights into various aspects of media and communication in South Asia. The second day continued with panel discussions that delved deeply into the evolving landscape of journalism, offering comprehensive insights into contemporary media challenges and trends.

A special exhibition titled **“Supercharged by AI – Synthetic and Out of Control”**, jointly organized by Tactical Tech and CMR-Nepal, was a major highlight of the conference. The exhibition explored the impact of artificial intelligence on online lives and included three poster presentations of research findings related to the theme.

The event underscored the need for regional collaboration and academic discourse to address the dynamic changes in the media landscape. With its focus on the future of journalism in South Asia, the conference laid the groundwork for further academic and professional cooperation in the region.

Day One, December 22, 2024

Inaugural Ceremony

Welcome Remarks by Deepak Aryal, CMR-Nepal chair

Message from Prof Dr Keshar Jung Baral, VC of TU, read by Dr. Binod Joshi,

Remarks by Prof. Dr. Dubi Nanda Dhakal, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Prof Dr Shobha Shrestha, Central Department of Geography, TU, Scientific Committee of the Conference

Introduction to keynote speaker by Bhuwan KC

Keynote Speech by Prof. P. Kharel

Concluding remarks by the Chair of the session Dr. Kundan Aryal, Head of the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, TU

Message from the Professor Dr. Keshar J. Baral, Vice Chancellor, Tribhuvan University

Good morning everyone.

Chair of today's Inauguration Program of the "**Kathmandu Conference on Communication and Media 2024**," *Professor Dr. Kundan Aryal*, Head of the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication; *Professor Dr. Kedar Prasad Rijal*, *Registrar of Tribhuvan University*; Deans, Executive Directors, and Directors; distinguished guests, professors, faculty, esteemed scholars, media professionals, students, and participants – it is a pleasure to address you, albeit through this message.

I sincerely apologize for my absence today. An unavoidable commitment – an ongoing Senate meeting – prevents me from attending in person. However, I am deeply honoured to extend my warmest regards and best wishes for the resounding success of this important conference.

This two-day event, organized by the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (CDJMC) in collaboration with the Kathmandu-based Center for Media Research (CMR), Nepal, provides a vital platform for dialogue and collaboration on critical issues facing media and communication in Nepal and South Asia.

The conference's diverse themes, including combating misinformation in the age of AI, the relationship between media and the state, ensuring journalistic viability, and

the future of media, are both timely and crucial. I am confident that the discussions will generate valuable insights that will inform both academic research and practical approaches to the challenges faced by the media and communication sectors today. The participation of academics, practitioners, emerging scholars, and students highlights the collaborative and inclusive spirit of this gathering. By bridging theory and practice, this event will undoubtedly contribute significantly to advancing media education and practice in the region. The exploration of innovative topics, such as data-driven consumer behaviour analysis, cross-border misinformation, and the evolving media landscape in South Asia, aligns perfectly with Tribhuvan University's commitment to promoting academic excellence and addressing real-world challenges.

I express my sincere appreciation to the organizers, especially the CDJMC, a distinguished department within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, for their tireless efforts in convening this important conference. Your dedication to amplifying the scholarly contributions of Nepali and South Asian academics is commendable and paves the way for meaningful collaborations and impactful research.

As you embark on this journey of discourse and discovery, I extend my best wishes to all participants. May the insights and ideas generated over these two days foster transformative changes in the field of communication and media, benefiting not only Nepal but the entire South Asian region.

Again, I regret my absence but assure you of my full support. I am confident that this conference will be a remarkable success, and I look forward to learning about its outcomes.

Thank you, and I wish you a fruitful and enriching conference.

Warm regards,

Remarks by Shobha Shrestha, Associate Professor, Central Department of Geography, Tribhuvan University and Scientific Committee of the Conference

I am deeply honoured to be part of this **Kathmandu Conference on Communication and Media: Discourse on Communication and Media in Nepal**

& South Asia (jointly organized by the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication and Center for Media Research – Nepal (CMR-Nepal)).

In today's digital landscape, access to media through various means is becoming an important tool for teaching, learning, and research. The Role of the Media in disseminating academic research findings to a wider audience through effective communication has become a key factor in public understanding and Informed Policy Decisions.

On this occasion, I would like to underscore the close relationship between media, access to information, reliability of information, and its utilization in everyday life. The effect of climate variability is well known phenomenon in today's world particularly in the agriculture sector of South Asian countries where more than 40 % of agriculture relies on monsoon rain. In this context, I would like to share a part of the research findings (funded by ANSO, China) on means and access to information, trustworthiness, and utilization by smallholders (farmers) in South Asian countries. Most smallholder farmers in developing countries rely on a combination of modern means, scientific forecasts, and traditional local knowledge for decision-making on their agricultural activities. However, most of the farmers in the Global South are constrained by necessary and reliable information on weather and climate variability.

With increasing climate adversities, reliable weather information plays a greater role in agricultural decision-making to enhance adaptive capacity to climate change effects among farming communities. Timely weather information, pertinent understanding, and utilization aids farming activities and builds the resilience of smallholder farmers. Our research found that information sources, trustworthiness, information-sharing mechanisms, and use of weather information in farming practices in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal show variations.

Regarding Information Sources

Multiple sources are considered before a final decision to minimize risk and production uncertainty.

- Community organization is the dominant information source in Bangladesh and India
- Public media particularly, (Local FM/TV) is dominant in Nepal

However, multiple sources sometimes create contradictions leading to confusion among farmers.

Regarding Trustworthiness and utilization

Trusted information is operationalized only for short-term strategic decision-making

- The Trust level is higher in Bangladesh and India (51.7% each) as compared to Nepal (21%)
- A relatively higher percentage of farm HH fully utilize acquired weather information in Bangladesh (48.8%) and India (47.9%) in comparison to Nepal (16.6%)
- 14% of farmers do not utilize acquired weather information at all

Regarding Availability of Sharing Platform

- 60% of farm HH reported No proper weather information-sharing platform
- A relatively higher percentage reported the availability of platforms in Nepal (51%) whereas 33% in Bangladesh and only 21% in India reported such.
- Availability and access to reliable weather information do not assert its utilization among farmers but presentation mode, timely and accurate information. An institutional role in monitoring and validating weather information from multiple sources is requisite for successful adoption.
- The effectiveness of translating information into action manifests in the localization of technology, communicative and modest delivery mechanisms. The role of community-based organizations, in contrast to the government and NGOs as important weather information sharing platforms ascertain a two-way communicative mechanism rather than one-way information delivery.
- Sharing and utilizing established local knowledge and perceptions of climate change across countries with similar socio-cultural and ecological settings could complement inadequate weather records and information as scientific evidence

And here I think lies the significance of effective communication in sharing information among South Asian media at the grassroots level in a diverse society.

Thank you for listening and wishing a fruitful conference participation!

Shrestha is Co-I of Alliance of International Science Organizations, ANSO-funded International Collaborative Research Project (ANSO-CR-PP-2021-06)on

'Assessing Households' Adaptive Capacity to Climate Change in the Diverse Socio-Cultural and Geographical Landscape of South Asia'

Keynote Speech by Prof P Kharel: "Age of Multi-channels and Audience Fragmentation"



South Asia has come a long way since the 18th century, when the first newspapers began to stamp their footprints on the world's most populous region, accounting for every fifth of humanity. Idealised and idolised since more than 200 years as the fourth power [fourth estate], newspapers and their later-day cousins in the broadcast landscape, followed by digital channels in the new millennium, are seen as contributing to making or marring individual and institutional images just as they highlight issues that impact sizeable sections of audiences.

One of the world's 20 oldest existing independent states, Nepal suffered a severe setback in making an early debut in journalism. Whereas the rest of the region

witnessed the sprouting of newspapers in dozens of languages by the mid-19th century, the people of independent Nepal had to wait for nearly more than 120 years after India for the first news publication to take off in 1901, that is, 50 years after the first printing press arrived in the country. Moreover, other newspapers took another 50 years to reach readers in the early 1950s. Whereas the British colonial rulers allowed private parties to operate printing presses and publish newspapers, the Rana regime in Nepal was vehemently against private-sector newspapers.

Stringent law and stiff punishment notwithstanding, the media history of much of South Asia starts in the first half of the 19th century. India's first newspaper, *Hicky's Bengal Gazette*, was published in January 1780. Within the next two decades, more newspapers in more than a dozen languages sprouted in different cities. Sri Lanka, too, broke into newspapering early in 1802. Bangladesh's newspaper records show the first news publication in 1818 whereas Pakistan's newspaper annals produce *Lahore Chronicle* as its pioneer newspaper that took off in 1822. Afghanistan pioneered a newspaper in 1873. Nepal in 1901, the Maldives in 1932 and Bhutan in 1967 have newspaper history in the 20th century. Because they arrived in only the first half of the 20th century, the broadcasting media (radio and television) did not see as much of a gap in their introduction to these countries.

Heavy censorship, intense media harassment and harsh laws prevailed in all South Asian countries at one time or the other.

Agendas thrust upon, and issues diverted or distorted in the name of gatekeeping at a time when prominent journalists in the West have begun dismissing "two-sides-ism" as outdated and impractical, do not bode well for maintaining objectivity. Little wonder that a Gallup poll in 2022 showed that Americans tend to trust newspapers significantly more than television. American media critics are concerned about journalism losing considerable public trust. A Gallup poll has found that only 16 per cent of Americans have a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in newspapers. This was down from 25 per cent in 2012 and 35 per cent in 2002.

And now comes the era of multi-channels in the communication landscape inaugurating a variety of content choices, which enables the public to pick their options by personal needs and specific interests. Time being a restrictive factor for any living being, receivers give their attention to the media contents that serve their interests the best.

The theory of multiple media choices and audience migrations sees the fragmentation of audiences as an inevitable effect. Multiple avenues encourage migration to new interests and communication channels, as curiosity expands and options cater to varied desires. Options are always power for audiences, who are

liberated from few or censored choices. This is the law of human nature. The more the choices in channels and contents, the greater the prospects of diverse voices being heard, and prompting frequent interactions essential for productive participatory democracy. Dissenting views find space for their case.

The theory would be that a variety of options offers opportunities for individuals and groups to cultivate tastes they previously had not developed or could not address for lack of platforms. In the digital age, they can develop habits and cultivate tastes they previously hardly ever dreamt of. Opportunities are now accessible for acquiring new knowledge and skills that satisfy curiosity, address needs or do both. The beneficiaries or the indulgent apportion their time and attention as per requirement or bent of mind. Even as individual interests scatter among disparate and heterogeneous groups, only a few media outlets attract a steady number of audiences for long durations.

Complete dependence on a few channels gets loosened in a sphere of multiple choices. The public are offered a range of services through multiple and easily available channels, often at reasonably affordable prices. Content narrowcasting and fragmentation of information seekers create competitive climates for the news media. Free speech—formal and non-formal—covers non-media communications, complemented by a right to information that ideally inspires responsible institutions to engage in proactive dissemination of messages at the earliest possible, and endorsed legally, professionally and ethically.

Agenda-setting and gate-keeping

Disinformation is the consequence of sexed-up or embedded media. Free news channels should be independent and competent information filtering agencies befitting the public trust reposed in them. Content fragmentation, or specialised news and views, should enable the channels to focus on effective purposes. This way they reach the right audience with greater effect and speed. The era of general news channels, carrying newsworthy something of everything is dimming fast. New generations cultivate specific interests and tastes. A generalised news service might not evaporate altogether but the age of deeply specialised news services will soon be seen gathering moments and making their presence felt fast across all continents.

Specialised news outlets attract specific audiences with particular interests. If the content is narrowcast to a target, it is likely to draw the right audience with the right focus. This helps advertisers to identify the type of audience a channel fetches for commercial advertising.

Putting profit before people and prioritising commercial interests over public credibility result in media capture by vested interest groups that monopolise *agenda-setting* and *gatekeeping*. Foreign funds support sensitive issues in many developing countries. Many INGOs and aid agencies dole out favours to create conditions that suit their agendas. On failing to obtain explicit support from the intended target, they strive to buy media silence.

If foreign donations influence local decisions, they also influence elections and agenda-setting—a prospect big powers abhor if it were to happen in their own countries. Fear journalism renders innocent people to the victimhood of half-baked content. Fair journalism adheres to ethics and does not create fear in public units that are reluctant to complain strongly against any injustice done on them by biased media carrying distorted information.

Journalists are expected to be active in stretching their senses for any clue leading to potential sources of news. The principle of the profession is that they practise field journalism, not passive journalism, and engage in fair journalism by verifying and cross-verifying information. Journalism seeks newsworthy information whose value is based on the impact it creates, with the prime purpose of informing society by explaining various complex issues for clear understanding. Journalism catering to the interests of a relatively small audience is known as niche journalism that focuses on issues one or a few subjects, such as food, fashion, cinema, cricket, crime, economy, football, politics, travel and tourism.

Professional gatekeeping presumes neutral and objective news. Journalists are expected to be neutrally distanced agents aiming at fair reporting and abiding by professional ethics. It enjoins upon them to take into consideration their target audiences when giving coverage to events and personalities. The proximity factor and the interest an event generates are of primary priority. Social media in the 2020s have contributed to the surge in public engagement in terms of interactions made and opinions created. But they too are involved in content polarisation that has raised concerns in the social as well as the core political classes.

How come our world affairs prioritisation matches with those of the global mainstream news media's gatekeeping? Or is it that our perspectives comply with the West's? Or do we give the audience what they want? Anglo-Saxon media narratives will have to be reviewed to know the facts better and understand global issues accurately. Competition might not always be affordable, but understanding issues in the digital landscape of vastly expanded opportunities to acquire information would mean preventing information predators from distorting content.

Credible media serve as reliable points of reference. They stand as valued institutions that the public can bank upon when it comes to news and views on contemporary affairs. Buddha's advice to learn to question and cross-check his statements underscores the purity of facts and an intelligent inquisitive mind. The significance of any message is in its substance. Exaggeration is dubious communication; far worse is peddling untruth—a grievous professional sin. The partisan press is combustible, and the tie-up between the press and political parties portrays a toxic relationship that takes away a channel's claim of being a public platform of trust and truth.

Regarding the 1990 Iraq war, American television journalist Lesley Stahl points out: “The news media became so unpopular that at one point 62 per cent in a *Washington Post* poll said that the Allies should bomb a Baghdad hotel even if it were filled with Western reporters. More than 80 per cent told the Gallup Poll that they approved of tight restrictions on the media.

Gallup Poll in 2022 showed that Americans tend to trust newspapers significantly more than television. But their number is less than half the US population. American media critics are worried about journalism losing considerable public trust. The survey found that only 16 per cent of Americans had a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in newspapers. This was down from 25 per cent in 2012 and 35 per cent in 2002.

India's political analyst Brahma Chellaney, in his column, rues: “When reporting on any mass tragedy, a basic rule of journalism is to be sensitive to the victims and those who are grieving. Western media, which double as the international media, usually observe this rule at home but discard it when reporting on disasters in non-Western societies. The coverage of India's devastating second wave of COVID-19 in 2021 is a case in point. Western media were filled with images of dead bodies and other graphic scenes that generally would not be shown following a similar disaster in a scene in a Western country.”

The Nepalese media allocate liberal space for entertainment but quite a few of them give Hollywood moviedom too much space, forgetting that movies in English are hardly ever screened at the cinema theatres anywhere outside Kathmandu Valley. The economy pages, likewise, carry news confined to the activity of only a few of Nepal's 77 districts. Agriculture, the mainstay of the country's economy, rarely gets a main story placement or space in editorials and opinion pieces.

The widely cited Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranks Nepal top among its South peers regarding press freedom index. Its report for 2024 places Nepal 74th, the Maldives 106th, Bhutan 147th, Sri Lanka 150th, Pakistan 152nd, India 159th, Bangladesh 165th and Afghanistan 178th in a list of 180 nations. The globally cited report expressed concern over the decline in media autonomy on account of pressure exerted by the state and other actors.

Multiple-channel media landscape means an environment for greatly reduced big media house hegemony. The breathtaking array of options covering different genres of information, including news, views and entertainment, pave the pathway to more focused content and opportunities for audiences to veer to greater concentration on their choicest interests. This might push individuals and groups to lose physical proximity and direct contact with social and professional units whose interests might differ from theirs and might be viewed by others as isolated or secluded life.

Specific areas of issues more than generalisation of interests and information will be the new order media audience priority. Those sticking to the legacy practices will either wither away or pale into insignificance unless they remodel their existing presentation patterns of general news content or go for vigorous specialisation.

A cohesive approach and cooperation create bonds for mutual benefit and trust without losing the opportunity to exchange candid views. A limited market for general news, whose saturated existence drives advertisers away, calls for focused contents that help identify the composition of content receivers better. As the advertisers have budgetary limitations, they would want the best for the money they spend on publicity commercials and brand promotions.

A.G. Noorani (2009), in *The Frontline*, criticised the Central Information Commission (CIC) for having rendered a grave disservice to the nation by ruling that the report of Lieutenant General Henderson Brooks and Brigadier PS Bhagat on India's military debacle in the India-China war of 1962 cannot be disclosed under the Right to Information Act, 2005. He questioned: "In 2009, our CIC bars disclosure of a report of 1963 on a military debacle of 1962. Are we such a substandard democracy?"

South Asian Public Service Broadcasting (SAPBS) can be initiated for greater connectivity. We need to wake up from the long slumber that the world's most populous region is not hibernating. Does SAPBS's idea sound like a utopia, removed from the language of probability? If so, therein lies the cascade of constraints. I would like to believe that South Asia will wake up to the call of the times.

And India is not the only country in South Asia facing such roadblocks against citizens seeking information that powerful forces might consider “sensitive”. All others, including Nepal, suffer similarly. The state should either live by the letter and spirit of the right to information or scrap it altogether from the fundamental law of the land.

Chair’s Remarks: Dr Kundan Aryal, Head of the CDJMC

I am delighted to welcome you all to the Camera Building of the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (CDJMC).

I extend a warm welcome to TU officials, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Executive Director of the Department of International Relations and members of the Executive Council, heads of various central departments, friends from Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka, media educators from diverse institutions in Nepal, and journalists. AND, most importantly, my beloved students and faculty members.

This location itself reflects the long and relentless journey of media education in Nepal. After nearly five decades of pioneering efforts in media education, Tribhuvan University now aspires to establish this department as a center of excellence in journalism and mass communication. Transitioning from a cozy environment within the Humanities Campus, we moved to this facility last year with the aim of broadening research and teaching opportunities in mass communication and reforming journalism education to align with the ongoing changes in the communication landscape.

The history of journalism in Nepal, marked by struggles, upheavals, and advances, spans over a century. For at least the last eight decades, it has served as a communication lifeline, contributing significantly to Nepal’s socio-political sphere. Today, on one hand, the information and communication ecosystem has undergone a tremendous transformation, especially since the start of this millennium, a process accelerated by the restrictions on physical mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, journalism's role in delivering verified, fact-checked, and well-edited content with high ethical standards has become more critical than ever.

In 1954, Wilbur Schramm, a pioneer in modern communication studies, observed: “We have come 180 degrees from a theory of the passive audience to a theory of an active audience” (*The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, Eds. Wilbur

Schramm & Donald F. Roberts, p. 11). As we near the end of 2024, in the midst of the digital era, his concept of the "Fraction of Selection" highlights the critical need for delivering thoughtfully curated and responsibly edited content to serve the public good and minimize potential harm. Journalism schools, like ours, have a pivotal role to play in addressing this responsibility.

While every new technology is a double-edged sword, digital advancements demand their responsible use. Journalism schools must adapt to evolving technologies, their impact on human behavior, and societal changes. When Nepal first recognized the need for formal media training in the 1970s, neither the advanced technology nor the actively engaged audience we see today was widely envisioned. Today, if we claim to prepare professionals for the contemporary world, we must adopt innovative pedagogies and foster creative understandings of the field.

CDJMC is committed to hosting discussions, exchanging ideas, and producing scholarly publications alongside vibrant and effective classroom teaching. We are making this humble effort, despite limited resources, because the Nepali media community looks to us to bridge the gap between the classroom, the newsroom, and emerging communication domains. From our side, we strive to develop competent communication professionals and researchers.

The Central Department views the Kathmandu Conference on Communication and Media, 2024 as another milestone in its journey. From our modest beginnings, we believe we are progressing in the right direction, fostering meaningful exchanges and collaborations now and in the future.

Although the Vice-Chancellor could not join us today due to Senate obligations, I am grateful for his encouraging message for our conference. My sincere thanks go to the Center for Media Research (CMR) for their hard work in bringing this conference to life, the leadership of Tribhuvan University for their support, and my colleagues and students at the department for their dedication.

Research Presentations Session I

Session Chair: *Rishikesh Dahal*, Assistant Professor, Tribhuvan University

Special Presentation:

Nomadic Narratives: the Cross-Border Spread of Misinformation in South Asia

Din M. Sumon Rahman

Professor, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

Dr. Din M. Sumon Rahman (the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh): "Nomadic Narratives: The Cross-Border Spread of Misinformation in South Asia." **Prof. Rahman** from explored "Nomadic Narratives: the Cross-Border Spread of Misinformation in South Asia." His research highlighted how misinformation travels across national boundaries in the region, taking on new forms and contexts.

Research Presentations and Discussion

1. Disinformation in International Relations: Impact on Nepal's Relations with India and China

Sahayog Ranjit

Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Tribhuvan University

2. Media Bias in Newspapers and Readers' Perception on Media Literacy

Sunil Paudel

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

3. Assessing Digital Media Literacy among College Students: Bridging the Digital Divide in Nepal

Bhuwan Bhandari

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

Concluding remarks by Session Chair

Research Presentations Session II

Session Chair: **Associate Prof. Dr. Nirmala Mani Adhikary**, Kathmandu University

Special Presentation:

An Analysis of Indian Media Coverage on South Asian Countries Beyond India

Anil Chamadiya

Media Studies Group, New Delhi, India

An analysis of how the Indian Media reports on SAARC countries: Anil Chamadia



Anil Chamadia , Media Studies Group ,New Delhi

Why are we discussing how Indian media reports on SAARC countries? SAARC is a group of countries that include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and India. Therefore, we are also discussing how Indian Media's reporting is portraying India. While we can see that, some SAARC countries have turned democratic a few years back and in others the process to strengthen democracy seems to be obstructed. India is said to be the world's largest and oldest democracy. Indian Prime Minister also presses on the fact that India is the Mother of democracy.

Looking at different SAARC countries, we witness that Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan have had religion based military rule. Bhutan is a constitutional monarchy while Maldives and Sri Lanka have faced democracy deficit in recent years. After the beginning of the quest for new global order in 1990, Nepal's monarchy was dissolved and the country became a democracy and since then has been struggling to strengthen its democratic system.

It is said that to judge the degree of democracy in a country it is imperative to observe how the medium of freedom of expression, which is also called the fourth pillar of democracy, behave towards those in power as well as the general population. Indian Media therefore, becomes important for SAARC countries because its favourable or unfavourable reporting on neighbouring countries is considered to judge the degree of democracy in these countries.

What is Media?

Media can be divided into two broad platforms—commercial and non-commercial. Generally, the commercial media is described as Media. What we are discussing in the Indian context are better known as Media companies. Times of India is India's biggest media house. Vineet Jain, the managing director, claims in an interview with The New Yorker on 8th October 2012, that he is actually not in the newspaper but rather in advertising business.

Constitutions of many countries guarantee Freedom of speech and expression as a basic right of citizens, but ironically, medium of the Freedom of expression are in the hands of few media companies. These companies have maximum control in different communication medium like newspaper, magazines, Tv channels, radio channels and news websites and portals.

Even before 1947, Saheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar raised a critique of these media companies. Bhagat Singh, writing in the magazine Kirti in 1928, pointed to the role of media companies in inciting communal violence for business interest. There have been many studies, conducted in India, on the role of media during communal violence. During 1943, Dr. Bheem Rao Ambedkar described how the media is completely in the hands of big businessmen and how they try to control the politics of the country. He said, “ news gives place to sensation, reasoned opinion to unreasoning passion, appeal to the minds of responsible people to appeal to the emotions of the irresponsible” is what journalism stands for today. He harboured this idea even for undivided India. This is what still

holds true today even after India had been divided into Pakistan in 1947 and further Bangladesh in 1971.

After 1947, Indian planning commission under the leadership of P.C Mahalanobis presented a report on 25 February 1964 before the government of India. The report mentioned “ Economic power is exercised not only through control over production, investment, employment, purchases, sales and prices but also through control over mass media of communication. Of these, newspapers are the most important and constitute a powerful ancillary to sectoral and group interests. It is not, therefore, a matter for surprise that there is so much inter-linking between newspapers and big business in this country, with newspapers controlled to a substantial extent by selected industrial houses directly through ownership as well as indirectly through membership of their boards of directors. In addition, of course, there is the indirect control exercised through expenditure on advertisement which has been growing apace during the Plan periods. In a study of concentration of economic power in India, one must take into account this link between industry and newspapers which exists in our country to a much larger extent than is found in any of the other democratic countries in the world.” There are many reports, both government and non-government, that provides a thorough analysis of the monopoly of companies over media. In 2001, Press Council of India, in one of its publication, presented fact-based information on the ill-effect of monopoly in media on democracy.

Press Council of India also says that in a democratic country like ours , a majority of the media be it newspaper ,magazine or electronic media are run by private individuals. The second press commission (P.1454-146) in India writes that “the newspaper industries (now Media) in the big business hand becomes involuntarily the cultural arms of other business and industries, and takes a vested interest in maintaining the existing socio-economic system. The newspaper controlled by them may be selective in their presentation of news and views in return for benefits conferred in respect of other business interest.

When we are looking at the relationship between democracy and Indian media companies, we must understand that the conclusion drawn from these analysis is not an isolated one. Parallel can be drawn in Pakistan as well. Syed Irfan Ashraf, Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi and Tabassum Javed wrote in their book titled *The Dark Side of Journalism* "The political economy of media not only looks into power from ownership perspective but also explain news in top-down decision-making order. The writers are providing insight into macro-level developments in Pakistan i.e., commercialization of media and the concentration of media to serve interests of those ruling at the top”.

We have seen this trend in Nepal as well. It is clear that similar to developed countries, the media companies in SAARC nations have expanded the ways in which they can become more important for democracy. These companies can be working in a particular nation but more often than not, they are related to media companies of international level. It can be said that in the new economic system, every company is of global nature. Here we are talking about the journalism that these companies are doing in democracies.

The Impact of Media Monopoly by Companies on the Entire Media Structure

1. Absence of Editors

In SAARC member countries, the monopoly of media companies has led to the near elimination of the position of editor. In such a scenario, the owners of media companies themselves often use their names in place of editors. This concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals or corporations has led to a significant shift in how news is produced and controlled, reducing the role of independent editorial oversight.

2. Sources of News

The sources of news in the media can be viewed at two levels: the first is the source of news itself, and the second is the source from which media consumers receive their news. At both levels, the sources of news have become extremely limited. In SAARC member countries, one can observe the narrowing down of news sources from other countries within the region. Media companies' representatives are not present in other countries, and this has further restricted access to diverse and independent sources of information.

The second Press Commission of India mentioned that “The diversity in the sources of information does not, however, mean many sources of information owned by the same individual or institution, or the same family.” This statement highlights the concentration of media ownership, where even if many outlets claim diversity, they are ultimately controlled by the same

individuals or entities, leading to a limited and controlled flow of information.

These developments have raised concerns about the independence and diversity of the media in the SAARC region, particularly in terms of how information is gathered and distributed. The concentration of media ownership and the erosion of editorial independence have significant implications for journalistic integrity and the free flow of information.

3) The Trend of Confirmation Bias

The tendency to confirm or cross-check news has nearly vanished in media companies. In India, on 23rd April 2022, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued a notice regarding foreign news. This notice specifically addressed the broadcast of content related to the war between Russia and Ukraine on Indian Hindi television channels. Russia also expressed its objections. In fact, the sense of responsibility towards foreign news has significantly diminished.

As Syed Irfan Ashraf and others point out, news from conflict zones is often presented in a way where the first version of events tends to prevail over all subsequent "truths." The events in such zones are so dramatic and traumatic that commercial media cannot afford to be left behind by competitors. This explains the significance of social media in every newsroom, where speed often trumps accuracy. In 1970, the MacBride Commission highlighted the issue of a "**one-sided flow of information**." However, today, we can observe that the monopoly of large capital has created a situation where news is used as a tool for attacks in the context of global power dynamics. This monopoly, driven by commercial interests, has led to a highly skewed and often biased flow of information, especially in global conflicts. The drive for profit and competition in the media industry often leads to sensationalism, with less regard for the accuracy and authenticity of the information being presented.

Inspiration for Discussing Media Journalism in SAARC Countries

What could be the objectives of media companies in one country while reporting on foreign countries? If we look at the declared objectives of media companies, their concern is to make readers, viewers, and listeners aware and to connect them with events happening in the country and the world. They claim that information educates. But is that really the case?

I often visit journalism teaching and training institutes in India. I have also spent three years at one of India's oldest institutes, IIMC, teaching hundreds of students.

When I became concerned about the lack of knowledge journalism students had regarding SAARC countries, I planned a study on the media of SAARC countries at Delhi University. I found that the students in the classroom were lacking knowledge about SAARC and its media. I then gathered information from the students about the media of SAARC countries and published a paper.

Mahatma Gandhi is closely associated with Wardha in Maharashtra, and while working as a professor at the International Hindi University there, I felt it was essential to assign similar work to students. Students felt energized and empowered by gaining knowledge about the media of neighboring countries, something I experienced as a teacher. This created awareness about what was being reported about SAARC countries in Indian media companies. However, people like us are often considered temporary figures.

During my journalistic work, I felt the need to create a platform to strengthen relationships between journalists of SAARC countries, so there could be dialogue among journalists in India. But a permanent foundation could be laid at the academic level, and that area is research. I proposed that a research student study the media of India and Pakistan. The methodology would be to analyze how select events were reported by the media of both countries. How much journalism was there, and how much did nationalism dominate the narrative? How can the same event be presented differently under the guise of religion and nationalism?

Why did this idea come to my mind? Because when a group from Pakistan, including some Hindus, came to speak at Jawaharlal Nehru University, I found that the way Pakistani media portrayed India was the extent of their knowledge about India. Similarly, Indian readers, listeners, and viewers only know Pakistan to a limited extent. Here is an interesting example of how a single event was reported differently by the media in Pakistan and India. This concerns the failure of the 2001 Agra Summit between India and Pakistan.

Pakistan's largest media group wrote: *"Advani admits he sabotaged Agra Summit"*

(Reference: [Dawn](#)).

On the other hand, an Indian media company published a report with the headline: *"India's Ex Diplomat Details What Led To Agra Summit Collapse in 2001"*.

(Reference: [NDTV](#)).

The Indian report explained that the collapse of the Agra Summit was due to Pakistan's then-President Pervez Musharraf's "overreach" in publicly expressing his

hawkish views on Kashmir, his lack of intent in addressing terrorism, and his insistence on linking the progress of overall relations with progress on Kashmir. It emphasized that the summit failed not because of LK Advani's hardline stance. This example shows how the same event was presented with differing narratives based on the perspective of the media in each country.

Media Access and Coverage Between India and Nepal

In India, common readers do not have access to Pakistani newspapers, and similarly, people in Pakistan cannot access Indian newspapers. Both countries' media companies serve their consumers in their own ways and languages. However, this situation does not apply between Nepal and India. In Nepal, Indian newspapers are available, and Nepalese consumers, especially in relation to the 2015 earthquake, have had their share of bitter experiences with TV channels. But what is the perception of Nepal in India? What opinions have been formed about Nepalese people living in India? Such studies do exist.

In India, Nepal is seen as a Hindu nation, and people can still be seen as consumers of companies' journalism. During a research study, I tried to find out how Indian media representatives in Nepal reported about the country. The scope of their reporting has been very limited. A historical context for this can be seen in an article published in 1970 in EPW (14 March 1970, EPW):

"Nepal has been very much in the news, thanks to the 'colourful' wedding of Crown Prince Birendra. All major newspapers thought it a fit occasion to send their own correspondents to Kathmandu. One hopes this is the beginning of a trend and that more and more Indian correspondents will be made available to report Nepal to India. It is customary for some Indian correspondents to accompany the President or the Prime Minister on their tours abroad, and the fact that President Giri went to Kathmandu personally to represent India at the wedding may have had something to do with the actual number of correspondents who visited Kathmandu for the occasion. Regardless, it is a step forward from the general apathy that newspapers have traditionally shown to the question of reporting Nepal. Not many newspapers, for example, have reported anything worthwhile about the move for a conference of Himalayan kingdoms that King Mahendra had planned to coincide with the wedding. Only Organiser seems to have taken more than a casual interest in these developments. The conference in question proved a non-starter as the Chogyal of Sikkim eventually decided not to go and the Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan had never shown any interest in it from the beginning, but the point is that Nepal is an area of close interest for India and needs to be covered more fully by the Indian Press."

This shows that, historically, Nepal's coverage in Indian media has been limited and selective, often tied to specific events or interests.

How Media Companies Set Priorities

Historically, it is well-established that media companies use "political sentiments" to strengthen their position and status. After World War II, the sentiment of nationalism, mixed with religion, grew stronger. Information does not belong to any nation, but the presentation of information is often controlled by a mix of nationalism and religion. Nepal has been a Hindu nation, and its presentation as a Hindu nation in India serves specific purposes.

The struggles of being a religious-based nation are not discussed in the Indian media in the context of Nepal, but they can be seen in the context of Pakistan. In 1990, I discussed the challenges faced by Nepal as a religious-based nation in a booklet. It also addresses India's religious-based politics and, on the other hand, the struggles of the people of Nepal.

I have yet to see a media report about how social development is being observed in Nepal after the acceptance of the secular principle, even though the social development of the 'Nepali Bahadur' is clearly visible. It is generally observed that in neighboring countries, religious minorities and majorities are not referred to as minorities and majorities, but rather as representatives of their religion.

What is the Scope of News in SAARC Countries?

Firstly, the scope of international news for media companies in any country can be defined in the following ways:

1. News from countries whose events affect the world.
2. News from countries with which the country has relationships at various levels.
3. News from neighboring countries.

Our focus is limited to the reporting of SAARC countries. In this context, what is the foundation of reporting on SAARC countries?

Humanitarian Tragedy/Natural Disasters

Humanitarian tragedies affect neighboring countries as well. However, media companies often focus not on the tragedy itself, but rather on the people affected by the tragedy based on their country, religion, race, or region. The 2015 Nepal earthquake can be seen as an example of this. It provides a perspective to understand the concept of nationalism, which is often shaped by global systems and their underlying foundations.

A report by *Annapurna Post* claims, referring to sources at the Department of Civil Aviation, that Indian government aircrafts lined up at Kathmandu airport were mostly engaged in airlifting their own nationals. Even in disasters like floods, language is used to highlight the role of neighboring countries in the situation.

The internal conflicts of a country which have an impact on other neighbouring countries.

It is believed that the internal struggles of neighboring countries affect other neighbouring countries as well. However, what seems to be the purpose behind sharing information about these conflicts in the media of SAARC countries? In most cases, these internal conflicts of neighbouring countries are used for domestic purposes. We have seen this in the reporting on issues such as the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Madhesi in Nepal, as well as in the cases of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other countries. The tendency to use the events of neighbouring countries for domestic purposes has already been a practice.

Mr. Samar Sen, editor of the magazine *The Frontier*, was assistant editor in *Anand Bazar Patrika* in 1963. The then Chief Minister of West Bengal, PC Sen held a meeting of editors and journalists and requested them not to publish the incidents of communal violence in East Pakistan in such a way that it affects the life of West Bengal people. Mr. Sen agreed and conveyed the opinion of the meeting of the newspapers editors with Chief Minister. But Sen was surprised to find in his newspaper the other day that the incidences of violence and communal conflicts in East Pakistan had been published very prominently.

The tendency of media companies to use relationships with neighboring countries at any level for religious and communal purposes has increased to a great extent. To illustrate this, I can present a couple of examples, keeping in mind the limitation of time.

On January 19, 1998, a sports reporter from *The Times of India* covered a match between the Indian and Pakistani cricket teams in Dhaka in this manner: “The stadium in Dhaka, where the Indian team achieved a thrilling victory against Pakistan’s 314 runs, is just two kilometers away from Suhrawardy Udyan, where in 1971, Pakistani General Niazi surrendered to General Jagjit Singh Aurora.”

Every language has its own form of journalism. In Hindi journalism, religion and communalism often appear as significant needs. After the India-Pakistan cricket match, an article by Prabhash Joshi, the editor of *Jansatta*, published on 12 February, 1987, mentions that for Indians, losing to Pakistan feels worse than losing to any other country’s team in any sport. Pakistan believes that the Muslims who ate meat,

fish, and eggs, and came from the Khyber Pass, could rule over the Hindus because they were stronger than the Hindus who ate simple foods like dal and rice, etc.

Neighboring countries are used in a two-fold manner. On one hand, the internal conflicts of neighboring countries are used for domestic purposes, and on the other hand, the role of neighboring countries in these internal conflicts is highlighted and heavily promoted. The feeling of nationalism becomes an effective tool to deal with the challenges posed by internal conflicts. The rapid rise of this phenomenon in recent years can be studied further.

In reality, journalism in SAARC countries is becoming more confined to borders. Blind nationalism has severely disrupted the concept of borderless journalism, and it has become the biggest obstacle in achieving the goals for which SAARC was established. At present, the media in India is filled with news about Hindus as a minority in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi government has not accepted the media companies' reporting as accurate. The use of cross-border language to turn internal conflicts into part of an international conspiracy and give them an international perspective is commonly seen. Several important studies have been conducted on this subject, including Ram Narayan Kumar's study on the unrest in Punjab and the role of the media.

Relations with China

Relations between SAARC countries and China have rapidly developed as a basis for media companies' reporting. Especially after the 1990s, following the expansion of China's economy, the relationships between China and countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives have become a major focus for Indian media companies' coverage. The growing ties between SAARC countries and China have also influenced the language used by media companies.

For instance, when Bhutan declares that it will formulate its own foreign policy, there is a sharp reaction in the Indian media. Similarly, when the Maldives appears to lean towards China, the Indian media's response is not similar to what is expected from a neighboring country.

Political Changes

When there is a political upheaval or a change of power in the SAARC member countries, or during election periods, media companies show increased interest. Specifically, the reporting often focuses on the stance of various political parties towards their relations with India during elections. This aspect of reporting directs

the attention to which parties have what kind of approach towards India and its interests.

Questions Before the Media of SAARC Member Countries

If studies of media companies' reporting show that the perspective towards the G-20 is not the same as it is towards SAARC, it raises important questions. The G-20 includes wealthy countries, whereas the purpose of SAARC's formation was to develop a strong social framework, build a relationship of shared values, and promote the identity of South Asian culture.

1. **Are neighboring countries accepted as a unified entity?**
2. **Do media companies in SAARC countries accept the objectives of SAARC?**
3. **Can media companies become a medium to strengthen communication between SAARC member countries?**
4. **Can the position of SAARC correspondents be created?**
5. **Can a news framework be developed that is favorable to SAARC member countries?**

Academic Responsibilities for SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established on 8 December, 1985 has eight member countries. The objectives of the Association is: to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life; to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials.

- **Developing a SAARC Fact-Check Model**
- **Study on the Impact of Media on the Society of SAARC Member Countries through the SAARC Media Student Forum. In particular, it would explore how much media consumers in each member country know about their neighboring countries, and what their sources of information are.**
- **SAARC Free Media Website**

Research Presentations and Discussion

1. Media narratives on the genesis of COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal

Lekhanath Pandey

Department of Journalism, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University

2. Communication and Social Change

Rudra Khadka

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

3. Spreading community awareness on Climate Crisis, Displacement and Conflict nexus in Nepal through media

Sudeep Uprety

Independent Researcher

4. Health news coverage in Nepali media: A qualitative content analysis of national newspaper contents

Sitashma Mainali

HERD International, Department of Research Uptake and Communication

Concluding remarks by the session chair

Research Presentations Session III

Session Chair: **Dr. Ghama Raj Luitel**, Assistant Professor, Tribhuvan University

Special Presentation:

Data-driven Media Consumer Behaviour Analysis with Media Engagement Rating (MER) System

H.A.Gayan Madushanka

Data-driven Media Consumer Behaviour Analysis with Media Engagement Rating (MER) System



H. A. G. Madushanka¹, L. D. P. S. Jayasekara², T. N. Gurusinghe², R. T. Seneviratne², M. P. V. A Gunawardhana², A. L. A. K. Ranaweera², K. M. D. C. Jayathilaka², S. R. D. Kalingamudali², W. M. S. S. Rathnayake³

¹*Department of Film and Television Production Technology, Faculty of Industrial Technology, University of Vocational Technology, Sri Lanka*

²*Department of Physics and Electronics, Faculty of Science, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

³*Ministry of Justice, Sri Lanka*

A People Meter, a Television Viewership Engagement Device, captures and analyses television/media consumption and consumer behaviours. Traditional People Meters use login/logout processes or authentication methods to identify the audience and advanced technologies like audio watermarking to track broadcast media content. These methods frequently encounter obstacles such as user discomfort, which may not adequately reflect natural watching behaviours, technological complexity, and cost constraints. To overcome these challenges, we offer a revolutionary Media Engagement Rating (MER) approach. This system uses IR remote signal decoding and TV current consumption measurements to monitor media consumption in real time. It detects user interactions, such as channel changes, volume adjustments, and other essential activities, without requiring advanced and complex technologies like audio watermarking. The system uses advanced computer vision and machine learning to estimate audience demographics like gender and age without capturing or transmitting any visual images, thereby ensuring strict adherence to data privacy standards. The MER system uses hardware-level analysis to deliver precise, non-intrusive measurements and automatic detection of viewer interaction, which eliminates the need for disruptive login/logout procedures or authentication techniques. This system's competitive advantage rests in its independence from any TV broadcasters or manufacturers, and its versatility across all modalities of TV reception, including analogue TV, IPTV, and satellite TV. This ensures that the ratings are not only comprehensive but also free from any potential broadcaster-induced biases. The MER system design was developed after a thorough literature review, patent prior art searches, and feedback from industry experts obtained through interviews and focus-group discussions. The system was tested, validated, and refined to meet exact industrial needs based on expert suggestions. This technology enables cost-effective, data-driven decision-making in the global media and advertising industries, especially in developing countries. It addresses privacy concerns, technological challenges, and economic and cultural barriers.

Department of Film and Television Production Technology, University of Vocational Technology, Sri Lanka

Research Presentations and Discussion

1. Exploring Subnational Media's Role and Challenges in Strengthening Democracy: A case study of Lumbini Province

Injina Panthi

Independent Researcher

2. Exploring Reporting Patterns in Nepali Print Media: Problems versus Responses

Tumaraj Koirala

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

3. दाडका पत्रपत्रिकामा स्थानीय समाचारको अवस्था

Ajay Sharma

Purbanchal University

4. Framing of transitional justice in Nepal: Content analysis of Nepali newspapers

Shreeman Sharma

Central Department of Conflict, Peace and Development Studies, Tribhuvan University

Concluding remarks by session chair

Day Two: December 23, 2024

Panel 1

Combating Misinformation in the Age of AI

Moderator: Namrata Sharma

Panelists:

Rewati Sapkota

Deepak Adhikari

Prema Thapa

Panel 2

Media's role in exposing and combating corruption

Moderator: Deepa Dahal

Panalists:

Dr. Dipesh Ghimire

Tejman Shrestha

Devendra Bhattarai

Dr. Raghu Mainali

Panel 3

Making Journalism Viable

Moderator: Tilak Pathak

Panalists:

Ajay Das

Nirjana Sharma

Amit Dhakal

Ashutosh Tiwari

Special Lecture by Kunda Dixit

Between panel discussions, founder and former editor of Nepali Times **Kunda Dixit** delivered a special lecture on reforming media education, emphasizing the need to blend traditional journalistic values with modern technological skills

Panel 4

The Future of Journalism

Moderator: Dr. Shreeram Paudel

Panalists:

Yubaraj Ghmire

Nirmala Sharma

Gopal Guragai

Biswas Baral

Panel 5

The Complex Relationship between Media and State

Moderator: Dr. Samiksha Koirala

Panelists:

Binod Bhattarai

Dr. Mahendra Bista

Sangita Khadka

Dr. Nirmal Rijal

Closing

Keynote Speech: Prof. Dr. Khadga KC

Parallel Session on Day 2

Students' Research Presentations I

Commentators: *Din M. Sumon Rahman, Anil Chamadiya, and H. A. Gayan Madushanka*

Closing

Keynote Speech: Prof. Dr. Khadga KC: "Impacts of Evolving Information Ecosystem on International Relations"



The event concluded with a keynote address by Tribhuvan University's Rector **Prof. Dr. Khadga KC**, marking the end of discussions that brought together academics, journalists, and media experts from across South Asia to address the evolving landscape of journalism in the digital age.

More than 200 media educators, scholars and researchers from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka participated in the conference, which served as a platform for regional collaboration in addressing contemporary media challenges while promoting academic discourse on the future of journalism in South Asia.

At Hall 3 on Day 1 and 2

Special Exhibition: *Supercharged by AI – Synthetic and Out of Control: An Exhibition About the Effects of AI on Our Online Lives*, by Tactical Tech and CMR-Nepal

Poster Presentations

1. **An Analysis of Fact-Checks in Nepal**, by Chetana Kunwar, Kathmandu University
2. **News source, coverage, facilitators and barriers of health journalism in Nepal: Initial findings from the national survey**, by Shreeman Sharma, HERD International
3. **Training Needs of Nepali Journalists: Preliminary Survey Findings**, by Rabiraj Baral, Kathmandu University

Research Abstracts

Invited Research Papers

An Analysis of Indian Media Coverage on South Asian Countries Beyond India

Anil Chamadiya

Media Studies Group, New Delhi, India

Nomadic Narratives:

the Cross-Border Spread of Misinformation in South Asia

Prof. Dr. Din M. Sumon Rahman

University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

Data-driven Media Consumer Behavior Analysis with Media Engagement Rating (MER) System

*H. A. G. Madushanka*¹, L. D. P. S. Jayasekara², T. N. Gurusinghe², R. T. Seneviratne², M. P. V. A Gunawardhana², A. L. A. K. Ranaweera², K. M. D. C. Jayathilaka², S. R. D. Kalingamudali², W. M. S. S. Rathnayake³

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The MER system design was developed after a thorough literature review, patent prior art searches, and feedback from industry experts obtained through interviews and focus-group discussions. The system was tested, validated, and refined to meet exact industrial needs based on expert suggestions. This technology enables cost-effective, data-driven decision-making in the global media and advertising industries especially in developing countries. It addresses privacy concerns, technological challenges, and economic and cultural barriers.

Keywords: *Television Rating, Audience Measurement, Media Analytics, Media Consumer Behaviour analytics, Machine Learning in Media*

Selected Research Papers

Use of Social Media for Identity and Community Engagement Among Muslim Minorities

Nilima Chandani Khan

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

This study explores the use of social media platforms for identity formation and community engagement among the Muslim community residing in the Kathmandu Valley. It examines how social media platforms are utilized as tools for connection and networking within Muslim communities. The research investigates the use of various social networking sites to facilitate the sharing and expression of opinions and ideas, fostering cultural and social connections as well as solidarity among Muslim minorities.

Using a mixed-method approach, which includes quantitative surveys and observations alongside qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study analyzes the patterns and purposes of social media use among Muslims. The research aims to identify both the opportunities and challenges posed by social media use for the Muslim community in the Kathmandu Valley. It also examines the appropriate use and misuse of social media within this group and seeks ways to minimize misuse while enhancing the advantages of social media for cultural exchange and promotion.

Furthermore, the study aims to provide recommendations for social media users on reducing the harmful impacts of digital networking sites and maximizing their potential to preserve and transmit cultural practices within the Muslim community. While extensive research exists on the benefits and drawbacks of social media in general, studies focusing on the implications of social networking for Muslim minorities remain limited. This research seeks to contribute to the broader body of knowledge in the modern age of technological advancement.

Keywords: *user engagement, identity, Muslim minority, social media, social networking*

Disinformation in International Relations: Impact on Nepal's Relations with India and China

In the world of diplomacy, the media is one of the central components. The power of mass media provides strong incentives to special interest groups such as politicians, diplomats, policymakers, and other actors and factors that influence diplomacy. Since information is power in today's world, countries tend to use data and information according to their will to meet their national interests. However, the deliberate spread of false information to confuse, mislead, and divide people is a growing concern in international relations.

With the rapid development of new technology and the emergence of Artificial Intelligence, misinformation and disinformation have become tools for disseminating false narratives. Such activities incite hate speech between populations of nations, manipulate public opinion, and influence government policies. Fake news is pervasive across the world and is frequently shared through various news and social media platforms, which has aggravated social tensions, hurt religious sentiments, and inflamed public unrest.

With the increasing use of social media and the growing diaspora network, the influence of misinformation and disinformation is also rising in Nepal. News media has also played a role in spreading false narratives. This trend has not only undermined social cohesion but is also affecting relations with other nations.

The purpose of this paper is to study how disinformation has affected relations between Nepal and other countries, especially India and China. For this, research questions will explore how misinformation and disinformation have impacted Nepal's diplomatic relations, social cohesion, and security interests. This paper will theoretically review disinformation in international relations and empirically analyze qualitative literature, news reports, and interviews with experts.

The findings will reveal that the deliberate spread of disinformation has significantly undermined Nepal's relations with India and China. Such acts have exacerbated political polarization and eroded social relations between populations of nations. The paper will conclude that the impact of disinformation on international relations and diplomacy must not be underestimated by Nepal. It will ultimately provide appropriate recommendations to address the growing impact of disinformation to maintain good relations with other countries.

Keywords: *disinformation, international relations, diplomacy, national security, propaganda*

Media Bias in Newspapers and Readers' Perception on Media Literacy

Sunil

Paudel

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

The study explores the trend of publishing news with positive and negative biases and its impact on readers' perceptions of media literacy. This study primarily aims to investigate how biased news affects the audience's perceptions. It also examines how newspaper readers' critical evaluation and analytical capabilities regarding information are influenced by media bias and media literacy.

Despite the rapid growth of online news media, printed newspapers remain a major and significant source of information in Nepali society. National broadsheet Nepali dailies are key players in disseminating newsworthy information, often presenting stories with varying degrees of positive or negative bias. Such biases can significantly affect audience perception and interpretation.

Several indicators and determining factors, such as framing, sources, language use, and tone, play a vital role in influencing readers' perceptions. The study seeks to identify the distinctions between positive and negative biases in news presentations in newspapers and their impact on credibility. Therefore, this research primarily aims to answer how readers' perceptions are affected by positively and negatively biased news and the level of media literacy among audiences.

To address this question, the research adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including an opinion survey of respondents, observations, and content analysis of articles published in major daily newspapers. Newspaper readers among the general audience possess varying levels of media literacy. These differences influence their ability to understand, evaluate, and analyze disseminated information to detect bias.

The findings underscore the importance of professional ethics in news reporting and the promotion of media literacy among audiences to encourage neutrality, balance, and credibility in journalism and media.

Keywords: *audience, media bias, media literacy, negative news, positive news*

Assessing Digital Media Literacy among College Students: Bridging the Digital Divide in Nepal

Bhuwan

Bhandari

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

This article thoroughly investigates the level of digital media literacy among college students and its significant impact on the access divide. The study aims to assist students at all levels in not only utilizing digital tools but also in discovering the benefits and responsibilities of being well-informed prosumers. The research employed both deductive and inductive methodologies for data collection.

The survey sample consisted of 103 college students, among whom 20 participants were selected for focus group discussions to gather nuanced perspectives on digital media literacy. The students were enrolled in undergraduate programs within the Humanities and Social Sciences faculty at Kailali Multiple Campus. This article seeks to help students understand how to effectively utilize digital tools and, more importantly, to recognize the advantages and opportunities of being informed, engaged, and responsible independent digital citizens.

A survey report revealed that 55.3% of participants considered media literacy a crucial analytical skill. Furthermore, 61.2% relied on search engine optimization (SEO) techniques to locate resources. The findings also indicated that 69.3% of students accessed digital content via mobile phones, while 46.5% emphasized informed citizenship as a vital component of digital literacy.

This study highlights the importance of fostering students' ability to source, locate, evaluate, synthesize, and utilize information in their daily lives. College students must develop strong digital skills to effectively leverage academic resources, collaborate efficiently, and meet the demands of the modern workforce.

Keywords: *digital media literacy, digital content, digital divide, digital skills*

Media narratives on the genesis of COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal

Lekhanath

Pandey

Department of Journalism, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University

Media narratives surrounding the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Nepali mediasphere are intriguing. Employing a mixed-method approach that includes an analysis of editorial content from two leading Nepali newspapers—representing the country's largest publication houses—The Kathmandu Post and The Rising Nepal, as well as key informant interviews with newsroom leaders, this study reveals that media portrayals centered on criticism and counter-criticism regarding China's

handling of the pandemic outbreak, transparency concerns, and access to initial data on the corona virus.

Although minimal attention was devoted to exclusive debates about the virus' origin narratives in these newspapers, sentiment analysis of their reporting and coverage indicates a positive bias towards China. Most of the coverage either endorsed China's version of the COVID-19 origin— that is, the zoonotic origin theory—or remained silent on the matter. Media coverage occasionally expressed criticism of China's pandemic response and sporadically referenced alternative origin hypotheses, such as the lab-leak theory and other conspiracy theories.

The study further highlights the significant influence of media ownership and organizational structure in shaping news content. Notable variations in sentiment were observed between the two outlets. The state-owned The Rising Nepal exhibited a considerably more favorable portrayal of China, largely reflecting the official position of the then left-leaning government, while the privately-owned The Kathmandu Post offered more diverse and critical perspectives.

Keywords: *media framing, media narratives, international relations, Covid 19*

Communication and Social Change

Rudra

Khadka

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

Every individual has a natural inclination to learn, understand, and observe new things. It is human nature to investigate and seek information about what is happening in their surroundings, whether in their village, district, region, or the entire nation. This constant thirst for knowledge has driven the development of various communication media. To meet the need for communication, thousands of newspapers, radio stations, TV channels, and online platforms operate worldwide. Recently, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter (X) have emerged as powerful tools. Communication has also elevated journalism into a significant profession and industry in modern society.

The question of what changes communication has brought to society is challenging to answer definitively. However, without communication, no society could evolve or experience change. Without it, society might still be in the primitive or hunting stage. Communication enables the rapid spread of technologies, such as those developed in America, to places like Nepal. Through media, Nepalese people

consume products like McDonald's and Coke, and adopt clothing styles influenced by Hollywood and Bollywood actors.

In the past, communication relied on verbal interaction or tools like drums or whistles in villages. While the rapid development of communication media has brought progress, it has also introduced challenges. Some young individuals, in their quest to imitate others, have adopted harmful habits. Families below the poverty line face financial strain trying to emulate luxury lifestyles.

Mobile communication has also contributed to an increase in sexual crimes and distracted students from their studies due to overuse of social media. The excessive spending on mobile phones and internet services has led some youths to engage in theft or smuggling.

Key challenges from advanced communication include: a. Decline in agricultural engagement; b. Increased use of luxury items, leading to financial strain; c. Loss of traditions, such as singing together during Teej; and d. family fragmentation and a rise in sexually suggestive media content.

This study focuses on communication's impact, public awareness, economic aspects, and solutions to challenges. It is conducted in Banke District, Khajura Rural Municipality-2, C Gaun, a region representing urban and rural communities, using descriptive, analytical, and interpretive methodologies.

Keyword: *communication, social change, media impact, social media, technology*

Spreading community awareness on Climate Crisis, Displacement and Conflict nexus in Nepal through media

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Climate crisis is posing an enormous challenge to socio-economic and environmental wellbeing, globally. The Climate Risk Index statistics shows that Nepal falls under the ten most affected countries in the world, which is a major concern. Climate crisis has impacted at various levels, especially for the most vulnerable and resource poor - among the developing countries, communities dependent on natural resource-based livelihoods, geographically remote areas, ultra-poor, people with disabilities, and women and children due to gender and social inequality. All these consequences are likely to trigger conflict among the communities in the coming years, especially when it comes to resources utilization,

tensions in relocation, child trafficking, violence against women and gender-based violence cases in transitional shelters, among others.

Attention towards disaster induced displacement, especially in the context of Nepal, is a fairly new agenda, as internally displaced persons (IDPs), have been studied and understood mainly from the lens of armed conflict induced displacement. This study was conducted with the objective to identify the nature of conflict among the indigenous/host and migrated/displaced communities due to the climate crisis; and explore and discuss the nexus of climate crisis, displacement, and conflict among media professionals and climate change professionals. Based in Jugal Rural Municipality and surrounding areas of Sindhupalchowk district, Bagmati Province, Nepal, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted among the local government representatives, local media professionals, humanitarian organization representatives working on climate change and disaster risk reduction and environmental protection issues.

The participants were selected following participatory and consultative process, using non-probability, convenient sampling method, where interviews will be conducted among most-relevant stakeholders. The study findings highlight limited and yet growing media coverage on climate change and displacement, climate crisis triggering conflict among communities, the perceived need of stakeholders to strengthen the media literacy on climate change, perceived need for increase in media prioritization on climate change and the need for an informed local government, media community and DRRM professionals to come together for a coordinated effort to minimize communal conflict in the case of climate-induced disaster incidents.

Keywords: *climate change, media, displacement, conflict*

Health news coverage in Nepali media: A qualitative content analysis of national newspaper contents

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Media are effective tools for raising awareness about social issues and informing policymakers. They set the agenda and influence how people think and act. Nepali media have consistently reported on various social issues to create informed citizens

and hold government authorities accountable. Public health is a critical social issue that significantly impacts people's lives, and as such, health issues have garnered media attention. As Nepali media continue to grow in both number and the platforms they use to disseminate information, we explored how traditional media—specifically newspapers—report on health issues.

This study addresses the following research questions: i) What is the trend of health reporting in national newspapers? And ii) What are the issues and challenges faced by Nepal's health system in achieving universal health coverage?

This qualitative study examines newspaper content on health issues in Nepal, focusing on four major national dailies: Kantipur, Nagarik, Naya Patrika, and The Himalayan Times, all classified as 'A' by the Press Council of Nepal. We analyzed health-related news stories published between January and December 2023 using a consecutive-day sampling strategy to ensure comprehensive coverage. Byline health news stories were the sole selection criteria. A total of 144 news stories were retrieved and recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, documenting the newspaper name, publication date, source, full text, and remarks. Five researchers reviewed, discussed, and categorized the news into six empirically identified themes: (i) human resources, (ii) health financing, (iii) medicine and equipment, (iv) non-communicable diseases (NCDs), (v) communicable diseases (CDs), (vi) representation of the poor and marginalized, and (vii) healthcare governance.

The study finds that in 2023, the four newspapers published 144 byline health-related news pieces, with Naya Patrika reporting the highest number (n=52). The most recurring theme was healthcare governance, appearing 51 times, with Kantipur leading in coverage. Subthemes included lack of coordination, regulatory difficulties, and poor service quality. NCDs were the second most emphasized theme, appearing 42 times, with Naya Patrika covering this theme the most. Subthemes included the prevalence of NCDs, associated risks, and public awareness. The representation of poor and marginalized groups received the least attention (17 news items), mainly by Naya Patrika. Subthemes included financial challenges, insufficient social protection, and limited access to essential services.

Newspapers play a vital role in raising awareness among the public and policymakers about health issues. They highlight critical agendas, such as the increasing prevalence of NCDs and systemic governance challenges. Newspapers provide valuable insights to health policymakers, urging accountability and promoting equitable health access to achieve universal health coverage.

Keywords: *media, health journalism, journalists, health system*

Exploring Subnational Media's Role and Challenges in Strengthening Democracy: A case study of Lumbini Province

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As described by the British politician Edmund Burke, the media is referred as the fourth estate of a democratic nation for its crucial role in shaping public opinion and ensuring accountability and transparency, which is essential for good governance and promoting participation. However, media doesn't perform in isolation. The issues like resource crunch and the reliance on the government for resources is hindering the performance as an impartial component. That hinders holding the government accountable, advocating for good governance, and streamlining the issues of marginalized communities.

In the context of Nepal, it has surfaced that media often provides deviated or manipulated information, favoring the government and private sector when it receives resources to run the media. This has led to widespread mistrust that made people outraged against leading media companies who have claimed to be forced to restore democracies and be its watchdog as '*Loktantrako Sachcha Paharedaar*'. In this way, the media's role in assisting democracies to function effectively comes under great scrutiny.

This paper, therefore, explores the dependency of subnational media on provincial and local governments, its impact on news content, and the role it has to play as strategies to retain the core value of media independence and play the role of watchdog. The subnational level media ecosystem has been analyzed through the theoretical framework of the Political Economy of media and public sphere theory and media capture theories. The interview and survey in this process have been conducted with journalists, editors, media owners and other key stakeholders of Lumbini province.

Keywords: *political society, civil society, hegemony, consent, leadership, domination, good governance*

Exploring Reporting Patterns in Nepali Print Media: Problems versus Responses

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This study examines the reporting practices of Nepali print media, focusing on whether news stories are based on problems or include responses, aligning with the philosophy of Solutions Journalism. This approach advocates for reporting responses alongside problems. Analyzing the articles from Kantipur Daily and Gorkhapatra Daily, this study seeks to answer the following questions: • Do these outlets report solely on problems, or do they also include responses? • What percentage of the articles focus on problems, responses, or event-based news? The research design involves a content analysis of one article per day taken from the front page, the first news article on the left side of each edition, for three months, from August to October 2024, resulting in a total of 184 articles- 92 from each newspaper. Articles have been classified into three categories: problem-focused, response-inclusive, and event-based news (which includes news stories primarily focused on political leaders' statements or events). Preliminary findings indicate that Kantipur Daily primarily reports on problems and less frequently on responses, while Gorkhapatra Daily mainly focuses on government-led responses and event-based news. Both outlets have failed to incorporate responses as a significant aspect of Solutions Journalism. This study argues that both newspapers exhibit a substantial gap in representing comprehensive views of issues and their responses, thereby calling for more balanced and constructive reporting

This analysis is significant for understanding the limitations in media practices, emphasizing the need to adopt constructive journalism that inspires reporting on solutions and responses. Recognizing this gap indicates the necessity for impactful and responsive journalism in Nepal. It points towards a shift from problem-focused narratives to solution-oriented reporting in Nepali journalism.

Keywords: *solutions journalism, constructive journalism, problem-focused News, response-inclusive news, event-based news*

दाडका पत्रपत्रिकामा स्थानीय समाचारको अवस्था

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यस अध्ययनमा मुलुकको पत्रकारिताको विकासमा दाड जिल्लाबाट नियमित रूपमा प्रकाशन हुने नयाँ युगबोध दैनिक र गोरक्ष दैनिक पत्रिकामा प्रकाशित स्थानीय समाचार सामग्रीको अध्ययन गरिएको छ । जसको मुख्य उद्देश्य नयाँ युगबोध दैनिक र गोरक्ष दैनिक पत्रिकाले के कस्ता स्थानीय समाचार प्रकाशित गर्ने गरेका छन् भन्ने नै हो । सोही उद्देश्य प्राप्तिका लागि मिक्सड मेथोडोलोजी

अपनाइएको छ । जसअन्तर्गत शोधकार्यमा नयाँ युगबोध दैनिक र गोरक्ष दैनिक पत्रिकामा प्रकाशित स्थानीय समाचारको सर्वेक्षण, विश्लेषण र मूल्याङ्कनमा सीमित गरिएको छ । साथै अध्ययनमा छनौट भएका दुई पत्रिकामा प्रकाशित समाचार चयनका विषयमा थप गहिराईमा बुझ्न पत्रिकाका सम्पादक र स्थानीय विषयविज्ञसँग कुराकानी गरिएको छ ।

यस अध्ययनलाई केलाउँदा नयाँ युगबोध र गोरक्ष दैनिक पत्रिकाले राष्ट्रिय, अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय र स्थानीय समाचारमा स्थानीय समाचारलाई उच्च प्राथमिकताका साथ प्रकाशन गरेका छन् । त्यसमा पनि स्थानीय समाचारतर्फ हेर्ने हो भने अर्थ तथा विकास निर्माण, समाज, स्वास्थ्यका समाचार प्रमुख छनौटमा परेका छन् । त्यसपछि राजनीति, शिक्षा र खेलकुद क्रमशः प्राथमिकतामा रहेका छन् । खोज पत्रकारिता यस्तो खालको पत्रकारिता हो जसमा रिपोर्टरले एउटा विषयमा गहन रूपले खोज गर्छ । यसरी तयार भएको स्टोरीले भ्रष्टाचार उदाङ्गो पार्छ, सरकार अथवा कर्पोरेट हाउसहरूको नीतिको समीक्षा गर्छ अथवा सामाजिक, आर्थिक, राजनीतिक र सांस्कृतिक चलनप्रति मानिसको ध्यानाकर्षण गराउँछ ।

दाङबाट प्रकाशन हुने नयाँ युगबोध र गोरक्ष दैनिकले अध्ययन अवधिभर २५३ (६%) खोजी समाचार प्रकाशन गरेका छन् । नयाँ युगबोध र गोरक्ष दैनिक पत्रिकाको २०७६ देखि २०८० सम्मका हरेक वर्षको असार महिनामा बढी स्थानीय समाचार प्रकाशित भएका छन् । यस अध्ययनबाट यी दुईवटा पत्रिकाले प्रसस्त सङ्ख्यामा स्थानीय समाचार छापेको पाइयो । स्थानीय औपचारिक समाचार दिने मामिलामा यी दुईवटा पत्रिका अब्बल सावित भएका छन् । तर, अनौपचारिक (खोजी, फिचर, अनुसन्धानमुलक) समाचार दिने सवालमा यी दुवै पत्रिका कमजोर देखिएका छन् ।

Keywords: *local journalism, subnational media, media priority, investigative journalism*

Framing of transitional justice in Nepal: Content analysis of Nepali newspapers

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Framing of transitional justice in Nepal: Content analysis of Nepali newspapers
Introduction: Nepal's transitional justice has been delayed for years and has been limited to endless rhetoric in politics. The transitional justice process started in Nepal with the beginning of peace process in 2006. Transitional justice incorporates various processes and mechanisms that aim to address society's large-scale abuses and ensure accountability, deliver justice, and foster reconciliation. As the transitional justice process delays in Nepal, its pertinent to revisit how this agenda has been evolving amidst the concerns of stakeholders about the protraction of the process. Media, as one of stakeholders bridging people and politics, its important to assess how media are dealing with these agendas and where their priority falls in shaping the agendas. This study has investigated key questions around media's framing on transitional justice responding to following questions. 1. What are the issues on transitional justice national newspapers of Nepal are covering? 2. How

have national newspapers been framing the transitional justice agendas? Methods: This study employed qualitative research design incorporating content analysis. The study involved an in-depth content analysis of three Nepali national newspapers, supported by case studies based on framing theory. An inductive approach was applied to generate theme, categorise the themes, identifying the frames to maximise the accuracy while organising loosely defined themes in the news contents. The newspaper contents from the three months following the endorsement of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Third) Amendment Bill, 2024, was analysed. Consecutive day sampling strategy was employed to perform news content analysis to ensure enough and accurate representation of samples. The analysis assessed framing of issues, tone and narrative elements.

Results: A total of 61 newspaper items meeting the selection criteria in Gorkhapatra, Kantipur, and Naya Patrika daily newspapers were analysed in the study. Most items were news articles (46), followed by opinion pieces (11), editorials (3), and one letter to the editor. Gorkhapatra published the highest number of items (28), while Naya Patrika had the lowest (14). The content analysis revealed that of the 61 items, 34 were event-oriented, focusing on accounts of what happened, while 27 were issue-oriented, providing descriptive and analytical presentations of the event, issue or situation prevailing in transitional justice agendas. The four thematic frames evolved in the study that includes Institutional Reform, Delivering Reparations, Rights to Truth, and Prosecution Initiatives. Institutional Reform emerged as the major frame across all three newspapers, reflecting a focus on the institutional initiative such as political consensus, endorsement of TRC bill, concerns about TRC commissioner recruitment. Delivering Reparations was framed as a critical theme intended to ensure justice to conflict victims followed by rights to truth and prosecution initiative. Similarly, tone framing analysis revealed that neutral tones was the most common providing just account of the event, positive or optimistic tones were less frequent but still present, emphasising hope towards logical conclusion of transitional justice process whereas constructively critical tones provided a detailed analysis of inefficiency in justice process as well as showing hopes. Finally, critical tones emerged the least raising concerns about unresolved issues such as government failure to address the needs of conflict victims. Conclusion: The newspapers have highly prioritised issue of institutional reform based on the government initiative of endorsing TRC bills and subsequent events. The tone and thematic prioritization varied in the news coverage of the transitional. Such framing are crucial in shaping

public discourse on transitional justice as most of the news items were neutral and constructively critical.

Keywords: *transitional justice, media, media framing, news coverage*

Poster Presentations

An Analysis of Fact-Checks in Nepal

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News source, coverage, facilitators and barriers of health journalism in Nepal: Initial findings from the national survey

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Training Needs of Nepali Journalists: Preliminary Survey Findings

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Organizers

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Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication *Tribhuvan University*

The Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (CDJMC) at Tribhuvan University serves as the hub for nearly 100 departments of journalism within the constituent and private colleges affiliated with the University. Journalism education began in 1976 at the intermediate (equivalent to plus two) level at RR Campus, Kathmandu, and culminated in the establishment of the Central Department at the dawn of the new millennium. Now housed in the iconic Camera Building on the University Campus in Balkhu-Kirtipur, the department offers graduate, MPhil, and PhD programs in journalism and mass communication.

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