

**FORMS AND CAUSES OF MEDIA CAPTURE IN NEPAL AND ITS
MANIFESTATION IN NEWSPAPER CONTENT**

A Dissertation

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in

JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

By

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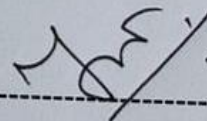
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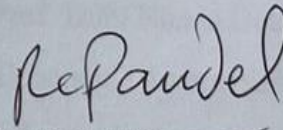
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We certify that this dissertation entitled "Causes and Forms of Media Capture in Nepal and its Manifestation in Content" was prepared by Binod Bhattarai under our guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for final examinations by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION.

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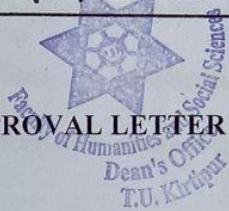


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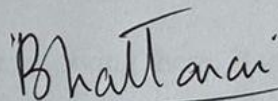


This dissertation entitled "**Forms and Causes of Media Capture in Nepal and its Manifestation in Newspaper Content**" was submitted by **Mr. Binod Bhattarai** of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Journalism and Mass Communication**. I hereby, certify that the Research Committee of the Faculty has found this dissertation satisfactory in scope and quality. Therefore, it has been accepted for the degree.

.....
Prof. Dubi Nanda Dhakal, PhD
Dean and Chairperson
Research Committee

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Dissertation is my own work and that it contains no materials previously published. I have not used its materials for the award of any kind and any other degree. Where other authors' sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.



.....
Binod Bhattarai

Date: January 2025

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Binod Bhattarai, Lalitpur-18

ABSTRACT

Media capture is the sellout by media/journalists of their responsibility in exchange of monetary and non-monetary favors from the government, businesses, and other interest groups. Captured media produce and disseminate content that is neither accurate and fair, nor impartial, or they disregard the basic standards for journalism production. Instead, they produce and disseminate information – even, disinformation – as desired by the capturers. In practical terms, capture in democracies substitutes brute force that authoritarian states use to rein media for the purpose of accessing or remaining in power.

Most studies on media capture by economists have resorted to quantitative analysis and economic modelling methodologies, while others have undertaken political economy analyses. This study has attempted to understand capture, using a qualitative approach – analysis of attributes of journalism drawing data from published testimonies, interviews and document reviews. It has also undertaken critical discourse analysis of media texts and includes a case study – to understand the forms of capture and its manifestation in newspaper content. Key informant interviews were used to validate the findings from data analysis. This approach primarily builds on the media capture paradigm, underlying which are multiple streams of scholarship such as political economy analysis, Critical Theory, and the Foucauldian understanding of power and how it influences social interactions.

The main findings are summarized as follows: (a) Political capture has resulted from partisanship among journalists and party-affiliated journalists' associations where politicians in government reward compliant media/journalists with handouts from state coffers, and by appointing journalists as public relations advisors or staff at state media agencies; (b) another form of capture takes place through advertising using which both government and businesses can influence viability and

profitability of media in a market that is dominated by a few large advertisers, of which the government has a roughly one-third share. Circumstantial evidence suggests that advertisers even pay for content in addition to exchanging advertising for favorable coverage. Some media willingly participate in capture, because it allows the owners to extract policy favors from politicians for other businesses they own, in exchange for favorable coverage; and (c). Journalists/media payback for the favors by not-reporting, reporting selectively – even reporting alternative facts – and by killing news not favorable to their patrons. Briefly, the main conclusions of the study are as follows: The growing partiality and inaccuracy in media content and the resulting – often significant – biases are attributable to political party affiliations of journalists, and this engenders capture. Further, the framing and tonal choices in coverage, as well as the selection and suppression of content, results from unprofessional conduct – often induced by secretive (covert) monetary or non-monetary favors (exchanges) between various interest groups and media/journalists.

The integrity of information in newspapers/media has been compromised and this can be attributed to various influences that interact with news production and dissemination, or media capture. Governments use funding from state coffers to support compliant media and journalists, the payback for which is positive coverage or ignorance of issues that could project the benefactors in a negative light. Both government and businesses use advertising to influence content, which is possible in media environments with few large advertisers and a large number of non-viable media. Nepali journalism has, in effect, been unable to sever ties with partisan journalism – often touted as “mission” journalism – and adopt professionalism, which is manifested in manipulated, biased and distorted content.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ad	Advertisement
AP	<i>Annapurna Post</i>
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CGT	Capital Gains Tax
COVID	Coronavirus disease
CPN (UML)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FNJ	Federation of Nepali Journalists
FM	Frequency modulation
GON	Government of Nepal
HMG/N	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
KII	Key Informant Interview
MC	Maoist Centre
MOICT	Ministry of Communication and Information Technology
NC	Nepali Congress
NCP	Nepal Communist Party
NP	<i>Naya Patrika</i>
NTV	Nepal Television
PSA	Public Service Advertising
PSM	Public Service Media
PCN	Press Council Nepal
PWA	Public Welfare Advertising

PR	Public Relations
TPI	Third Party Interview
THT	<i>The Himalayan Times</i>
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
US	United States

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Independent media are considered to be the founding blocks of democratic societies. Accurate, fair, and independent information informs citizens and empowers them to make informed choices, including the selection of the leaders. Such media can infuse debates and assist people to contest ideas and to exercise “democratic controls on power, (and) root out corruption and misuse of public resources” (Lublinski et al., 2015, p.1). Modern day media, according to Mills (first published 1956) comprise a dominant force in society “and the publics become mere media markets: all those exposed to contents of given mass media” (Mills, 2000, p. 304). This is a characteristic of the legacy media (newspapers, radio and television), where there are a few producers of content (opinion) and large numbers of receivers (Poe, 2011). The situation when analyzed within the “media capture” paradigm transports us to the mass society aptly described by Mills (2000), one “of media markets (where), competition, if any, goes on between the manipulators with their mass media on the one hand, and the people receiving their propaganda on the other” (Mills, 2000, p. 305). The influences and manipulations on media cause them to stop performing against the underlying expectations of society, which is that they confirm to their role neutrally and provide professionally-produced information, educational materials, and entertainment content. Media capture disrupts these functions of media, particularly, that of providing independent, accurate and fair information.

According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), “A free, uncensored, and unhindered press or other media... constitutes one of the cornerstones of a democratic society” (Human Rights

Committee, 2011, p. 13). Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Nepal is a state party, provides both the media and the public the right to receive information – which media use to produce content – without any restrictions. The information that citizens receive from media helps them to participate in public affairs and make informed choices, from shopping to electing leaders or voting-out non-performers.

The preamble to the Constitution of Nepal (2015) has recognized this role of the press and commits to building a society with “full freedom of the press” (Const. Nepal, 2015, pp. 6-7); and has specific provisions to protect the Freedom of Opinion and Expression (Article 17a), and the Right to Communication (Article 19), which bars censorship, closure, registration cancellation, seizure of media assets for publishing or broadcasting content, and the interruption of communication services (press, electronic broadcasting and telephones). The limitations to these rights, however, allow the government to impose “reasonable restrictions” on:

...any act which may undermine the sovereignty, territorial integrity, nationality and independence of Nepal or the harmonious relations between the Federal Units or the people of various castes, tribes, religions or communities or incite caste-based discrimination or untouchability or on any act of disrespect of labor, defamation, contempt of court, incitement to an offence or on any act which may be contrary to public decency or morality.

(Const. Nepal, 2015, art. 17 (2) (1))

Despite the broadly worded restrictions, the provisions do indicate a recognition of the role of media in a democracy, particularly the freedoms necessary for it to function effectively.

Media, in general, have not always performed to the normative expectations of independently serving citizens. An account of American journalism in the early 20th century, provides a brutal description of newspapers and how “capitalist corruption” (Hitchcock, 1921) had made them subservient to powerful commercial interests and advertisers. By another account, the newspapers of the day represented: “private interests and not public interests ... there will be occasions upon which exception to this rule is made; for in order to be of any use at all, the newspapers must have circulation, and to get circulation they must pretend to care about the public (Sinclair, 1919, p. 44). Or, the newspapers were manipulated and used by various interests, particularly through advertising on which they depended more than they did on subscriptions – something Sinclair called a “legitimate” graft. The advertisers – through sales and marketing departments and publishers – decided not just what was printed about them but also influenced general articles that could affect their interests. “This system of publicity in return for advertising is a fundamentally dishonest one, but it is inseparable from the business of publishing news for profit” (Sinclair, 1919, p. 285). There were times where owners – not editors – had final say on publishing critical content, and where public relations agents of large businesses even rewrote their versions of critical stories/reports that newspapers sent to them for “reviews”. Often, the newspapers themselves also wrote into the critical reports to soften up content from contributors.

In short, it was a submission of journalistic responsibilities to report independently for public good to the financial interests, which – not surprisingly – had helped the papers to grow. Sinclair surmised: “The methods by which the ‘Empire of Business’ maintains: its control over journalism are four. First, ownership of the

papers; second, ownership of the owners; third, advertising subsidies; and fourth, direct bribery” (Sinclair, 1919, p. 241). These owners were politicians and entrepreneurs, and where others owned the newspapers, powerful interests controlled the owners or “owned” them.

Sinclair received a fair share of criticism for the “hideous picture” he had painted on “corruption and the profit system” (Hitchcock, 1921, p. 347) but his book also triggered a discussion on the need for establishing professional standards on training, journalism ideals and ethics, which later culminated in the standards for doing journalism. These standards helped to protect the freedoms that journalists need to do their jobs. However, as some scholars have argued, the resulting professionalism also came with the “inherent limitations” of 20th century media owned by profit-motivated companies (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999), particularly because “the professional reliance upon official sources and the need for a news peg, or event, to justify coverage of a story plays directly into the hands of those who benefit from the status quo” (McChesney, 1999, p. xvii). The argument is tenable because even casual observation of sources used by media, or those who get to speak, reveals that they are usually people in positions of power. But the media do not to make them accountable by asking questions and obtaining responses, because this role of media is compromised after they are captured.

1.1.1 Media and Society

Laws and standards define social norms, and these are propagated through various communication channels, including mass media. However, as many Critical Theory scholars have suggested, the transfer does not take place in isolation but is influenced by the interactions of messages with the organizational foundations of society, mainly ideology and power, including powers emanating from finances and

the resulting technologies. This thinking is immanent in the understanding of culture production as an “integrated part of the capitalist economy” (Adorno, 1991, p.9), which today is the overarching global framework for economic exchanges. The media, including the information they carry, were to Adorno all part of the Culture Industry (first published in 1944) whose effectiveness depended “not on its parading an ideology, on disguising the true nature of things, but in removing the thought that there is any alternative to the status quo” (p. 11). Accordingly, the arrangement of facts in journalism copy, detached from both context and thought, intended to simplify to facilitate quick grasp, something that “must always be accurate but never true” (p.85). When this happens, the outcomes “tend towards deceit and the journalist’s canard and the feeble invented anecdotes of the radio reporter are merely an explosion of the untruth which already lies within the blindness of the facts themselves (p.86). In the Marxist approach to media studies understands power as being concentrated in the elite, “and media content is seen as both expressing and furthering the power of these interests” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 220). This understanding underlies the political economy of media, where different forms of power are at play.

Another scholar with roots in the Frankfurt School discussed how individual thought in modern society was “absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of ‘public opinion’ together with its makers” (Marcuse, 1991, p. 6). As explained by Douglas Kellner in the book’s introduction, this means that “intellectual freedom of expression is ineffectual when the media either co-opt and defuse, or distort and suppress, oppositional ideas, and when the image-makers shape public opinion so that it is hostile or immune to oppositional thought and action” (Marcuse,

1991, p. xxxi). The cooption, diffusion, distortion, and suppression of ideas take place consciously or unconsciously emanating from the “world view” or “class outlook” of the creator or communicator, or the journalist in the case of media.

Despite its anti-capitalistic undertones, media critique that emerged from the Frankfurt School, provides a context for a critical understanding of media and society even in the 21st century. Seeking favorable media has now become commonplace among the powerful across societies with capitalism, socialism, and anything in-between while the ways of influencing content have not only remained largely unchanged as those observed in early 20th century but have become more sophisticated. This is because capitalism is now rooted deeply as the underlying ideology in the framework of globalization.

It is, therefore, important to continue examining media and its influences on society, with a critical approach irrespective of the ideology – economic, political, or cultural – which has been attempted in this study. The research aims to understand how different influences interact on Nepal’s newspapers/media not only in terms of capitalistic exchanges but by also examining the competing politics for social control, and how these forces compromise the professional boundaries of independent news production to serve vested interests, mainly under the influence of power and money. According to Fuchs (2016), this idea of money and power as “forms of communication” are evident in Habermas, who “sees them as alienated media of communication that colonize, delinguistify, control, steer, dominate, replace and curtail authentic communicative action in the life world and thereby create social pathologies” (p. 187). It is control over this power that lies at the heart of understanding media capture.

The anti-capitalist, political-economy explanation of social influences and media content that re-emerged in the late 1980s, accuses the media of serving and propagandizing on behalf of powerful societal interests who control and finance them, or groups “well-positioned to shape and constrain media policy” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. xi). Among others, the Propaganda Model extensively discusses influences arising from ownership and control, funding sources (including advertisers) and shared interests between media and news makers – usually the people in power who define what different events mean (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This model continues to serve as an approach for examining the pathologies of the media ecosystem, now characterized by increased concentration and conglomeration (also across newer media platforms) (McChesney, 1999; Noam, 2017; Pedro- Carañana et al., 2018). These scholars have questioned the inabilities of commercial/private media because they intermingle with the largest advertisers. “It makes sense politically and socially too, as the media owners and managers run in the same circles as the major shareholders and executives of local corporate powerhouses” (McChesney, 1999, pxvii). These political economy explanations relate to why media operate the way they do, which is often magnified in contexts with low or no professional standards to guide journalism.

1.1.2 Media Capture

Media capture is a framework that brings together various approaches to studying media pathologies holistically, particularly how the different influences interact with production of content disseminated to wider audiences. It combines observations and arguments of various social scientists, on media corruption (Sinclair, 1919), influences of ideology, money and power (Adorno, 1991; Althusser, 1971; Fuchs, 2016; Habermas, 1984, 1991; Marcuse, 1991) and the government, and market-media relationships (Habermas, 1991; McChesney, 1999). Captured content

can involve co-optation, distortion, and suppression of ideas and information, particularly in markets with non-transparent ownership, concentration, and in small markets with unsustainable media where funding from government and advertisers are critical for their survival. Such environments can make media sites for interaction of multiple moneyed and powerful interests, which is often operationalized in collusion with media owners/ journalists (owners who control media and their employees, the content producers)(Habermas, 1991; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999). Such influences erode editorial independence and impact journalism and its products, while condoning non-professional practices, distorting markets and by short-changing audiences in terms of the information they receive (Dragomir, 2022; Dragomir & Aslama Horowitz, 2021). The following four-part model allows the examination of media capture in its different forms:

1. Regulatory capture (consisting of government control of the regulatory process that, due to the licensing powers of these authorities, affects the composition of the media market)
2. Control of Public Service Media (consisting of mechanisms to control their governing structures and financial dependence on state bodies, which can turn these operations into government channels)
3. Use of state financing as a control tool (consisting of forms of public funding mechanisms, including public funding for state-administered media, state advertising, state subsidies, and market disruption measures, all of which are used to influence the operations and, indirectly, the editorial independence of media outlets)
4. Ownership takeover (consisting of forms of forceful takeover of commercial media through private enterprises close to the government).

(Dragomir & Aslama Horowitz, 2021, pp. 218-219)

Examining the entire four-part model can be difficult, particularly, in media markets such as Nepal where data availability is low, but some tendencies discussed above are also evident in Nepal, particularly those relating to state financing and other control measures such as regulatory control, and using state-run media as “employment centers for party workers and supporters” (Kharel, 2000, p. 29), which is indicative of one form of capture. In Nepal the government owns and controls media and is a sizeable advertiser. There are also anecdotal evidence of the government using state financing to support media and selected journalists’ associations with both cash handouts and advertising.

Private/commercial media are essentially businesses, and profit is an important reason for their existence. This profit can be earned by having more consumers (subscribers/audiences in the case of media), which media can do by providing independently-produced content that serves the needs of the audiences, or the public. The other path to profit is to serve powerful vested interests – even at the cost of mis/disinforming audiences – in exchange for financial and other favors to keep the media viable while continuing to disseminate propaganda. The business need of becoming commercially viable makes media vulnerable to capture, as was observed by Habermas in relation to media in the second half of the 19th century, when, he said, “that the press itself became manipulatable to the extent that it had become commercialized” (Habermas, 1991, p. 185). Money, therefore, remains a major influence on media.

Both money and state power (including regulatory) can be used to influence media, but one can argue that money has a greater role because while embodying the economic power of capitalistic societies, financial transactions can also be hidden allowing the media to continue exhibiting a semblance of independence – even after they have been captured. The money and other favors could come from various

sources such as governments, politicians (aspirants to be in government), powerful interest groups and businesses as subsidies, bribes, advertising, etc. (Atal, 2017; Bagdikian, 2004; Besley & Prat, 2006; Dragomir, 2019; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Hitchcock, 1921).

In new democracies and developing media markets capture by politicians is often aided by ideological indoctrination of journalists, where mindsets are influenced to result in what Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz called “cognitive” capture which, “relates to how reporters perceive the world, and therefore how they write about it” (Stiglitz, 2017, p. 14). He called this type of capture the “most subtle, and difficult to prove”. According to Stiglitz, when cognitive capture takes place,

Rather than being the “fourth estate,” set apart from the rest of society to provide the checks and balances necessary to make society function well, the media are embedded within society (in this case political parties) and are little more than a reflection of the views widely shared within it. Indeed, they can become part of the echo chamber that amplifies and solidifies conventional (partisan) wisdom. (p. 14)

In some countries such as Nepal, governments have ultimate authority as regulators – where they decide the rules of the game, including licensing – and also as owner of state-media sometimes run under the guise of public service media (PSM). They have authority to appoint regulators and heads of state-run media, as well as those who run the PSMs. After 1990 successive governments in Nepal have hired and fired leaders and board members of state media with every change of dispensation, which is indicative of the effort to control media content. Other tools that governments are said to use to capture media content are state advertising, subsidies for favorable media, and tax audits and investigations or other hassles for media that do not toe the line.

This study has attempted to understand the different ways independence of media/journalists in Nepal has been compromised by various interests, including government, which is what media capture is about.

Nepal's media environment, when assessed against the four-part model of media capture (Dragomir & Aslama Horowitz, 2021) makes it a likely site for interaction of numerous influences. The members of the main regulatory agency are appointed by and answerable to the government which in turn runs its own newspapers, and radio and television stations. The government appoints editors, general managers, and board members of these state media institutions. All state-run media were formed under specific laws or orders that gives the government authority to appoint the top officials. In the case of Radio Nepal and Nepal Television this authority comes from special orders for establishing the radio broadcasting service as a development committee and the Communication Corporation Act, 2028 B.S. The Gorkhapatra Corporation Act, 2019 B.S. concerns with publishing the government newspaper.

Until 1993, Nepal's independent media comprised largely of tabloid-size sheets, most of them supporting one political party or another or even serving as mouthpieces of political parties (Aryal, 2016; Baral, 1975). The only broadsheets were the state-run newspapers – *Gorkhapatra* (Nepali) and *The Rising Nepal* (English); the state also owned the only radio and television stations. The first privately-run broadsheets – *Kantipur* and *The Kathmandu Post* – began publishing in February 1993 (Kantipur Publication Ltd., n.d.), made possible by media freedoms in the new Constitution (1990) and media laws enacted in 1991 and 1992. There were 73 dailies in Nepal in 1989 and the number rose to 96 in 1992 and 200 in 1999 (Kharel, 2000). The same laws also opened the doors for private investment in television and radio, first permitted in 1994 (Rao & Koirala, 2000) and 1997 (Bhattarai, 2000;

Upreti, 2017). In the years that followed media organizations in Nepal have extended ownership horizontally and across platforms, such as newspaper owners also owning radio and television stations, and internet-based platforms. Owners of some large media companies also have interests in other sectors such as manufacturing, real estate, aviation, education, and finance, among others. In 2021/2022 there were 717 registered daily newspapers, 2079 weekly newspapers and 3494 online news portals in Nepal (Press Council Nepal, 2022).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Conceptually, even though media capture has yet to emerge as a full-fledged theory, it draws from concepts and theories on cultural capture (Kwak, 2013; Stiglitz, 2017), the relations of media with capital, including capitalist businesses (Adorno, 1991; Reberich & Trautmann, 2019), the media's role in extending the dominant ideology (Daldal, 2014; Althusser, 1971), and the interaction of media with power (Foucault, 1980; Habermas 1984, 1985) and its outcomes. Much research on media capture by economists (Besley & Prat, 2006; Corneo, 2006; Lam, 2017) have explained capture and how the media political economy works quantitatively and through modelling. For example, Lam (2017) has demonstrated advertiser capture and argues that censorship can be incentivized rather than only coerced, based on analysis of selected Hong Kong media and slant of their coverage. In this sense, media capture is the examination of granular data to explain by media behave in certain ways deviating from established professional standards (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Lue, 2020) in a context where the same market can have two opposing functions: “the market as an engine of freedom; the other as a system of control” (Curran, 2014, p. xiii). Global scholarship has explained capture in terms of relations between politics, money and media, and the proximities of the journalists/media with the centers of political and financial power.

There have been various attempts to understand media capture in other geographies. One has attempted to understand what drives media capture through case studies in South Sudan, Tanzania, Bangladesh and South Africa, where the drivers considered were media capacity, socio economic factors, demographic factors and institutional factors (Cárdenas et al., 2017). The institutional factors were a combination of “the independence of the media..., including ownership structures, the legal environment, relationships between the media and the government (including polarization), and patterns of clientelism in both government and the media”(Cárdenas et al., 2017, p. 13). Drivers associated with capture have been examined in emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008), including party colonization of media (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014), which extended the idea of political clientelism (Papathanassopoulos & Hallin, 2002) even further. There have also been some studies on capture in different countries such as Afghanistan (Relly & Zanger, 2017) and China (Frisch et al., 2018) that explain how politics and business can influence media, which are unique to the different contexts.

However, Nepali media scholarship after 1990 has remained largely oblivious of the issues discussed above, even though there was one attempt to understand the political economy. This study had concluded that media had begun moving from partisan to commercialism after 1990 (Aryal, 2016). Other studies have been limited to the exploration of coverage of specific issues like ethnicity on television (Upreti, 2017), Right to Information policy and effectiveness (Paudel, 2023), and review the “role” and “contribution” of newspapers to establishing democracy in Nepal (Aryal, 2024; Nepal, 2080 B.S.). Another recent doctoral thesis focused on how news was sourced on radio (Luitel, 2024). Common to all these studies is the underlying

assumption of media independence, irrespective of various political and economic influences that could have influenced media behaviors including slow institutionalization, low capacity and high political partisanship and clientelism.

This study has attempted to problematize the assumption of independence in media/journalism practice in Nepal, because having formal media freedoms provided by policies and laws may not always guarantee independence and impartiality particularly in political-economic spaces where the government owns and also controls media and regulates private media through regulators it appoints. The situation can be exacerbated in markets where most media are nonviable as businesses and rely on external support for survival and where media are owned by individuals with multiple business interests, which makes them vulnerable to political pressures. Another dimension that drives media operations is capacity, particularly professional standards upheld by journalists, which in the case of Nepal where a majority of journalists are politically sympathetic towards one political party, or another is questionable. This research is anchored on the drivers of capture discussed above (Cárdenas et al., 2017). and has attempted to explore effective independence in media coverage by interpreting content/texts and documents vis-à-vis factors that are known to influence capture to arrive at inferences. The study is premised on the understanding that non-independent, and non-viable media (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2008) – for whatever reasons – are more susceptible to being influenced or captured.

Most studies on media capture have been carried out in the West and by Western scholars, particularly countries where data on media is readily available. Some studies have also been done in the neighborhood, such as China and some countries of South Asia, while the subject remains largely unexplored in Nepal.

Building on various studies done on media capture globally and regionally, the core problem or gap identified by this study is to understand whether or not Nepal's media is captured.

The study has attempted to understand the media's ability to independently serve the public interest, using newspaper and print journalism (including, online media) as sites for examining whether or not they could be captured. It has attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the forms of media capture in Nepal?
2. How does capture manifest in newspaper content?
3. Why is media captured in Nepal?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to understand media capture in Nepal with a focus on newspaper journalism. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the forms of media capture in Nepal.
2. To examine how capture manifests in newspaper content.
3. To evaluate why newspapers/media are captured in Nepal.

1.4 Theoretical Perspectives

Mungiu-Pippidi (2008) described a captured medium as one that has failed to remain autonomous and demonstrate "a will of its own" – a state where various groups, including government, control media and the content they produce. Capture is more likely in markets where media are unviable, media owners have other business interests, and where the political elite own media and/or have strong links with media and journalists. Similar assumptions underlie Nepal's media environment, where there are tendencies of concentration, with media owners also owning other businesses and

across sectors. Many of the drivers of media capture (Cárdenas et al., 2017) are evident in Nepal in various degrees but remain largely unstudied. Most visible is the political clientelism manifested through partisan associations of journalists that have been condoned and encouraged by political parties. Further, most of Nepal's media are unviable evidenced by reports of journalists not receiving minimum wages (International Federation of Journalists, 2023). Hence the assumption that Nepal's media could be captured.

Media can be captured in various ways. Directly, through use of force or policies and laws (Cárdenas et al., 2017); indirectly through non-transparent payoffs and bribes, and favor exchanges and by distorting media markets (Dragomir, 2017) and also through advertising (Lam, 2017). There are a number of economic models that explain how that works (Besley & Prat, 2006; Corneo, 2006; Petrova, 2008a).

This study explores media capture using political economy approaches to account for the nonavailability of financial data and ownership information of media in Nepal. It has examined content and texts to isolate inconsistencies of media practice to explain the forms of capture, how capture manifests in content and what drives such behaviors or the causes. The forms of capture have been explained through analysis of experiential statements, while the influences of government and businesses have been examined through analyses of texts and content, and by analyzing official documents and discourses. Some variables used are distortions, inaccuracies (purposive), under-coverage, non-coverage and biased content. This approach was needed because no single method was adequate for studying capture and its multiple implications as it operates differently in each sociopolitical context (Cárdenas et al., 2017; Finkel, 2015; Frisch et al., 2018; McElhone, 2017; Relly & Zanger, 2017; VojtĚchovská, 2017).

The Foucauldian understanding of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1980) underlies the argument that information in captured media is not influence-free and, is instead, distorted as desired by the capturers. In such situations media surrender their watchdogging role and become tools for buttressing and extending existing power relations, an explanation that also emerges from the Habermasian interpretation of money and power as being “media” that unsettle communicative action (Habermas, 1984b, 1985). Power for the purpose of this study is understood as being “... comprised of instruments for the formation and recording of knowledge (registers and archives), methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation, apparatuses of control and so forth” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 22), which are also instruments integral to media production.

Capture is the outcome of the interplay of influences (power, including money power) on media and journalists to result in distorted journalistic content. It has been examined by studying attributions, texts, content and documents/ records and discourses, particularly how they introduce, amplify, and maintain and frame topics/events and tell us what to think about if not what to think (Cohen, 1963). Hence the importance to study the influences on media.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

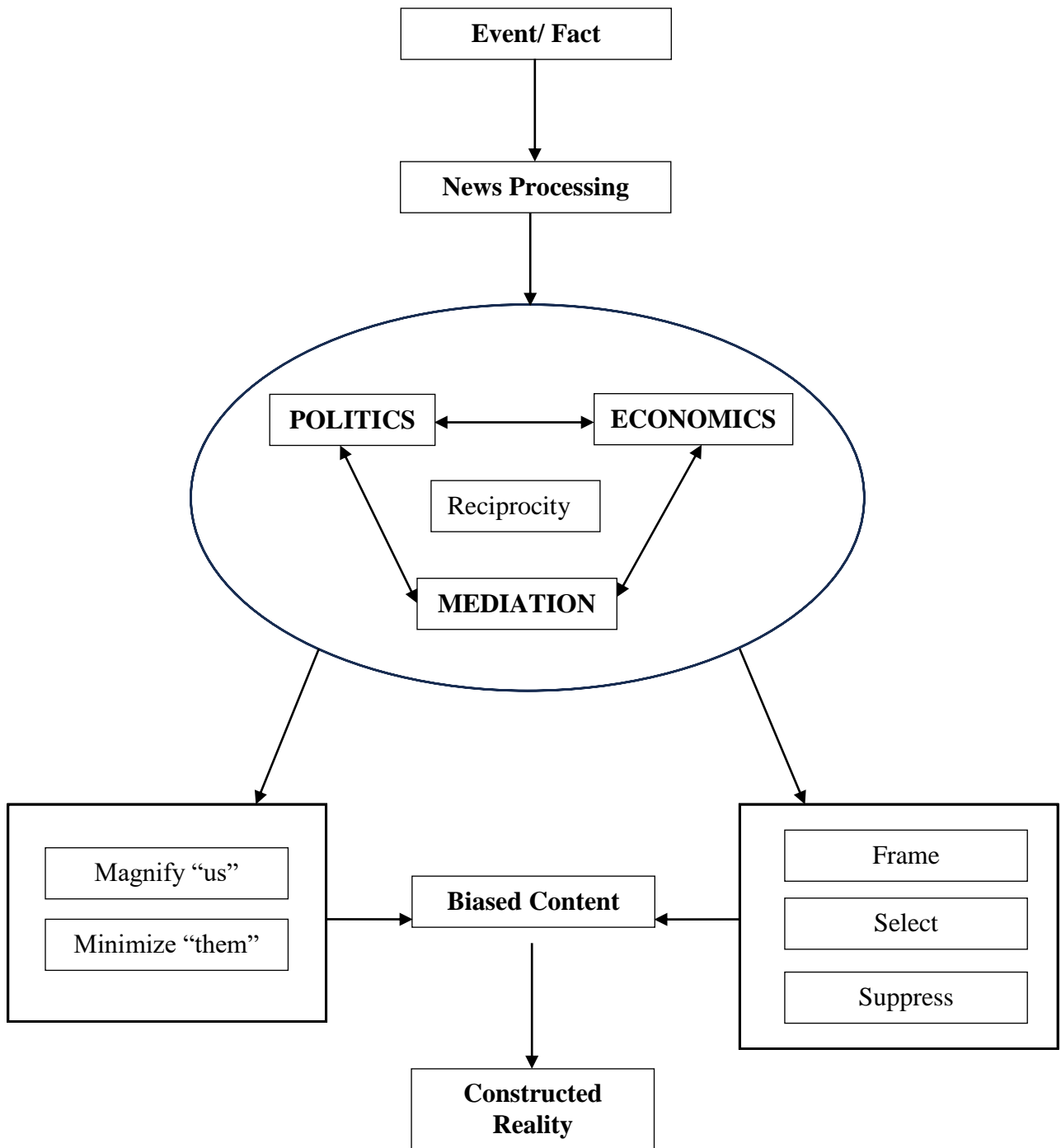
This study has attempted to analyze newspaper content, texts and documents/ records (also from online media) as predictors of media capture, which, is the use of monetary or non-monetary favors to influence media content. Mungiu-Pippidi (2008) has described a captured state to be one where media has failed to remain autonomous and has instead been influenced by various groups, including businesses. Various studies have shown how advertisers can influence media by demonstrating the relation between increased advertising and low corruption coverage (di Tella &

Franceschelli, 2011) and how advertising from the auto industry can influence coverage of climate change (Beattie, 2020). According to Street (2001), media have three types of power, and one “discursive power” (p. 232) can shape political arguments in content, which then affects the public’s political access and participation.

The political economy of media examines the relations of production and circulation/distribution in a process that involves a give-and-take with politics and economics in the process of mediation. The political here is ideology, legal and administrative power, and economics is about money. It is within this context that the media process events/ facts and mediate them to construct reality or news. The study has adopted a political economy approach, particularly three theoretical anchors to explore media capture: a) links of journalists/media with political and business elite, b) media ownership and concentration, and c) advertising and other sources of funding for media.

The following are some reasons to assume Nepal’s media are captured: a) historically politicians have had strong relations with journalists/ media (Bhattarai, 2024), now exemplified by partisan political associations and their memberships; b) ownership of large media is concentrated and the owners have multiple business interests, c) media financing is not transparent and most media are financially non-viable – do not even pay journalists’ wages on time – hence the assumption that they sustain on covert support/ sponsorships and can also be swayed by advertising.

The conceptual framework is illustrated in the Figure 1. 1

Figure 1.1*Conceptual Framework*

Typically, journalists/media take events/facts, process and publish/broadcast the work product when the events/facts become a constructed reality. Media production involves processing, where different forms of power interact – politics including the ideological, legal, administrative power, economics or money as power – during the mediation by media, which involves both journalists and media owners. This is the site for reciprocity and give-and-take, particularly in political environments emerging from conflict and emerging democracies, where the advertising market required to support independent media is small, journalists/ media do not fully adhere to professional standards and are overtly partisan and clientelist. The resulting exchanges – both monetary and non-monetary (favors) – can result in content tampered through distortion, framing, selection and suppression and/or partisan content that magnifies “our” positives and minimizes “our” negative and does the opposite for those considered “others/ them”. The resulting constructed reality can affect effect choices people make based on information obtained from media, including their decisions to elect or reject their leaders.

It was not possible to examine media finances and incomes, including that from advertising for this study because most of Nepal’s media are private companies and their financial information is legally protected. Therefore, this study has analyzed content and texts to isolate inconsistencies in media practices against established journalism norms and standards to postulate the forms of capture, how capture manifests in media content, and to explain why media is captured.

The forms of capture have been explored through experiential statements, how capture manifests in content has been studied by analyzing content and texts, and the causes of capture are explained by analyzing all data in context. The political links

between journalists and media are explored through experiential statements of media industry workers (both existing and former), while ownership concentration has been understood by analyzing self-declared information of media owners – the best possible alternative to government data, given that private company information is legally protected. The influence of advertising on content has been explored through a case study built by analyzing content, while a government document has been analyzed to understand non-transparent, public financing of partisan media organizations and media. Various approaches have been used to explore the results of the interaction of politics/ideology and economics/ money on media content. The findings have been extended and validated by information obtained in key informant interviews and literatures that were reviewed as part of the study.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This is the first attempt to study media capture in Nepal and therefore, it contributes to existing area studies on the subject, while also laying a foundation for research along this line of inquiry within the country. Media capture in Nepal is unique in some respects and has some parallels with how it has been taking place in other geographies. What makes it unique is the deep political partisanship and clientelism, which remain as the main drivers for capture. Even though partisanship is rarely discussed in Western literature on capture, what this study has suggested is that it is still very relevant in countries with emerging democracies and in environments where media capacity – professionalism, ethics and institutionalization-wise – is low.

The study is important because captured media distort and undermine the exchange of independent and accurate information, which are vital for democratization and democratic governance, particularly in countries with a history of

illiberal politics, and/or those embarking on their democratic journeys. The failure to nurture an independent and professional media in any country can, therefore, pose serious challenges to democratic development because citizens who begin to lose trust on traditional media can begin seeking and relying on information obtained from other sources, typically social media. Information on social platforms are unedited and unregulated and therefore more likely to have high misinformation and disinformation. Since people use information to make choices, it is important to ensure that the information people receive is independent and professionally produced and assists them to make informed choices particularly when it comes to electing their leaders, which is the foundation for a strong democracy. Information that is influenced can disrupt informed decision making by citizens, which is why it is important to study capture to generate evidence to facilitate informed policies to regulate media operations.

This study is important because it can serve as a mirror to alert journalists, media and media policy makers about the symptoms of capture that have become evident, as a first step towards slowing down the inevitable slide into what could become an abyss of inaccurate and unreliable content.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

The following operational terms have been used in the study; they are understood as described below.

Advertisements: The term includes all paid commercial messages published in media, including sponsored content, and other types of promotions.

Content: Includes all news and information-related and advertising content, including editorials and op-ed pieces on current affairs. The study does not include entertainment and educational content in the analysis.

Forms of Capture: Means the various ways media is captured.

Media Capture: The term media capture is defined as a situation where the media are not independent in the production of content – the normative expectation of media – and are instead subservient to influences from various interests. Power or the legitimate authority of governments and money that drives capitalist economies are the main tools of capture, alongside favors that may be exchanged by the rich and the powerful with media/journalists to secure desired content.

Media/ Journalists: The terms media and journalists are used synonymously in the analysis as media/journalists to mean both or individual entities based on the contextual reference. This has been done to account for the unique Nepali situation where journalists are also owners/editors of media, which makes differentiation difficult, and also because of the assumption that owners and editors also collude and encourage capture.

Public Relations (PR): Public relations is understood to be communication done with the objective of projecting a positive image of the communicator. In the case of private companies, company statements on products that media unquestioningly reproduce, often with company logos used as illustrations. This is how the term “PR content” in the text is understood.

1.8 Organization of the Study

The research is organized in seven parts, which is as follows:

Chapter 1, Introduction; Chapter 2, Literature Review; Chapter 3, Methodology; Chapter 4, Forms of Media Capture in Nepal, Chapter 5, Manifestation of Capture in Newspaper Content; Chapter 6, Causes of Media Capture in Nepal; Chapter 7, Findings and Conclusions.

CHAPTER-II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter has examined media capture in existing knowledge and methods to identify gaps for locating this study, and for developing the conceptual framework for examining the subject.

Generally, media capture is an approach for studying how newspapers/media (newspapers in the context of this study) are fulfilling their primary role of independently informing citizens, which required the examination of studies on social, political, and economic effects of media on society as well as scholarship on the media capture. The literature review is organized in three broad parts. The first has compared evolution of newspapers in different historical, sociopolitical contexts; next it has discussed the media capture paradigm and methods used to study the subject, and the third discusses some relevant social and political-economy theories to understand the social and political implications of media capture on societies.

2.1.1 Literature Search Methods

Materials for review were located and selected through various approaches, primarily “key word” searches on various online databases. The search was done on Research for Life/ Hinari database using the term “media capture” for a 15-year period (Sept. 2005-Sept. 2020). Eleven of the 493 items returned were relevant for this study. A similar search on the JSTOR database returned 169 results, of which four were studies on media capture, and two on media corruption and ownership that were also relevant. Similarly, a Google scholar search of “media capture” returned over 4500 results. However, following a review search-results, 52 articles were shortlisted for review. Two related articles on media bias and media and politics on Google scholar were also reviewed.

Other keywords used to search literature were “media concentration” and “media ownership”. The relevant articles were further shortlisted after reviewing the abstracts, and this resulted in a reading list of books, peer-reviewed publications, and newspaper articles. Thereafter, additional literature was identified through snowballing based on references in the articles that were studied.

A similar approach was undertaken to identify books and book-chapters for review. One major text was a 2017 book on media capture “In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the threat to Democracy” (Schiffrin, 2017b) where the authors of different articles had referred to other text texts that were also relevant. Further, the researcher has also reviewed different theories and concepts related to media in general, including readings on political economy, ideology, slant/bias, media production, watchdog journalism, objectivity, truth/post truth, and their references in Critical Theory, and cultural studies.

2.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Review

Proto newspapers (and pamphlets, news sheets, books, etc.) underpinned the freedom of societies from feudal aristocracies in many parts of the world starting in 16th century Europe. Newspapers, and later other forms of mass media, provided the public voice which eventually contributed to liberating and shaping societies. However, the generally accepted role of media to support freedoms has come under intense scrutiny in the 21st century alongside the disruptions caused by rapid political, economic, and technological transformations, particularly in media and communication, where even the notion of truth has come under questioning in what is said to be a post-fact, post-truth world (McIntyre, 2018). The resulting disruptions in traditional business models, amidst increased concentration and political interference, have raised questions about both editorial independence and credibility of journalism,

particularly in regard of the media's role of regulating society by exposing wrongdoings. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

The two most significant political trends impacting media systems around the world are the widespread de-legitimation by political actors of the media as a venerable institution along with the profession of journalism, and the growing efforts made towards media capture particularly online media, which not so long ago was regarded as more resistant to such form of control than other types of media. Media capture has often occurred where there has been economic pressure on media outlets, and recent trends suggest that the upheaval of older modes of media production and the decline of traditional mass media models is changing normative ideas of independence. (UNESCO, 2018, p. 114)

In the Asia-Pacific region, UNESCO noted increase in “organized and systematic state sanctioned de-legitimization of media” (UNESCO, 2018a, p. 34) and increased power play by politics and business interests and media companies. Such tendencies had also been observed scholars in the 20th century, though not in the context of the media capture paradigm (Hitchcock, 1921; Lippmann & Curtis, 1991; Sinclair, 2019). UNESCO had also observed increased government influence on media. It said, “Media capture is commonplace ... Despite the high number of media outlets, many continue to be owned and controlled by the economic and political elite, or by business people with close relationships to government,” (p. 34). What is clear is that the media have begun to stray away from their socially-expected role of providing independently produced information the reasons for which can be explained through the media capture lens.

A 2017 report by the World Bank and the Department of International Development said media capture takes place “when the government or public officials influence the gathering, dissemination, and reporting of news content” (Cárdenas et al., 2017, p. 4) through *coercive* and *non-coercive* (emphasis added) influences. Forceful capture involves use of government authority, threats, or violence. Non-coercive media capture is a situation where media do not report information which they would have done normally even when there is no direct government intervention (Cárdenas et al., 2017). This takes place when they have been influenced in some other ways. One example of this is the alleged tax evasion by the Coca-Cola company in Nepal that was reported by the leading newspapers in Nepal only after the government pressed charges (Kantipur Correspondent, 2023, 11 March), almost over a year after a magazine, *Taksar*, had investigated and written a number of stories indicating foul play. The following paragraphs explain the various ways in which media can be captured.

Media Capture – an Outcome

Media capture is not direct restriction on media operations but concerns with the outcome of the restrictions. Control implies use of authority, both administrative and legal, to influence media behavior, including threats and attacks against journalists and impunity for aggressors. The intended outcome of capture is content production as desired by influencer – either government or business. This same outcome results in the case of capture through indirect means. While the term content includes all material in media, the focus of capture is usually on news and current affairs that can be used for manipulating public (audience) perceptions and influencing their voting decisions in democracies. Governments attempt to control information reaching electorates through media because public perceptions on their

performance could influence how citizens vote. According to Leeson (2008) “This control can be direct, such as when states monopolize media ownership in their nations, or indirect, such as when they exert financial pressure on private media outlets to cover news in a certain way” (p. 155). Control is direct, for example, when state force is used to regulate content (outcome) as was the case in Nepal in 2005 following a royal coup when military censors were dispatched to newsrooms to ensure that only permitted material was disseminated (Bhattarai, 2005, 2006).

Typical Media Capture – Indirect and Insidious

Indirect or non-coercive capture is understood to result from subtle and not-so-obvious influences on content secured through non-transparent funding such as handouts, bribes, tax concessions and through advertising. Money is involved in indirect capture and so are favors to influence how journalists/media cover news, including inclusion or exclusion of relevant information. Another form of indirect capture takes place through advertising by both governments and private businesses (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), because advertisers have both economic and cultural power over media (Atal, 2017b; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Advertising is typically market driven, and media with largest audiences command the largest share because its purpose is to maximize reach of the messages. However, this may not always hold true for all government advertising, and particularly in the case of Nepal, where it has also been used as a welfare tool or something devised to support financially unsustainable newspapers when it was initiated in the 1950s (Maharjan, 2014). Often such ads were used to support newspapers providing favorable coverage.

Media Capture – Erodes Professionalism

Professionalism in journalism is understood to be detachment or distancing of the occupational self from the social self and the associated obligations, and sometimes also from the personal self in terms of likes and dislikes, interests, and

detachments. It is an abstraction that needs to be internalized to ensure accuracy, impartiality and fairness, the basic expectations of the public from journalism.

“Professionalism refers to the extent to which journalism is differentiated as an occupation and institution from other social institutions, in particular politics” (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014, p. 18). It is a product of autonomy or independence and established norms and values of the profession or the belief that media are there to serve the public interest.

Another concept commercialism underscores that media are businesses and are susceptible to influences of money in both the production and dissemination processes. Media use different formats to deliver information – visuals in television, audio on radio and texts in the print media. Media capture operates within the domains of content production and dissemination across platforms and is a situation when inducements have undermined professionalism. Commercialism is about money and profits, and it influences selection, rejection, and presentation of news content, which is accentuated in captured media. Commercialism manifests in content in the same way as clientelism does in the case of sociopolitical influences (Papathanassopoulos & Hallin, 2002). Clientelism in the context of this study is limited to explaining partisanship among media and journalists.

Media Capture – Endogenous and Susceptible to External Influences

Besley and Prat (2006) proposed a model where the media capture is endogenous because of the way the organizations are structured. “Each media outlet faces two possible sources of profit—commercial profit and profits from collusion with the government” (Besley & Prat, 2006, p. 721). The collusion could be direct (bribes) or indirect, including policies and laws to favor media owners and other business they own. Money is a major tool for influence. The other types of influences

could take place at the “ideological level, extra media level, organization level, media routines level and individual level” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 214). These include influences stemming from the dominant ideology and social practices/socialization, including production routines and individual beliefs of journalists. Irrespective of where the influences originate, they interact with media products.

2.2.1 Historicity and Influences on Media in Nepal

Nepal lacks a comprehensive history of newspapers and available histories are either truncated and/or scattered. This section briefly historicizes the origin and growth of newspapers with a reference to Nepal to contextualize this study.

There is a coincidence in what developments in printing did in the Western world in terms of political changes starting with the American and French revolutions about 100 years after the invention of printing and the arrival of newspapers, and the political changes that took place in Nepal in about the same time after the printing press was brought to the country. Like the early periodicals in the West that were highly regulated by the rulers who exercised controls by licensing printers, Nepal’s early publications also required approval of the Rana rulers (Devkota, 2051 B.S.)ⁱ. In the West, expansion in literacy supported by efforts of the emerging welfare states and churches had helped to increase the reach of the printed word and later newspapers, triggering the shift in political power from royalty and priests to the masses. The ideas that the print revolution helped to spread eventually culminated in epochal changes that defined the relations between the rulers and the ruled (Poe, 2011). The following paragraphs discuss the evolution of the Nepali state in the wake of mechanized printing.

Nepal joined the print revolution with a hand-operated printing press brought back by Jang Bahadur Rana, Nepal's first Rana Prime Minister after his visits to England and France in 1851 (1908 B.S.). The press had arrived almost 300 years after the invention of the moveable type and was initially used to print stamps, envelopes and official stationery (Devkota, 2051 B.S.; Dixit, 2070 B.S.). Nepal's second printer had published the country's first book – a 1038-page compendium of laws. According to (Devkota, 2051 B.S.), other print operations that were established thereafter were either owned by members of the ruling family or their *gurus* (priests). Arguably, it was this control over printed texts and little or no effort to spread literacy that had assisted the Rana oligarchs (1846-1951) to keep the country isolated and under hereditary rule for 104 years (1846-1951).

Officially sanctioned “news” (1901-1950)

Devkota (2051 B.S.) has provided a basic roadmap for tracing the evolution of newspapers in Nepal. The first periodical (monthly) published in Nepal – *Sudha Sagar* – was a literary magazine that had appeared in 1898 (1955 B.S.) (Devkota, 2051 B.S.). The first Nepali periodical to carry “news” was *Gorkhapatra*, which began publishing every Monday from 16 May 1901. Its content was guided by a *sanad* (directive/ order), and every copy had to be signed off by a Lieutenant Colonel before printing (Regmi & Kharel, 2002). According to Devkota, the paper began publishing thrice a week after 45 years, and as a daily 59 years after its first publication. All other publications that appeared during the regime supported and had support, including financial, of the rulers. They were never intended to provide independent content but were used to praise and support the regime (Devkota, 2051 B.S.).

Rana Prime Minister Padma Sumsher had promulgated a constitution in January 1948 amidst growing political opposition, which for the first time included press freedom as a fundamental right. But the statute never took effect because the prime minister resigned in 1948 and because the revolution of 1950/51 leading to the establishment of democracy swept the statute away (Kharel, 2010; Savada, 1993). What is clear, however, is that some form of privately produced journalism began in Nepal only after 1950/51.

Freedom of Expression (1950-1960)

Nepal's modernization began without the corresponding reforms in politics, social systems, literacy, and without independent journalism. The country was never colonized, but the rulers ensured that it remained isolated to prevent exposure of the citizens to new ideas about politics, culture, and social practices. Christian missionaries had brought the printing press to neighboring India by the 16th century, and in 1780 James Augustus Hicky had launched the *Bengal Gazette*. Newspapers run by Englishmen were intended to largely support the British colonialists and it was much later that, Indians opposed to British rule launched their own newspapers to promote political and social changes (Gunaratne, 2000). A similar pattern was evident in Nepal in terms of shift of content focus after democratization began.

Nepal's political changes of 1950/51 included the restoration of powers of the king who the Ranas had reduced to a titular head, and the introduction of democratic rule. Nepal's first newspaper with a semblance of independence, had appeared three days before democracy was announced. *Jagaran* (weekly) began publishing on 16 February 1951 and according to Devkota (2051 B.S.), its editorial sought to build public awareness through "appropriate criticism". Nepal's democratic journey began on 19 February 1951, when King Tribhuvan proclaimed fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, resulting in an environment conducive for independent

newspapers. The first newspaper to appear thereafter was the daily *Awaj*, on 20 February 1951. According to Devkota, *Awaj* initially claimed to be “independent and impartial” and even sold 1000-1500 copies a day but soon sided with the government and the Nepali Congress party, and folded up within two years after it had appeared (Devkota, 2051 B.S.).

Political, Government Financing of Media

Historically, government support for periodicals began in the Rana regime and continued even after democracy was established. Most of the pre-1950 publications had both favor and financing of the Rana rulers. They had very few subscribers and little or no advertising, and even, repeatedly editorialized their poor finances. Dixit has mentioned one instance when the government had used financing to control media – and began providing two newspapers, one monthly and one fortnightly, Rs. 900 each year. This was extended to some other newspapers later (Dixit, 2070 B.S.). The post-1950 newspapers were not better off both financially and in terms of readership. Politicians and/or political parties largely paid for the newspapers or were published by individuals with certain politics to pursue. The longevity of these papers also fluctuated with the fate of the political parties (Dahal, 2070 B.S.; Pathak, 2007). Dahal (2070 B.S.) has provided one example, where an editor had agreed with the then prime minister to receive Rs. 600 every month to do journalism that was supportive of “monarchy, parliamentary system and B.P. (Koirala) as prime minister”. The said editor has recounted this experience in his memoirs, saying he had made the request with his self-imposed conditions, to Koirala who is said to have asked, “*Afno yo bachan lai palanata garnuhuncha?*” (“Will you abide by this commitment of yours?”) (Dixit, 2066 B.S., p. 251). This indicates a tradeoff. Dixit said that he had received a total of Rs.2150 from Koirala at a meeting he later had with King Mahendra.

Devkota (2051 B.S.) said the post-1950 governments supported different newspapers but secretly, fearing the resulting opposition. The first elected government had introduced a policy to “classify” newspapers in December 1959, under which they were grouped in four categories and provided monthly advertisements valued between Rs. 200 and Rs. 600. However, within six months, the government stopped advertising in newspapers that opposed its policies. One can argue that this was Nepal’s first recorded instance of a democratically-elected government interfering in media over displeasure with content and of using public finances to reward supporters and punish non-conforming newspapers. This is what we know today to be a form of media capture. Therefore, the argument that political and government financing of media in Nepal began with the introduction of newspapers and has continued in one form or another causing the media to remain in a perpetual state of capture.

The brief discussion on the evolution of printing and newspapers in Nepal in assists in asserting historicity of the relationship of newspapers with state institutions that began with the Rana period and has continued after 1950. All newspapers in Nepal required registration, which made them eligible for government support. In practice this meant the more supportive newspapers were of government the more likely they were to receive generous handouts (Baral, 1975).

Even after 100 years of the arrival of the printing press, Nepal neither had the literacy nor the industrialization to support demand for reading news because it lacked both audiences who could read and a market to support newspapers. One publication estimated the literacy at two percent, it said:

When the Ranas fell, only 2 percent of the adult population was literate, the infant mortality rate was more than 60 percent, and average life expectancy was thirty-five years. Less than 1 percent of the population was engaged in modern industrial occupations, and 85 percent of employment and income came from agriculture... (Savada, 1993, p. 41)

Like the medieval rulers of Europe before the print revolution, until 1901 Nepal's Rana rulers had restricted education to the elite and were opposed to public schooling of ordinary citizens (Savada, 1993), which was also reason for low newspaper readership.

Period with Limited Media Freedom (1960-1990)

Nepal's efforts to establish democratic politics was cut short on 15 December 1960, when King Mahendra began ruling directly after dismissing the country's first democratically-elected government. He issued a new constitution and consolidated controls on information flow by establishing an official news agency (after shutting down two private agencies) in 1962 (Baral, 2006; Rao & Koirala, 2000). The two agencies and a number of newspapers serving the different political lines, including some papers supportive of India existed at the time (Dahal, 2070 B.S.). Essentially, repression of free expression and the private press had become the "hallmarks" of the political system introduced by the king (Rao & Koirala, 2000), and it was a period when journalists were regularly incarcerated under public security and treason laws (Baral, 1975; Savada, 1993). The new constitution mentioned the freedom of expression and publication (Article 7), but this was not reflected in the Press and Publication Act (1963) that gave the government power to suspend publications in the "public interest", without appeal. The law was later amended to allow appeals against closure (Baral, 2006). The media environment of the day has been aptly described by Maniraj Upadhyay in Dahal (2070 B.S.):

The newspapers either supported the *Panchas* (Panchayat politicians) or parties. There were papers that were known to be [pro-] Congress, and also those known to be [pro-] communist. But these newspapers would be obtaining money from government in one form or the other. (p. 35)

The governance system under the Panchayat constitution placed the king at the helm of public affairs, while the polity also allowed elections to elect individual politicians

supportive of the regime. This system with reforms in-between lasted until April 1990, when a democracy with a constitutional monarchy was reestablished in response to the popular movement that began on 18 February 1990 and culminated in April the same year (Savada, 1993).

Democratic Politics and Media Freedoms (1990-2005)

The Constitution of 1990 guaranteed basic freedoms, including freedom of expression, and ended both censorship and the government's powers to close down newspapers for published content (Articles 12 (2) and Article 13) (Nepal Adhirajya Ko Sambidhan 2047 B.S. [Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990]). New laws on press and publications and broadcasting enacted in 1991 and 1992 resulted in an environment conducive for private investment in broadsheet dailies, television, and radio stations. This was also a period when journalists and media could function without fear of sanction but the partisanship that was deeply rooted in the journalism before 1990 – often touted as “mission” journalism by adherents – continued, alongside attempts to professionalize journalism by seeking to be accurate, fair, and impartial (Bhattarai & Mainali, 2014). Increased Western donor support for journalist training had helped introduce liberal journalism practices. The period also saw arrival of investment by individuals with varied interests in commerce, industry, and politics in media. This period was the beginning of media aggregation and concentration.

Transition to a Federated Democracy (2005-2015)

The democratization and media expansion were interrupted by an insurgency led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) that began in February 1996 and culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006. The insurgency brought with it a “brand” of partisan journalism promoted by the Maoist party that was reminiscent of the pre-1990 media. The rebelling Maoists operated some newspapers and later, also some clandestine radios. This period of history was also marked by

regicide and killing of other members of the royal family – allegedly by the Crown Prince (who later also succumbed to self-inflicted gunshot injuries) – in June 2001 leading to the transfer of the monarchical title to King Birendra’s only surviving younger brother Gyanendra.

The successor, King Gyanendra, suspended parliament and began ruling directly from 1 February 2005 supported by ministers he appointed. The pro-democracy protests that ensued thereafter culminated in April 2006, when the king agreed to restore the parliament and form a government of elected representatives of the reinstated parliament. This government led peace negotiations with the Maoists the outcome of which was the Interim Constitution 2007 that was followed by the nomination of Maoist leaders to parliament. The election of a Constituent Assembly was held in 2008, and another one in 2013, after the first one had failed to promulgate a constitution. The second assembly promulgated the Constitution in September 2015 and introduced a federated polity of 753 local governments, seven provincial and one federal government. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 also provides basic guarantees for freedom of expression and media, even though with greater restrictions compared to the 1990 statute (Bhattarai & Mainali, 2014).

2.2.2 Overall Media Environment 2020

Four characteristics clearly stood out in Nepal’s media in the 21st century: (a) continuance of partisan journalism, (b) high political content, (c) continued government media ownership and control, and (d) growing media concentration. The following sections discuss these tendencies.

Partisan Journalism

Despite the liberal laws and the increased investment in media, Nepal’s journalism after 1990 remained entangled in partisan shackles. Partisanship,

particularly in the case of the weekly press (and, more recently, online media), was fairly well-known and the audiences recognized the political leanings while the same was not apparent among the daily newspapers (Aryal, 2016). Typically, the weeklies had lower circulations compared to dailies and little or no visible advertising, raising questions about their viability as well as their motives or objectives to be in business – for profit, public service, or partisan politics.

Historically, profit became the main motive of newspapers starting in the late 19th century while the other rationales for publishing remained but were less important (Nielsen, 2017). According to Nielsen, the logic for understanding capture is fairly straightforward: loss making media continue to remain in business because either they are making profits from elsewhere or have other ways to make up for the losses. In the case of Nepal, one can argue that newspapers (and media) remain caught up between the different objectives discussed above while their traditional income from advertising has begun diverting to flow to the newly-arrived online news portals resulting, one can argue, in a situation where some media are looking elsewhere for profits – a situation conducive to media capture. According to Mungiu-Pippidi (2008), “a large sector of non-viable media living on covert sponsorship indicates a captured, not an autonomous media. Media cannot operate in a democratic country if they are not economically viable”. (p. 91)

Partisanship in the weekly press began in the 1950s with political parties using newspapers as organizational tools. During the organization building years the leadership of one communist party had written a note to its cadres explaining the need to have 500 subscribers in all areas where the party was active to ensure that its newly-launched mouthpiece was financially sustainable. The same party also began to let go of its ownership of all but one newspaper it financed and controlled in 1995

(Aryal, 2016). This thesis had concluded that partisan journalism had made way for professionalism and commercialization of media, which, however, no longer seems tenable.

Even today most weekly newspapers remain aligned to one political party or a faction within and serve them as mouthpieces, either declaring their affiliations or without doing the same. In some cases, political cadre are directly involved in newspapers and in others, journalists themselves are members of the parties. A study by Pathak (2007) had found that over 50 percent journalists – 85.7 percent editors, 60 percent executive editors, among others – of weekly newspapers had party memberships. Further, 50 percent of the respondents had said that their political affiliation had affected the content they produced. The study included 108 respondents from 24 weekly newspapers. Adjusting for journalists who had said they had given up party memberships, Pathak (2007) concluded that only 34 percent journalists in the weekly press had no political affiliation – or were independent.

There is also some recent evidence showing that the political parties have not stopped actively promoting partisan media. Kharel (2010) discussed how the erstwhile Maoist party had grouped Nepal's media into five categories, including over a dozen of party-run apparatuses such as *Janaadesh*, *Janadisha*, *Janaekata* and ABC Television, when it had begun discussing a media strategy. This was another indication that the parties had yet come to terms with the independent role expected of media in a democracy. Therefore, one can argue that Nepal's political parties have mechanisms for influencing newspaper content, not necessarily by financing only, understanding which is one purpose of this study. Further, very little information is available on media financing by the political parties, but one can assume that at some point in the history, it may not have been very different from that in the United States, as described by Petrova (2011):

Newspapers were parts of the political machines, as they ensured that information flows were controlled by faithful party members. For a newspaper, affiliation with a political party had both benefits and costs. The benefits included direct and indirect subsidies from political parties and better access to political information. (p.7)

The financing model at the time included purchase of supported newspapers by party members – irrespective of the price, which Petrova (2011) said was “relatively high” because it was part of the duties associated with membership.

Partisan newspapers continued to exist in the United States until the growth in circulation and advertising ended the need for political support (Chandra and Kaiser, 2016; Petrova, 2011, Gentzkow et al., 2004), even though it had not vanished even in the 20th century. Bedingfield (2015) discussed how an editor and a journalist covering politics had assisted in building support for the Republican Party in a state three years before the journalist contested in the election. “The journalist consulted with party leaders on story ideas, helped to rewrite news releases, withheld significant political news, and developed campaign strategies to help the Republicans compete with the Democrats” (Bedingfield, 2015, p. 6). The candidate lost and returned to journalism. It was an example of how journalists could continue to do journalism that is supposed both independent and impartial and also simultaneously serve partisan interests. Such tendencies are also evident in Nepal where “journalists” have propagandized for political parties and have also contested to receive party election nominations. In Nepal, even though there was some form of advertising after printing began (Devkota, 2051 B.S) it was barely sufficient to generate profits for newspapers, because of other factors such as little or no industrialization and low literacy. Even today the advertising available is not enough to free media from reliance on benefactors both in

politics and business, nor is it enough to sustain all media as profitable operations. Hence the question about how they manage to survive, which is a reason to assume capture.

Political Content

The partisan history of Nepal's journalism – perhaps – explains the high political content in media. Political reporting, when mixed with partisan loyalties, can result in content with little or no information of value for citizens, particularly those without party preferences. Kharel (2010) had analyzed content of 25 category-A newspapers (including 13 tabloid weeklies) and found that 69.38 percent of all news carried by the dailies were political. The same for the tabloid weeklies was 88.73 percent. In terms of sources, the tabloids had used a high proportion of unnamed sources (80.9%) in political stories, which raises credibility questions. Similarly, the percentage of political editorials was 64.13 percent for dailies and 94.23 percent for the weeklies. The study had defined political content as news on the functioning of various branches of government, political parties and their organizations, ministers, party leaders and their activities, decisions, and announcements, among others (Kharel, 2010) . Low source attribution and high political coverage raises questions on the compliance with generally accepted norms of good journalism: accuracy, fairness, and impartiality.

Government Ownership and Control

Nepal's government-owned media largely serve as the paymaster's voice with occasional, measured, critical content to exude a semblance of impartiality, while performing to the government's desires most of the time. The government's desire to have a compliant media was first articulated in the Communication Plan of 1971 that specified the duties of the Gorkhapatra Corporation (publisher of newspapers): It was to inform people on the philosophical and practical aspects of the Panchayat System,

the party-less governance system introduced by King Mahendra (Sharma, 2008). After 1990, successive democratically elected governments continued not only to retain but to also strengthen the official media that they have used – like the leaders in the Panchayat era – for partisan ends. Writing about how Panchayat era politicians used the official media, a longtime employee at state-run Nepal Television said:

... it was mandatory that the speech of one minister with the last name Panday had to be broadcast at all costs. The said minister handed over the text of the speech that came with marked priorities or the order in which the paragraphs should be read. (Singh, 2008, p. 105)

After democracy was established, the same journalist had to read an 18-minute statement with no visuals of a prime minister in the early 1990s as part of the 30-minute television newscast – something unheard in television journalism. It was done to comply to an order that had originated from the Prime Minister's press advisor. King Gyanendra outdid this in 2005 by sending a recorded tape with his address to the nation for broadcast by Nepal Television. According to Upreti (2017), the tape had been delivered to the station by soldiers of the then Royal Nepal Army.

After the restoration of democracy in 2006, the government formed a high-level commission to recommend media policy, which among others, had recommended privatizing government-owned newspapers, which successive governments have largely ignored. The commission had desired that government-owned broadcast media be converted into public service broadcasters accountable to parliament (Federation of Nepali Journalists/Ifex, 2006). These recommendations were not executed while the state-funded media have continued to serve the government and the ruling party instead of functioning as public service media. Further, successive governments have appointed journalists loyal to the political parties or politicians in leadership positions at state media to reward them for favors received. This has been documented in a doctoral thesis, where the author has

discussed how political parties or cliques within continue to influence journalism content, often aided by journalists willing to serve partisan interests (Upreti, 2017). Another journalist who benefitted from successive appointments to state media institutions has provided anecdotal statements on how politicians had instructed him on news priorities, and also how he had mediated relations between private media owners (where he had worked briefly) and politicians (Nepal, 2070, B.S.), another situation conducive to media capture.

Media Concentration

Nepal's media environment has begun showing signs of concentration, a result of the lack of laws to regulate cross-media ownership. Government media are run by legally defined corporations and are more transparent in terms of both ownership and finances. Other media are privately run and therefore do not have the obligation to be transparent either in terms of ownership or finances. What is known is that the political actors, including those who also identify themselves as journalists, control both government and even private media (mainly local radio) as chairpersons or members of the board of directors. For example, even in the 21st century almost 40 to 60 percent of the supposedly independent radios were owned or controlled by political party operatives (Kharel, 2010; Thapa, 2012). Thapa (2012), a political party member and editor of a newspaper close to a communist party, even claimed that 80 of 250 community radios that were operational at the time had involvement of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist party) or UML. Similarly, he estimated that 60 radios were close to the Nepali Congress party, 35 to the Maoists, 30 to Madhesi parties and organizations, and 10 were undertakings of identity and religious organizations.

The high political content is another indication of the continued proximity of journalists/media with the political elite. The political stories generally originate in Kathmandu Valley – a reference to three contiguous cities, one of which hosts the federal capital – in the 25 major daily and weekly newspapers whose content was analyzed by Kharel (2010). This study also mentioned infiltration of media by secret services, particularly operatives using accreditation/ identification cards issued by the Department of Information, which according to Mungiu-Pippidi (2008) is one more indicator of media capture, particularly when most media are not financially viable. Such media survive on undisclosed (even secret) sponsorships. Historically, the dominant narrative of the media sector – particularly the weekly press – has been to demand financial support from government, which seldom comes without strings attached. This narrative remains unchanged even today.

Nepal's post-1990 media laws did not specify ownership provisions for multiple media that made it easy for companies already in one medium to expand horizontally. One large private media company, the Kantipur Media Group, owns radio, newspapers, and television. While both radio and newspapers (English and Nepali languages) are fully controlled by the same owners, television includes other shareholders who also have interests in telecoms, hydropower, and banking, among others, providing probable cause on their interest on media content relating to the sectors where they are invested. However, because all media in Nepal are private businesses and the information was legally protected it was not possible to obtain ownership information of media owners, including of other companies where they have interests. Media concentration in the case of government, is exemplified by its ownership of newspapers (English and Nepali), a news agency, and radio and television. The government funds these media and also appoints their directors and executives.

The Kantipur group of companies established successful broadsheet dailies in the 1990s and later added radio and television. Similarly, another private company, the Image Group, began with a television license and added radio to its holdings. Other media companies also have multiple publicly known interests, such as in radio, telecoms, cement, banking, and insurance in the case of the owners of Radio Thaha Sanchar; and television, newspapers, radio, and aviation, among others, in the case of the Annapurna Groupⁱⁱ.

Even smaller private radio stations have devised ways to aggregate content through networking and sharing arrangements. A private company, Ujyaalo Multimedia Network, claimed having over 200 stations in its content-sharing arrangement. Another private content sharing platform, Community Information Network, run by the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) included over 300 stations. Prat (2006) argued that diverse ownership can assist in tackling capture, which such content aggregation does not allow because all a capturer would need to do to influence news on networked radio would be to control the main content producer. Both the conglomeration and aggregation of private media have resulted because of the lack of adequate laws to regulate ownership and concentration. There were no laws on cross media ownership and networked content in 2023.

Mainali (2006) had traced the growth of the Kantipur group, where among other things, he argued that the connection of the owners with political and business elites, the bureaucracy and the security services had helped the company to extract disproportionate concessions for expanding radio. He concluded that coverage by media under the company was tilted to favor a faction of the then ruling party, the Nepali Congress, not because of its politics but to extract concessions in terms of policies towards construction, insurance, carpets, and the tourism industries – the other businesses where the owners had interests. One example he used was the silence

in Kantipur Group-owned media in the coverage of pollution and child labor in the carpet industry in Kathmandu. Another example, used to illustrate owner influence on content was the killing of a story on the crash of an aircraft operated by a major advertiser, by the newspaper's editor (Mainali, 2006).

A media environment with many journalists – the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) had about 14,000 members in 2020 – and generally low professional standards is susceptible to influences or being captured, particularly in a context where most media are not financially viable. In terms of the motive – public service, profit, or politics – one can argue that the political motive is particularly strong in Nepal's media, as indicated by journalist memberships in partisan associations that function as extensions of the political parties. This characteristic of media, one can argue, is a dominant indicator of media capture in Nepal, as such media are more likely to stray from their role of independently informing citizens.

2.3 Understanding Media Capture

Media Capture is not necessarily only an outcome of external influences. While Cárdenas et al. (2017) point towards the capturer, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi's definition of media capture takes the concept closer to the media:

By media capture, I mean a situation in which the *media has not succeeded in becoming autonomous* (emphasis added) to manifest a will of its own and to exercise its main function, notably of informing people, *but has persisted in an intermediate state* (emphasis added), whereas various groups, not just the government, use it for other purposes. (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2008, p. 91)

Such a media landscape is characterized by “concentrated, non-transparent ownership of media outlets, with important political actors controlling the media, a strong linkage between media and political elites, and important infiltration of the media by secret services” (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2008, p. 91). This definition provides many signs that could serve as predictors of capture, which eventually reflects in content.

Nielsen (2015) has explained capture as being a systemic governance problem that transforms into a “mutually corrupting relationship” of political leaders and media owners – one where media “provide supportive coverage in exchange for favorable government treatment of their business and political interests” (Finkel, 2015, p.1). In a captured situation, the media-generated profits are less important compared to being able to influence large audiences and being on the side of government because the profits would then come from elsewhere. The generally held notion is that the media exist independently to inform, educate, and entertain citizens. The independence is compromised after capture, because captured media provide privileged access to powerful interests – in government and businesses – who then influence decisions on what to publish, what not to, and how.

Even though one could argue that the interests of large corporate media already influence these decisions (Lichtenberg, 2004), capture adds a new, subtle dimension to the media-decision making processes. Herman-Chomsky’s Propaganda Model provides a basis to understand how the media industry structure and influences interact. Accordingly, “(T)he media are major corporations selling a product (audiences) to other corporations (advertisers), with close links to the broader corporate world and to government” (Klaehn et al., 2018, p.166). Further, Herman and Chomsky (1988) have argued that the main features of media (discussed above) influence both the character and assumptions of reporting and interpretation. This understanding is grounded in the idea of liberal media being a part of a political-economy and elite culture that are shaped by and shape the professional ideal in journalism. “The people, who manage, and are contracted to and employed by the media, tend to embrace and sustain the underlying rationales of the systems with which they are associated, whether or not these foreground the broader political-

economy or socio-culture” (Bromley, 2009, p. 27). This study has selected daily newspapers and texts to understand the influence of capture on media operations, primarily the domain of content production.

2.3.1 Capture by the Government

The government is a major source of media capture. Dragomir (2017) has explained how public funds were used to manipulate media in Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union, and the Persian Gulf region:

By financing media and journalists willing to toe the government line and by not funding independent, critical media, authorities manage to suppress large parts of the media sector. In some countries, the entire media industry is controlled by governments, directly or indirectly. (Dragomir, 2017, p. 2)

Governments use various tools to manipulate media content, including ownership of media outlets, laws and regulations, and physical attacks and threats against journalists or media owners, or through financial baits. Another approach – market disruption – is aimed at distorting how the market functions for destabilizing the finances of unsupportive or critical media or by funding compliant media. Market disruption methods are complex, and according to Dragomir (2017), they include specific policies and laws aimed at crippling media, state guarantees for loans to friendly media, decrees to underwrite debts of media, etc. The advertising tax introduced in Hungary in 2013 is one example of how media markets can be unsettled. The tax was targeted at disrupting the revenues of a television company and it had worked: its revenue declined by over Euro 230 million within a year.

Governments also extract desired content outcomes through different means including state handouts, non-transparent distribution of public advertising and even tax-

concessions in exchange for favorable treatment by media (Dragomir, 2017; Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008; Yanatma, 2016). The behaviors discussed above are not difficult to observe in emerging democracies and markets where media are unviable.

Tax Breaks for Media

There have been instances where tax waivers have been extended to certain media in Nepal. According to one report on www.mysansar.com, four media companies Avenues Television, Nepal Republic Media, Spacetime and Kamana Publications had received waivers of Rs. 15.1 million, Rs. 14.9 million, Rs. 168 million and Rs. 3.3 million, respectively. The article had listed other private companies that had also benefitted from waivers provided by the Tax Settlement Commission. The headline of the story in www.mysansar.com said the benefiting media had not opposed or were uncritical of the Commission's decision (Salokya, 2017). The use of advertising by government to influence media is a form of capture that remains to be studied in Nepal.

Another well-known example of government capture of media is that of Italy under Silvio Berlusconi as prime minister. The Berlusconi family controlled three of the country's top television channels before the public broadcaster also came under his dictates after he became prime minister. At the time, the family's media interests and the public broadcaster controlled roughly 90 percent of the national audience and the advertising revenue (Pavli, 2010). The situation in Italy was also a case of media concentration and misuse of state power to silence non-friendly media through targeted legislations, and of disregard for rule of law and court decisions against media concentration. Prat (2016) differentiates the latter from media capture, preferring to call it media power, as it was a case of media exercising power. Either way, the content of media was tailored to suit the interests of those in power.

2.3.2 Cognitive Capture

According to Stiglitz (2017), the use of the term capture increased after the financial crisis of 2008, when it was used to explain how regulators had failed in their oversight of financial institutions that they were supposed to have been watching over. He used the same idea to explain media capture. Accordingly, media capture takes place when one or more of the parties that the media are supposed to be watching over as sentinels of society captures or makes the media hostage, so that they fail to perform their societal function (Stiglitz, 2017). He added that capture takes place through “(a) ownership, (b) financial incentives, (c) censorship and (d) cognitive capture” and singled out cognitive capture as being “the most subtle” and the most difficult form of capture to prove. This capture of the mind relates to how an individual perceives self in society and how those perceptions could influence the person’s work as a journalist:

Rather than being the ‘fourth estate’, set apart from the rest of society to provide the checks and balances necessary to make society function well, the media are embedded within society, and are little more than a reflection of the views widely shared within it. Indeed, they can become part of the echo chamber that amplifies and solidifies conventional wisdom. (Stiglitz, 2017, p. 14)

Cognitive capture is difficult to discern and therefore its impact can be very detrimental on media audiences. In the case of newspapers, the readers can generally guard themselves against the obvious forms of capture, such as those associated with ownership or partisanship, and would also know how to read the texts to derive meanings. It can be argued that readers of weekly newspapers in Nepal already had

this knowledge about how to read a particular paper (Aryal, 2016), something they had cultivated over the years. However, as Stiglitz (2017) argued, cognitive capture and its insidious effects can be extremely difficult to recognize.

This idea is similar to “cultural capture” which takes place when, “as if by osmosis, the objectives, interests, and perception of reality of the vested interest” (Kwak, 2013, p. 78) is assimilated by those supposed to watch against that.

In journalism this would be a situation where journalists (in their role as regulators on behalf of society) reporting politics share the objectives of those they report about (politicians and parties). It is easier to understand cultural capture where journalists have partisan loyalties and are members of partisan associations, as is the case in Nepal.

2.3.3 Ownership Concentration

Various scholars have singled out ownership concentration as a situation that could make media vulnerable to capture. Generally, ownership of media around the world has been grouped under three types – family owned, state owned, political party owned (Djankov et al., 2003). The ownership stakes could differ even within family-owned units as higher shareholding translates into larger say, and sometimes there could be overlaps between family ownership of media and the state – say, like the earlier example on Italy.

State ownership could differ from country to country. At one end of continuum is the British Broadcasting System (BBC) that is said to be the best example of public service broadcasting, despite being a state entity, at the other extreme are states with authoritarian governments such as Myanmar (Djankov et al., 2003). In Myanmar the government controlled the largest television station, and the military, the second largest station. State media ownership in Nepal is closer to the

Myanmar example, where all state media are units under the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MOCIT), with government-appointed board members and editors who are shuffled at the whim of the ruling party and sometimes that of the concerned ministers. The most recent example being one that took place in July 2020 (Rai, 2020).

Governments use various means to control media, including subsidies, advertising, and direct regulations. One example of direct control is in China where, all media, “a newspaper, a magazine, or a television, and even a news website, has an equivalent level as does a government agency. So, the chiefs and senior editors... are usually government officials instead of professionals” (Li, 2013, p. 302). Li added that the media there are state owned, and private participation even in advertising and circulation businesses is limited to 49 percent. There are other ways through which governments directly influence media. For example, in Nepal, the early F.M. radio license holders were barred from broadcasting news, while also being required to mandatorily carry the morning newscast of the state broadcaster (Bhattarai & Ojha, 2010; Mainali, 2006).

Media concentration relates to control of the information resources. Noam (2016) has argued that concentration is driven by basic seven economic factors beyond the personal (politics or ambition) and the factor relevant to, say, a newspaper is, the “high and growing fixed costs, low and declining marginal costs” or “Media content is typically expensive to produce but cheap to reproduce” (Noam, 2016, p. 10). This fixed cost when distributed across various media units can bring the average costs down, because production resources are shared. Another reason for concentration would be to spread the risks. However, the personal and political are also important considerations depending on the society where the media in question is located (Noam, 2016).

Concentration is a product of objectives, which according to Noam (2017), is specific to the context where the media is located. The objectives driving concentration differ in different stages: “are politics-driven in the first stage, synergies-driven in the second stage, and investment-model driven in the third stage” (Noam, 2017, p.2). By this argument, one can say that media in developed countries have moved beyond being political “mouthpieces” (of the politics-driven stage), while those in developing countries could still be wading through that stage. The findings were based on data on media assets of companies with interests across 26 countries. “The worst stage seems to be the second one, in which industrial empire builders increasingly control media with the rationalization of pursuing business synergies, while in reality a major driver is an incestuous relation with the government in power” (p. 15). The assumption, thus, that this relation, though difficult to discern can be postulated based on coverage of government by particular media.

The 21st century is one where there is one more player in the media ecosystem. The Internet was expected to create information alternatives by making more content available and by diversifying media to reduce the threat of capture. However, as (Atal, 2017a) discovered through case studies in India and South Africa, that had not been the case. She argued that even Internet platforms could be captured by the rich and the political elites: “Because ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ media technologies have emerged simultaneously in many developing democracies, these forms of capture do not replace one another, but combine and compete” (Atal, 2017a, pp. 19-20). Arguably, therefore, it could be a similar situation in Nepal, where both democratic and media development have been slow.

The argument supporting the statement is that even though established democracies have laws, rules, regulations, and societal norms that define the role of independent media, they face challenges of managing and regulating media

monopolies alongside the digital transition. She said, “in countries where independent print and broadcast media are still consolidating, ... and where societal norms and practices are less well entrenched, the challenge (to prevent capture) is even greater” (Atal, 2017a, p. 21). Nepal – where democracy has for all purposes been a work-in-progress since 1990 – lacks adequate social practices needed to steer media towards impartial accurate coverage which has, arguably, made it more vulnerable to capture.

The Internet has changed media like no technology had done before. Even though it has made it possible for any organization to function as a mass medium with control over content, this does not automatically negate the possibility of capture. This is because Internet has also made it easier for various interests to buy or start news organizations and use them in the pursuit of power. How that takes place depends on the context in different countries (Nielsen, 2017) this is influenced by:

(1) How politically and socially important are news media seen to be?; (2)

What alternative means are available to political actors and others pursuing

power?; (3) Do political actors and their allies have the resources to invest in

news media?; and (4) Are there any regulatory or other constraints on media

ownership and the like? (p. 39)

Ceteris paribus, Nielsen argued that the Internet was lowering the barriers to political “re (entry)” and could result in the opposite of economists’ expectations that more competition could reduce capture. Nielsen used an observation of journalist Amir Teig from *Haaretz* who had suggested that the Israeli newspaper business was “no longer a ‘profit-oriented industry’ but an ‘influence-oriented industry’” (Nielsen, 2017, p. 40). Such signs were also observed in India. There the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is said to have delegitimized existing media and created its own platforms for communicating with voters and citizens (Ninan, 2019). According to

Ninan, a number of television channels – “Zee News, India TV, Republic TV, Times Now, among others” – had turned openly partisan under the first tenure of the BJP (in its second at the time of writing). Media capture could explain what led to the turnaround.

The observations and arguments in the preceding paragraphs apply to the Nepali situation because both institutionalization of the democratic transition as well as the transformations taking place in media policies and laws under the new federal set up were works-in-progress in 2023. Nepal also has different types of media, including Internet-enabled media, while the industry has not been able to completely sever its relations with its partisan past. Nepal’s politicians also had no alternatives to newspapers for communication with the masses until the second decade of the 21st century, and that had made traditional media important both politically and socially. This, however, began changing with the arrival on online news portals that now outnumber newspapers, some of which are said to be financed by political and business interests.

2.3.4 Advertising and Capture

Advertisements began changing the liberal media after the 1950s. According to Petrova (2011), most American newspapers were affiliated either with the Republican or Democratic parties until the mid-1800s, and the partisanship also had benefits: (it) “included direct and indirect subsidies from political parties and better access to some kinds of information. The costs consisted of restrictions on the content..., and lack of control” (Petrova, 2011, p. 793). The affiliated papers were controlled by party officials – which has some parallels in Nepal – while the independent newspapers in the U.S. were controlled by editors and owners. The financial resources that advertising brought to newspapers eventually freed them from reliance on political financing, but the advertisers also came with power of their own – money – which, remains a major influence on media.

Nepal does not have publicly available data on media reach and use to measure effectiveness of both advertising and advertiser influence. This has made it difficult to analyze the flow of public advertising to explore its possible use to buy influence and to punish unsupportive media. Further, various laws and regulations in Nepal require State agencies to publish public notices as advertisements in “national daily newspapers”, one example of which is Rule 15 of the share issue regulation issued by the Securities Board of Nepal (*Dhitopatra darta tatha niskasan niyamawali, 2073 B.S.*) [Share Registration and Issue Regulation, 2016]. Such rules, in the absence of both publicly available audited circulation data and fixed criteria to determine what is truly a national newspaper, provide room for discretion – and capture.

Nepal introduced a law to regulate advertising on 25 October 2019, which among other things has a provision requiring all government advertising to be done through an Advertising Board (Section 32), which will give the government greater control on the total advertising budget and, upon implementation, place it in a stronger position to influence disbursements (Act (to Regulate) Advertising, 2076) and also to capture media.

Atal (2017b) had studied the economic and cultural powers of advertisers in media covering businesses and concluded that “new forms of advertising, where branded content is presented alongside, and intended to mimic reported content, increase the threat of advertiser capture” (Atal, 2017b, p. 1). Other scholars have studied the power that corporations can exert to influence media through advertising (Bagdikian, 2004; Herman & Chomsky, 1988), which is often enforced on media through advertising companies. Atal’s study (2017b) aimed at understanding how advertising impacted editorial decision-making of reporters based on interviews and financial analysis at six (two online startups and four legacy media) newsrooms in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Liberal journalism imagines a wall-equivalent separating the news and business sections to insulate content from advertiser influence. But, according to Atal (2017b), this changed after the arrival of Internet-enabled sites that provided advertisers with more choices not just in terms of media, but also for audience segregation and product branding within news content. Atal found “practices that compromise[d] the divide between news and advertising staff” (p.1) which explained why investigative business coverage had declined in the legacy outlets. For online startups the new advertising formats (such as native advertising) were always part of the business strategy.

Business Journalism and Capture

Business journalism relies on corporations for both advertising and information. This can serve a tool for businesses to operationalize capture – through threats to stop advertising for critical coverage or by not entertaining interview requests of critical media. Further, reporters rely on businessmen and women as sources, and this also makes them vulnerable to source manipulation, particularly when journalists become too friendly with their sources. Overtime, many journalists become reliant on the same business sources because of the compulsion to keep producing stories (Kwak, 2013). This power to provide or restrict access to information that businesses hold makes it difficult for journalists who do not rely only on information-handouts to do independent reporting. This relationship also raises a fundamental question: do such journalists report in the public interest or in the interest of business? Atal (2017b) has argued this was a situation where interests of reporters were uniquely conflicted because the businesses they reported about also advertised in their media. She added, “This conflict of interest makes business journalism structurally distinct from the rest of the industry, and most at risk in an advertiser-captured world”. (p. 2)

Media today compete with the new Internet-based platforms for advertising where ensuring a steady revenue flow requires them to focus on volume with lower margins. Digital media offer advertisers something print advertising cannot – interactivity – and this has required print publications to find new formats to attract advertisers, such as branding of specific content and native advertising. Form of such advertising observed in Nepal include jacketing newspapers with advertised products/brands, placing company press statement-based stories on the advertised products in the business news pages with company logos within related news content. Some statements made by Atal’s editor-respondents (below) show the depth of advertising influence on business news production:

We write more now about things that get interest, like consumer-oriented topics’ (Editor). Everything we do is overseen by the search-engine optimization team – we don’t launch anything without them.’ (Business editor). We have a circulation department in the newsroom now.’ (Editor). You as a reporter can promote [a story] yourself.’ (Business editor).

We now tell them [the sales staff] what stories we are planning, for them to sell advertising against it. (Business editor) (Atal, 2018, p. 8)

The conclusion was:

The emerging consumer-oriented, non-confrontational relationship with brands and corporate power among reporters and editors sustains support for branded content partnerships and prevents investigative story ideas from arising. In this way, economic and cultural forms of advertiser power combine to produce advertiser capture. (Atal, 2017b, p. 15)

Data on the size of Nepal’s advertising market is unavailable, but an industry estimate puts it at around Rs.8-8.5 billion, including Rs.700-800 million that is paid

overseas illegally (Mishra, 2020). Others have estimated this to be as high as Rs. 14 billion (Dhital, 2022), which is small, given the size of Gross Domestic Product which was Rs. 3 trillion 209 billion in 2020 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Further, Schiffrin has observed that many traditional media outlets have either overlooked or readjusted their editorial standards to accommodate the new financial arrangements with advertisers. The growth of native advertising, and the erosion of the imaginary wall between the editorial and advertising, have made it harder for the media to act as watchdogs for covering big business critically (Schiffrin, 2017a). Advertising, by both government and private businesses, is therefore integral to the study of media capture.

Government as Advertiser

Governments and other social organizations also advertise and when they do, they possess the same power as other advertisers. What is of more interest is the government's role as advertiser because it also has the power to make policies and laws to regulate media. The media capture paradigm holds that governments use advertising – alongside other direct and indirect measures – to influence media, which this research attempts to explore.

In Nepal, the government has both regular advertisements – bids and tenders, public notices – and advertising done under the name “public service announcements/ advertisements” (PSAs). The PSAs were introduced in 1959, mainly as a support mechanism for partisan newspapers that had served the politicians of the day – a form of a return favor. The PSA budget has increased over the years and the fund has been used to support media for making announcements to supposedly benefit the general public (Maharjan, 2014). According to Maharjan, the budget for PSA in fiscal year (FY) 2014/15 was Rs. 161.6 million. Such advertising had been recommended by the

1958 Press Commission that saw it as a possible way to support newspapers. This policy changed in 1978 when the government introduced subsidies on newsprint purchase, which continued until 2001, when it was again replaced by the PSAs. The payments received by newspapers vary based on annual classifications done by the Press Council Nepal (PCN) on criteria that include, “continuity, circulation, distribution area, language, content, the use of photo, quality of design, and professionalism” (Maharjan, 2014).

The PCN is a government-appointed body with a fixed tenure. Little can be said on the independence and fairness of appointments because the process is not advertised nor transparent. The PCN’s classification – has been contested by newspapers almost every year – is a requirement for receiving public advertising but and the details on the scores are not available for public scrutiny.

The points secured by newspapers are said to be based on a marking scheme detailed in the PCN classification regulation, which however appears to be both ad-hoc and subjective. For example, according to Rule 8 of the regulation, a newspaper with over 20,000 circulation and 85 or higher score in the classification will be considered as being in category “*Ka*” (or “A”), with little explanation for this cut-off number. The same rule adds that newspapers not included in classification will not qualify for any advertising paid from the government treasury (Press Council Nepal, 2066 B.S.) [2018]. Another ad-hoc stricture is the minimum number of issues that newspapers are required to publish, by the Press and Publication Regulation Rule 7 (2), for being considered in the classification. It is 300 for dailies (against 365 days in a year) and 40 for weeklies (against 52 weeks in a year). Further, even though the classification includes both objective and subjective criteria, but some otherwise objective criteria have been adjusted, without explanation, as evident in the following example.

Criteria for seeking classification under national category ‘*Ka*’ includes, having sales and distribution in a minimum of 31 (of Nepal’s 77 districts) and covering all seven provinces; must have published news (sic) representing geographical, race-related, gender, social diversity, and pluralism; and must have implemented the Working Journalists Act; among others (Press Council Nepal, 2066 B.S.). Given that distribution in 31 districts is enough to be considered “national”, what this suggests is that the term has been used more for convenience rather than its true meaning. The second requirement (above) is a deep dive in content, which is difficult to measure objectively. The third requirement is a separate law that the PCN has been trying to enforce through regulation. However, the classification results seldom report on how well the classified media met the stipulations. While the PCN does award points for ethical conduct during classification, there were no clear criteria indicating how that was measured.

The use of PSAs to punish non-complying newspapers was evidenced in 2005, when following the takeover by King Gyanendra, PSAs were discontinued in some weekly newspapers which had left their editorial spaces blank in protest against the royal coup (Bhattarai, 2006). One can argue that the operationalization of the Advertising Board (discussed earlier) will bring all government advertising under one umbrella and give the government more financial muscle to influence media revenues – and content.

A study of advertising in Nepal requires examination of other benefits that newspapers and journalists also obtain including cash handouts, sponsorships, advertising as payback (not market driven or based on publicly available audience surveys), even bribes and other benefits. This applies more to business journalism in

Nepal, because the association of journalists reporting business is said to have partnership agreements with major industries and business organizations, where they have committed to support each other. As one example of the support, in 2017, a life insurance company agreed to provide life insurance coverage to 254 members of one association of business reporters and editors. Two newspapers had reported the arrangement as being a part of the company's corporate social responsibility. The story said, "Sejon members will get Smart Life Insurance worth Rs. 250,000, accidental insurance coverage worth Rs. 250,000 and total permanent disability insurance worth Rs. 250,000 for a year without paying any premium fee," (My Republica, 2017, 6 May, para 2). Similar text had appeared in another news paper's online story a day before, suggesting it had originated from the same PR statement (Himalayan News Service, 2017, 5 May).

In October 2013 the government began a scheme of providing partial premium payments for journalists' insurance at the recommendation of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ). According to Bhattarai (2017), the insurance scheme provides coverage of Rs.500,000 upon death and disability caused by accidents, and medical coverage of Rs. 200,000. The insured or his or her media company provides 25 percent of the premium. This scheme, however, is not available to journalists at media which do not receive public welfare advertisements (PWAs), and also discriminates against other journalists, as evident in the self-payment rate. The advertising scheme is a sort of sanction for independent journalists and media who do not sign up for or qualify for PWAs. The insurance scheme covered over 3,500 journalists in end-July 2020. Such measures involve a cost, which one can argue, justify as cost of doing business the expectation of payback through favorable coverage.

2.4 Other Forms of Capture

The forms of capture are contextual, but the reason for capturing media is usually the same: for influencing content and controlling the narrative. As Relly and Zanger (2017) discovered, even philanthropies could capture media they support in emerging democracies. In other words, funding of any type can threaten newsroom independence, because while some donors may provide untied support, others could provide support for reporting on topics in their interest.

The “biggest problem” the respondent-journalists in their study had identified was the connections of heads of media organizations with political parties, and their attempts to advance their interests through media (Relly & Zanger, 2017). Such capture, one resulting from partisanship, relates to the worldview of the journalists themselves and cannot be excluded as an influence, particularly in developing democracies. Similar findings were reported by (Bhattarai & Mainali, 2014) where respondents in their study on self-censorship said political affiliations of owners or editors caused them to tone down some content or drop certain stories or photographs on instances when the reports could have depicted specific parties or party-affiliated organizations negatively. In many cases it was senior journalists in the same news organizations who encouraged the softening, even killing, of content.

2.4.1 Media Capture Typologies

Scholars have studied different media capture-like tendencies in different contexts and historical periods. Bignon & Flandreau (2014) studied media capture in relation to the debasement of French newspapers between World War I and II, when there was “(a) cartel agreement between incumbent newspapers (owned and controlled by incumbent politicians) who limited entry (of new newspapers) during the Interwar and thus the supply of substitutes, facilitating capture” (Bignon &

Flandreau, 2014, p. 800). The conclusion was derived using stock exchange data to examine the value of media capture. The empirical and analytical study of Interwar French newspapers explains how newspapers were misused for private interests – not public interests:

A newspaper allows its owner access to politicians. It also secures and protects privileges and positions, ... and rewards clients through eulogy. These activities give rise to benefits which are both pecuniary and non-pecuniary and both tend to be absent from the balance sheet. Such benefits are acquired at the expense of three groups of stakeholders: minority shareholders, readers, and journalists. Readers get misleading news. This lowers the reputation of the newspaper, which is bad for journalists, and also for junior (non-voting, or minority) shareholders, because readers react by lowering demand and/or willingness to pay. (Bignon & Flandreau, 2014, p. 805)

The benefits derived by media owners was the value derived from promoting their political views, using media for lobbying, and for supporting partner industries. They concluded that “The temptation to debase newspapers for personal gain is fundamental” (p. 826), which is something that could apply to all media owners (and also explains their willingness to be captured).

A dossier has discussed different ways in which governments have captured media, using examples from Europe (Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, 2019). Another scholar, Dragomir (2019), has traced the origin of media capture in Eastern Europe to the late-2000s, or in the wake of the disruptions caused by the global financial crisis. He has argued that the context was conducive for capture for two reasons. One was the dipping market value of major news organizations, presumably owing to poor journalism content that had made them cheaper to purchase by preying oligarchs or governments. Another reason was that financially weaker

media were easier for governments to influence. This caused foreign investors in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria to leave in large numbers rather than stay back and compete with government-supported local media. The vacuum left by foreign-owners was filled by individuals closely linked with political parties and interest groups, or politicians themselves, with media funded through loans from state-controlled banks or capital from non-transparent sources (Dragomir, 2019). In the case of Nepal, there were no major private investors in media before 1990 and therefore it was an open field for entrepreneurs who could see the “other” benefits of media ownership, given that there were no laws on ownership and concentration.

Another study has explained media capture in Ukraine as being a result of the highly concentrated, non-transparent, media ownership, and the involvement of media owners in politics (Ryabinska, 2014). Capture in Ukraine is a match with the textbook model if there was one. The media owners there had other industries, which were the primary sources of income and profits while media were secondary. Their profits from other businesses depended on political decisions, which was why the media owners preferred cooperation with government rather than holding it to account. The preferred ways to produce content desired by government included in-house censorship, hiring editors who would comply, and firing those that stood by journalistic principles. The journalists and editors were replaced to match “each new political constellation” (Ryabinska, 2014, p. 57). The methods of capturing content discussed above have some parallels in Nepal, particularly if one is to consider the alleged political affiliations of media owners and journalists with political parties.

In the case of Turkey, media capture there “describe[d] the tension between media as a public good and media as an economic and political actor co-opted into the processes it is meant to observe” (Finkel, 2015, p. 4). According to Finkel,

... a corrupted press has already solved the problem of balancing the books by running media as a loss leader—using the influence that press ownership brings to secure any number of government favors including government tenders, incentives, favorable changes in land zoning, and advertising from government agencies or state-controlled enterprises. (p. 20)

The outcome was one where the independent or uncaptured media faced difficulties to remain in the business.

Media capture is not unique to Europe, however. Various scholars have studied the of capture in countries such as Thailand, Japan, Mexico, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Bangladesh. One study in Hong Kong has discussed “how news media can be quietly and unofficially captured via a convergence of interests between business and government” (Frisch et al., 2018, p. 1166). This study had interviewed with 34 journalists at traditional media and concluded that the capture stemmed from ownership of assets in China by media owners, which had made them more likely to succumb to pressures to maintain an editorial line that matched Beijing’s desires, which was what they needed to prosper. In 2016, about 31 percent of the Hong Kong media were owned by corporations from the Chinese mainland. Another form of capture was picking the “right” editors. “An owner of a news media outlet picks its editors and other key personnel and, as a result, shifts in ownership often lead to changes in editorial personnel and direction” (p. 1174). The cumulative effect of capture first through ownership then editorial policy had caused the media there to stray from liberal journalism values.

In 2018, Milosavljević and Poler (2018) studied how public service broadcasters (PSBs) in the Western Balkans had been captured and explained the underlying reasons. They concluded that capture which began with the political

changes in the 1980s had resulted “in the capture of public media by governments, and political instrumentalization of private news outlets by political parties”

(Milosavljević & Poler, 2018, p. 2). They added,

Attempts to transfer the habits and procedures of public service television channels to the Western Balkans repeatedly ran up against political and state capture, and commercialization. PSBs failed to provide impartial news and quality programming and, instead, were used for political purposes or commercialized. (p. 3)

The content of the captured PSBs was biased, and lacked editorial independence, neglected public interest content and focused on entertainment, while the news programs had become shorter and less investigative.

Another scholar has argued that media were captured not just for influencing public opinion and electoral behavior but for “party colonization” – a term used to refer to party control of state media not just for managing public opinion, but to extract state resources (Bajomi-Lazar, 2015). He has observed that,

The composition of the boards of regulatory authorities and of the public service media – the key targets of party colonization – is often a direct reflection of the political power structure, which has also enabled parties to exert informal pressures on the operation of these institutions. (p. 230)

There are parallels in Nepal in terms of how political parties in government have targeted the boards of state-run media and regulatory agencies for appointing people close to the party or their leaders. By the argument above, one can assume that there could be more than one purpose for such appointments – 1) to influence public opinion through content, and 2) to capture the resources at the agencies for the parties. Unlike central and eastern European countries, in Nepal the audiences of state media

have generally been lower than private media other than that for news on government-run Nepal Television (Acharya & Chapagain, 2019), therefore, capturing public opinion could apply only to television.

In Hungary researchers have established that advertising favors from the government to media resulted in coverage favors to government in terms of corruption reporting (Szeidl & Szucs, 2021). Overall, their results were consistent with qualitative evidence suggesting that government advertising affects media content. The term favor may apply particularly when advertising spend by government on a particular media is not justified by its audiences and market logic, something that is difficult to measure in Nepal owing to lack of government advertising data, or any advertising data for that matter.

A similar outcome was demonstrated by di Tella and Franceschelli (2011) in Argentina. They found a direct relationship between advertising by government and reporting of corruption stories by newspapers where the advertisements had appeared. Their study investigated how four newspapers in Argentina covered corruption scandals in which the government was accused during 1998–2007 and reported, a negative correlation between the front-page space devoted to coverage of corruption scandals and the amount of advertisement money paid to the newspaper each month” ... “a one standard deviation increase in government advertisement (was) associated with a reduction in coverage of corruption scandals by 0.31 of a cover per month. (di Tella & Franceschelli, 2011, p. 2)

Overall, the study found that the newspapers did not face high financial losses in the exchange because biased reporting (by newspapers) was compensated by government monetary transfers.

2.4.2 Economic Models on Capture

The term “capture” originated in economic scholarship. According to Schiffrin (2017), the term “media capture” was first used by economists Timothy Besley and Andrea Prat who developed a model of democratic politics showing governments could control media and “influence news by maintaining a cozy relationship with media” (Besley & Prat, 2006, p. 720). They established “a link between observable features of the media industry (concentration and ownership) and observable political outcomes (capture, corruption and turnover)” (p. 722) and argued that formal freedoms – in policies and laws – alone were not enough to ensure a free media. Three other conclusions were: (1) “Media pluralism provides effective protection against capture” (2) Independent ownership reduces capture”, and “Media capture affects political outcomes” (p. 721). They concluded that diverse players in the media industry resulted in lower levels of capture. The studies by both Besley and Prat, and Corneo (2006) have suggested that captured media can influence collective (voter) decisions based on the influenced information the media carry after capture.

The thesis about the inadequacy of formal safeguards to insulate free media from political interference became evident in Nepal following the takeover by King Gyanendra, who had introduced new rules to control media while the 1990 constitutional provisions also remained in place. The controls were enforced through state power until they were eventually reversed by the Supreme Court (Bhattarai, 2005). It was a case of direct capture.

Another author has explained how the rich could influence content of a media company at a price. She demonstrated that higher inequality and higher accessibility of media are associated with lower media freedom; but higher number of media outlets and higher accessibility of an alternative source of information, that cannot be subverted, lead to greater media freedom (Petrova, 2008a, 2008b). The findings

confirmed that of Besley and Prat (2006) who had argued that more access to media – and more diverse outlets – led to greater media freedoms but this depended on how strong the country’s democratic institutions were. She analyzed the effects of the economic environment and conditions that facilitated media capture and concluded that “higher inequality in the economy increases the willingness of the rich to spend money on influencing the media” (Petrova, 2008a, p. 184). Income inequality provides one more basis for assuming media capture in Nepal. A 2019 report said in 2010/11 Nepal’s Gini coefficient was 49.42, reflecting high disparities in the preceding 15 years. It added that “the income of the richest 10 percent of Nepalis is more than three times that of the poorest 40 percent” (Khanal et al., 2019, p. 7). Another account on inequality said it was 0.33 in 2010/11 (Measured using the Gini Index that ranges from values of 0 to 1, where 0 is a situation of equality in terms of incomes in a society and 1, perfect inequality, or a situation where all income belongs to one individual) (Tiwari & Uematsu, 2016). The high-income inequality in Nepal provides one more reason to study media capture, which is the purpose of this research.

Media capture is different from media power, which according to Prat (2016) is a situation where “politically driven media organizations use reporting strategically to manipulate electoral outcomes” (p. 669). Media capture works differently:

The government attempts to induce media outlets to suppress potentially damaging news. Capture arises when this attempt is successful. Two factors make capture harder: media plurality and transaction costs between the government and the media. Media plurality—namely the existence of a large number of independently owned outlets—raises the incentive for an individual outlet to publish information that voters find interesting and hence makes it more difficult for the politician to suppress a scandal. Transaction costs—akin

to the checks and balances mentioned above— reduce the government’s ability to reward favorable media sources and punish critical ones. (Prat, 2016, p. 672)

In Nepal, examples of media biasing content were evident during protests by Maoist labor unions against major newspapers, and in another instance following media reports on “sub-standard” fruit juices sold by an Indian multinational. In the latter case, content was biased either in support or against the position of the Indian Embassy, which the media accused of controlling advertising by Indian companies based in Nepal to influence media content (Prajapati, 2012).

A March 2020 paper has looked at different ways a “principal” or the capturer “can either influence journalistic investigation (internal capture) or let the media investigate and pay to suppress news stories at the publication stage (external capture)” (Louis-Sidois & Mougin, 2020, p. 1) . The capturer could be anyone – the government, interest group or a company, and the approach to capture could differ depending on how and where it takes place through media ownership, bribes to journalists or physical violence. The paper has explained both theoretically and empirically the different forms of capture resulting from the structure of the media market and the institutional and legal environment” (Louis-Sidois & Mougin, 2020) and distinguishes between the different strategies of capture:

On one side of the spectrum, media ownership gives the principal total control of the agenda. This strategy is preventive as it implies an *ex-ante* transfer from the principal to the media. We call this strategy *internal capture*. Instead, the principal can refrain from setting the agenda and propose an *ex-post* payment after the investigation process, typically a bribe, in exchange for the suppression of negative news stories. We refer to this reactive option as *external capture*. (p. 2)

This distinction between internal and external capture provides one more way to understand the paradigm. The internal aspect relates to the influence of media owners who prevent journalists from investigating sensitive topics, while external capture involves offers made by those in the stories investigated to influence (block, tone down, etc.) publication or broadcast the resulting content. Understanding internal capture requires one to understand media sociology to locate where various influences interact with the content production processes.

This study has been informed by the findings of economists (Besley & Prat, 2006; Corneo, 2006; di Tella & Franceschelli, 2011; Petrova, 2008b), while attempting to understand how media capture manifests in Nepali newspapers. Variables such as suppression of information or under-reporting, selection of specific angles, partisan/biased coverage, etc. are generally indicative of the captured situation.

2.4.3 Critical Approaches to Examining Media Capture

The media and newspapers as part of the communication industry are unique because their products are different compared to other consumables. The communication industry plays a “central double role in modern societies, as industries in their own right and as the major site of representations and arenas of debate through which the overall system is imagined and argued over” (Wasko et al., 2011, p.2). A critical political economy lens can, therefore, provide two approaches for examining media capture – holistically, through analysis of economic practice, society, and political organization – and historically, rather than focusing only on immediate – often disjointed – events to explain contemporary trends. This critical political economy approach:

...in contrast to economics that severed its historic links with moral philosophy in an effort to present itself as an objective science, ... continues to be centrally concerned with the relations between the organization of culture and communications and the constitution of the good society grounded in social justice and democratic practice. (Wasko et al, 2011, p. 2)

Arguably, therefore, an economics-only approach may not be sufficient to understand media capture, because it also requires an understanding of histories influencing and shaping media organizations. One such influence is capitalism which today has become almost universal, and the other is politics, which shapes both media and societies. Ownership concentration in media has been examined through the political economy lens since the 1940s, starting with the Hutchins Commission Report (1947), which among others, described the oligopolistic nature of the industry where the market is shared by a few producers, serving large audiences with their outputs. This structure concentrates power, bars or constrains competition and silences the opinions of others who do not own the press – or a situation similar to one described by A. J. Liebling that the freedom of the press belongs to someone who owns one (in Downing, 2011). This ownership is the source of power for media owners.

A critical political economy approach is relevant for studying media capture because it allows deeper understanding of how news is communicated within the economic system, in the context of both culture and history. For this, “the economy of communication is understood as the pivotal linking mechanism that simultaneously engineers consumption to match production and reproduces the ideological system that supports the prevailing status quo” (Faraone, 2011, p. 189). This economics of communication has to be studied from two different angles: “as a sector of the total economy, and for its linking function in the production, circulation, and consumption of goods and services and its strategic symbolic role in maintaining and perpetuating

political and economic control” (p. 189). As mass communication products, newspapers produce information at centralized sites for dissemination to large audiences who do not participate in production. It is a case where a few senders are sending messages to large numbers of receivers with little or no feedback (Gray & Rodman, 2006; Poe, 2011). This monologic nature of the industry makes the newspaper a vehicle that can speak to large audiences without having to listen to them. In a captured state, this power of media/newspapers is taken over by the capturer.

Herman and Chomsky discussed how the news production arrangement affected content, suggesting that media use five filters to produce a distorted reality to serve the interests of the ruling elite (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The filters have been discussed variously in literature on media capture and political economy analysis of media, where anticommunism, was understood as the commonsense belief (ideology) of American media at the time. The ideological equivalent today could be the “war against terror” (Lichter, 2014, p. 5). Such ideological shifts among media/journalists can influence news production, and the “common sense” can vary from context to context. New democracies with evolving media systems, could manufacture their own ideologies for filtering news – such as “prosperity”, “infrastructure development”, “nationalism”, and “national interest” that rulers often use to justify decisions, and/or to censure critical media.

Herman and Chomsky’s “flak” can be equated with the strong censure of media originating typically from power centers (often disseminated through Internet platforms), which has among other things, continued to erode public perceptions about the role of media in ensuring accountability in democracies. According to Downing (2011) the distinctive aspects of the Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda

model are its proposition that all the filters interrelate and include both the ideological vectors (flak and anticommunism), as well as political economic and structural dimensions (ownership, advertising and sourcing) (Downing, 2011). The Herman and Chomsky model provides structural insights in the news production process, the ideological underpinnings of news, and the censure that results when mainstream media “deviate” from the established line. These points of influence in the production process correspond with those in media capture, and therefore, the need to adopt a political economy approach to understanding capture.

Habermas (1991) discussed how journalism began to change from straightforward reporting of events to include ideologies and viewpoints after the introduction of the editorial function, which he said, transformed the publisher “from a merchant of news to a dealer in public opinion” (p.182) [Translated by Lawrence, Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick]. The transformation in the role of owner/ publisher has to be understood in terms of how media businesses have changed and are now structured; the sizes of markets and audiences they serve, and also in terms of other economic units or businesses run by the media owners. More changes were brought about by advertising, which made the newspaper “marketable” (p.183). According to Habermas (1991), “The history of the big daily papers in the second half of the nineteenth century proves that the press itself became manipulatable to the extent that it became commercialized”. (p. 185)

Under the liberal model of the public sphere, public institutions engaged in rational and critical debate were protected from interference by public authorities because they were run by private people (Habermas, 1991). The owners and publishers controlled the debate in media and with commercialization and ownership

concentration, they emerged as powerful gatekeepers. This put them in positions from where they could peddle favorable content in return for policy favors from politicians, which is another form of media capture.

Media capture is operationalized by both external and internal factors and can be studied at different stages of content production and dissemination. Even though it may not be possible to demonstrate cause-and-effect type of relations among actors involved (political parties, government, and advertisers), capture can be explained using circumstantial evidence.

The Propaganda Model, therefore, has been used as a framework to understand media operations and to explain how they could be influenced through use of political and economic power. According to Klaehn, Pedro-Carañana, et al. (2018), the propaganda model's perspective matches the Marxian analysis of media being a part of the capitalist system and the associated profit maximization and capital accumulation and becoming more and more oligopolistic. The propaganda in Western systems is different from that in communist states because in the latter, government power is used to directly control the media.

The media capture paradigm provides that opportunity as it points the lens beyond the glitz and glamour of journalism into the dark depths of non-transparent payouts and patronage which make media tools for those in power to maintain the status quo. This is a result of the “contradiction between a for-profit, highly concentrated, advertising-saturated, corporate media system and the communication requirements of a democratic society” (McChesney, 1999, p. xi), where media conveniently avoid critical investigations of powerful commercial interests, which:

... makes very good economic sense, as the local powers are often major advertisers. It makes sense politically and socially too, as the media owners

and managers run in the same circles as the major shareholders and executives of the local corporate powerhouses. ... Another long-term problem of the system is the commercial media's willingness to provide favorable coverage of politicians who provide them with favorable subsidies and regulations.(p. xvii)

Nepal's media system is neither fully capitalistic nor communist. The 2015 constitution envisions Nepal as a federated democracy with socialist-type social protections alongside a free-market, capitalistic ethic, and a generally free media capable of producing and disseminating independent news content. Such "unbiased news columns are of much greater concern because it is on the reliability of information that rationality of judgment must depend" [while making informed choices] (Hitchcock, 1921, p. 339). The statement was part of a review of a study of American journalism, one where the author spoke about how "the business side was encroaching on the editorial... [even] owning the owners" (Sinclair, 1919, p. 31). Media are businesses and need to rely on advertising for remaining viable. The issue of capture emerges when both journalism and advertising stray from their professional standards into a relationship of give-and-take.

Generally, direct control or use of force for influencing media has become a thing of the past in Nepal. But those in power still use other means to ensure desired media behavior. These other means are the "less visible, market and political mechanisms that tend to filter information that is *fit to print* in a non-conspiratorial way" (Pedro-Carañana et al., 2018, p. 9), which is what media capture is about. Both the propaganda model and a political economy approach, therefore, have been adopted to understand the possible misuse of power and money to influence media content and influence public perceptions.

2.4.4 Power, Ideology and Capture

Exploring media capture through a critical political economy approach requires an understanding of key concepts such as power and ideology their manifestation in texts. Historically, writing was always associated with power, as only those in positions of power wrote and read while others listened, which began changing only after the spread of literacy. Power, according to Antonio Gramsci, is essentially ideology, in the sense of having “access to people's consciousness (which) is an enormous power...,” (Daldal, 2014, p. 167). Gramsci held that control over ideology was an arena as important as controlling the forces of production. This power is derived from socially sanctioned behaviors and norms, which shape consciousness. According to Daldal (2014), a hegemony results when people internalize social relations and accept it as “common sense”. Newspapers/media normalize such consciousness. Power according to Gramsci is a product of the complex “relations of force” in society, is transmitted through ideology and interacts “on the popular mentality via the institutions of civil society...” (Daldal, 2014, p. 150). By this conception, praxis cannot be separated from both power and ideology.

Gramsci's thesis about civil society, and its role in propagating the accepted common sense, was elaborated by Althusser (1971) in terms of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). Accordingly, the ISAs function in the private domain, but in line with the ideology of the ruling class, and even though the institutions through which this operated were diverse, the ideology by which they functioned was unified. He argued that the “communications apparatus [did this] by cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc., by means of the press, the radio and television” (Althusser,

1971, p. 154). The ideology is therefore embedded and always present in content produced and disseminated by media. The ideologies embedded in texts can be understood by analyzing discourses. As Althusser (1971) argued, for retaining power the power holders need to control the ISAs, including the media, which explains why various interests seek to influence them.

A more contemporary explanation of power as it relates to media has been provided by Street (2001). Accordingly, controlling information on the activities of authorities and keeping the people in ignorance provide ways to avoid political protest (Street, 2001). He has argued that media power is exercised through three types of powers discursive, access and resource. As for the discursive power, "... insofar as mass media are responsible for the circulation of particular ideas and images, and insofar as these shape thoughts and actions, the mass media are thought to wield discursive or ideological power" (Street, 2001, pp. 233-234). This provides a basis for arguing that analysis of media texts can assist the understanding of particular accounts of events they encode within the narratives.

Access refers to who gets to speak through the media (and those who do not), which is normatively a journalistic decision, but is surrendered in the context of capture. The access is controlled by media organizations, in terms of who gets to use them mainly as contributors or participants in the discourses they propagate, and these are usually the rich and the powerful selected by journalists/media to interview/cover. Street's third source of media power, "refers to the way in which media conglomerates can affect the actions of governments and States" (p. 236), a reference to the bargaining power of media conglomerates which results from ownership concentration.

2.4.5 Locating Media Capture in Media Research Traditions

There are seven traditions in communication research, each with a unique way of understanding the subject – rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, socio-psychological, sociocultural and critical. These traditions theorize communication as “(t)he practical art of discourse, inter-subjective mediation by signs, experience of otherness; dialogue; information processing; expression, interaction, and influence; (re)production of social order; and discursive reflection” (Craig, 1999, p. 133), respectively. All these traditions converge in media, considering their varied forms, formats, and platforms, which makes it difficult to adopt any one tradition or theory to underpin this study. Communication research draws from other disciplinary traditions and that explains the diversity of both the subject and interests as well as how communication has permeated the entire lifeworld in forms and formats that are continuously evolving.

Communication involves people and their signs (languages, for example) and therefore “intersubjectivity” (Habermas, 1981) in the process of meaning making. Therefore, the need for a critical approach to understanding media capture, one that goes beyond instrumentalism and functionalism. This idea draws from the Habermasian proposal that societies should be considered

in terms of the lifeworld, on the one hand, in which agents’ actions and self-interpretations are integrated communicatively, and, on the other, in terms of the system, in which integration takes place systemically, via the impersonal mechanisms of capitalist exchange and bureaucratic procedure”.

(Gordon et al., 2019, p. xviii)

This requires understanding knowing not as making the unfamiliar familiar and codifying it into something we objectify, conceptualize and control, but to strive to know about things as they exist. (Bernstein, 2019)

Bernstein's explanation of the 1944 work of Horkheimer and Adorno – *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – inspires a line of questioning that can be proposed to understand news (media) routines and how they could possibly affect knowing. For example, take a discussion in parliament, the discourse of the moment, which is a unique single experience where a representative of a section of the voting public speaks to represent his/her constituents. Media as mediators of communication between the elected representative and the constituents report on parliament (also recorded in parliamentary records) and are expected to take the information to the constituents. Parliamentary reporting has become a news beat, with its own repetitive regularity (reiteration, according to Bernstein) where what is reported, how, and what is not is beyond the control of the communicator but subsumed in production routines of the mediator (media) that does report parliament but, in a form where the essence of what was spoken could become “de-subjectivized” or formatted into a genre devoid of the context, which would have allowed those receiving the communication to fully know.

The Frankfurt School philosophers laid the foundations for Critical Theory that second-generation scholars, particularly, Habermas, extended in relation to communication and society. Habermas' idea of “communicative reason” had “the intent of creating a vision of critical theory that would be less defeatist, more engaged with contemporary political reality, and rather more attuned to the genuine achievements of liberalism” (Gordon et al., 2019, p. xviii). The emerging neoliberal ideology and governance and the growing power of corporate capitalism defined the sociopolitical context of the period, and these scholars had focused on explaining how the liberal ideology was universalizing understanding or knowing.

In one sense, therefore, media capture becomes an instrumental/ functionalist understanding of the outcome of influences of power and finances on communication content. But there is something beyond the instrumental outcome that influences understanding, and the propagation of the understanding until it takes shape of a common understanding – or becomes an ideology of its own.

Another Frankfurt School scholar, Marcuse wrote that the entanglement of science and technology with capital had created a source of “*rationality deficits*” and “... capital should be understood as the ensemble of technocratic rationality (one version of instrumental rationality) and capitalist relations of production (another version of instrumental rationality) whose essential character is to eviscerate and dissolve competing conceptions of reason and rationality” (Bernstein, 2019, p. 10). When extrapolated in terms of media as an institution within the neoliberal project, there arises a need to understand them as part of a system that has the tools that could be both good and bad for society, depending on how they are used.

The term “culture industry” – a reference to mass media and its influence on mass culture – originated at the Frankfurt School as an explanation to the self-enclosed system of production and consumption, that film, radio, and magazines made up (Rebentisch & Trautmann, 2019). The cultural commodities result from “the rationalized and standardized means of production and distribution. The logic of sale, the relation of supply and demand, and the public’s taste, determined by market research, (which) completely shape cultural commodities” (Bernstein, 2019, p. 26) . These production processes have become more sophisticated today – including the newspaper which cannot be excluded from the culture industry classification given that its production process has adopted many of the ideas discussed above and do also influence public perceptions. This is particularly true as the Internet now allows

even newspapers to produce and distribute audio and video, and also the sophistication in both market research and content delivery to segregated audiences with converged content, including embedded advertising.

Therefore, the idea of looking beyond instrumentalism that the Frankfurt School adopted remains relevant for understanding media and its influences – a pervasive but amorphous concept – on society. This study has attempted to understand media capture beyond “capitalistic exchange” and “bureaucratic order” by also examining all emerging and competing influences seeking to steer news production using the media capture framework. Two of these influences are money and power that are central to understanding media capture:

Habermas does not deny that money and power are forms of communication. He however sees them as alienated media of communication that colonize, delinguistify, control, steer, dominate, replace, and curtail authentic communicative action in the lifeworld and thereby create social pathologies. (Fuchs, 2016, p. 187)

Critical Theory was a result of the context of the post-World War I period marked by social systems with competing ideologies of capitalism, fascism and communism alongside which media and communication evolved. If postmodernity is the context today – with it defined as “...the historical epoch that began to emerge in the 1960s as the economic mode of production in most Western societies gradually shifted from commodity-based manufacturing to information-based services” (Ott & Mack, 2020, p. 10) – then we need to understand media in terms of the five broad trends that define the context: “convergence, mobility, fragmentation, globalization, and simulation”. What this implies is that “the media no longer represent, if they ever did, our social world; they construct a realer-than-real space that is our social world” (Ott & Mack,

2014, p. 13). Therefore, how the media environment has been affecting social life and how the changes are affecting media companies are some questions that become relevant and necessitate the need to extend the effort to know by not limiting oneself within any one theoretical or disciplinary boundary.

Critical media studies provides a path leading away from the “direct influence” approach to communication studies towards a framework relating to the ideological role of the media. This approach views media as a “cultural and ideological force, standing in a dominant position with respect to the way in which social relations and political problems were defined and the production and transformation of popular ideologies in the audiences addressed” (Hall, 1980, p. 104). Hall extended the conception of ideology as a “false consciousness”, it’s supposed unidirectional flow from the “base” to “superstructure” and that it was “economic” (capital) under Marxist analysis, and argued that ideology was also cultural, social, and political. Hall’s position was that both the base and superstructure interacted with each other, and each determined the other rather than ideology flowing unilaterally only from capital (Procter, 2004). Another concept we can borrow from Hall is “multi-accentuality”, a reference to the way “in which language produces different, even opposing meanings depending on how it is ‘accented’ by those who ‘speak’ it within a given social context” (Procter, 2004, p. 31). This can be determined through textual analysis, where text includes everything that signifies the message – all not said but which form parts of the message. For example, a news story with a photograph and without can affect meanings differently, and so would other details in the photographs of the “signifier” and “signified”.

Cultural Studies holds that texts interact with audiences differently in different contexts to create different meanings. The message, according to Hall, is a discursive

form and that has a privileged position in the communicative exchange because “when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal ‘rules’ by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a ‘story’ before it can become a communicative event (Hall, 1980, p. 118). Hall’s work on encoding/decoding was centered on television that by nature has two types of discourse – visual and aural – in the case of newspapers it is language that serves as the code, which functions like all codes and is culture-specific and is “naturalized” through usage. The analysis of this communicative language can provide insights to understanding how ideology comes into play in content, because a language will have signs that convey the literal meaning (detonation) as well as the associative (connotative) meanings the same sign is likely to generate:

It is because signs appear to acquire their full ideological value – appear to be open to articulation with wider ideological discourses and meanings – at the level of their ‘associative’ meanings (that is, at the connotative level) – for here ‘meanings’ are not apparently fixed in natural perception (that is, they are not fully naturalized), and their fluidity of meaning and association can be more fully exploited and transformed. So, it is at the connotative level of the sign that situational ideologies alter and transform signification. (Hall, 1980, p. 122)

Hall contended that both detonation/connotations showed the presence of ideology and that they were more useful for understanding at which levels the ideologies and discourses intersected.

The analysis of discourses are expected to allow the understanding of captured content. Both Hall’s approach to encoding/decoding and the Foucauldian approach to comprehension suggest that “(t)he manifest discourse, is really no more than the

repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said” (Foucault, 2002, p. 28). By Foucault’s reasoning discourse must be treated as and when it occurs (treating it),

...as an episteme of a period, not the sum of its knowledge, or the general style of its research, but the gap, the distances, the oppositions, the differences, the relationships of its multiple scientific discourses: the *episteme* is not a kind of a grand underlying theory, it is a space of *dispersion*, it is an *open field of relationships*, no doubt indefinitely describable. (Foucault, 2014, p. 101)

American journalist and philosopher Walter Lippman had a similar conception of how meanings were made. He wrote, “For the most part, ‘we do not first see, and then define – we define first and then see” and this form is stereotyped by culture (Curtis, 1992, p. xvi) . Lippman’s phrase, the “pictures inside our heads,” can be argued to be a product of the dominant common sense or ideology. The same can be said for the “pseudo-environment” that Lippman discussed, where he wrote that facts were not enough to convey meaning as people took facts not for what they were, but what they perceived to be facts or a pseudo-environment (Lippmann, 1992). Lippman also discussed the inadequacy of words alone to convey meaning:

Words, like currency, are turned over and over again, to evoke one set of images today, another tomorrow. There is no certainty whatever that the same word will call out exactly the same idea in the reader's mind as it did in the reporter's. (Lippmann, 1992, p. 66).

The ideological underpinnings are, therefore, important for understanding media texts and discourses, which in the case of this study is limited to selected media texts.

Political economy analysis of media has been criticized largely because of the lack of attention to journalists as part of the process, who were considered “replaceable parts” of the production machine (Hearns-Branaman, 2018). He has cited

Pierre Bourdieu (1995) who was critical of the political economy approach, and said, “to understand what happens in journalism, it is not sufficient to know who finances the publications, who the advertisers are, who pays for the advertising...” (p. 29) and urged the conceptualization of the journalistic “microcosm as such and endeavor to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another” (Hearns-Brannaman, 2018, p. 29) or the interactions within the field itself. Media sociology allows the influences at different layers in the content production process, including among journalists.

Media capture takes place at the firm or unit level, but the outcome of capture (incomplete or biased content) has influences at a social level. There are different entry points through which external influences can enter the media production systems explained by (Reese) 2019)(that isolates the different historical contact points where influences interact with news production. These include (1) social system, (2) social institutions (3) media organizations, (4) routine practices, and (5) individuals. These influences are conceptualized as concentric circles, with the outermost circle being the social system level,

... including influences on content from the system as a whole. This includes ideological forces in the sense that they concern ideas and meaning in the service of interests and power – encompassing how all the other levels add up to a larger result. (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p.8)

The influence loci both within media organizations and outside puts media in a position vulnerable to being influenced or captured, and content either being biased (owing also individual biases) or serving the interests of owners and commercial interests. This general critique of media can be better understood when located and analyzed at the specific levels of influence suggested by Shoemaker and Reese

(2014). Media capture manifests at the social level of influences but take place within media organizations and the levels within (routines and individuals); and it is also a product of manipulations at the social institution level (sources, financiers, donors, and advertisers, for example). It is about how agency and structure interplay – what is controlled by media organizations, production routines and individual journalists; and by structure including ideology and social institutions. Generally, media mediate messages functioning amidst different influences, “particularly the construction, production, and control of specific patterns of meaning contained in media *content*” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. xii). This mediation function also makes media candidates for capture by different interests, which is why any analysis would require an understanding of media sociology.

The afore-discussed hierarchies are relevant to the study of capture of newspapers because despite the disruptions caused by Internet-enabled platforms, the traditional media still remain as major information providers. This is true for Nepal, where people still read newspapers despite the availability of online versions, as was evident during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020. A newspaper explained why this could be the case suggesting that Nepali audiences believed that newspapers have a “agenda setting” function, and also because they are read by people in power (*Nepali Times*, 2020, 6 April 2020). In countries like Nepal, access to Internet will determine both the spread and popularity of new platforms and until that happens the traditional media may continue to remain as agenda setters, in the classic sense of the associated theory that “media do not tell us what to think, but what to think about” (Baran & Davis, 2013, p. 264). The relevance of the newspaper in the Internet age could also be associated with audience habits.

A similar pattern was observed in Australia in 2016, where researchers found that “(T)he established press and broadcast media (including their online editions) continue to be the primary and most trusted sources of election news for Australians” (Carson & McNair, 2016, p. 443). The legacy media there was not without problems such as decreasing revenues and the shift of younger audiences to online sources, but the legacy media were still relevant.

A clear idea of how interest, power and values interact in the social system of news can assist in understanding influences, because power is also about the ability of one social actor to impose his/her will over others. Because all social systems have specific values, interests and power structures, their influence on news at the macro level is a given. “Not only is news about the powerful, but also the news paradigm structures stories so that events are interpreted from the perspective of powerful interests” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p.65). In other words, the social system also imposes upon the individual journalists who while producing content need to match it with socially accepted meanings where the content is received.

2.5 Approaches and Concepts

A study on media requires familiarization with different approaches and concepts underpinning the work, particularly how these are understood in the context of the research. The following section discusses some approaches and concepts referred in the study.

2.5.1 Watch-dogging

Freedom of expression is a fundamental Human Right that grants all people the right to be able to seek and receive information and express their opinion (Human Rights Committee, 2011). The media can facilitate this by providing information and a platform for people to express themselves if they so desire. Freedom of expression underpins many other democratic rights: the right to seek information, form

associations and political parties, share political ideas and question the actions of public officials. Therefore, free expression provides a basis for outlining the role of media in a society, one formulation of which is as follows:

Free, independent, and pluralistic media empower citizens with information that enables them to make informed choices and actively participate in democratic processes. They can help enhance transparency and accountability, by facilitating dialogue between decision-makers and the rest of society and by exposing abuse of power. They also play a crucial role in improving the public's understanding of current or emerging issues, events, priorities, and policy pronouncements and options. (UNESCO, 2008, p.v)

There are, therefore, a number of expectations from 21st century media, which includes serving society as a watchdog on behalf of citizens on governments, corporations, and other social institutions to expose wrongdoing. By performing this watchdog function, journalists can make public officials accountable. According to Norris (2014):

Political information provided by the independent media helps citizens to evaluate the performance of their elected leaders, both individually and collectively. In multiparty liberal democracies, informed citizens have opportunities to 'throw the rascals out' at regular intervals, ensuring the *electoral* accountability of legislative representatives and, indirectly, the bureaucratic accountability of public servants. (pp. 2-3)

The social expectation from journalism and media is rooted in classical liberalism, where, by fulfilling the role, independent media are believed to strengthen the accountability of powerful decision-makers. This accountability function extends to all sectors, including the private sector and the judiciary. "Liberal theories claim

therefore that news coverage can inform the public and official bodies, catalyze electoral, managerial, or legal sanctions against transgressors, and thus provide incentives for better performance” (Norris, 2014, p. 3). However, following capture media do away with the watch-dogging functions and instead could turn into lapdogs of the rulers or guard dogs serving political and corporate interests, among others.

2.5.2 Public Interest

Even though rooted in liberalism, the belief that the press keeps watch on matters related to the public interest and provides information needed for making decisions is almost universal. However, both the expectations and the roles of media may differ in different sociopolitical contexts, which is why how well media and journalists play the role towards developing a “rational, deliberative and pluralistic public sphere” (Pedro- Carañana et al., 2018, p. 5) – both real or imagined – requires continued studies, particularly in the context of changes taking place in how people access information or use media. Because “(i)n an ideal society, media would, by performing their fourth and fifth-estate (reference to Internet) function, act as instruments used for citizen empowerment and as the primary citizen watchdog over the ruling powers” (Pedro- Carañana et al., 2018, p. 5). This is why this study has used liberal journalism norms and standards to assess journalism/media performance for understanding media capture.

The definition of public interest is broad and has been interpreted widely by the courts. According to Dennis (2003),

The free flow of information is in the public interest. Information about public affairs is of public interest and in the public interest. The publication of newsworthy information is in the public interest. Communications diversity is in the public interest. Government regulation of certain communication

activities affected with a public interest is in the public interest. Matters of public interest or matters in the public interest are usually immune from libel and privacy recovery. (Dennis, 2003, pp. 166-167)

Nepal's courts have also discussed and defined the public interest. Delivering its verdict on a litigation, (*Guragain vs. Office of the Prime Minister, and Council of Ministers, 2066 B.S.*), Nepal's Supreme Court said, "informed and aware citizens are the strength of a democratic republic, [ensuring it is] the government mandate" (translated by author) (p. 222). It added that misinformed, non-informed and disinformed citizens cannot give strength to the democratic republic, adding that the government should always ensure that the people were in a situation where they were informed. The bench of Justices Balam K.C. and Girish Chandra Lal Das had referred to international conventions on human rights that embed the public interest. Expounding further, the Court explained that media provided the "means" for citizens to be informed, alluding to the role of media in a democracy (*Guragain vs. Office of the Prime Minister, and Council of Ministers, 2066 B.S.*).

A definition of public interest as it applies to the press can be found in the definition by the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) of the United Kingdom. The Code of Practice of the PCC said, "There is a public interest in freedom of expression itself and specifies the following: "(i) Detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety, (ii) Protecting public health and safety, (iii) Preventing the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organization" (Press Complaints Commission, 2004, p. 18). The actual expectations from journalists in this regard are discussed in the ethical codes. This press also has certain behaviors to uphold because activities like driving out competition, encouraging censorship or preventing free discussion and debate on matters of public concern are not in the public interest. Therefore, Public interest "does not mean simply giving the public

what it wants; rather, it entails acquainting the public with the broad range of possibilities and then allowing it to make a free choice within that extensive panoply” (Dennis, 2003, p. 167).” However, giving the public what they want – now supported by extensive market studies – is what journalism has been heading towards, after media began catering to segmented audiences and demographics.

2.5.3 Bias/ Slant

The term Fourth Estate applies to all media. It is said to have been first used by Thomas Carlyle in 1841 and originated in a 1787 parliamentary debate in England where Edmund Burke had referred to the press in the gallery saying, “... there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all (a reference to the other estates) ...” (Crichton, D., Christel, B., Shidham, A., Valderrama, A., n.d.). This was also a reference to the role of the press in a democracy, particularly of bringing to people information and diverse opinions to enable them to make political choices and complete the democratic feedback loop – where people elect leaders, leaders serve people, and people reject non-performers and reelect those who deliver and continue to promise to serve. Citizens require accurate, impartial, and fairly presented information to make these choices. Biased or slanted coverage results when media do not deal with sources impartially. Slant has been studied by various authors (Lichter, 2014; Parkin & Druckman, 2005; Wolton, 2019), and this study has attempted to apply the concept to bias/slant as a predictor of capture, which has been necessitated because of the unavailability of data on ownership, circulation, and advertising spend by different interest groups.

It is important to understand that bias could be a result of media capture, while it could also result from a number of other factors.. Bias can also result from individual beliefs, say, in a political ideology or a political leader, and it can also be instigated by money. Generally, bias can be political or ideological or just negativity

or bad news bias – "often presented as an alternative explanation for findings differently characterized as ideological or partisan bias" (Lichter, 2014, p. 2). Bias has typically been measured against the values of the liberal journalism (Bagdikian, 2004; Lichter, 2014), particularly dispassionate "objective" reporting. This study will attempt to understand bias by analyzing fairness, impartiality and accuracy of coverage because objectivity has been described as "an unattainable ideal, a subjective convention, and a mask for personal or political interests" ... and in that sense, is itself a form of political bias" (Lichter, 2014, p.3). This study has adopted Lichter's definition of bias: "distortions of reality, favoritism or one-sidedness in presenting controversies, and closed-minded or partisan attitudes" (p.3). Bias influences content but could itself be shaped by several factors such as norms, values, and attitudes of journalists, as well as the capitalistic system and markets, ownership, and the news production processes. In addition, news could also have structural biases such as commercial bias, temporal bias, narrative bias, bad-news bias, status quo bias, fairness bias, class bias and also overlaps (Lichter, 2014). The news production process involves selection – omission and commission – and journalists are continuously required to make decisions about what is news and worth reporting and what is not, which they do based on their experiences (which in turn could be influenced by a number of factors including their socialization). In addition, the structural biases in news production could also have a role in marginalizing other voices in favor of a narrative that tilts positively for people in positions of power and the rich.

Some studies have demonstrated presence of "liberal perspectives" in major media outlets of the United States but bias of three types "gatekeeping bias (selecting stories that favor one party over the other), coverage bias (the amount of coverage of each party), and statement bias (the valence or tone of coverage) was not observed" (Lichter, 2014, p.7). Further, more recent observations suggest that there are

commercially successful biased content operations such as conservative perspectives in media (talk radio and Fox News Channel in the U.S.) and even other previously “balanced” or “objective” media have shifted to partisan coverage (such as MSNBC) (Lichter, 2014). What this suggests that there is a possibility that biased coverage could become more widespread when media realize there are profits to be made from interest-serving coverage, which could then expedite the capture process.

Bias can be observed through content. One study had used three types of evidence to study newspaper bias – stated party affiliation, the use of charged language (negative words such as "slander" "liar" and "villainous" to dismiss undesirable statements and words like "honest", "honorable" and "irreproachable" used to defend political heroes. The study (Gentzkow et al., 2004) found a substantial drop in partisan and charged language across the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The model suggested that newspapers weighed the rewards of bias – political bribes or personal pleasures – against the cost of bias, such as lost circulation from providing faulty news, and predicted that newspapers become less biased and invest more in information gathering as the size of the market grows and marginal cost of production falls. This study also underscored the importance of a sizeable market for an independent media to flourish.

Journalists are expected to seek the truth by thoroughly checking and rechecking facts which has become important, particularly amid the spread of disinformation that can spread through media. McIntyre’s (2018) thesis on post-truth eerily suggests that journalism has been headed towards falsification of the facts, which is something that can be a result of capture. Such practices contradict the very truth that media claim to report on a daily basis. Often the media also carry untruths unknowingly, and knowingly and often with intent, when they have been captured. This happens when facts are subordinated by the political point of view of audiences, as information receivers and media as producers of the information,.

“Post-truthing” – for lack of a better word – is not new, however, and can be traced to the tobacco industry-funded research of 1960s when it was accused of denying science with the industry position about “no conclusive links” between cigarettes and cancer – their truth. This industry claim was advertised and also used for communication through media and other platforms (such as press statements).

With capture of media, one could imagine a post-journalism situation where media end up serving as the axle on which the post-truthing machine runs, continuously churning out convenient facts that are amplified through various platforms of mass communication, including the Internet. Truth becomes a casualty when governments and businesses manufacture facts to manipulate public perceptions and politicians adopt similar approaches – produce partisan media comments and mobilize partisan journalist mobs to spread their truth. Such manipulation can seep into the content production routines where journalists who are supposed to be pursuing the truth become tools for manufacturing convenient truths for various interests. Such manipulation is more likely in societies with low or no professionalism, and more evident where there is clientelism and journalists do not hesitate to take sides. A situation like this cannot be ruled out in Nepal, where leaders of a journalist association close to the ruling party, were sworn to office by the party leadership at the official residence of the prime minister (Baral, 2019; Onlinekhabar, 2020) At this meeting, the co-chair of the Nepal Communist Party had said, “It is unfortunate that the information technology is in the hands of the bourgeoisie. We need to win this war. I look at your force as a big battalion” (Onlinekhabar, 2020, para1). Such attitude towards journalists goes well beyond ideological coaching, inducting them in party communication committees during elections, and “nominating” candidates to contest elections of journalist associations.

The media, being the carriers of information in modern societies create public opinion on matters of general interest. This function also makes them vulnerable to manipulators seeking to influence opinions and resulting decisions. In this sense, a possibility of media being targeted for capture has always existed; it began with attempts by government to control and regulate media, and later after growth of commercialization and advertising. The arrival of the Internet has changed advertising further, which has begun moving towards better-targetable online platforms, exposing further the soft financial underbelly of traditional media and making them more vulnerable to capture. The public nature of the media business and the impact content can have on society is an important reason why media need to be continuously studied and analyzed to expose forms of capture already in place.

Media capture provides a framework that brings together knowledge from various traditions of journalism research to help understand the changes taking place in terms of how the industry functions. The oldest medium of public affairs, the newspaper, has undergone changes with every advancement of technology beginning with the arrival of telegraphy and radio, film, and later television and then the Internet. The media capture paradigm provides a framework for exploring media operations, particularly for isolating influences in disseminated content.

The concepts of public welfare and accountability are said to have originated following the arrival of newspapers, which later culminated in the American and French revolutions in the 18th century. These revolutions also brought forth the ideals of government of the people, by the people and for the people with journalism as a public mechanism to monitor compliance to allow citizens to make choices based on the information they receive. A post-journalism world would be an antithesis to the democratic ideal, which will also redefine the ideals of welfare and accountability, a situation that is difficult even to imagine. This is yet another reason why the study of media capture is important.

2.6 Gap Analysis

A research gap is generally understood to be information or parts of it that is missing in the research reviewed, or some aspect of the subject matter that remains unexplored or is under studied (Baako et al., 2022). That said, not all gaps are significant and require further study and, instead, according to the problematization approach, only those with academic and practical implications need to be selected (Chatterjee & Davison, 2021; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011; Tadajewski & Hewer, 2011). In the case of media capture, it has yet to emerge as a full-fledged theory, and it draws from theories on cultural capture and political economic analysis. The paradigm extends the political-economy explanations of journalists/media operations and the resulting deviations from professional standards such as, selective coverage, favoring of the rich and powerful, undermining of established liberal journalism standards and values, even engagement in corrupt practices. These are some reasons why media fail to provide truthful and credible accounts of events and issues reported (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Lue, 2020). Nepali scholarship on media and journalism, particularly those after 1990, have not examined media behaviors in terms of issues discussed above and have instead explored trends related to coverage such as ethnicity on television (Upreti, 2017), the “contribution” of newspapers to establishing democracy (Nepal, 2080 B.S.) and the performance of the print media in a political movement (Aryal, 2024). One study did examine the political economy and concluded that newspaper journalism had begun shifting towards commercialism from partisanship (Aryal, 2016). The underlying assumption for all studies has been that media have been independent.

This study has attempted to problematize the assumption of independence in media/journalism practice, because just having formal media freedoms provided by policies and laws do not guarantee independence and impartiality (Besley & Prat, 2006) particularly in situation where media are still government owned and

controlled, or are largely nonviable as businesses and government support is critical for their survival. The freedoms are also compromised when media are owned by individuals with other business interests as that makes them vulnerable to political pressures. The underlying assumption of media studies in Nepal after 1990 has been that the journalism has been independent, a generalization that does not account for high partisanship among journalists. This research has attempted to explore this gap by interpreting content/texts and documents to make inferences about effective independence and impartiality that underlie media capture.

Methodologically, most studies on media capture by economists have been positivist and have used quantitative data to explain how capture can affect reporting on corruption (Di Tella & Franceschelli, 2009), for creating doubts about climate science (Beattie, 2020), and have used models to demonstrate the influence of captured content on voting behavior (Besley & Prat, 2006). There have also been studies that have used qualitative data from documents and records, interviews, focus groups and observations to analyze the impact of capture in specific countries: Afghanistan (Relly & Zanger, 2017), Afghanistan (Relly & Zanger, 2017), the Czech Republic (Vojtěchovská, 2017), China (Frisch et al., 2018; Li, 2013; Pi, 2010; Qin et al., 2011), Turkey (Finkel, 2015; Woodall, 2018), Bangladesh (Cárdenas et al., 2017) and Burma (Myanmar) (McElhone, 2017). The studies reviewed, however, had not analyzed media content and texts as predictors of capture, which this study has attempted. Further, there are also no studies that have interpretatively analyzed media attributes extracted from publicly available interviews of media industry participants – used by Reagan (2009) to evaluate teaching effectiveness, for example – to explore and explain the tendencies symptomatic of media capture, which this study has done.

This study has attempted to address the methodological gap discussed above by analyzing texts and discourses to explore relationship of capture with bias and

partisanship. Similarly, themes extracted from attributes derived from experiential statements of individuals in the media ecology have been used to explore the different forms of capture. Information from the analysis of data so obtained has been complemented by that generated using other tools such as Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), review of documents/ records, and a case study on media content and advertising related to a company accused of tax evasion, and analyses of discourses in headlines to political stories in print media. The attributes discussed above have also helped to understand the “practical knowledge gap” or why “actual behavior of practitioners is different from their advocated behavior in research,” (Miles, 2017; Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2015 in Baako et al., 2022, p. 553). Further, the study of media capture has largely taken place in the West, with some exceptions such as Afghanistan and Bangladesh in South Asia but has largely been authored by Western scholars. Therefore, the media in Nepal remain an unstudied in terms of capture, which is another gap this study has attempted to address.

Nepal provides a unique case where democratization has, for all practical purposes, remained a work-in-progress since the 1950s, and also, as country emerging from a violent conflict (1996-2006). The sociopolitical context is unique compared to those countries where the media capture has been studied, particularly the influences emanating from political partisanship, which undermine, the media’s ability to perform to normative standards. Therefore, this study of media capture can add a new perspective to existing research in terms of forms, manifestations and causes of capture. The use of content and textual analysis as predictors of capture could also provide an alternative approach to study influences in sociopolitical contexts where historical data on media operations either do not exist or are not available in the public domain.

To summarize, the study has attempted to understand the media's ability to independently serve the public interest with a will of its own, using newspaper and print journalism (online media) as sites for examining their performance against the media capture paradigm. It has attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the forms of media capture in Nepal?
2. How does capture manifest in newspaper content?
3. Why is media captured in Nepal?

The approach and methods to undertake this research included generic qualitative tools, including analysis of content and texts relating to selected events reported by newspapers and online (print) media. Other tools used were key informant interviews, document reviews and analysis of data on media ownership and concentration mined from the internet.

CHAPTER-III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Background

This section has discussed the methodologies and tools used in the research to explore media capture in Nepal. The study has used a generic qualitative approach and has analyzed selected content and texts, publicly available interviews of media industry members, government documents, information on ownership and concentration mined from the internet, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Having worked as a journalist at various media outlets in print and broadcasting for about 25 years, the subject has provided the researcher an opportunity for introspection and better understanding the underlying factors influencing journalism in Nepal. The media capture paradigm can provide some explanation to why journalism content deviates from standard practices when instigated by financial and non-financial influences, and how, governments, businesses, and other interest groups control media content by misusing power and corrupting the media. This study has used both primary and secondary data to examine the forms, manifestations and causes of media capture in Nepal.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The study has explored and explained how the sociopolitical and economic context influence journalism production, particularly in an environment marked by high political polarization and partisanship, and in a media market that relies on a few large advertisers; and how the journalism output could influence social processes. The sociopolitical context has been one marked by epochal historical and political changes, including the creation of the space for doing independent journalism. The journalism produced interacts with individuals in multiple ways, where they develop

subjective meanings or multiple realities based on what appears in media, even what does not, which the research has acknowledged and observed without attempting to “narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The ontological base of the study is the existence of multiple realities rather than one. The assumptions underlying this understanding is that human beings construct meanings as they engage with world making sense of the engagements within their social, cultural and historical contexts (Creswell, 2009). The varied and multiple meanings are difficult to simplify are they are context specific, i.e., influenced by where people live and work, and can also be influenced by the researcher’s personal, cultural and historical experiences, which is this case involves the practice of journalism.

Such knowledge needs to be interpreted and explained and, therefore, the aim is “understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). The epistemological base of this study is constructivism which involves understanding, interpreting and explaining the multiple meanings others make of the world based on social and historical construction to arrive at theory. This “philosophical worldview” (Creswell, 2009, p. 6) has guided this study.

A largely exploratory and explanatory approach has been adopted to understand and explain media/journalists’ behavior based on attributes volunteered by industry participants to inductively isolate the forms of capture. Similarly, purposefully selected discourses and content have been analyzed to make inferences. This approach to research “seeks to find out how people get along in the setting under question, what meaning they give to their actions, and what are the issues that concern them” (Schutt, 2012, p. 13). Alternatively, this can be explained as “relativism – local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 225). Therefore, this study has involved identification of different population groups

relating to the research question and exploring and interpreting how they make meanings of their worlds. The findings are, therefore, largely subjective, and subjective interpretations derive meanings from the “latent” reality emerging from beliefs, values, experiences, etc., all of which are internal and personal (Berg, 2000). Therefore, the meanings derived from the interpretations based on the manifest texts and content may not be applicable universally because all three – beliefs, values, and experiences – vary from researcher to researcher and so do the interpretations.

3.2.1 Axiology

The study has abided by the highest ethical standards to assure objective interpretation of data fully aware of likely accusations of subjectivity, given the researcher’s experience in the profession. Therefore, it is likely that the inferences have been influenced by the researcher’s values relating to the practice of journalism. The values can also be explained in terms of theories that underlie journalism particularly cultural theory, critical theory, and normative media theory where one “embraces, rather than limits” researcher’s values, another is “aggressively value laden”, and the third is also value laden (Baran & Davis, 2013, p. 16). The study, therefore, does not claim to be value-free, but has attempted to minimize the researcher’s influences in interpretation by upholding accepted journalism norms and standards as yardstick for interpreting the practices. To summarize, the values are included, the ethic is “intrinsic” tilting towards revelation, and the voice is of a “passionate participant’ as facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 225).

For example, ethics are personal standards of behavior that individuals set for themselves and upholding them is a matter of choice of the individual. Both ethics and codes of conduct are applicable in journalism. While codes of conduct are enforceable, ethics are self-regulated by journalists. In this study, the researcher has

abided by the highest ethical standards to self-regulate subjectivity arising from the experience as a journalist. Therefore, it is likely that comparisons of, say, “what-would-I-have-done” in particular situations based on journalistic norms and standards may have influenced the analysis and interpretations.

3.3 Data Sources

The study used both secondary data and primary data. Primary data used in the research included data collected in KIIs, a pilot and one done after the analysis of data. The KIIs have been used largely for validating and complementing the inferences derived from analysis, while piloting was done to map the context and understand the research-ability of the topic. Data from old newspapers can be both primary and secondary depending its use (American University, n.d.; University of the Fraser Valley, 2023), which this study has also used. This study has used primary data from newspapers and online media on past events for analyzing discourses and has also used information from primary sources (interviews) appearing in one online portal for identifying attributes of journalism for developing themes for analysis. In journalism scholarship, “a primary source can be a person with direct knowledge of a situation, or a document created by such a person,” (NYU Libraries, n.d.) or original content. One source of secondary data was the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MOCIT), from where data on grants made by the ministry to media associations and media for a particular period were obtained for analysis. Another source of secondary data were newspapers used for content analysis-based case study of the coverage of a telecom company and advertising by the company in the newspapers under study.

The study involved use of multiple data sets, such as interviews with journalists (including editors) and published journalism content (of both newspapers and online media). The published content was selected for understanding the behavior

of journalists and media and the media industry in general. It also included purposefully selected texts that have been analyzed to explore partisan/ biased coverage.

The media studied and individuals who have been interviewed were located in Kathmandu Valley, which is the seat of most journalism activity in Nepal. Bagmati Province had 2,671 or 55.36% of all registered newspapers, of which 2006 were operating in the Valley (Press Council Nepal, 2022). Further, all large daily newspapers are located in Kathmandu, and these newspapers have higher reach compared to the weeklies. Even though disaggregated data on registration of radio, television and online news portals was not available, it is assumed that their location and registration pattern would be similar. Kathmandu is also the seat of the federal government and corporate offices of all major businesses, the major advertisers, which is reason why the study has focused on data available within Kathmandu Valley.

Selection of Media

The study has analyzed content and texts appearing in daily newspapers assumed to be most influential and those whose past printed copies were available – *Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Annapurna Post, The Himalayan Times* and *Gorkhapatra* –, as well as data from interviews of journalists and media workers available on an online portal, and reports on a similar event reported by three online portals that were assumed to be partisan.

The five newspapers were selected purposively, based on their declared readership, and two were selected because one was government-run and another because it published in the English language. In 2019/20 (2076/77 B.S.) the circulation claimed by these newspapers for audit by the PCN in 2019/20 was as

follows: *Kantipur* 420,056; *Naya Patrika*, 140,080; *Annapurna Post*, 173,645, and *Gorkhapatra* 19,449. *The Himalayan Times* had not submitted circulation figures that year. The selected newspapers included both those with private and public funding. Four newspapers published in Nepali and one in English language, which was included because it aimed to reach a different audience group. Another characteristic of studied newspapers was that four had Nepali ownership while one had allegedly been established with foreign investment. (Nepali Times, 2014)

The editorial and publication details of the newspapers at the time of the study are as follows: (a) *Kantipur*, Kantipur Publication Pvt. Ltd, publisher and distributor; Central Business Park, Thapathali; Chairperson and managing director: Kailash Sirohiya; Editor: Umesh Chauhan, Chief editor, Sudhir Sharma; (b) *Naya Patrika*, published by Naya Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. Executive director: Sushil Thapa; Chairperson, managing director and chief editor: Krishna Jwala Devkota; Star Mall, Putalisadak; (c) *Annapurna Post*, Nepal News Network International Pvt. Ltd, publisher and distributor; Corporate Tower, Tin-kune; Chairperson: Captain Rameshwor Thapa; Editor Akhandha Bhandari; (d) *The Himalayan Times*, published by International Media Network Nepal Pvt. Ltd., APCA House, Baidiya Khana Road, Anamnagar, Acting editor: Rajan Pokhrel; and (e) *Gorkhaparta*, published by Gorkhapatra Corporation, executive chairperson: Krishna Murari Bhandari, Gorkhapatra Chapakhana, Dharmapath; Officiating Chief editor: Shreedhar Acharya.

Another data set used in the study was that on coverage of a major political event of December 2020 in the first pages of five newspapers, and the coverage of three similar political events in three online portals in 2022. The three online portals selected for their known partisanship and proximity to three separate political parties.

Data were also collected from interviews. One source for interview-based data was an online portal (<https://www.ukeraa.com>) that publishes interviews with individuals in the media industry and commentators on media, among others. The researcher also interviewed key informants who were selected for their knowledge and experience in the media/newspaper industry and on issues related to the research questions. The selection of interviews on the Ukeraa portal involved first readings of all texts that were considered to be relevant based on their headlines and were also available for download (some were not downloadable owing to backend issues), and exclusion of those that did not include articulations symptomatic of media capture. The 22 key informants included senior journalists and editors, including those who had led partisan media associations. These informants included seven former office holders of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), one from a women's journalist association, six editors of various media, three journalists, two chairpersons of media, one media researcher, one advertising agency leader, and one former government official. The potential for conflict of interest in disclosing information related to media operations was minimized by selecting most respondents who had changed jobs recently or had moved on to other vocations.

The case selected for content analysis was also a purposive choice given the magnitude of the event, and the associated public interest on alleged tax fraud by a telecom company. The research was a layered process, one leading to another and also overlapping as required during the analysis.

Research Process

The research process included the following steps:

- (1) First round of interviews with purposively selected key informants to understand the research ability of the subject and to obtain insights on media that were indicative of capture.

- (2) Step two involved the study and analysis of attributes of media based on interviews that had appeared on www.ukeraa.com to develop themes for analysis.
- (3) The next step was the examination of data on the non-competitive and non-transparent financial support of the government to media associations and media. This was followed by collecting and analyzing media ownership data, and data on other companies owned by selected media owners.
- (4) Next, the researcher analyzed texts in print headlines critically to understand partisan coverage via discourses using two data sets: coverage of a major political event in five daily newspapers and coverage of one similar political event in three partisan online portals.
- (5) The penultimate step involved an interpretative content analysis of coverage of and advertisement by a company in five daily newspapers. The company in question had faced a public relations crisis at the time.
- (6) Finally, after analysis of all data, the researcher carried out a second round of interviews with key informants.

3.4 Research Design

The research has used generic qualitative approaches. The philosophy of the research is interpretivism, and the reasoning is inductive, and the conclusion is premised on the existence of multiple truths. The study has adopted a multi-method qualitative design using data derived from archival research, discourses, and a case study. The research is linear or longitudinal in a broad sense but has relied on the analyses of data caches rather than a time series focusing on exploring the paradigm rather than attempting understand capture longitudinally.

The process involved concurrent engagement with data, asking questions and seeking answers, note-taking, consultations, and discussions, collecting additional

information, interpretation, and writing, for each category of data that was analyzed. A qualitative exploratory design involved exploring, elaborating and extending findings from each method with that of another method (Creswell, 2009), where data gathered from multiple sources has been used guided by the research questions and the conceptual framework. The data obtained from content analysis supplements the understanding of the relationship derived from interviews between advertising and media capture. For example, qualitative data indicating growing advertiser influence on newspaper/media content, has been elaborated further with numerical information on advertising and news content on a telecom company caught up in a public relations crisis, even though all data have been analyzed using qualitative methods. Because qualitative research is inductive it required working with different datasets and themes to arrive at inferences, rather than working with a preset structure. This is the reason for first undertaking qualitative analysis of attributes from TPIs for deriving themes and later conducting a numerical analysis of content for a case study to understand the relationship between advertising and media content and capture, which was followed up with qualitative analysis of KIIs and analysis of secondary data.

An exploratory design has been used to investigate media capture in Nepal, or the form of captures assuming that it exists, which is the first research question. This “what” has also been explained by answers obtained for questions such as what is behind the unprofessional practices, bias, and partisanship from key informants. The study has been limited largely to journalists/ media, and does not include audiences, because there were no existing studies to compare against in terms of both the forms and causes of media capture in Nepal. This explains why key informants were asked many “what” questions to validate the themes and inferences of published interviews, which is consistent with exploratory qualitative case study design (Creswell, 2007).

The question on why media is captured in Nepal, or the cause of capture, has been answered by interpreting all data analyzed, including literatures reviewed, to arrive at the postulations. The responses to the other two questions also generated information, which when analyzed in context, provided the insights required to postulate the motives behind capture for the different sides involved government and politicians, businesses, and journalists/media.

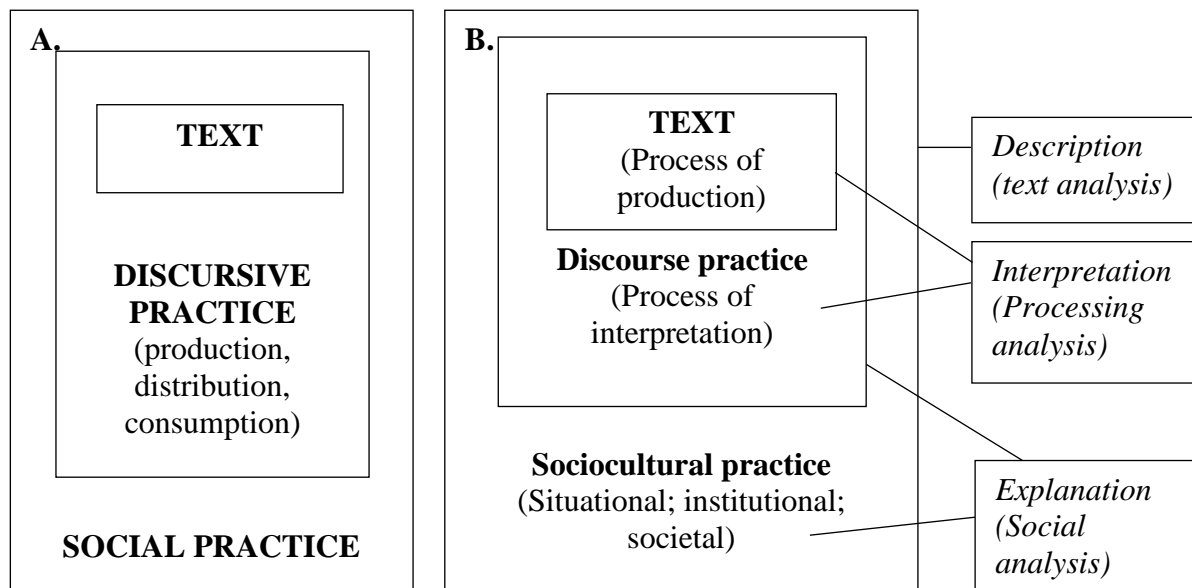
The qualitative design used is guided by constructivism, because as discussed in the epistemology, it is premised on the understanding that “reality is subjective, multiple and socially constructed” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Nottingham & Newton Fund, 2017). Or this study is an attempt to explore reality through experiences of individuals engaged in journalism production and dissemination, with understanding that learning varies as it stems from how each participant experiences reality in his/her own historical or social context, including the social common sense, or ideology. However, in order to avoid being caught up in methodological structuralism associated with quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches (Creswell, 2003; Hanson et al., 2005; Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015; Kroll & Neri, 2009), this study has adopted different methods to analyze and interpret data to find answers to the complex research questions. The qualitative data on media attributes, critical analysis of discourses, review of documents/records content analysis and KIIs used in the study supplement each other and also validate the conjectures.

3.5 Sampling

Taking cue from Glaser and Strauss (1967), this study has opted to represent information categories rather than the population because the purpose was to explore and interpret and not to test hypotheses for making generalizations. The goal was to investigate deeply-rooted, complex, and the non-transparent exchanges involved in

media capture to generate plausible explanations. The samples used are comparatively small and have been selected purposefully, to generate “caches” of data to draw inferences, selecting “information-rich” cases such as the tax evasion controversy of 2015/16 by a telecom company, and coverage following the dissolution of parliament by the prime minister in December 2020. Information rich cases, according to Patton (2015), allow in-depth learning on the topic under inquiry, and thus, was appropriate for this study. These were the significant cases (Patton, 2015) that allowed rich and deep understanding of bias in both political content and coverage of business.

Discourses have been analyzed critically with the understanding that audiences do not decode fixed meanings of media texts but that they are negotiated, which confirms the Foucauldian idea that “‘power is everywhere’ and that power relations are embedded in social life” and Gramsci’s notion of power as embedded in “‘the relations of force’... (residing) in the complex relations of force within society, It is present and observable... (Daldal, 2014, pp. 149-150), and van Dijk’s “socio-cognitive approach”, which takes textual analysis away from pure linguistics and closer to the understanding that meanings are socially constructed. This process involves a layered analysis at the “text, discursive practice and social practice” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 73) levels (Figure 3.1, ‘A’), which when analyzing media texts includes (a) journalists and editors and specific texts they produce and their sociocultural worldviews, which involves intratextuality and descriptive analysis; (b) the practice level includes production, distribution and consumption in context or at the intertextual level with neighboring texts, where interpretation is involved, and (c) extends to the social practice level, where discourses can be explained in terms of broader societal level meanings that go beyond what is apparent in the text or what is not so obvious.

Figure 3.1*Understanding Discourses*

Sources: (A). *Dimensions of discourse* (Fairclough 1992, p.73), (B). *Dimensions of discourse analysis* (Fairclough, 1995, p. 98)

At the intra-textual level, the analysis includes what has been said in terms of choice of words and phrases, which are influenced by the social, cultural, and political worldviews of the creators of text. For example, the same event could be portrayed as ‘Prime Minister Dissolves Parliament and Seeks Fresh Mandate’ in one headline, and ‘Prime Minister Violates Constitution, Seeks Fresh Mandate Without Trying Out Constitutional Options’ in another. The sociocultural forces leading to such articulations can be indicative of bias, ideological positioning of the writer of the text, or something resulting from influences. Such discourses can be interpreted with neighboring texts, to explore meanings, say, for example, with something like, ‘PM Dissolved Parliament to Avoid Facing Confidence Vote’, which at the sociopolitical level indicates issues not apparent in the manifest discourse. (Note: the examples used above were created by the researcher to elaborate how discourses can be understood and were analyzed in this study and do not come from newspapers that were analyzed).

One significant event selected for discourse analysis was the dissolution of parliament and announcement of fresh elections in December 2020. The headlines in coverage of the event in five newspapers day after the event have been analyzed. The discourses in the headlines after the Supreme Court verdict in the same paper were also reviewed to observe the shifts in positioning of the newspapers in terms of the discourse.

In addition to the approaches discussed above, the study has examined coverage and advertising in five newspapers (newspaper content) to explore the relationship and/or influence of advertising on content as a case study. The selected case involved tax fraud allegations by a telecom company in 2015 and was significant because of its magnitude in terms of the losses caused to the national coffers, which made it a matter of wide public interest.

Similarly, the key informants selected has included journalists who have led media associations, including partisan associations, and those engaged in professional journalism. These informants shared a common characteristic as journalists, though not necessarily a common understanding of professional journalism.

Further, the selection of the case study for my research, was purposive and done with the assumption that advertising could provide one explanation to the type of content in newspapers, which was necessitated by the non-availability of financial data. Further, analytically-focused sampling became relevant during the analysis, which caused the researcher to also study discourses in texts carried by partisan media to understand how partisan influences influenced the practice of journalism in Nepal. This involved analyzing the texts of headlines in three partisan online portals reporting on a similar event of three different political parties to understand where each stood while reporting about the political party considered “us” and “them”.

3.5.1 Sample Size

The study has adopted a qualitative research design, where saturation of information obtained one sample was the criterion to move on to another information-rich data source. While this approach is usually applied for stopping interviewing after information begins to repeat, this study has used it for moving on to the next sample as is done while dealing with small samples (Patton, 2015). Further, because needed numerical data was unavailable, this study has used “slices of data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to understand the information categories and their properties for reaching the inferences. One example of this would be the slice of data on annual government funding of media associations and media, which even though available for a five-year period provides data that implicates government in using state finances for vested interest.

Final Samples

Different data samples have been selected purposefully for the study as discussed in 3.3; the final samples are listed in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

Samples Used for Data Collection

Description of Data	Source of Data	Sample Size
Publicly available interviews	www.ukeraa.com	54
Newspaper headlines	<i>Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Annapurna Post, The Himalayan Times, Gorkhapatra (21 Dec. 2020); and 13 July 2021)</i>	76
Headlines from partisan online portals	ratopati.com, janatatimes.com, hamrakura.com	33
News and advertising	<i>Kantipur, Naya Patrika, Annapurna Post, The Himalayan Times, Gorkhapatra</i>	800 days
Government data	Ministry of Information and Communication Technology	5 years (2017/18-2021/22.
Key informants		22

Source: Fieldwork 2022-2023

The selection approach has been adapted from those recommended for qualitative studies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2015) and are therefore, considered to be valid.

(a). Publicly Available Interviews

Even though samples were purposively selected, one important criterion for selecting third party produced content, in this case interviews, was that it had to relate to the journalism/media sector. This was met by content appearing in a column, which is regular by design, in www.ukeraa.com. The columnist had interviewed journalists and media industry professionals on different aspects of journalism practice. The researcher first reviewed all interviews available for download from the site ranging and those not relevant or did not directly indicate association with news content production were excluded. Further, only interviews of journalists (including former journalists), media-industry workers, and members of the public (audiences) commenting on media performance – from 91 interviews that had been available for download. Interviews that were not downloadable or had faulty links were also excluded. The final sample comprised of data drawn from 54 interviews that appeared between August 2021 to February 2023.

(b). Newspaper/Online Portal Headlines (texts)

- a) Headlines on page 1 of five purposively selected daily newspapers of 21 December 2020, a day after the political event
- b) The selected newspapers were *Kantipur*, *Naya Patrika*, *Annapurna Post*, *Gorkhapatra* (government-run) and *The Himalayan Times* (English language)
- c) Of four private newspapers, three were in the Nepali language and one in the English language. The government newspaper publishes in the Nepali language.

- d) A total of 38 headlines have been analyzed.
- e) Discourses in 38 headlines of the same newspapers on 13 July 2021 reviewed for validating the findings.

Online Portals

- a) All headlines appearing on three online portals identified as partisan were included.
 - b) All online portal headlines collected by searching for their coverage of election manifestoes of three major political parties.
 - c) The portals were identified as partisan by three random individuals (all journalists by training) at the request of the researcher, the results were checked independently with three other journalists to confirm the suggested political slants.
 - d) The sampling days began on the day of announcement of election manifestos (on different dates) of three major political parties – Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) or CPN (UML), and CPN Maoist Centre.
 - e) The web search was stopped when Google Search returned no more new stories.
 - f) The total sample added up to 33 headlines.
- (c). Newspaper Coverage and Advertising
- a) Sampling included all issues of newspapers starting on 21 December 2015, the day the company in question announced the sale of its shares and was continued for a period of for approximately five months (i.e. 31 May 2021).
 - b) All stories and advertisements were counted.

- c) All stories and advertisements were measured in terms of column and space occupied for example, six columns (half page), indicating that the advertisement covered one-half of space of a particular page of a particular paper; all stories were measured in terms on the number of columns 1,2, 3, etc. and appearance on a particular page.
 - d) The headlines were grouped as negative, positive, or neutral to the company concerned.
 - e) In all, 800 days of content – news and advertising – was reviewed and analyzed.
 - f) The company (Ncell Axiata) was selected because it is a major advertiser and was facing a major reputation crisis, which is a time when there is increased attention to public relations.
- (d). Government Records
- a) An attempt was made to obtain government data by making a Right to Information request at the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MOCIT) for documents mentioned in its annual report.
 - b) The obtained documents did not contain the required financial data. Following this, another attempt was made to request data to a Joint Secretary at the MOCIT. This meeting was possible following an introduction provided by an intermediary. A formal application was made to the ministry thereafter, in response to which it provided the requested information on government payments to media associations and media for a period covering 2017/18 to 2021/22.
 - c) A written application was made at the Press Council Nepal for circulation claims of five newspapers to get an idea of their reach. One newspaper had not submitted its claimed circulation for 2019/20.

(e). Publicly Accessible Private Records

Another source of secondary data was the World Wide Web (Internet), which was used to track the information on businesses also run by media owners. This was done using Internet search tools to find information disclosed by the companies themselves, which was compared with ownership information reported by media on various occasions.

(f). Key Informants

- a) Key informants were selected twice – first by the researcher for pilot interviews – based on their experiences in leading newsrooms and journalist associations. The second group of informants were selected after data analysis.
- b) A total of 22 interviews were carried out between September 2020 and May 2022, etc.
- c) The second round of interviews included 10 informants were selected for their knowledge about and experience in journalism and the media industry. These interviews were intended for validating findings of data obtained from samples discussed above, particularly in relation to advertiser/ business, political and owner influence on media operations.

The final sample was as follows:

- a) 54 interviews appearing on www.ukeraa.com.
- b) 38 front page headlines of five daily newspapers the day after the dissolution of parliament and announcement of elections by the President in December 2020 and after reinstatement of parliament on 13 July 2021.
- c) 33 headlines on the coverage of the announcement of election manifestos.
- d) Data on government financing of media and media associations 2017/18 to 2021/22.

- e) Publicly accessible data on ownership of media and other companies by media owners.
- f) Coverage of and advertising by Ncell in five newspapers after the company announced the sale of shares, and allegations of avoidance of Capital Gains Tax (CGT) that followed for a period covering five months (N=800).
- g) 22 key informants interviewed by researcher.

3.6 Data Processing and Interpretation

Data for this research has been processed in the manner described in the paragraphs below.

The analysis of adjectives (Godey et al., 2013) and interpretative analysis of attributes (Reagan, 2009) provided the basis for deriving the themes for analysis. The researcher has adopted the approach used by Reagan (2009) for analyzing the publicly available interviews (ukeraa.com). Reagan (2009) had used the attributes derived from data generated from anonymous online faculty reviews combined with interpretative content analysis of 300 anecdotal evaluations of their classroom experiences. The researcher has used 54 interviews that were publicly available for deriving attributes and themes for analysis and interpretation.

The analysis and interpretation includes narrative descriptions with contextual details as required. In other words, the researcher has accounted for and explained the directly unobservable contextual meanings that make any utterance meaningful (Geertz, 1973; Ponterotto, 2015). This approach “assigns purpose and intentionality to ... actions (utterances in this case), by way of the researcher’s understanding and clear description of the context under which the social actions took place” (Ponterotto, 2015, p. 543).

Data have been processed and interpreted drawing from various theories including Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 1993; 1985, 1993, 1998), content

analysis (Krippendorff, 2019; Schreier, 2012) and political-economic analysis. Understanding media capture requires a multidisciplinary because interpreting the observations and findings requires some understanding of various social science disciplines, which can to some extent be obtained through readings on Critical Theory (Rush, 2004) and critical theory (Green & LeBihan, 2006) as they apply to media studies. This can assist the interpretation of meanings of content, which is required for making inferences regarding bias/partisanship.

Content has been analyzed largely qualitatively and also numerically, with the understanding that qualitative content analysis “is a method for systematically understanding the meaning of qualitative material” done by “classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). The method is adequate given its applicability for describing a concept that required some interpretation (Schreier, 2012); the process was structurally “sequential exploratory” even though the study is not a proper “mixed-method” examination (Castro et al., 2010; Creswell, 2009; Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015)

Data have been interpreted contextually to arrive at inferences. For example, the answer to why an information and communication minister hands out public funds annually for building support among journalists through partisan journalists’ associations or to media, could be to extract positive coverage or some other form of PR support. Therefore, context is important for understanding the interpretations and the resulting inferences, which in the case of this study have been validated using data derived from other sources, such as key informants.

The data were interpreted sequentially starting with critical analysis of discourse to understand bias. The findings provided indications of the need to explore political partisanship among journalists and its influence in coverage to fully

contextualize the findings of the textual analysis. The next step was analyzing the texts in headlines of media identified as partisan. Similarly, the observed partisanship in coverage led to questions on what sustained such behavior leading to the examination of discretionary government funding of partisan – political party affiliated media associations – and media that advocate political interests. Another stage of qualitative research involved analysis of attributes of the media industry by participants for developing themes to explore the forms of media capture. Finally, the researcher studied the influence of businesses/ advertisers through a content analysis on the coverage and advertising for a five-month period of a company facing tax evasion allegations. All content was coded, categorized, and analyzed by the researcher, maintaining appropriate notes, and using Excel for data management.

All data used in this research was in the Nepali language, except for one English newspaper. Therefore, all data in Nepali – used for selecting attributes, analyzing discourses, and KIIs were translated into English for analysis.

The KIIs were recorded, transcribed, and translated in English and were shared with some key informants; this “member checking” was done to ensure that the transcriptions matched what the speakers had said. Effort was also made to ensure that the closest idiomatic cultural meanings of the translations were captured, which was aided by the fact that the researcher was also a native speaker of the Nepali language and had considerable experience in the use of the English language as a journalist.

The research has been carried out in a natural setting – a library where hardcopies of newspapers (and from websites, as required) were studied and KIIs were carried out in neutral spaces (coffee shops, restaurants), with the researcher as the key instrument for “examining documents, observing behaviors or interviewing

participants” (Creswell, 2009) using a protocol (check list) for all interviews. The study has used multiple sources of data (interviews – third party, KIIs, documents), and themes were derived by organizing, analyzing, and re-analyzing data for arriving at the final themes. The design emerged with the research, and the initial plan was adopted as data collection progressed. Media capture provided the framework for the study, which was informed by various theoretical lenses, and the political, social, and historical context of the growth of privately-run newspapers in Nepal. The resulting data has been interpreted by the researcher and even though the focus has been on participant meanings, it has also been influenced by the researchers own background and understanding of journalism and media.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability of data collected from publicly available online interviews, the researcher verbally checked with some of the interviewees by making references to their articulations, which they confirmed and also volunteered additional information, in addition to pointing the researcher to other documented sources of indications of media capture. The researcher also checked the translated transcripts with some key informants to ensure that the intended meanings were not lost in translation. Therefore, “member checking” (Mckim & Mckim, 2023) or “member reflections” (Ramanadhan et al., 2021) was done to ensure validity of some data used in the research. This approach provides an “opportunity to review a personal experience or narrative” and “is critical and honors the integrity of qualitative research” (Mckim & Mckim, 2023, p. 45). This, however, was not done with all participants because that would have added to their burdens of spending time for the review, after already having agreed to the interviews. With some other participants the

researcher checked the validity of the translations through follow up telephone interviews. The checking with some participants helped to assure the validity of the translated interview transcripts.

The researcher checked several online portals to find columns similar to *Chautho Anga* on www.ukeraa.com and did not find any, confirming that it was the only source that could provide the information-rich data required by the study. The researcher has validated all the keywords that assisted in deriving themes from the data with key informants.

In the case of online media selected for analyzing reportage by media identified as partisan, the researcher had asked three journalists (who regularly read online media) to name portals that they would identify as partisan and believed they were associated with major political parties. Their suggestions were rechecked with random informants to ensure that the selection was reliable. The researcher is, therefore, confident that the strategies used for data collection and analyses are both valid and credible.

Checking validity of qualitative data, particularly that coded by a single researcher, cannot always qualify standard validity tests. The researcher has tried to improve data reliability after generation by grouping them in categories and themes with a focus on finding answers to the research questions and excluded data, which were believed to be untenable or not relevant to the research objectives. The other means used for enhancing data validity was testing and retesting (Reagan, 2009), particularly while selecting the attributes and deriving the themes, the same was also done with data for textual analysis. and the themes derived were discussed with the thesis advisors and two qualified academics separately for further refinement.

Adopting a position similar to that of Krippendorff, the researcher has allowed “multiple voices speak through a text” (p. 430), in accordance with the practice in critical scholarship.

On a practical level, the poor quantitative data availability and the political-economic nature of the research objectives made qualitative analysis the best possible methodological option for the research. Further, even if quantitative data had been available it may not have led to the “most obvious” conclusions that could be drawn from qualitative interpretations of textual data, as my study was ontologically concerned with “local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 225). The researcher believes that the coding frame is valid because the categories that emerged represent the concepts in the research questions, which was done by adapting the frame to match the materials used in research (Schreier, 2012). Therefore, this study is both reliable and valid.

3.8 Ethical Concerns

All interviews used in the data analysis chapters were obtained with informed consent of participants, who were briefed about my study, research questions and how the information would be used. The consent was recorded before the actual interviews. To protect research participants, the researcher has even anonymized all individual opinions taken from publicly available interviews for data used in the analysis in order to abide by ethical standards related to the study of human subjects. A code known only to the author has been used to attribute information associated with particular human sources, including the key informants. Similarly, none of the newspapers and online media stories have identified the producer because, the production process is not influence free and that dilutes agency; while the medium – a

public institution by function – has been named, as appropriate. In this sense, the researcher has fully protected the identities of all human sources used in the study, despite agreements by some key informants (recorded) to using their identities, if required. All data used for analyzing attributes, discourses and media content and advertising are available in the public domain (institutional websites). Finally, as the researcher, translated all the Nepali texts taking care not to alter the intended idiomatic cultural meanings, with reference to the context where what was said. The researcher believes that the translation is comparable to what would have been done by an independent translator who is used to contextualizing meanings and not doing word-to-word transformations.

3.9 Theoretical, Methodological, Empirical Delimitations

The study is a bricolage of qualitative analysis, including critical discourse/textual and political economic analysis as they relates to media and society. It is likely that a survey could have resulted in different inferences, which would have been the case had the study been designed from the media audience/readers perspectives, for example. The study largely involves data covering the period from December 2015 to end-2023, but is not a longitudinal study, because it has selected caches of information-rich data for analysis. It also refers to historical data on media development from 1950, where applicable.

The study is largely exploratory, qualitative, and interpretative and based on a number of data caches derived from secondary and primary sources, including publicly available websites as well as newspapers, and government data obtained through special request. Some numerical data have also been analyzed, particularly to supplement the findings of qualitative and textual analysis. What this study largely

does is attempt to understand the realities as they relate to media capture from the perspective of industry participants, which are experienced, real, and fundamental for this study. Similarly, the discourses reveal both conscious and unconscious biases that slip into content, which in the case of this study is understood to be an influence of capture.

Methodologically, the study has attempted to adapt applicable research approaches. Quantitative media capture studies have largely been done in societies where required empirical data are available (di Tella & Franceschelli, 2011; Louis-Sidois & Mougin, 2020; Trombetta, 2018), while other studies have largely been on economic modelling (Corneo, 2006; Prat, 2016; Vaidya & Gupta, 2016). Still other studies have been explanatory consolidations of research findings and political-economic analyses (Cárdenas et al., 2017; Dragomir, 2022; Petrova, 2008a; A. Schiffrin, 2017b; Strömberg, 2015). Among those reviewed was one qualitative assessment, based on interviews with journalists (Relly & Zanger, 2017), which has been expanded. By the study that has adopted critical textual analysis to understand bias in content, particularly political bias, and its influence on what is produced and communicated. Media capture drives such behavior.

Media capture is by nature very surreptitious and difficult to discern. The difficulty was compounded because quantitative information on private companies required for evidencing the analysis is legally protected in Nepal. The required data – mainly financial reports of media companies – was not available. The same is true for information on other businesses run by media owners, which because they are private companies have legal protection. To go around this, the study has attempted to compile data from publicly accessible sources for understanding media ownership and concentration, which is said to be a driver of capture.

Similarly, it took a Right to Information application and a personal request to obtain some data on discretionary financing of partisan media associations and media by the government. Even though some data for a limited period was available it was not possible to categorize and analyze them quantitatively owing to inconsistencies in recording and reporting. Nonetheless, the data does provide some evidence of how government resources are used to fund media associations and media supportive of political parties.

Finally, the Corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic disrupted the research momentum because the resulting restrictions on mobility made it impossible to access public libraries, meet informants or visit government departments for seeking the required data. Effort was made to make the best use of the time by carrying out the pilot online interviews using the Zoom (<https://zoom.us>) platform with purposively selected key informants.

The study is largely based on textual analysis guided by theories discussed above. Therefore, the researcher does not claim that the findings are generalizable, nor are they universally applicable. Instead, what the study has done is isolate and explain the tendencies of media capture in Nepal, which was its primary purpose. A section of the study bases on data on individual opinions of industry participants that have been used to extract attributes for determining themes interpretatively. No effort was made to check the credibility of the medium from where the data was derived because it was a public medium that had over 100 interviews of public personalities, including journalists, when reviewed by the researcher, and hence was assumed to be a credible platform. The researcher did not purposively interview media owners and government media handlers for reasons of accessibility, and also because capture

would not be a subject they would openly discuss as admitting to capture would affect their overall credibility. Hence the perspective of owners is not analyzed. Further, financial data of media companies, including advertising incomes, have not been included because they were unavailable.

The largely qualitative interpretative analysis is based on available data. Even though such research tends to be dismissed by both faculty and university administrators for not being adequately “scientific” – a debate that remains unresolved in social science scholarship – this study has succeeded to explore, explain, and make some inferences on media capture in Nepal and can inspire further research.

CHAPTER-IV

FORMS OF MEDIA CAPTURE IN NEPAL

The word “form” in this study means observable inconsistencies in journalism practice indicative of media capture or something that distinguishes capture. For example, it would be journalism content where there is evidence of selectivity, under-reporting, exaggeration, etc. The study has isolated the forms of capture evident in experiential statements of knowledgeable individuals (journalists, advertising managers, etc.) and validated that with information obtained in key informant interviews (KIIs), review of government records, and from publicly available information on media ownership and concentration of the interests of media owners in other businesses. The interpretative analysis is based on themes derived from the attributes (inherent characteristics) in the publicly available interviews, data on government payouts to journalism associations and institutions and publicly available ownership data of media and other companies by some media owners.

The chapter is divided into three sections: Section A has analyzed text obtained from publicly available interviews of journalists and media practitioners, Section B has analyzed government funding of media associations and media, and Section C has examined media ownership and concentration in Nepal.

All attributes of media/journalism derived from publicly available interviews were not exclusive but overlapped across themes. Therefore, the categorization of the attributes in this chapter suggest their best fit thematically. For example, “selective” as a descriptor is indicative of both bias and unprofessionalism, but it has been used as indicator of bias, where its meaning in context of use was most relevant. Similarly, the terms “media” and “journalists” used in the analysis are not exclusive and refer to

either one or both when the context is appropriate. This has been done to avoid repetition. The analysis has been organized thematically, with sub-themes where appropriate to answer the research question on the forms of media capture in Nepal?

Section A

Inferences in parentheses in the tables below have been drawn from the context in which the data sources used the analyzed texts. The analysis has also referred to some of the specific statements of the speakers/sources, and all such attributions are coded with a “U” prefixed number (e.g., U-1, U-2, and so on) to represent the publication from where the interviews were obtained. This has been done to ensure anonymity of those making the statements. The “U” in the thesis refers to relevant articles on www.ukeraa.com. The keywords derived from the statements have been used to develop themes for analysis.

4.1 Biased/Selective Coverage

Bias or selectivity in coverage is one form or indication of a captured media environment, because the resulting content favors a specific party related to the issue (the side that has captured media) and such content is not neutral or impartial. All descriptors categorized in the following table have meanings that indicate the existence of partiality or bias in content (Table 4.1), which is assumed to be indicative of capture.

Table 4.1*Indications of Bias and Selectivity in Nepali Journalism*

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Selective, power driven, exaggeration, business interest (in news), interest driven, interest driven coverage, cover/hide malpractices, don't see critical issues (are paid), block news on corruption (media advisors), directed news (by sources).	These words and phrases indicate erosion of impartiality and implies the existence of favor exchange by media/journalists with those favored in content.	Bias – selective coverage

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The descriptors used in Table 4.1, such as “selective”, “power driven”, “interest driven”, and “business interest” underscore partiality or the existence of bias, which some data sources had used to explain what makes content partial. Examples included articulations where journalists were accused of pretending not knowing about what happened, particularly with news they did not want publicized, and also of instances when they blocked news on corruption or even covered/hid malpractices of certain groups/ interests instead of reporting them (U-13, U-14). One interviewee said, journalists/media worked not to expose wrongdoing but to cover up (U-20) Another example of this was the ignorance by large newspapers or the non-coverage of tax fraud allegations against a multinational company for almost a year even though the issue had been consistently reported by one small publication. One large newspaper had reported the story only after the government had pressed formal charges (Kantipur correspondent, 2022). Journalists said it was almost an unwritten policy to avoid accusing large businesses as they were also major advertisers (KII 12, 13 & 16)

and the idea was to be sure rather than report what still required evidencing. Some of these tendencies were discussed in context of journalism practiced after 2017/18 when local governments were formed and the elected officials began appointing journalists as “media advisors” – a situation also of conflict of interest, which has more or less been “normalized” by media/journalists. The tendency to pick sides and partisan advocacy was noted by an editorial that appeared in a Press Council Nepal publication (Press Council Nepal, 2078 [2021]). One interviewee even said “party journalists” are appointed as chair of the Press Council Nepal (U32).

Impartiality/fairness is an indication of effective independence in journalism. Biased journalism, therefore, indicates dereliction of journalistic obligations and also contradicts the very notion that journalists independently pursue the truth. The terms in the statements as displayed in Table 4.1 indicated bias, which can be assumed to have resulted from compromises made by journalists and media by siding with people in positions of power and/or with money in a transactional relationship of favor and cash exchanges (U-18, U-20). The currency for capture is power emanating from different state positions and exercised by officials at all three levels of government – federal, provincial, and local – and public money, which is an economic force in itself.

The basis for assuming favor exchange are the indications by data sources about possible incentives provided to media/journalists to ignore or pretend not to know about issues that powerful interests did not want covered or publicized, or to even block/kill news (U-14, U-18, U-20, U-37, U-52). According to a key informant, “Threats and inducements from political leaders are usually aimed to stop coverage of certain stories if they are aware of the likelihood of publication, and to stop/delay follow up stories after one not to their liking has been published” (KII-13). The

informant had served as an editor at a newspaper. He added that such influences (sometimes, even monetary) came from top political functionaries, including senior party members, ministers and even the prime minister.

The goal of media capture is to influence content for desired outcomes, which is possible only when journalists are willing to be biased. In Nepal, this bias is rooted in political ideology, real or opportunistic (discussed later), or has resulted from compromises made for monetary gain and other forms of instant gratification, such as accompanying top leaders/ministers on their visits to foreign countries and other junkets. Based on these inferences, one can argue that the bias can be an indication of capture that is taking place, while how it operates, or its mechanics could vary. The data also indicated existence of corrupt practices among journalists – discussed under another theme, unprofessional/ unethical practices – which exacerbates capture. In Nepal, political affinities are assumed to be a major driver of bias, which is discussed separately below.

4.2 Unprofessional and Unethical Practices

By “unprofessional practices”, this study refers to lapses resulting from not-knowing or lack of full knowledge of how journalism is done, and “unethical practices” refer to the moral lapses of journalists and media, and violations of accepted (and known) ethical standards. The existence of unprofessional/ unethical practices in Nepali journalism is evidenced by the following types of descriptors: (1). Unethical/ unprofessional practices, (2) paid journalism, and (3) conflict of interest. The related data are displayed in tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4

4.2.1 Favor Exchanges and Unethical/ Unprofessional Practices

The fairly frequent references to “unethical” and “unprofessional” practices in data indicated the presence of both minor infractions and major malpractices in the journalistic profession (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2*Unethical/ Unprofessional Practices in Nepali Journalism*

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
No verification of “given” content, unprofessional, unethical, immoral.	These words indicate both minor and major deviations from professional conduct.	Such unprofessional/unethical practices are exacerbated by favor exchange.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The three related descriptors derived from the texts “unethical”, “unprofessional” and “immoral” indicated the existence of such behaviors in journalism. Another attribute mentioned was non-verification of content, which is related to capacity and professional practice, because verifying information using at least three independent sources is considered to be the normative standard. The statements from which data were derived accused journalists of not verifying content, and even making use of information/ content made available by various interests.

The references to unethical behaviors and unprofessional practices in Table 4.2 indicate deviation from standard journalistic practice. In such situations, even minor ethical compromises that could be corrected with awareness, if unchecked, could mature into unprofessional/ unethical habits, which is what the data in the statements indicated. The exchange of favorable coverage by media/ journalists can be exacerbated by “incentives” that come from power and money of sources. Therefore, one can argue that the public disclosure of existence of such practices by the interviews from which data was derived, indicated ubiquity and signaled that the media/journalists have been functioning in intermediate states between independence and dependence (on sources), which is an indication of media capture. The exact form of this could vary depending on situations. According to one informant the struggle

for survival of media has become so intense that they would do anything with content to please advertisers – as they are already providing kickbacks to company officials who channel advertisements to their platforms (KII-19).

4.2.2 Influence of Money

Money is a major influence on media, particularly that passed on non-transparently in exchange for favorable coverage. Table 4.3 lists the words and phrases which indicated monetary exchanges that were taking place in data derived from the statements by journalists and other media sector workers from interviews downloaded from www.ukeraa.com.

Table 4.3

Paid Editorial Content in Nepali Journalism

Descriptors	Interpretative analysis	Theme
Paid (by leaders), brokering-dealing, salaried (by colleges), bargaining, blackmailing, fabricated scoops, readymade news, paid coverage, Bargaining (in exchange for easy questions to candidates in TV talk shows), paid news (media advisors), bought (by sources), sold (to banks), “pocket” journalism.	The terms “paid”, “brokering-dealing”, “fabricated” news suggest the worst that could happen to independent journalism. While indicating how professionalism has eroded, they also indicated the deeply rooted the corrupt practices.	Influence of money on media content.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

As displayed in Table 4.3, the word “paid” was used numerous times by interviewees, along with other words such as “brokering/ dealing” and even “blackmailing”. All of these connoted the existence of a transactional relationship

between journalists/ media and various interest groups, including the sources they covered. Further, phrases such as “ready-made news” and “fabricated news” demonstrated complete subservience to the interests who exercise power/financial influence over media/ journalists. The use of another term – “salaried” – suggested the pervasiveness of the malpractice (Table: 4.3).

Paid coverage/news is the worst that can happen to media because journalism thereafter can no longer be independent, fair, and accurate. Instead, it instead becomes a propaganda tool for those who pay. One interviewee had even used the term salaried in reference to corrupt practices in education reporting (U7). The frequent use of paid and other words that described monetary exchanges indicated transactions (e.g. brokering, ready-made news, salaried, money driven, etc.), which one can assume is what media/ journalists obtain by providing favorable coverage. Further, the use of the phrase paid news in the statements referred to money-for-coverage type of give-and-take, with the money coming different sources – politicians, businesses and even educational institutions. One source said that elected local leaders even ask reporters to cover their work in exchange for “servicing”, connoting a payment of some kind. Another source said that television program hosts have found a way to “sell” easy questions to candidates who are featured in televised interviews and debates, during elections (U10, U25, U30, U31, U35, U42, U48).

The reference to educational institutions categorically said that reporters had been receiving “salaries” from private schools and colleges (U10). Attempted payments by politicians were also confirmed by key informants. Accordingly, on one instance a politician had actually visited an editor in his office with cash for stopping a story from being published (KII-13); and in another instance a politician had

purchased thousands of copies of the newspaper with his photograph for distribution to constituents during election campaigning (KII-17). The newspaper's publisher had agreed to carry the photograph of the candidate at the same place in the paper throughout the campaign.

The words and phrases used to describe Nepali journalism in data suggested the existence of capture, which, however, is difficult to prove at an individual journalist or media-level given the secretive nature of the exchanges involved. Even though circumstantial, the evidence from data can be considered adequate for inferring that the media is captured, and money is a major factor involved, and is present if not industry wide at least at the meso-level. Further, since favors are exchanged between more than one party, there is another side also involved in the exchanges, who in the context of media capture are people who benefit from controlling the narrative – usually those in positions of power (politicians) and those with money that would usually be businesses. Finally, the fact that journalists speak publicly about the malpractices underscores the existence of such tendencies, which also seem fairly well-known within the profession and – perhaps – has been normalized.

4.2.3 Conflicted Interests

Conflict of interest is a situation of incompatibility between the goals and concerns of two parties, one where say person is in a position to benefit or lose from a decision he/she makes. The descriptors from the text such as “influence-peddlers”, “dual roles”, etc. of journalists/media indicate such a situation (Table: 4. 4).

Table 4. 4*Conflicted Interests in Nepali Journalism*

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Conflicted interest (owner-journalist), dual role (owner/journalist), friends of investors, conflicted interest (with businesses), conflicted interest (beat journalists & media advisors), seeking jobs for friends and family, influence peddling/ fixing (contracts, jobs, political deals).	Mention of conflict of interest appeared multiple times in data.	Conflicted interests

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The data in Table 4. 4 present unique occurrences of descriptors, even if they had appeared multiple times in the text. According to data, situations of conflict of interest arose because media owners were also editors/journalists, which is an ethical conundrum where they need to strike a balance between conflicting goals. The goal of an editor which would be public service through journalism, which conflicts with the same person's business goal of earning a profit that is associated with his/her investment and ownership. The data also had references to the close proximity of journalists with business sources – suggesting that some reporters had even become “friends” of advertisers/ investors – which is again a relationship that can facilitate capture of content by sources. The inability to maintain a professional distance from sources can blur the lines between what is acceptable and what is not.

There were other types of conflicts indicated by data sources, including that of beat journalists being uncomfortably close with sources and functioning as their public relations (PR) agents, and journalists advising local government leaders while concurrently working in media. Other situations where interests conflicted were the

use of professional contacts/ sources by journalists to secure jobs for friends and family (in government and businesses), and even for influence-peddling and fixing contracts, and for helping media owners to secure political deals by introducing them to their sources. The situations described by data sources below are such where it could be impossible for a journalist to practice impartial, fair, and accurate journalism because they need to make compromises for the favors they receive from sources.

Some of the statements indicating such influences were:

- a) Advertising has killed news in media. Some stories have also brought back advertising (that had stopped), but when there is advertising, news becomes second priority... In recent times, I have seen editors soliciting advertisements. Soliciting ads. is not an editor's task. An editor should be concerned about news. Soliciting advertising can lead to compromises. (U-7)
- b) The reason why economic journalism has deteriorated ... is because journalists themselves are investors (in media) ... (Many journalists who run media) believe that they must receive advertising. The same person is soliciting advertising and writing news. Owner interest is now linked to news. (U-9)
- c) Once a beat is assigned, (the understanding is) no one else would write the (related) news. That made it easier for (journalists) to form syndicates (cartels)... morals have disappeared, news is reported based on agreements (with sources). The number of journalists salaried by private schools and colleges has been increasing. (U-10)

The multiple interests at play in Nepali journalism (Table 4.4) indicate how easily media can be manipulated. The dual position of journalist/ owners, particularly their conflicting motives – profit and public service – is the most apparent

incongruity. When interpreted in the overall context of other words and phrases in data such as unprofessional/ unethical journalism, paid news, and ready-made or fabricated stories, one can conclude that the proverbial line separating journalism interest from business interest has but become very thin – if it has not already vanished. This is a situation that is conducive to making compromises and engaging in non-transparent exchanges or being captured. The nature of possible return favors that captured media offer to sources who pay or offer jobs for journalists' family and friends are providing positive coverage, not covering critical stories, and softening coverage of critical stories in other media by reporting “alternative facts” and stories to create doubt among audiences. Such tendencies are difficult to pinpoint but can be inferred. It must be noted that such practices also contextualize the unprofessional practices discussed above because paid journalism and independent verification are the opposite sides of the same coin – one indicative of bad and the other of good journalism, respectively.

4.3 External Influences on Journalism

In addition to conflicted interests of owners and journalists, there are various external influences that interact with Nepali journalism content. The most obvious influences mentioned in the text can be grouped under (1) influence of advertisers/ businesses, (2) influence of media owners, and (3) Influence of politicians/ political parties.

4.3.1 Influence of Advertisers/ Businesses

Advertising is paid content carried by media to inform and persuade consumers to do as advertised. Generally, businesses seek media with high reach and readership/ audiences to advertise. These are also media that are sought by readers/audiences for their credibility, which can result from independence, accuracy, and fairness in coverage. Media charge fees for carrying commercial content and

therefore advertising is an important component of media revenues and profits. Table 4.5 shows text from data that indicate the media's relationship with advertisers and the market.

Table 4.5

Influence of Advertisers/Businesses

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Compromising, ad-dependent, powerless (editors), compromised, commercialized, market-driven.	Dependency on advertising has made editors powerless, and media compromising, market-driven, and commercialized.	Businesses and advertisers exert significant influence on content.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The descriptors of media-advertiser relations – such as compromising, ad-dependent, powerless (in relation to advertisers), compromised, commercialized – are self-explanatory or, a majority of the media are ad-dependent, and therefore, go out of the way to please advertisers (Table 4.5). Further, the following statements by interviewees allude to how comprised the media/ journalists have become:

- a) More recently, editors have themselves have become investors. Definitely, this is when they have commercial interests. There has been more advertorial content (in media) where they (advertisers) are friends of those who are both editors and investors. (U-11)
- b) The market has directed journalism. Reporters have been caught up in the profit-loss psychology. The media have been squeezed so much that we now have (a situation requiring us) to think and re-think before publishing any news – about how the market could react to it? [Or, the market determines coverage] (U-12)

- c) Ninety-nine percent investigative reports and breaking (news) are provided by interest groups. In a majority of cases, those who bring the files (to media) do not only bring news but also their interest. Economic reporters are accused of siding with businesses and obtaining money from them. This is not fully true, nor it is fully untrue. (U-30)

Balancing the dependency on advertising for revenue with credible, critical content (including that on businesses) is what gets media more readers/ audiences who then make media more marketable to advertisers. However, the volume of credible, critical, and fair business content has been decreasing in the newspapers analyzed in this study, where one can observe that “business journalism” has been transformed into PR tools for major advertisers, and media have become their mouthpieces. The media’s dependence on advertising has caused it to follow the dictates of those who pay and this a type of influence, which when unchecked, is shortest route to being captured. This also contextualizes the use of descriptors such as “ready-made” and “fabricated” news discussed in the earlier paragraphs.

Audiences/readers desire independent and credible sources on news and information, which media can provide only by adhering to high professional standards. But as the texts analyzed have suggested, this has not been the case. Both independent media and advertising in Nepal developed rapidly in the 1990s, but overall economic growth and business expansion have remained slow resulting in a handful of major advertisers and a large number of media competing for the same advertisements. The expansion and growth of the Internet as a new platform for advertising after the turn of the century, has made the market more competitive for the legacy media.

The media market in Nepal is one where there is high demand for advertising while the number of major advertisers (supply) is limited, which provides businesses the leverage to pick and choose favorites, which one can assume they do, by seeking out compliant media. The inference, thus, is that the media have been making compromises, which in this case has been to provide favorable, uncritical coverage of businesses as payback for advertising. Businesses in Nepal expect media to return favors, it is a “I support you, you support me” type of situation (KII-21).

Governments also advertise and such advertising can also be employed for similar purposes. The establishment of an Advertising Board in December 2020 represents an effort by the government to consolidate scattered advertising being done by different public agencies to bring them under one window, which, when fully operationalized, can provide the Board substantial financial leverage to use advertising payouts to control media content. This is because having all government advertising – estimated to be about a third of the total – under one agency can give the institution disproportionate power and make it easy for government to reward supportive media and starve out those critical of its policies and actions.

4.3.2 Influence of and on Media Owners

The interaction of media owners with content takes place within organizations and therefore can be detected only through anecdotal evidence drawn from interviews with journalists willing to share their complicity in such behaviors. The descriptors indicating such influence are given in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6*Influence of Media Owners on Content*

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Influenced (by owner), Used (editors by owners for business purposes), influenced (both editors & owners), used (editors & owners), used (editors for soliciting ads.)	Dependency on advertising has made editors powerless, compromising, and the media market- driven and commercialized.	Businesses influence content.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

In addition to advertisers/market, the sampled text suggested that owners are also major sources of influence on journalism content. The data sources accused both the owners and editors of being used – the owners by political and commercial interests and the editors by the owners, and also by external interests. The major descriptors suggesting this in the texts were “influenced” and “used” (Table 4.6).

The data suggested that one channel through which the interests of both politicians and businesses interacted with media content were the media owners, particularly those who also had other businesses and their own political ambitions. There are different situations where such influence is possible, one being the case where the interests (both political and business) of media owners align with that of external influencers as well as the editors, at other times commercial imperatives dictate.

Editors are salaried staff of media companies, which are essentially family-owned businesses in Nepal and therefore owners are in a position to exert direct

influence on staff, particularly in a small media industry environment where there is low professionalism (discussed earlier), which leaves editors limited choices – of either quitting their jobs or playing along with the owners. The external influences that lean on owners are usually governments and advertisers. Owners cannot risk offending governments because they also have other businesses to protect (in addition to political ambitions). They cannot offend major advertisers either because advertising is the media's major source of profit and in a market where there are a few large advertisers, offending them could be counterproductive as boycott by major advertisers it could cause the media to be unviable. One owner had even influenced the editor to comply with a politician's election strategy of having a photograph published in a newspaper throughout the election campaign as support for helping the owner/publisher secure a nominated political position later (KII-17).

The owners sway because it is in their interest to be on the side of powerful politicians and advertisers and have been known to have made “requests” to editors for “consideration” or to “review” certain content carefully; in some cases, they have even bypassed editors who do not comply and reached out to other senior journalists to exercise their wills (KII-9). Further, owners of large media companies in Nepal have various other media and non-media businesses and are therefore pliable given that their fortunes can be influenced by both adverse policies (instigated by politicians) and cutbacks in advertising by major advertisers (sometimes also in collusion with government).

According to one informant, there was a time when business owners met the newspaper publishers after a critical story to try to control further coverage (“damage”), when the owners used to tell them, “You should be thankful that your names have not been published, which I believe the reporters have (irrespective of

whether they had it or not, to deflect advertiser pressure)” (KII-15). This, however, seems to have to have changed as owners have begun to yield to advertiser pressures. Further, what some are also said to be doing, is to use critical/investigative content on businesses for negotiating advertising and other deals, including “free” or “sweat” shares of companies.

In addition to the influence of owners, external influences on editors can result from their proximity with the sources. The political proximities of journalists are evidenced in the existence of partisan journalists’ associations, which function as extended units of the political parties. The estimates of party-affiliated journalists in Nepal are as high as 90 percent, and therefore, the conclusion that such journalists have presence across all media and serve as entry points for partisan capture. Partisan influences are more pronounced where the politics of the owners and journalists/editors match.

One can assume that editors who are not politically independent – particularly those who have been appointed as media advisers to prime ministers and ministers, as political party functionaries and as members of party publicity departments or committees during elections are burdened by the dialectical opposition between loyalty to the political masters in anticipation of future favors or the general citizenry, on whose behalf media is expected to keep watch on powerful interests in society. Often, journalists thus appointed to political positions have not had a cooling off period from their media engagements. This is the basis for inferring that media capture in Nepal not only takes place through individual proximities of editors with sources and their political leanings, but it is something that permeates across all levels of journalism practice and is operationalized through party-affiliated journalists and the “journalism” they do. Some statements in data indicative of this are as follows:

- a) ... we are not (no longer) political reporters but are becoming party reporters... A journalist reporting one party does not even know who office holders in another party are... (The person) responsible for the Congress (party) beat becomes a press advisor when it is in government, when the UML is in office, the journalist covering the UML beat becomes an advisor... A reporter's goal should be to become an editor, but it is now to become an advisor... (U-27)
- b) Editors do different tasks for owners. Their role now has become to lobby political leaders for corporate tax concessions for owners, meet businesses to solicit advertising, and accompany owners for collecting news in their interest. ... If any media house writes about excesses of a public institution or business the market begins to say (this appeared because) "something might not have worked out" (in negotiations). (U-41)
- c) Media is dominated by party or corporate journalists. They have been placed there not to write news but to block it. The person in charge of reporting on the (Nepal) Oil Corporation is not there to write but to block (reports). Another does not write about cement companies, blocks it. Never print critical news, only sing praises. ... Now reporters are more loyal to owners than the editors. (U-46)

Table 4.7*Influence of Businesses and Politics*

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Influenced/directed (business journalism), higher influence on private media, influenced (both editors & owners), used (editors & owners), financed (by leaders & businesses), party and business-controlled, ownership (of media) by businesses, close relations, (with business), no questioning (of businesses, take sides (of businesses), journalists' campaign during elections (for parties).	Both business and politics have high influence on editors and owners, and through them on content.	Business and political influence on journalism.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Table 4.7 shows descriptors in the text that indicated less than professional relations between politicians and businesses, and media in general. While the descriptors suggested that all media were generally influenced, there was one comment suggesting that there was higher business influence on private media (U-43). State-run media are financed and controlled by government, and – perhaps – because their content follows a predictable pattern and have lower audiences/readers (except for Nepal Television and Radio Nepal – owing to their history and nationwide reach), they have lower private advertising, and influence.

Other descriptors indicating unhealthy relations between politicians and businesses and media were phrases such as financed by political leaders and businesses, controlled, business ownership (of media), close relations with sources, and bias (partisan campaigning by journalists during elections) (Table 4.7). Some of the relevant experiential statements about such influences are reproduced below:

- a) I used to work at an economic daily. There I wrote about fungus in Real juice. In the end I had called the company owner for a quotation. Space had been allocated on Page-1 for the story. But (when published) an advertisement had appeared in the allocated space. The story was printed on Page-3. (U-34)
- b) Journalists associated with organizations affiliated to political parties have submitted the keys of their organizations to political parties. ... There are fewer questions on the rights and wrongs once you (journalist) become a (party) cadre. Your attention is on what will be beneficial for the party/ leader. Cadre-journalists prefer to assist in hiding news that could affect their parties negatively... later he (she) end up working at the publicity department (of party) and engage in politics at the municipal, province, or federal levels...(U-40)
- c) Now (businesses) need to have regular journalists. Otherwise, the (political) leaders harass you. (You) need to register a F.M. radio or online (media), then paste PRESS on your vehicle. Otherwise, you cannot work. There are many industries in Madhesh (plains), and every industry has (its own) journalists. Now when you have journalists for every industry, how can there be news? Even if there is news, what would it be like? (U-44)
- d) Every political leader has a news medium, and (such media) have failed to do more than publicity (for leaders). Now the Fourth Estate revolves around publishers, editors, businesspersons, political leaders, and some journalists... Until we media stop behaving like mouthpieces for banks and printing stories on inauguration of ATM machines, till then we will not print stories of farmers made homeless by the same banks. Instead, we publish advertisement/ notices using threatening language calling their borrowers to payback their loans within 15 days. (U-61)

- e) Most news sources are getting news that they prefer published... They have been sending news in their interest... and journalists are being used for disseminating the news... Most local journalists are in the pockets of political leaders and businesspeople. These journalists have online (media) in their pockets... When you have a business in your pocket how can we (audiences) expect news? (U-60)

The use of the phrases and terms in Table 4.7 are largely self-explanatory, and the statements above provide the context leaving very little room for conjecture, particularly because the statements are those of members of the media community. The statements confirm that Nepal's media have been operating below normative standards, which can be an outcome of either low capacity or external influences, or both. Capacity issues can be discounted because 30 years have elapsed after the environment became conducive for independent journalism – after 1990 when multiparty democracy was established and controls on free expression and media were ended. Therefore, the deviation of media from the normative performance expectations, can be inferred to have resulted from external influences, which in the context of media capture result from favor exchanges both monetary and non-monetary, which have also been substantiated circumstantially in the statements of media industry workers as well as by key informants.

4.4 Partisan Influences on Media/Journalists

Generally, journalists in democracies are also voters and participate in periodic elections to elect leaders except in situations (including eligibility and other election-related technicalities such as registration) that could prevent them from casting their ballots. Therefore, it is normal for journalists to have political beliefs, but they also need to be careful to ensure that their convictions do not influence the content they produce. The descriptors from statements that were analyzed suggested an increase in political partisanship/bias which is not limited to favoring major parties

but has extended to affinities with particular cliques and factions within political parties, and the numbers of such journalists has been growing (U10, U17). One interviewee said political beat reporters end up as becoming media/press advisors (U19). This is one indication that suggests that political affiliations and the proximity of journalists with political parties and politicians provides a platform for favor exchanges, and is therefore, a form of media capture (Table-4.8).

Table 4.8

Influence of Partisan Politics

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Partisan bias (incl. in story angling and focus), party journalism, cadre-journalists (incl. Govt. media), party influence on associations, party affiliations (of journalists), partisan appointments (in Govt. media), partisan and pro-corporate journalists.	Partisan bias among journalists was a frequently appearing attribute in data.	Political influence on media/journalists.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The main descriptors relating to partisanship in data were party journalism, big party domination of journalism, cadre-journalists (incl. government. media); and such journalists were described submissive, unquestioning, power pleasers, influenced by (partisan) associations, and having party affiliations (Table 4.8). There were also references to partisan appointments (by government in State media and regulatory agencies). The partisanship among journalists is contextualized by the following statements from where data was derived:

- a) (Journalists) become advisors of municipal heads and earn. This business has grown in remote areas. Local governments do not only advertise, but they also hire advisors. That has helped them to hide irregularities at the municipalities. Few news (reports) on corruption (can be found) because

of competition (among journalists) to become advisors. I have heard allegations that reporters in districts do not attend events unless they are provided with envelopes. When I was president of FNJ, I had received more than Rs. 80,000 in such allowances. (U-60)

- b) Our journalism has become dependent on Comrade (communist) or *Dai/Daju* (Nepali Congress). Once you are dependent, the news angle is not (decided by) the journalist but based on what the Dai or Comrade says. The rush to become press advisors is one reason ... Qualified journalists are now identified also as the advisor or (news) coordinator (for Z, Y or Z). This has blocked news on corruption in different levels of government. Political journalists are accused of holding party memberships, (of) partisanship in news, protecting *dais*, comrades, or cliques... When there are such weaknesses there are also reasons behind them. (U-62)

The descriptors when read in context can be extrapolated to argue that Nepali journalism is party dominated, particularly when read together with the references made about behaviors that result from subservience to ideologies/ political parties, for example, becoming submissive, pleasers of those in positions of power, and unquestioning. Such relations cause journalists to deviate from impartiality and independence. The reasons explaining such behaviors – in one statement above – include benefits for the journalists concerned, which can be inferred to be both money and other types of support particularly for journalists with political ambitions.

Nepal's journalism environment is one where partisanship has been incentivized by politicians. For example, those with memberships in partisan journalists' associations are rewarded when the parties they support assume power. The associations have served journalists as launch pads for appointments to state media positions or to other state financed regulatory institutions such as the Press

Council Nepal (PCN) and the Minimum (journalists’) Wage Fixation Committee (U32). It can thus be inferred that journalists who are members of partisan organizations are not fully independent and impartial in the content they produce and are instead beholden to the custodians of their political beliefs (party leaders), or to those from who they have received favors or expect future favors. This is a situation where journalism cannot be done independently owing to the give-and-take involved, which is typical of a captured media, even if purely monetary exchanges are not very obvious (U20, U26) (Table: 4.8.).

Table 4.9

Partisanship Among Journalists

Descriptors	Interpretative analysis	Theme
Big party dominance, cadre-journalists, submissive, unquestioning.	Journalists have picked sides in politics and are no longer independent.	Partisan preferences among journalists.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Additional descriptors relating to partisanship (Table 4.9) indicate that the larger parties have been active in propagating clientelism to dominate and place “friendly” content creators across media. One source in the text classified such journalists as “cadre journalists” or those who also hold party memberships, which had made them submissive and unquestioning (U-40).

One can therefore conclude that both ideological positioning of journalists and favor exchanges explain the partisanship in media content to a large extent. The ideological positioning is related to the membership of journalists in various partisan media associations, which almost every political party has nurtured. This partisanship is public knowledge, which even journalists don’t hesitate to brag about. For example,

three individuals who called themselves journalists and were also associated with partisan associations were on a national TV show in 2022. One of the panelist had bluntly said, “We are not impartial politically... we are partisan journalists (Himalaya TV, 2022, 14":39'-14":42'). In addition to mobilizing journalists behind an ideology, leaders of such associations and their members also function as PR agents and even organize regular “press conferences” for leaders of “their” parties. The invitees at such events are usually members of the same partisan association, an arrangement that works well for politicians because they get a largely pliant audience, which seldom asks undesired questions. At such platforms political leaders can make statements – often misinformative and dis-informative – which are unquestioningly reproduced and propagated by media, which is but a form of capture that could be either cognitive or money-induced. Examples of such press events organized by partisan media associations are available in Adhikari (2071 B.S, Poush 8) [22 Jan. 2015] , *Kasaila Chayerapani Sanghiyata Ulauna Sakdaina: Prachanda*, 2073 B.S. [No one can reverse federalism even if they want to, 16 Dec. 2016], and (Poudel, 2073 B.S., Magh 7) [20 Jan 2017].

Among the motivations for journalists to join partisan associations or do partisan journalism are favors they can receive from politicians when they are in leadership positions in government. These favors include political appointments to paid positions in State institutions and regulatory bodies, jobs at public media agencies, and payouts through the government coffers (See: Section B). When appointments to the regulatory body are influenced, it is not far-fetched to assume that there would be favorable treatment to certain newspapers/media and not others and also in classification of newspapers by the Press Council Nepal (PCN), which is the basis for public service advertisements. The impartiality of the regulator has been questioned by both media and civil society organizations (CSO); one CSO even

accused it of being “politically motivated” after the PCN had sought clarification from one newspaper (Freedom Forum, 2022, para 7). One interviewee even said that the chairperson of PCN was usually a “party journalist” (U32). The researcher, therefore, argues that political bias evident in journalism is an important predictor of media capture as this has been a form of payback by journalists for favors received from the government/ politicians. The bias is also a result of political party memberships of individual journalists, which conflicts with the broadly understood norms and standards of independent journalism.

4.5 Media Attributes and Outcomes

The descriptors in the text analyzed were also indicative of the attributes of media and journalists in general, which arguably, are indicators of a captured state. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.5.1 Industry Perceptions of Media/Journalists

The descriptors in the text and statements displayed above are also indicative of the perceptions of the media and journalists by the sources and audiences. Some of the words and phrases that occurred in the text were “elitist” and “feudal”, which indicate the distance of media/journalists from the general public and their affinity and service to power, and not the public whose interests they are expected to serve in their role as watchdogs. Two other descriptors – unlawful and spying – suggested deviant tendencies while others such as “low paid”, having “multiple vocations” and “ad agents” provided insights into the media political economy, where journalists are required to engage in multiple vocations to sustenance. One can also argue that the low media salaries is one driver of unprofessional practices, and that has contributed towards making media/journalists more vulnerable to capture. (Table 4.10)

Table 4.10*Industry Perceptions of Media and Journalists*

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Elitist, feudal, uninterested, unlawful (behavior), low paid, multiple vocations (<i>dhandā</i>), spying, ad agents (dist. Reporters).	Journalists in general have distanced themselves from citizens.	Increased threats and attacks on media and journalists.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The words and phrases drawn from the statements suggest that journalists rather than bringing those in power to account, identify and align with the those in power often in clientelist relationships, and that they have multiple vocations alongside journalism – including serving as advertising agents for their media – some of which result in unprofessional mix up of roles. One interviewee described the situation as one where media have been trapped between partisanship and commercialism and serve the interests of both benefactors (U40). Another said, most journalists in the districts were in the “pockets” of leaders of businesses (U43). The situation is clouded further by the non-transparent investments in media and the multiple interests of media owners in other businesses. There was also one mention of a nexus between politicians, businesses, and journalists, which is worrying because this is at the heart of the media capture paradigm. Another interviewee admitted to pretending not to know about issues that had to be reported for reasons beyond straightforward journalism (U42) – or capture.

4.5.2 Trust and Credibility of Media/ Journalists

There were descriptors in the text that alluded to how audiences perceived present day media in terms of trust and credibility. The use of words and phrases such as “unreliable” and “declining trust” referred to credibility and trust, while the other

phrases such as “two types of journalists” (real & pretenders), “assumption-driven news” and “hurried/ click-baiting”, etc. point back to unprofessional, even corrupt practices. Table 4.11 shows the descriptors that occurred in the experiential statements.

Table 4.11

Trust and Credibility of Media

Descriptors	Interpretative analysis	Theme
Unreliable, two types of journalists (real & pretenders), assumption-driven news, hurried/ click-baiting, declining trust	Journalism in general has begun to lose credibility among audiences.	Erosion of trust and credibility.

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The words and phrases grouped under trust and credibility (Table 4.11) can be understood to be the overall outcome of deviations of journalists from the basic professional norms. The deviations mentioned in data included not reporting without being sponsored (U33), readers having to read multiple media to come to some understanding about what exactly happened (U37) and also having relations so close with business sources that journalists cannot ask them questions (U42). These statements describe a media that has failed in its job to report on behalf of the public and cease to serve democracies as the fourth pillar to make power holders accountable when they are deemed to be unreliable and unworthy of public trust. Media after capture lose credibility and trust, the first signs of which were also apparent in the statements that were analyzed.

Section B

4.6 Government Funding and Media Capture

This section analyses a document made available by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MOCIT). The ministry provides annual grants to government media, media-related state institutions and also to journalists' associations and independent media for variously-worded purposes. This funding is not competitive, systematic, or transparent. The purposes of the grants – as evident in the ministry document – are repetitive, and use is also rarely monitored (Office of the Auditor General, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Table 4.12 contains data extracted from information provided by the MOCIT for a five-year period (2017/18-2021/22) on *patake anudan* (repeat grants) to media organizations and media. It includes only data where the total amount received by organizations have exceeded NRs. 1 million. The size of the grants ranged from NRs. 50,000 to NRs. 5 million. The funds were provided at different times when the ministry was led by ministers from the three major political parties – the Nepali Congress (NC), Nepal Communist Party, the Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), and the Maoist Center.

Table 4.12*Government Grants to Media Organizations Including Radio Stations (NRs. '000')*

Recipients	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total	%
11 different organizations	1425					1425	4.81%
38 FM radios	3075					3075	10.39%
Alternative Foundation					5000	5000	16.89%
FNJ	1000		2000		1500	4500	10.14%
FNJ district units (15) *	4000	3500				7500	25.34%
Nepal Batabaran Patrakar Samuha*			4500			4500	15.20%
Nepal Press Union	300		1000		900	2200	4.39%
Press Center			1000		500	1500	5.07%
Press Chautari Nepal	600		1000	700	700	3000	7.77%
Total	10400	3500	9500	700	8600	32700	100.00%
Total Annual Grants	48156.5	35429.9	78641.9	23596.6	37145.6	222970.8	

*Source: Ministry of Information and Communication Technology * Building construction grants*

In the five years for which data was available, the government had handed out NRs. 2.2. billion to media, the bulk of which went to state-run media organizations, and other media-related state agencies (Table 4.12). Because government media are not considered to be independent owing to their funding by, and government appointments at these organizations, the grants to them have not been analyzed. The remainder, about 1.5% percent of the total, went to media associations, media and also to organizations not known for their engagement in media or media development. In 2021/22 an organization whose website said its “guiding principle is Preserving nature, Promoting Science and technology and enhancing humanity” and sought to “Contribute for the social transformation and equal progress of human beings through

R&D and experimentation” and “to advocate through evidence-based policy discourse, research and publications, transformative campaigns and networking for equitable society” (Alternative Foundation, 2021) had received a grant of NRs. 5 million, the highest one-time grant provided by the MOCIT in the period for which data was available.

The ministry does not publicly announce the fund availability for media organizations, which has been disbursed each fiscal year. The funds to state-run media were distributed for purposes such as programming and digital archiving, in addition to conditional grants (to state radio, television, and newspaper) for example, “Weekly constitutional education and fortnightly program” (NTV), and “inclusive publication” (NTV and Radio Nepal), etc. Grants under the same headings were provided in almost all years for which data was available. The grants to non-governmental media organizations and media had the following purposes, according to the MOCIT records (Based on translation of the budget lines that were in Nepali):

- a) Building construction grant (15 FNJ district units).
- b) Grants to journalism-related organizations (including that to 38 unnamed radio stations; recorded as one grant).
- c) Journalists’-citizens’ dialogue program (4 grants to FNJ and three partisan journalist associations).
- d) Grant (one radio station).
- e) Citizens’ dialogue program (11 grants).
- f) Grants to journalism related organizations (20 grants).

The average annual spending on grants to non-government media organizations and media was about NRs. 18.6 million during the period under review. (See: Appendix 4 for complete list)

Among repeat recipients of such grants were the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), and three party-affiliated journalists' associations – Nepal Press Union, Press Chautari Nepal and Press Centre Nepal – affiliated to the NC, UML, and Maoist Center, respectively. The ministry does not have a published criteria for providing such grants to these organizations, or that to other recipients for that matter, which confirms its discretionary use allowing it to favor certain organizations or media, which one can assume is money exchanged for coverage or hush money, or a return favor for PR and other types of support provided by these organizations.

The FNJ had received the highest volume of the grant in the review period, while it was highest for Press Chautari Nepal among the three partisan journalists' associations. There was also a year (2020/2021) when the FNJ – an organization representing journalists of all political ideologies that also makes it politically inclusive, in form at the least – did not receive any funding. The reason was probably government displeasure over FNJ advocacy against the media bills that were under preparation, while the leadership of the FNJ was held by journalists close to the Maoist Centre and the NC.

The seemingly ad-hoc funding to media organizations was partially explained by the leadership in the ministry when the grants were made; the former Nepal Communist Party, now with the bulk of its members in the UML was in charge of the ministry for most of the review period. This is one explanation for the grant amount received by Press Chautari Nepal. The NC led the ministry for two brief terms and was succeeded by the Maoist Centre in 2021/22, when the NRs. 5 million grant was made. However, because specific dates when the grants were made were unavailable, it was difficult to track the grant to the tenure of particular ministers but the variation in funding levels over the years does suggest that both size of the grants and funding levels to partisan organizations vary with the political leadership at the ministry. The

grants exemplify how politicians hand out cash to media organizations/ journalists, presumably for some favors they have received in the past in the form of positive coverage or PR.

Media capture in Nepal cannot, therefore, be separated from partisan journalism. All journalist associations receiving the cash grants are affiliated with the main political parties, and because they receive monetary favors, they also need to provide return favors through PR services, or favorable coverage in media. One can further conclude that since many journalists from such associations hold party memberships and have been members of the party publicity committees during elections, and party communication departments, they cannot be expected to do independent journalism. Instead, they have been functioning in intermediate stages between independence and dependence, where they function as journalists only as long as this function does not conflict with their partisan loyalties.

Further, the grants made to media have been ad-hoc, with no published criteria for qualification. Such direct funding to media, including those supposedly private or community media, is but a transgression and misuse of public funds for favorable coverage, or funds for extending the clientelist relations that politicians have built with media and journalists over the years.

The use of taxpayer money to fund such organizations without competitive proposals and published eligibility criteria, is therefore problematic as it allows discretion, favoritism, and nepotism. For politicians, the arrangement is ideal as it allows them to disburse slush funds to media organizations and journalists and influence content, which is media capture in its purest form.

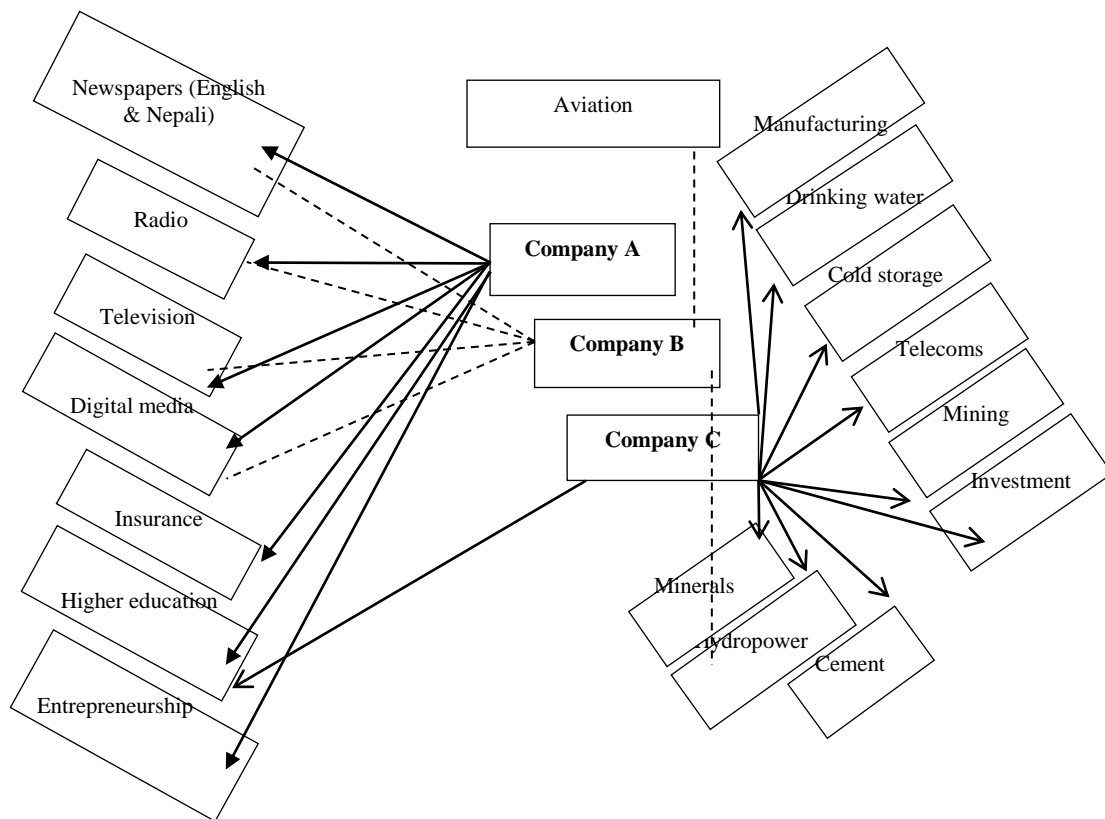
Section C

4.7 Analysis of Publicly Available Information on Ownership & Concentration

The researcher carried out an analysis of publicly available information on the websites of three large media companies selected purposefully, based on media reports on engagement of their owners in other businesses. This was done because it was not possible to obtain ownership data from the Company Registrar's Office as the information is legally protected. The analyzed information was collected from the websites of the companies also of individuals who owned media. Some information was also collected from other websites and news reports that were considered to be credible. From the analysis it was evident that the interests of media owners extend not only across media platforms but also to other non-media sectors (Figure 4. 1).

Figure 4. 1

Interests in other Businesses of Owners of Three Media Companies



Source: Fieldwork 2022

As shown in Figure 4. 1, one newspaper has interests in radio, television, digital media and in insurance, education, entrepreneurship, research and tourism (*The Kathmandu Post*, 2016, Feb. 5). Similarly, another self-declared “leading media conglomerate” has two newspapers, radio and television (Annapurna Media Network, n.d.), a helicopter company (Aero News Network, 2016), and a hydropower company (Urja Khabar, 2022). Yet, another media owner, runs a radio station, a telecom company, and a large number of companies in various sectors, including cement, education and energy (Muktishree Pvt. Ltd, n.d.). It was not possible to obtain information on shareholding of media owners in other publicly listed companies, which would also represent an extension of their interests.

Based on information in Figure 4. 1 it is evident that the media ownership is not only already fairly concentrated, but the same owners also have investments in other businesses and hence the postulation that they have an endemic interest of not offending the government through their media because it could ‘get-back’ through unfavorable policies in other areas of their interest which could then affect their profitability. The owners of concentrated media – with adequate reach and audiences – also have media power, which they can exercise on government as a bargaining tool for securing enabling policies in areas that affect their interests. This is a situation conducive to give-and-take. Therefore, it is in the interest of both government/ politicians and media owners to maintain a complementary relationship, which is aggravated when media operate in non-viable markets and require government concessions to remain profitable. The inherent power of media to highlight and undermine issues, therefore, becomes tradable resulting in a situation of capture. Hence, both concentration and cross-media ownership has resulted in an environment that supports another form of capture, and this has been serving the interest of both the capturers and media owners.

4.8 Discussion

This section discusses the major findings as they relate to the forms of capture that were observed and inferred. To recapitulate, media capture is a situation where a government or business is unable or unwilling to control media directly and instead uses indirect means – mainly money – to influence content. A democratic government, for example, would not want to be seen as one controls media, and would instead prefer to use incentives to influence media content, which is capture. Similarly, businesses prefer having a cozy relationship with media, which they can build through advertising and sponsorships. Such support helps to prevent critical reporting at times when there are lapses in the ways business is done. Some key findings in response to the question “what are the forms of media capture?” are discussed below under two broad arguments:

- 1) The biased and inaccurate content and unprofessional practices indicated by the study have little to do with media capacity and professionalism but are outcomes of intentional manipulation and distortion of information at the bidding of interests in both politics and business. This is a state of capture.
- 2) The study has resulted in evidence suggesting misuse of power (including money or financial power) by Government to influence journalists and, presumably, media content.

Firstly, the forms of media capture across countries can be similar while also being unique to specific geographies because “social control patterns” of each society influence and shape media (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2008). The proximity of media with politics, for example, can uniquely explain capture, in countries like Nepal while it is seldom mentioned in mature Western democracies where political partisanship has

become a thing of the past. Generally, while the forms of capture are more or less similar across countries, what stands out in Nepal is the strong partisan influence on journalists/media, which had parallels in how media was captured in Afghanistan (Relly & Zanger, 2017) and Bangladesh (Cárdenas et al., 2017). The media in Bangladesh was deeply polarized and was divided along party lines. In Nepal journalists had close ties with political parties before 1990 (Bhattarai, 2024), which was consolidated in the 1990s when political parties began organizing journalists in associations under their parties. The independence of journalism practiced by journalists in these associations has not been discussed as much as it should have been as it has worked well for both political parties for capturing content, and for journalists who benefit from handouts when their parties assume power. While all journalists in such associations may not have direct access to the political masters, one can argue that the intermediaries in leadership positions make sure the membership complies with the instructions from above, as was observed by Relly and Zanger (2017) in Afghanistan. Further, the journalists who sign up as members in partisan associations do not see how such a relationship could harm journalism, which could have resulted either from low capacity and poor understanding of journalism standards, or from the power-worshipping mindset in a society that began emerging from feudalism only in the 1990s.

Theoretically, it has been argued that “media pluralism provides effective protection against capture” (Besley & Prat, 2006, p.721), which somehow, does not appear to be the case in Nepal because even though there is a pluralistic media environment, there also are signs of capture as indicated by media content. The reason why the situation in Nepal differs is – perhaps – the political partisanship in an environment where 90 percent journalists are said to have partisan loyalties.

Therefore, what this study has suggested is that the postulation on media pluralism could result in a different outcome if political partisanship at the cognitive level (Stiglitz, 2017) of journalists in Nepal is taken into consideration, which, however, is a subject for another study.

Secondly, the study has resulted in evidence suggesting misuse of power (including money or financial power) by government to influence journalists and, presumably, media content. By theory, such actions aim to misinform people and influence the choices, particularly voting decisions of citizens to reduce the turnover of elected leaders. Business resort to advertising and sponsorships to buy similar influence or, let the money do the talking.

As Besley & Prat (2006) argue, where media is captured voters do not have all information they require to make voting decisions, particularly for voting out non-performers, and hence, there is low political turnover. This is seemingly true in Nepal where politicians from the 1990s still contest to and lead government. Therefore, the study tends to agree with the postulation about reducing political turnover, which is clearly one reason why politicians seek to influence media, and their preferred tools are funding them from the state coffers and directing state advertising – sometimes, even colluding with business to direct private advertising – to favored media. While this study did not study political turnover, it has explored, demonstrated and explained government funding of partisan journalists' associations and selected media. This funding is neither competitive nor transparent and has been paid out for similar purposes every year, which gives reason to suspect if it is intended for the stated purpose. It also leads to the postulation on the presence of ulterior motives, including the intent to use finance to capture content and control the narrative – to reduce

political turnover – or as payback for support received from particular media, journalists' associations and their leaders. This study did not study government advertising, which is about a third of the total advertising, and is thus another formidable tool through which the State can influence content.

In the private sector, Atal (2017b) found that advertiser influence poses a threat to critical business reporting, which new (online) media have begun to adopt and normalize. Critical business journalism vanishes where advertiser influence dominates. Circumstantial evidence generated by this study has indicated high advertiser influence, where they not only advertise but are also said to “trade” or provide “copy” of what they expect the media to carry in return for advertising/ sponsorships. Further, it was also obvious that advertising sets the tone of the coverage of companies that advertise (See: Chapter 5). The advertiser influence has resulted from the small advertising market and a large number of non-viable media that Mungiu-Pippidi (2008) discussed in the context of media capture in Europe. Another study, (Beattie, 2020) on climate change reporting and advertising had concluded that potential advertising allows firms to capture media, and within media “the tone of coverage shifts towards skepticism” (p.1) and reduces coverage. In Nepal, governments at all three levels also advertise, and given how businesses have used advertising as evident in this study, one can assume that government could also be doing the same to exert its influence. Nepal has recently formed a government-appointed an advertising board that has begun to consolidate public advertising, which when completed would make it easier for the government to use the fund to capture media, if it so desires. The study of advertising and capture is another area for further study.

Finally, media largely are family businesses in Nepal (only one newspaper company was listed as a public company in 2024) and media owners have multiple businesses across sectors; some have also begun vertical integration, particularly with in the areas of digital services and telecoms. Such conglomeration of businesses of media owners provide governments multiple avenues to influence them. This they do through favorable or unfavorable policies in different sectors, which can be inferred, but difficult to prove because information on private companies is legally protected.

At the theoretical level, Herman and Chomsky (1988) have discussed several structural factors which define and explain what news means, which overlap with the forms of capture observed by this study such as those emanating from “ownership and control, dependence on other major funding sources (notably, advertisers), and mutual interests [partisan politics of journalists and politicians, for example] ... between the media and those who make the news” (p. xii). Some of the same structural factors were also inferred by this study, particularly in terms of ownership concentration and dependence of media on advertisers, in addition to the relationship of politicians with partisan journalists. Arguably, therefore, the media environment in Nepal has always been vulnerable to capture, and as the study shows, it has begun showing signs of capture. In addition to exposing the symptoms of media capture in Nepal, this study, has also demonstrated that the media capture paradigm can assist in testing political economy theories on media, particularly for isolating what drives certain behaviors in media and journalism. Since private company finances are protected by law in Nepal, it was not possible to study how Government policy has been favoring/disfavoring companies owned by media owners, which remains another area for future inquiry.

CHAPTER-V

MEDIA CAPTURE AND ITS MANIFESTATION IN CONTENT

5.1 Introduction

This section includes critical analyses of discourses in selected texts, one related to a selected political event and the headlines in coverage by five daily newspapers, and another of three separate, but similar political events, by three online portals identified as supporters one of the three large political parties. It also includes a case study based on the analysis of content (both news coverage and advertising) related to a Telecom company that had faced a reputational risk following allegations of tax fraud. Section A discusses the discourses in the headlines of five newspapers a day after the dissolution of parliament and announcement of fresh elections by the Prime Minister and Section B presents the analysis of headlines on the coverage of the announcement of election manifestoes of three political parties by three online portals identified as partisan. Section C presents a case study of the coverage of and advertising by Ncell Pvt. Ltd. in five newspapers during a period when it had faced allegations of tax fraud.

Section A

The headlines appearing on the front pages of five newspapers on 21 December 2020, the day after the President of Nepal announced the dissolution of parliament at the recommendation of Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli were selected for analysis of discourses. The newspapers included in the sample were *Kantipur*, *Naya Patrika (NP)*, *Annapurna Post (AP)*, *The Himalayan Times (THT)*, and *Gorkhapatra*. The first three newspapers above were selected purposefully for their higher circulation, *THT* was selected because it is published in the English language and therefore could offer content differentiation based on the type of audience it catered to, and *Gorkhapatra* was selected because it is a government-run newspaper.

The prime minister's decision was the culmination of continued infighting in the ranks of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) – a party formed after unification of two large communist parties the Unified Marxist Leninists (UML) and the Maoist Centre – on 17 May 2018 (*The Kathmandu Post*, 2018, June 5). The unified party had a two-third majority in the parliament (Giri, 2018). Headlines appearing on Page-1 were selected for CDA because they are considered to be the page that gets first attention of readers or is “prime” real estate of daily newspapers reserved for most important news and high-cost advertising, evident in the published advertising rates (AMNNepal, 2021; KMG, 2020; Naya Patrika, 2019). The researcher translated the Nepali language texts in the headlines into English for analysis and the numbers in the tables below correspond to the translated texts. The specific words, phrases, or statements underlined, in the following section, indicate that they were the basis for the analysis and interpretation. The resulting data have been displayed, analyzed, and interpreted below.

5.1.1 Headlines and Sub-Headings in Five Daily Newspapers

The word “headline” refers to text prominently displayed in bold typeface and/or larger font size than regular news texts which is intended to grab attention of readers. In all there were 38 headlines related to the dissolution of parliament in the five newspapers on 21 December 2020, the day after the Prime Minister dissolved the House of Representatives and announced fresh elections in May 2021 (Table: 5.1). Headlines that did not dwell on the subject were excluded.

Table 5.1*Number of Related Headlines on Page-1*

Newspaper	No. of Headlines
<i>Kantipur</i>	7
<i>Naya Patrika</i>	7
<i>Annapurna Post</i>	6
<i>The Himalayan Times</i>	10
<i>Gorkhapatra</i>	8
Total	38

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Among the newspapers, *Kantipur* had seven headlines on Page-1 – one main headline on the dissolution, four related stories, an editorial, and a timeline of the previous day’s events. Similarly, *Naya Patrika* had seven related headlines, one main headline and five others on related issues, and an announcement of two related reports covered in the inside pages. The *Annapurna Post* had six, one main headline and five other headlines on reports related to the prime minister’s decision – it had also reproduced the related constitutional provisions and announced the headline of its editorial on the front page (Table 5.1).

The only English language paper included in the analysis – *The Himalayan Times* – had 10 headlines including a main headline, with sub-headings within text boxes, and nine other stories, of which one was unrelated but also perhaps the most important running story of public interest at the time when the Coronavirus (COVID-19) infections had crossed over 250,000 and had caused 1700 deaths. This story stood out as it did not appear in the front pages of other papers. The state-run newspaper – *Gorkhapatra* – had eight headlines – one main headline and seven other headlines, including one that was unrelated to dissolution, and seemingly of lesser importance to have deserved front-page placement on that particular day.

Generally, most of the headlines were summary statements on what had happened, worded variously, and only two newspapers NP and THT had headlines that attributed the sources of statements/claims of others that had appeared in them. The following paragraphs discuss the discourse direction and strategies evident in the texts of the different newspapers.

5.1.2 Headlines in *Kantipur*

The translated main headline and sub-headings in *Kantipur* were, Unconstitutional dissolution of the House of Representatives, and Prime Minister uses power non-existent in the Constitution; NCP headed towards split, disciplinary action against Oli; and Nationwide public resentment, respectively. The editorial was headlined Oli-Bhandari's (*Bhasmasur*)¹ demonic (self-destructive) path and the text box (timeline) was headlined, what happened all day? There was another headline casting doubt on the role of the president – *Rastrapatiko bhumika sankhako ghera ma* (Table-5. 2).

Table 5.2

Headlines in Kantipur

Main headline	Translation	Discourse Direction/ Frame	Discursive Strategies
<i>K1. Pratinidhisabhako Asambaidanik Bighatan</i>	K1. Unconstitutional dissolution of the House of Representatives	A verdict on the act, to influence the meaning	Predication, adjudication
<i>Sub-headings</i>			
<i>K2. Pradhanmantri dwara sambidhanmai nabhayeko adhikar prayog</i>	K2. Prime Minister uses power non-existent in the Constitution	Judgement, non-attribution	Negative presentation of “other”, otherization

¹ Reference to a mythical demon that acquires heavenly powers to destroy anything it touched.

<i>K3. Rastrapatiko bhumika Sankhako gherama.</i>	K3. President's role suspicious	Creating doubt	Negative presentation of "other", otherization
<i>K4. NeKaPa bivajantarfa, Olilai anushshanko karbahai hune</i>	K4. NCP headed towards split, disciplinary action against Oli	Implied wrongdoing	Predication, adjudication
<i>K5. Deshbhar jana akrosh</i>	K5. Nationwide Public Resentment	Hasty qualifier/ quantification	Lack of adequate representative evidence
<i>K6. Editorial: Oli-Bhandariko Bhasmasoor Path</i>	K6. P1 Editorial: Oli-Bhandari's demonic (self-destructive) path	Demonization/use of negative trope	Evocation of mythical imagery

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The use of declarative statements such as “unconstitutional dissolution”, “non-existent” authority, and declaration of disciplinary action against the prime minister, strongly suggests the newspaper’s disagreement with what had transpired, which was confirmed by its editorial, where the prime minister who made the recommendation and the president who approved the dissolution were compared to a mythical demon. The headline also suggested that the decision was a joint one, which was as a matter of fact based on the decision of the Council of Ministers and required the president to only sign off, a practice in democracies, and also an understanding based on the Constitutional provisions.

Creating doubt as a discourse strategy, is generally used for otherization or negative presentation of the “other” (Table: 5.2), therefore the headline (1) indicated “otherization” or negative presentation of the “other” (in this case the Prime Minister and his party). The coverage also revealed the side where the newspaper stood in the situational political context. Another strategy apparent in the text, was generalization,

e.g., “nationwide resentment”, something that is not possible to conclude overnight (news production time) or lacked representative evidence – another indicator of the paper’s positioning, as an “episteme” (Foucault, 2014) of the period in that particular sociopolitical context. Further, the term *akrosh* in Nepali translates into extreme anger – a tone also evident in the other headlines. Thus, one can argue, the term appeared to have been used to imply that the anger was against the paper’s perception of “unfair” treatment (of opponents), which is better captured by the English word resentment.

The emphasis on the negatives – either real or perceived – and the use of declarative statements suggested the newspapers’ position and also implied that it had reached its verdict, which had taken the Supreme Court had taken seven months to decide (on 12 July 2021) (*Deuba v. Office of the President*, 2079 B.S.). The other discursive strategy employed was generalization indicated by the adjective “nationwide”, which one can argue was far from true, as indicated later by the results of the election held in 2023 when the same prime minister’s party emerged as the main opposition with 79 seats in the House of Representatives (HOR) despite having contested against a pre-election bloc formed by the parties that had contested the dissolution in court (Hr.parliament.gov.np, n.d.).

5.1.3 Headlines in *Naya Patrika*

The main headline in *Naya Patrika* was People’s mandate kidnapped and the sub-headings were as follows: President dissolves sovereign parliament at the recommendation of Prime Minister betraying country’s constitution and people’s mandate, Opposition in one voice by not just political parties and the public, but also by experts on constitutional law, Responsibility of safeguarding constitution now in court, and Prime minister has used authority he does not have – Sushila Karki. The inside page announcements read, Appointments to vacant positions in Constitutional

bodies, decision on Tuesday based on Ordinance and Three months prior to dissolution: Head of RAW and BJP (Indian intelligence, and India's ruling party) leaders visited Nepal. (Table: 5.3)

Table 5.3

Headlines in Naya Patrika

Main Headline	Translation	Discourse Direction	Discursive Strategies
<i>N1. Janadesh Apaharan</i>	N1. People's mandate seized	Judgement	Predication, adjudication, abstraction
<i>Sub-headings</i>			
<i>N2. Deshko sambidhan ra janatako adeshlai dhoka diyera pradhanmantriko sifarishma rastrapati dwara sarbabhoum samsad bhanga</i>	N2. President dissolves sovereign parliament at the recommendation of prime minister betraying country's constitution and people's mandate	Judgement/ implied wrongdoing, even though also self-contradictory	Negative presentation of "other", otherization
<i>N3. Rajnitik dal ra aamjanatabata matra haina, sambaidhanik kanoon ka gyatabata pani ek swar ma pratibaad</i>	N3. Opposition in one voice by not just political parties and the public, but also by experts on constitutional law	Raising doubts	Negative presentation of "other", otherization/ positive presentation of self;
<i>N4. Sambidhanko rakchyako jimmewari aba adalatma</i>	N4. Responsibility of safeguarding constitution now in court	Assignment	Magnification/ reproduction
<i>N5. Pradhanmantrile afu sangha hundai nabhayeko adhikarko prayog garnu bhayo – Sushila Karki</i>	N5. Prime minister has used authority he does not have – Sushila Karki		Negative presentation of "other", otherization; magnification/ reproduction of "our" case

Inside Story Promo

N6. <i>Sambaidanik nikaya ka rikta pad ma niyukti sifarish, Adhyadesh anusar Manglabar nai nirnaya...</i>	N6. Appointments to vacant positions in Constitutional bodies, decision on Tuesday based on Ordinance	Affirmation / negative presentation
N7. <i>Sansad bighatan aghika tin mahina; Raw pramookh dekhi Bha-Ja-Pa Netaka Nepal Bhraman</i>	N7. Three months prior to dissolution: Head of RAW and BJP leaders visited Nepal	Otherization/ Evocation of recent negative imagery

Source: *Fieldwork 2022*

Discursive strategies used by NP were similar to those of *Kantipur* where the main headline suggested forceful seizure of the “people’s mandate”, which was not the case, but the abstraction was used, nonetheless. The use of word *apaharan* (kidnapped), while factually on a slippery slope, sought to affirm a situation where no force, unlike the meaning implied by the term *apaharan*, was used. The next headline accused the president and prime minister of “betraying”, even though the story text clarified that the decision had been taken by the president at the recommendation of the prime minister. Generally, the discourses in the headlines were judgmental, included otherization and positive self-coverage, assigning (role), doubt mongering and also included the use of historical imagery, which are suggestive of the newspaper’s position or bias in the dispute. There also was evidence of “reproduction” and “magnification” of what the newspaper believed in, and, hence, supported.

One, NP story was similar to that of *Kantipur*. It declared that the Prime Minister had used non-existent authority, which in the case of NP was an attributed statement – and not a declaration as it had appeared in *Kantipur*. NP had used

historical imagery to buttress its negative coverage of the “other”, particularly the reference to the three months period preceding parliament dissolution and the recollection by the paper of the controversial visits of the head of the Indian intelligence agency and leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. This particular story was seemingly intended to bust the prime minister’s “nationalistic” public image by re-referencing to his meetings with Indian officials, while it remained silent on attempts by Chinese diplomats and party officials to forestall a split of the largest communist party (Brattberg & Feigenbaum, 2021). The fact that this story was promoted on page-1 suggested that the newspaper wanted to draw readers attention to remind them of recent history, which was also suggestive of the side the paper had aligned itself in the dispute.

5.1.4 Headlines in *Annapurna Post*

The main headline in the AP were Parliament dissolved: Elections in May (Constitutional provisions, and the editorial’s headline was provided within story – Game with no winners). The other stories relating to the dissolution that appeared on Page 1 were, Contest between impeachment and dissolution, Parties agitated, Proposal to discipline prime minister, seven ministers resign, and Constitutional appointments recommended (Table-5. 4).

Table 5.4*Headlines in Annapurna Post*

Main headline	Translation	Discourse Direction	Discursive Strategies
<i>A1. Pratinidhi Sabha Bhanga: Baisakh ma chunab</i>	A1. Parliament dissolved: Elections in May (Constitutional provisions, editorial headline within story)	Dumbed down, comparison to a game/ routine contest –usually associated with fun	Positive presentation of “us”
Other headings			
<i>A2. Mahaabhiyog ra bighatan uchinpachin</i>	A2. Contest between impeachment and dissolution (2-sides)	Frivolous, routinization	Positive presentation of “us”, normalization
<i>A3. Dalharu Andolit</i>	A3. Parties agitated	Abstraction	Self-preservation/ minimization of negative
<i>A4. Pradhanmantri lai Karbahai prastab</i>	A4. <u>Proposal</u> to discipline prime minister	Dumbed down	
<i>A5. Saat mantri ko rajinama</i>	A5. Seven ministers resign		Selection
<i>A6. Sambhaidanik niukti ko sifaris</i>	A6. Constitutional appointments recommended	Dumbed down	Positive presentation of 'us'

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The reportage in the AP, differed compared to both *Kantipur* and NP, where the dominant discourse direction evident was an attempt to dumb down, or underplay what had happened, and one headline even almost bordered frivolity, indicative of an attempt to normalize the event. The discursive strategies were tilted towards positive “us” presentation, which one can argue is indicative of the position taken by the newspaper vis-à-vis the event. An abstraction used in the headline of a story on protests by opposition parties, could have been more straightforward had facts been presented because term used – *andolit* (agitated) – provided no indication about the reason for the discomfort or why they were agitated – possibly, an attempt to underplay the political decision (dissolution). Another headline that was also indicative of dumbing down, said seven ministers had resigned with no reason provided, which in fact was done in opposition to the Prime Minister’s decision. This relevant piece of information was ignored by the headline, which is an example of selection, another discursive strategy, that was employed.

5.1.5 Headlines in *The Himalayan Times*

THT had 10 stories, including a report on an event related to the spread of the Coronavirus that all newspapers had excluded, even though both fear, and uncertainty associated with the pandemic were high at the time, which was why having the information was in the public interest. The main headline (THT1) was “House dissolved; mid-term polls announced”, accompanied by boxed texts headlined: “What next?” “Constitutional provisions”. (Table-5. 5).

Table 5.5*Headlines in The Himalayan Times*

Main Headline	Direction of Discourse	Discourse Strategies
THT1. House dissolved; mid-term polls announced. Boxed texts: What next? Constitutional provisions	Factuality, uncertainty	Balance
<i>Other headings</i>		
THT2. Seven ministers resign in protest	Factuality	Balance
THT3. EC ready to hold elections		
THT4. Rai recommended CIAA chief	Factuality	
THT5. Democratic values violated, says Nepali Congress	Opposition voices, attribution	Balance
THT6. Undemocratic, autocratic step – NCP	Opposition voices, attribution	Balance
THT7. Oli's action violates party's interim statute: Narayan Kaji	Opposition voices, attribution	Balance
THT8. EU nations halt UK flights, fearing virus variant	Factuality	

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Rather than speculate on what was ahead or reach a verdict, the newspaper presented the questions that remained unanswerable at the time as they were: “What Next?” Instead, it had decided to reproduce the constitutional provisions to allow readers to make their own assessments. The discourse direction in THT stood out among other newspapers because it seemed aimed towards impartiality and factuality, with balance as the discursive strategy. Unlike other newspapers – except NP in one story – the newspaper had attributed the opposition voices in headlines, rather than present them as unattributed facts. The coverage in THT can be explained by its independence or detachment from the political parties on either side of the dispute, which one can argue could have resulted from the alleged ownership of a majority of its shares by foreigners, where its interests are best served by not being seen as taking sides in a political dispute.

5.1.6 Headlines in *Gorkhapatra*

The headlines in *Gorkhapatra* were largely informative even though dumbed down, which was not surprising for a government-run newspaper. What stood out was one unattributed statement, and in this case it was that of the opposition. This statement also appeared encased in single quotation marks. Another story, unrelated to the event, was of an on-going development project in a mountain district in Karnali Province (Table-5. 6).

Table 5.6*Headlines in Gorkhapatra*

Main headline	Translation	Direction of Discourse	Discourse Strategies
<i>G1. Pratinidhi</i>			
<i>Sabha Bighatan; 2078 Baisakh 17 ra 27 gate dui charanma nirbachan ghoshana</i>	G1. House of Representatives dissolved: Elections declared on 17 & 27 Baisakh, in two phases	Business-as-usual, factual, sterile	Normalization
<i>Other headings</i>			
<i>G2. Pradhan</i>			
<i>mantri dwara nirbachan ayuktasangha paramarsha</i>	G2. Prime minister consults election commissioners	Business-as-usual, sterile	Normalization
<i>G3. Adha</i>			
<i>karyakal mai simit</i>	G3. Only half of term completed	Factual	Normalization
<i>G4. Saat mantriko rajinama</i>			
<i>G5. Mulukko surakchya abastha bare jankari</i>	G4. Seven ministers resign	Facticity, selection	Normalization
<i>G6. 'Pratinidhi Sabha bighatan loktantrabiparit'</i>	G5. Briefing on country's security situation	Business-as-usual, sterile	Normalization
<i>G7. Sambaidanik nikaya ma sifarish</i>	G6. 'Dissolution of House of Representative undemocratic'	Non-attribution of "them", single quotations, dual meanings	Minimization of "them"/otherization
<i>G8. Humla sadak khanda chaitbhitra tayar hunadi</i>	G7. Recommendations to constitutional bodies	Dumbed down	Positive coverage of "us"/minimization
	G8. Humla highway section to be completed by Chait (March/April)	Unrelated	Deflection

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Gorkhapatra had headlines that were largely factual and informative – and included an important fact, the dates of the proposed elections that was missing in the other newspapers. The direction of the discourse was business-as-usual and facticity on stories related to government and underplaying of oppositional voices, indicative of normalization as being the overarching discursive strategy. The minimization of opposition voices was a direct consequence of its government ownership.

The decision of the Prime Minister was definitely not normal in the sense that parliament with an absolute majority had been dissolved within just three years after the election or two years short of its full term. This was apparently not considered important by the editorial decision makers. The discursive strategies evident were dumbing down and positive coverage of “us”, and normalization, in the case of stories related to the government. Both marginalization and otherization were evident in the rare story on opposing voices. The only opposition-related headline, came with single quotations marks and without attribution, conveyed dual meanings. This headline said was, ‘Dissolution of House of Representative undemocratic’. Had it been attributed, it would have been obvious to the readers that it represented the opposition position as a fact, but without it, raised questions/ doubts about the credibility of the entire statement itself, because one meaning of using the single quote in U.S. English also indicates sarcasm.

The researcher carried out a rapid review of headlines appearing in the same newspaper after the Supreme Court had announced its verdict on the political dispute. The headlines that appeared in the newspapers on 13 July 2021, a day after the court verdict, vindicated the analysis above (see: Appendix-5: List of headlines...). Overall, *Kantipur*'s coverage had a celebratory tone, including some vindictiveness against the

then Prime Minister whose removal had been ordered by the court. It had equated the verdict to have favored democracy – of course a matter of debate – and had an interview advocating for the impeachment of the President, and an editorial that continued its label of the Prime Minister and President as *bhasmasur* in its headline for the editorial that was announced on page-1. Another story speculated on what would happen to the UML party after the verdict.

It was a similar celebratory approach was evident in *Naya Patrika*, which had a page-1 editorial announcing victory of “law” over “whim”, questioned about the fate of decisions taken by the outgoing prime minister, and also had an op-ed piece on the “shattering” of the pride of the outgoing head of government.

Annapurna Post demonstrated facticity in its main headline reporting what the verdict said and was the only newspaper with the outgoing prime minister’s photograph with the accompanying UML statement following the event. It had another story questioning whether the 23 UML MPs that had sided with the petitioners in court would vote for the new prime minister in parliament and had singled out among the 23 as the persons to blame for leading to the collapse of the government. This story also reported on the outgoing prime minister’s achievements. Of interest in the reportage was another story where it had labelled the side that had won the case in court as “opposition” – presumably, to our side because at the moment there was no parliamentary opposition in place.

True to its earlier positioning *The Himalayan Times* resorted to facticity and neutrality, and it had only one story on the verdict, unlike the other newspapers.

Gorkhapatra’s coverage was similar to its earlier coverage of dissolution, where the verdict was the main story, and it also had a separate story on the would-be prime minister as indicated by the court decision. Another headline dealt with the

“welcoming” of the decision, which, however, did not have representative evidence as discussed in some stories earlier. What was most noticeable in its coverage was one headline, again in single quotes, with the comments of the UML after the verdict. The placement of this was similar manner to what it had done with the opposition comment after the dissolution.

The review confirmed the observed biases in the discourses and how they shifted after the court verdict. Again, while, the shifts in content focus exemplify the different influences at play at the newspapers, it was not possible to ascertain the exact types – cognitive, partisan, or money-induced, etc. – for the same reasons as discussed in earlier sections.

5.2 Critical Analysis

The researcher analyzed the headline texts of stories on one event – the dissolution of parliament and announcement of fresh elections – which five newspapers had covered in differently. Three had delivered complete information on dissolution and elections as one message, while two (*Kantipur* and NP) had opted to select what to convey and what not to in their headlines. Such texts convey different meanings to readers and are important to account for while studying influence, and – in the context of this study – whether or not that had resulted from capture. While a single story may not provide insight into what exactly caused news discourse on a same event to differ across newspapers to conclude that the media were captured by the opposing sides, the findings when triangulated with that of other data such as texts on media professionalism and behaviors (Chapter 4), and key informant interviews (KIIs) allow one to postulate the existence of hidden influences and at play which are indicative of a state of capture.

5.2.1 Use of Unfounded Negative Tropes as Indicators of Bias

The selection of tropes in reference to the event studied – “demonic” (“self-destructive”), as well as the association with “RAW” and “BJP” – one can argue, convey the newspaper’s perspective of the Prime Minister, which was negative. Both the terms “demonic” and “self-destructive” associated with the mythical character used to characterize the Prime Minister and President had appeared in the paper’s editorial comment – and were clear indications of the paper’s opposition to the decision, which even if acceptable as an editorial comment/position – also seemed to have influenced the tone of news headlines. When such tendencies are observed in news headings or unattributed declarations, one can assume interaction of influences – both external such as favor exchanges or anticipated favors, and internal reasons such as partisan bias – had a role in the production of the texts.

Similarly, the evocation of recent history to convey “association” of the prime minister with controversial Indian agencies as news content, had arguably resulted from an underlying bias. This was possibly done because the Prime Minister’s party had won the election by largely portraying a “nationalistic” image. The Prime Minister’s other meetings with foreign officials during his tenure that were not as controversial, for example, were conspicuous by absence and therefore, the coverage was unbalanced, possibly intended, and devoid of appropriate context. Such expressions are therefore products of the news production process and emerge through various gate-keeping functions in newspaper hierarchies and are constructed by journalists. What causes the different content producers to produce journalism with such disparate meanings are low professionalism and bias, which in turn are either related to intrinsic capacities, and biases (ideology, for example) or inducements, which result from external influences such as political affinities and/or exchange of favors.

In the case of the five newspapers whose texts were analyzed, one can rule out low capacity because the larger daily newspapers generally hire staff with capacities above the market average, and individual ideologies are also diffused as these newspapers are likely to have more staff (hence, multiple ideologies that check and balance) and policies (written/unwritten) to guide what is published and how. One can therefore argue that external influences and possibly also influences of owners/editors caused the papers to report the way they did. In normal situations, external influences cannot dictate content where the media is assumed to be professional, therefore, arguably some sort of exchanges or anticipation of future favors explain the deviations in coverage – which is but a manifestation of media capture even though difficult to pinpoint.

5.2.2 Presentation of Opinion as Fact and Use of Unqualified Descriptors

Some headlines had also used words that implied illegality, even criminality – things for the courts to decide – and on this, some newspapers had passed judgements in declarative statements as facts, without attribution. Similarly, the term “public” was used to qualify “resentment” at the Prime Minister’s decision, and “people’s mandate” were used as a generalization, without appropriate qualifiers/ evidence. The use of declarative statements of sources as fact, without attribution is indicative of the newspaper’s agreement with the statement, the example of which was one statement in *Kantipur* that declared the Prime Minister’s decision was illegal (without attribution). Another newspaper, NP, had attributed the same opinion to its speaker, in the way it is usually done in journalism. Further, the same development was conspicuous by its absence in *Gorkhapatra*, where one can assume it was ignored, given the paper’s government ownership, while in the case of AP, the content did not appear in the headlines – perhaps – owing to the publicly discussed proximities of the owner with the leader of the mainstream of NCP (Setopati correspondent, 2021) led by the Prime Minister. One key informant said that it was “normal” practice at the

government-run paper to ignore opposition voices, the only exception being the leader of the main opposition party, and to remain uncritical of what takes place in government. There was one instance when the paper had published critical opinions by a communist party leader about the President and Prime Minister following which the Chairperson of the corporation had been required to make a clarification to the information and communication minister (KII-14).

5.2.3 Discourse Strategies Across Papers

The coverage and tone of the 20 December event in three newspapers – *Kantipur* and NP, contrasted with that in AP, THT, and *Gorkhapatra*. The coverage of the latter two slanted towards facticity and neutrality and the overall discursive strategy was balance in the case of THT. It was magnification of “us” and minimization of the “others” and selection, for both AP and *Gorkhapatra* that had sided with the positions of the party faction leading the government. Their highly toned-down coverage contrasted with that of *Kantipur* and NP, the coverage in which appeared distressed and aggressive. The tone of their coverage was evidentially supportive of the opposition position not only in terms of discursive strategies used, but also in selection of what to cover and what not to. They were also judgmental in the selection and use of words and phrases to describe the event.

5.3 Dominating Themes

The three dominating themes emerged from the analysis of discourse in headlines of five newspapers are (a) anti-establishment positioning (against Prime Minister’s decision), (b) Guarded pro-establishment positioning, and (c) neither pro-nor anti-establishment, or a balanced positioning.

a. Anti-Establishment Positioning

The underlying discourse strategies of two newspapers, *Kantipur* and NP, suggested anti-establishment or pro-opposition positions in terms of both the selection and focus of coverage. Two newspapers had used terminology that was selective,

declarative/ judgmental or attempted to issue “verdicts” of implied illegality (K1,2,4,6 and N1 &N2). What also stood out in the two newspapers was the tendency to make to hasty/unqualified generalizations and use of negative imagery through tropes (mythical, and Nepal-India real-politick) to portray the leadership of the establishment as demonic and not nationalistic, respectively (lines K6 and N6). Similarly, lines K5, N3 were declarative and seemingly intended to set a direction of the public discourse. For example, dissolution of parliament is usually followed by an election in democracies, but the word “election” did not appear in any of the Page-1 headlines of both *Kantipur* and NP. Even though the latter had indicated the idea of election in the use of the word “mandate”, it was not explicit nor was it used in the context of fresh elections but to qualify an unqualified, abstract allegation of “cheating”. *Kantipur* had also cast doubt on the President’s role by using the word suspicion.

b. Guarded Pro-Establishment Positioning

Two newspapers – one private and one state-run – had similar discourse approaches with an underlying pro-establishment position that also appeared guarded/cautious. The coverage was largely dumbed down or had attempted to downplay the dissolution through selection of neutral words to qualify headlines and by even attempting to minimize the event by calling it a “contest” and “game”, which generally involves two sides, is routine, and is associated with fun in a sharp contrast to the far-reaching implications of the development in the country, not to mention the cost of an election (lines A2, A2, A4, & A7). Similarly, AP had used qualifiers such as “proposal” while mentioning the impending party reaction to the Prime Minister’s move. Both newspapers used the word, “recommended” to the story on the appointments to constitutional positions, which NP had gone a step ahead to predict that the appointments would be made the following day. [It was not surprising for NP to do this, given that it was one main issues of contention within the NCP before politics took the turn towards dissolution (N6)]. The word “proposal” had also

appeared in *Gorkhapatra* (line G7), the government newspaper. The paper, however, did not carry the story on the stated desire of the splinter faction of NCP to push for disciplinary action against the Prime Minister (example of selection), which both *Kantipur* and NP said would be the case. Both AP and *Gorkhapatra* had mentioned elections in their main headlines, which both *Kantipur* and NP did not. Another observation in the coverage was the non-attribution of sources opposed to the prime minister's decision (A3 & G6) – the *Annapurna Post* had preferred an abstraction to attribution while *Gorkhapatra* had opted to place the opposition statement in single quotation marks. *Gorkhapatra* also had one story, which was not related to dissolution, and normally not one that would have deserved Page-1 placement given the important development in politics – a story on the construction progress on a stretch of highway in a district in Far-western Nepal.

c. Neither Pro- nor Anti-establishment Positioning or Balanced

THT did not take a noticeable pro- or anti-establishment positioning in its headlines while reporting parliament dissolution. The paper had one headline that was unique among all papers – one on the continued coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic that had become a widespread concern at the time. This was something that all the newspapers had left out of their front pages. The paper also stood out among the others for proper attribution, which provided a greater understanding of the headlines in context and also indicated its position favoring neutrality and balance. Its coverage of the political event has provided basis to conclude that foreign ownership (as is alleged in the case of THT) can result in impartial coverage of national politics, particularly in a media environment where partisanship runs across journalists and media (See: Chapter 4). In the case of THT, one can argue that its alleged foreign owners did not have as many direct interests or links to the politics of the country and hence they held a position where they preferred not to be seen taking political sides as that could potentially harm their already controversial business.

5.4 Postulations

The analysis of text of 38 headlines of five newspapers a day after the dissolution of parliament and announcement of fresh elections, revealed three distinct discursive directions: pro, anti-, and neutral in relation to the main subject of the discourse – dissolution of parliament by the Prime Minister. What is axiomatic from the analysis is that media texts can be manipulated to trigger or convey distinct understandings or meanings. This study argues that such manipulations in media content result from various influences, irrespective of whether they are news stories or headlines and are influenced by the ideology and interests of media institution/owners and the content producers, and can also result from other external influences, mainly finances and non-financial favors. Such influences can be postulated but not isolated given the nature of the exchanges involved.

The researcher's understanding is that of such exchanges include favors emanating from those who exercise state authority, which are exchanged – both financial and non-financial favors – with media (owners and journalists). In democracies different political parties periodically contest for state authority, and in countries like Nepal where democracy has yet to be firmly rooted and where a majority of journalists are organized along partisan lines, it is not far-fetched to assume that unprofessional media are likely to pick sides, even if the professional standards dictate otherwise. Such practices can be exacerbated when financing and favor-exchanges are involved, which is what happens when media is captured.

Similarly, there were differences in the tones or slant of the coverage, in terms of negativity, positivity and neutrality across the headlines reporting the same event, and in subheadings that conveyed contextual information indicative otherization and self-promotion. This was but an outcome of the relationship between media institutions/owners and journalists with those who exercise power. In the case of

journalists such relationships could be developed from continued access while gathering news, kinship, shared ideologies, and clientelist relations, particularly in Nepal where both kinship, partisanship and clientelism run deep.

For example, two leaders from a large national party had proposed including a media owner as the party's nominated member in the Constituent Assembly. In return, the said newspaper had published a photograph of one leader who was contesting the election for almost two months (the entire election period), in the same page and with the same placement (KII-17). This was an attempt to magnify "us" and minimize "others" in terms of the resulting visibility. It was also no coincidence that, according to the same informant, several thousand copies of the said paper with photographs of the politician were purchased by the candidate and distributed during the campaign.

Further, given the political significance of the dissolution of parliament, and the general erosion of editorial independence and political polarization of media and journalists (See: Chapter 4), one can argue that the tropes that appeared in the headlines had approval at all levels of media production. Even if the tropes had originated at the reporter level, it is unlikely that they would have not been screened, discussed, and approved in the news production chain of command where the partisan identities and relationships of media (including, journalists) with newsmakers influence content to assure desired portrayal. The owners can also be expected to have had a say in this, given that interests their also span across various non-media sectors and their ability to pick the "right" side could determine their fortunes.

The coverage of the dissolution by three other papers – AP, and *Gorkhapatra* – indicated a stance supportive of the dissolution. Arguably, the discourse in headlines of the state-run newspaper, indicated the influence of power (in this case exercised by government both as State and as its owner and financier) and that explained the

editorial choices: dumbed-down headlines with no indications on what led to the event and/or the possible outcomes going forward. The same can be said of the AP, in the context of the affinities of its owner with the NCP leadership, as reported by media. In this case, one can argue the likelihood of a history of favor exchanges, given the multiple businesses run by the same media owner and also the owner's reported proximities with the party leadership.

Contrasting, with all the other newspapers, THT was closest to neutrality-balance, which one can argue had resulted from the low interest of the owners/publication in Nepali politics or, a desired intent to distance itself from partisanship. Another reason for the neutrality, could be the alleged foreign investment in the newspaper – a sensitive issue that had been widely debated and opposed after its launch in 2001. Arguably, therefore, the owners and the newspaper could have opted for neutrality to minimize the political risks in the business.

Overall, the researcher argues that various interests in Nepal continuously seek to influence media content and manipulate information that reaches audiences, and the process also implicates the media/journalists. Further, the manifestation of content as discussed above is not only a result of low capacity and low professionalism but a result of favors – financial or non-financial or both – that are exchanged. And, because direct control of media in the 21st century is not something that democratic governments would like to associate with, indirect control through favor exchanged is the preferred route, signs of which are already evident in Nepal and could but only grow. Organizing and supporting partisan media associations provides political parties and government a channel to exert influences on content, the other avenue for influencing is advertising and State cash handouts.

Section B

5.5 Partisan Influence on Content

Political affiliation – as well-wishers, supporters, and party members – among journalists and their inability to separate work from their beliefs and interests, can influence journalism content and undermine impartiality and independence. Media capture is the situation where journalism content has been influenced – by money or favors – and also by beliefs, particularly, political. However, the beliefs coexist with favors that are exchanged between political party leaders and media and journalists, as indicated in the analysis in Chapter 4.

This section has analyzed discourses of the coverage of the same political event, subject matter-wise, of three political parties by three online news portals (that have of late started functioning like the weekly newspapers before 1990) identified as being close to one of the three large parties. The event was the announcement of the election manifestos of the three parties Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Unified Marxists-Leninists) or UML, CPN Maoist Centre (MC) and the Nepali Congress (NC). The UML and MC made their manifestos public on 1 November 2022, and the NC on 29 October. The online portals reviewed were *Hamrakura*, said to be close to the NC, *Janata Times* (close to UML) and *Ratopati* (close to MC). The three online portals had covered the party events in the manner shown in Table 5.5.1.

Table 5.7

Number of Headlines on the Coverage of Election Manifestoes Analyzed

Name of Portal/ Party Event	UML	NC	MC
<i>Hamrakura</i>	2	5	6
<i>Ratopati</i>	4	3	1
<i>Janata Times</i>	8	2	2

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The details of the coverage are displayed and analyzed in the following section.

5.5.1 Coverage of UML Manifesto Announcement by Three Online News Portals

All three news portals *Hamrakura* (close to NC), *Ratopati* (close to MC) and *Janata Times* (close to UML) had covered the announcement of the manifesto by UML (Table: 5.8). The coverage, including follow-ups, continued for two days. The three online portals had covered the party events in the manner shown in Table 5.8

Table 5.8

Coverage of Election Manifesto of UML by Three Online Portals

News Portal	Headline	Translation	Discourse Direction	Discourse Strategy	
<i>Hamrakura</i>	<i>Emaleko ghoshanapatra digital madhyambata sarbajanik</i>	UML's election manifesto made public digitally	Generic/factual	Informative	
	<i>Emaleko ghoshanapatra: Purano kitabma naya gata, abjash aruko kandhma</i>	UML election manifesto: Old book with new cover, blame on others	Critical, dismissive	Negative coverage of "them"	
	<i>Ratopati</i>	<i>Emaleko ghoshanapatra sarbajanik</i>	UML's manifesto made public	Generic	Informative
		<i>Emaleko ghoshanapatra: Paile ra aihelema kati farak?</i>	UML's manifesto: What is the difference between then and now	Critical, comparative	Negative coverage of "them"
	<i>Emale ghoshanapatra: panch barse 20 guaranteeeko bhuktani kati barsa</i>	UML manifesto: In how many years will the 20 guarantees be realized?	Questioning, interrogative	Questioning, Creating doubts	

	<i>ma paune?</i>			
	<i>Panch barsama 60 lakhlai samajik surakcha bhatta dine Emale ko ghoshana</i>	UML declares to provide social security allowances to 6 million	Factual	Informative
<i>Janata Times</i>	<i>Emaleko ghoshanapatra: 50 unitsamma bijuli ra 10 hajar litresamma pani ni-sulka</i>	UML Manifesto: Up to 50 units electricity and 10,000 liters water free	Factual, Declarative	Positive coverage of "us"
	<i>Emaleko ghoshanapatra sarbajanik karyakram tasbirma hernus</i>	Watch in photos, UML's program to declare its manifesto	Photo feature/PR	Positive coverage of "us"
	<i>Emaleko ghoshanapatra: Panch barsama 6500 MW bijuli utpadhan</i>	UML manifesto: 6500 MW of electricity production in five years	Factual, Declarative	Positive coverage of "us"
	<i>Emale ghoshanapatra: Emaleko sarkar bandha yi 20 kurako guarantee</i>	UML manifesto: These 20 things to be guaranteed by UML government	Factual, Declarative	Positive coverage of "us"
	<i>Emaleko ghoshanapatra: Paryatakko sankhya barshik 25 lakh puraine</i>	UML manifesto: Tourist numbers to be taken to 2.5 million annually	Factual, Declarative	Positive coverage of "us"
	<i>Emale ghoshanapatra: Shramikko nyunattam jyala 25</i>	UML manifesto: minimum worker wages to be increased to	Factual, Declarative	Positive coverage of "us"

<i>hajar puraine</i>	25000		
<i>Emalele lyayo 20</i>			
<i>hajar sabdhako</i>	UML brings		
<i>ghoshanapatra, haat</i>	20000-word		
<i>scan garera</i>	manifesto,		
<i>adyaksha Olile</i>	Chairman Oli	Exaggeration,	Positive
<i>garnubhayo</i>	made it public by	attempt to	coverage of
<i>sarbajanik</i>	scanning his hand	magnify novelty	"us"
<i>Emale</i>			
<i>ghoshanapatra ma</i>	UML manifesto		
<i>yesta chan janatako</i>	has the following		
<i>samasya sambodhan</i>	commitments for		
<i>garne athot</i>	addressing the		Positive
	problems of	Factual,	coverage of
	people	Declarative	"us"

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The data show that the news portal identified as close to the party whose manifesto was made public had the highest coverage of the event (8 stories), while the number was four for *Ratopati* and two for *Hamrakura*. In terms of the tone of coverage and the discourse strategy, while *Janata Times* used a factual-declarative approach, exaggeration, and magnification; the other two had bare-bones versions of stories, which while being factual were also critical and probing/ questioning. The evident discourse strategies were either just informative, negative coverage of “them”/ otherization or creating doubts by the portals that did not subscribe to the ideology of party (UML), and positive coverage of “us” and exaggeration by the news portal identified as close to the party.

5.5.2 Coverage of MC Election Manifesto by Three Online Portals

The announcement of the MC election manifesto appeared on all three news portals, with one story in *Ratopati*, two in *Janata Times* and six for *Hamrakura*. The headlines of the stories that were published are given in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9

Coverage of MC Manifesto Announcement by Three Online News Portals

News Portal	Headline	Translation	Discourse Direction	Discourse Strategy
Ratopati	<i>NeKaPa Maobadi</i>			
	<i>Kendrako pratibaddhata patra: Samriddhika lagi</i>	NCP Maoist Centre's commitments:		Positive coverage
	<i>krambhangata (purna path)</i>	Disruption for prosperity (full text)	Factual/ declarative	of "us"
Janata Times	<i>Maobadile bhane jasto sashakiya swaroop ra nirbachan pranali parivartan sambhav cha?</i>	Is it possible to change the governance mechanism and election system as desired by the Maoists?	Critical, questioning.	Raising doubts
	<i>Maobadile lyayo 82 prishako</i>	Maoists bring 82-page manifesto, property of those in		
	<i>ghoshanapatra, labhko padma rayekako</i>	paid/authority positions to be investigated	Factual/ declarative	Positive coverage
Hamrakura	<i>sampati chanbin Nepalko panima garum lagani, jalasrotmai cha sambhavanako khani'</i>	Let's invest in Nepal's water, water resources are a mine of possibilities'	Factual/ declarative	Positive coverage of "us"

<i>Maobadiko nara</i> (<i>ghoshanapatra sahit</i>)	(with manifesto)		
<i>Yesari garna</i> <i>khajdaicha maobadile</i> <i>deshma arthik unnati</i> (<i>video sahit</i>)	This is how Maoists want to bring about economic growth in country (with video)	Factual/ declarative	Positive coverage of "us"
<i>Bahudalpachi</i> <i>karyakari padhma</i> <i>baseka sabaiko</i> <i>sampati chanbin</i> <i>huncha: Prachanda</i>	Property of all in executive positions after multiparty democracy will be investigated: Prachanda	Factual/ declarative, magnification	Positive coverage of "us"
<i>Garibi nivaran garne</i> <i>yesto cha Maobadiko</i> <i>yojana</i>	This is the Maoist's plan to reduce poverty	Factual/ declarative	Positive coverage of "us"
<i>Abako pradhan mantri</i> <i>afai banne</i> <i>Prachandako sanket</i>	Prachanda hints that he will become next prime minister	Assumptive	Creating doubt

Source: Fieldwork 2023

There was a similar pattern in the coverage of the MC manifesto by the three online portals, with *Ratopati* and *Hamrakura* resorting to largely positive coverage of “us”, with a factual-declarative discourse direction, and *Janata Times* taking on the role of critic and interrogator of the commitments to raise doubts. Interestingly, *Ratopati* had only one story, possibly because the event had also been broadcast live. The coverage of *Hamrakura* (close to the NC) could possibly have resulted from the pre-poll electoral alliance formed by the NC with MC and some other parties, and therefore the high positive coverage of “us”. There was also one assumptive headline, which showed that the portal was not fully supportive of the MC leader being prime minister after the election.

5.5.3 Coverage of NC Manifesto Announcement by Three Online News Portals

The NC announced its election manifesto before the two other parties and the event was covered by all three news portals. (Table: 5.10)

Table 5.10

Coverage of Election Manifesto of NC by Three Online Portals

News Portal	Headline	Translation	Discourse Direction	Discourse Strategy
<i>Hamrakura patra</i>	<i>Mangsir 4ka lagi ayo Congressko chunabi ghoshana</i>	Congress' manifesto for Mangsir 4 has arrived	Generic/ factual	Informative
	<i>Tin barsha muni ra 73 barsa mathika nagariklai nisulka upachar garne Congressko sankalpa</i>	Congress promises to provide free treatment to those below age 3 and above 73 years	Factual/ declarative	Positive coverage of "us"
	<i>Congress ghoshanapatra sarbajanik karyakram jari (live)</i>	Congress manifesto-publicizing program underway (live)	Generic/ factual	Informative
	<i>Congress ghoshanapatra: Satai pradeshma sangraahalaya sthapana</i>	Congress manifesto: Museums to be established in all seven provinces	Factual/ declarative	Positive coverage of "us"
	<i>Congress Sankalpa Patra: Ek ghar, ek dhara abhiyan sanchalan garine</i>	Congress' Promise: One house, one waterspout campaign	Factual/ declarative	Positive coverage of "us"

		Here's what the		
	<i>Yesto cha Nepali</i>	Nepali		
	<i>Congressko chunabi</i>	Congress		
	<i>ghoshanapatra</i>	manifesto is		
<i>Ratopati</i>	<i>(purna path)</i>	(full text)	Generic/ factual	Informative
	<i>Congressko</i>	Congress		
	<i>ghoshanapatra:</i>	manifesto:		
	<i>Prathimiktama</i>	Sport not a		
	<i>parena khelkud</i>	priority	Nitpicking	Minimization of "them"
		Congress		
	<i>Congressko ekikrit</i>	unified social		
	<i>samajik surakchya:</i>	services: from		
	<i>Kakhdekhi</i>	the lap to		
	<i>sokhsamma</i>	mourning	Generic/ factual	Informative
		Congress		
		manifesto:		
		Congress		
	<i>Congressko</i>	leadership of		
	<i>ghoshanapatra:</i>	government,		
	<i>Afnai netritwama</i>	Prachanda-		
	<i>sarkar, Prachanda-</i>	Madhav	Takes jab at	Negative
<i>Janata</i>	<i>Madhavlai mantri</i>	offered	Prachanda/Madhav	coverage of
<i>Times</i>	<i>offer</i>	ministers	"others"	"them"
		Found in		
		Congress		
		manifesto,		
	<i>Congressko</i>	'diusai raat		
	<i>ghoshanapatrama</i>	<i>parne kura'</i>		Negative
	<i>bhetiyo duijai rat</i>	(lies, false		coverage of
	<i>parne kura</i>	claims, etc.)	Critical	"them"

Source: *Fieldwork 2023*

Hamrakura had five stories on the NC manifesto, *Ratopati* had three and *Janata Times* had two stories (Table 5.5.1c). In addition to positive coverage of “us” as discourse strategy, the coverage of *Hamrakura* was also informative. In the case of *Ratopati*, while the headline was bare-bones informative, it also had one story where the discourse strategy was minimization of “them” by nitpicking on a specific matter.

Janata Times took on the critical role, raised questions and also took a jab at the leaders of other major parties in the NC-led electoral alliance by undermining them – both former prime ministers – saying that the NC had offered them ministerial positions.

The texts in the tables above show that coverage of party-political events by media identified as close to political parties' generally slants to favor specific partisan interests. One explanation for this bias is ideology, resulting from political indoctrination, as journalists leading the portals had histories of leading and working in the party-affiliated journalists' associations. Independent journalism requires the journalists to keep their personal beliefs out of their work to ensure impartiality. One can, therefore, conclude that the type of coverage is a result of ideological influence often rewarded through favors exchanged between journalists/media and their patrons.

The political economy of Nepali journalism is unique because in addition to the market forces, it also still remains caught up in both partisanship and party affiliation, which underlie the evident practices. Because a large number of journalists are affiliated to partisan journalists' associations, their members of are influenced – if not directed by political party leaders – in their work. The resulting biases become visible during election periods, when political parties mobilize media for publicity and campaigning. The incentives for partisan journalists for doing such journalism is the share of the spoils of power when their preferred sides are elected to office, as evidenced by fluctuating amounts in the handouts made by the MOCIT when led by ministers from different political parties (See: Chapter 4, Section B) and appointments of partisan journalists to paid positions in State media and as press and media advisors. The researcher, therefore, argues that political clientelism and partisanship in coverage by media is another form of media capture because favors are exchanged for desired media content by the principals.

Section C

5.6 Coverage and Advertising Following Tax Fraud Allegations

Ncell Axiata Limited – previously, Ncell Private Limited – began operations as the first private mobile service provider in Nepal in 2004. The parent company was incorporated as Spice Nepal Pvt. Ltd. with the Mero Mobile brand in 2004. The company was acquired by Telia Sonera Group of Sweden in 2008 and rebranded as Ncell in 2010 (Ncell Axiata Limited, 2023). The rebranding was widely covered by media. In fact, all major daily broadsheet newspapers in Nepal at the time had come out with full-page jacket advertisements in purple, the brand color, and had announced “Purple has arrived” (Purple *ai pugyo*) on 12 March 2010. The newspapers had in effect even “sold” their normally black mastheads and had adopted the purple color for the day.

On 12 April 2016, Ncell became associated with Malaysia-based telecom company – Axiata Group Berhad – which had bought 80.4% shares of the company for US\$ 1.03 billion making it the largest transaction involving ownership change of a private company registered in Nepal (Mobile World Live, 2015). However, only a small part of the sale took place in Nepal (20%), while the remainder was transacted offshore, triggering a controversy on possible Capital Gains Tax (CGT) evasion by the seller (Telia Sonera). The main allegation was that the company had sold the shares offshore to avoid the applicable CGT in Nepal. The dispute was first adjudicated by the Supreme Court of Nepal, which ruled that the tax was payable that was appealed. A final settlement was reached in June 2023 following the conclusion of arbitration by the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (Transnational Dispute Management, 2023).

This section presents a case study of the coverage of Ncell’s change of ownership in 2015 by five newspapers to explore whether or not the company used advertising to secure favorable content. The analysis is based on a review of both news (including public relations or PR) content and advertising in the newspapers for a total of 800 days, 160 days per newspaper, starting with coverage on 21 December 2015 when the sale was announced through a company statement in Nepal. PR stories, for the purpose of this study, are those received by media as company statements and the non-critical “interviews” with company officials.

5.6.1 Newspapers Reviewed, Total Number of Stories and Advertisements

The five newspapers carried telecom-related content, generally news and advertising in 286 of 800 issues (35.75%) in the study period. The highest proportion of such content appeared in *Kantipur*, followed by *The Himalayan Times* (THT), *Annapurna Post* (AP), *Naya Patrika* (NP) and *Gorkhapatra*, respectively. In terms of the number of stories (journalistic content), AP had the highest number (35) followed by THT, *Kantipur*, NP and *Gorkhapatra*. Except for the state-run *Gorkhapatra*, which had 11 news stories and zero Ncell advertising, all other newspapers had both advertising and news content in various proportions. (Table 5.11)

Table 5.11

Ncell &NT News Content (Including PR) in Newspapers vs. ad. Content

Newspapers	News Content	(%)	Ad. Content	(%)
<i>Kantipur</i>	27	21.3%	69	43.7%
<i>Naya Patrika</i>	22	17.3%	27	17.1%
<i>Annapurna Post</i>	35	27.6%	23	14.6%
<i>The Himalayan Times</i>	30	23.6%	39	24.7%
<i>Gorkhapatra</i>	13	10.2%	0	0.0%
Grand Total	127	100.0%	158	100.0%

Source: Fieldwork 2022

The total advertising – both Ncell and Nepal Telecom ads. – was highest for *Kantipur* (69), followed by THT (39), NP (27) and AP (23), respectively.

Gorkhapatra did not have any telecom advertising during the review period. The percentage distribution of news content and advertisements was 21.3% news and 43.7% advertising, respectively, for *Kantipur*, followed by 23.6% and 24.7% for THT, 17.3% and 27% for NP and 27.6% and 14.6% for AP.

In terms of overall coverage and advertising, one newspaper with the highest coverage of the Ncell tax controversy, had the lowest advertising among the four, while three newspapers with comparatively lower coverage had higher advertising. The correlation coefficient (r) for news content and advertising was a high positive relationship (0.45). What the correlation suggested was a strong relationship between coverage and advertising, which gives room to assume that there was an exchange or give-and-take involved, which is symptomatic of media capture.

One key informant (KII-16) said there was no give-and-take deal on coverage and advertising and that the high coverage could have been a coincidence. He, however, added, “Everybody (newspapers) rose to the occasion when Ncell was caught in the controversy and made the best of the opportunity.” Another informant was more upfront. “We took a positive call, the management was also on the same side, we did not see it appropriate to ask the buyer to pay CGT” (KII-11). In other words, the paper believed that it was the government bureaucracy that had approved the deal, and the buyer was not liable. “Newspapers are here to make money for which you coax and cajole the private sector” (KII-11). He added, Ncell had also done its bit such as taking editors, including his editor, and that from another English publication on foreign junkets, which is a form of influence; and that it is no secret that management has an interest in how the corporate sector is covered or the PR content.

While some key informants were guarded about their responses, there was one who was not. He said, “a give-and-take is *always* (emphasis added) involved” (KII-17). He also provided an example. Before the tax evasion story broke out, the informant’s paper had published a series of articles critical of Ncell following which the company had stopped advertising for about four months. A deal (sic) was eventually negotiated between the newspaper and Ncell, facilitated by its lawyers at a restaurant in Thapathali (the informant had participated in the negotiation where the head of PR at Ncell was also present). After the negotiation, Ncell agreed to increase its annual advertising in the paper by about two-folds (about Rs. 7 million worth of advertisements) (KII-17).

Gorkhapatra had no advertising and also the lowest coverage of the alleged tax fraud story. This could have resulted from a number of reasons one of which could be the use of lower quality newsprint, which does not result in good quality reproduction of ad-copy – particularly because all Ncell ads and most NT ads in other papers were full-color displays that require minimum newsprint quality for desired aesthetics. Another reason could be the generally tepid marketing that can be associated with a state-run institution with no compulsions to be profitable compared to private newspapers, while the private newspapers could have also sensed the emerging “opportunity”, as indicated by the informant above, for increased PR coverage in exchange for increased advertising. Still another reason, is the fact that *Gorkhapatra* being a government-run newspaper usually avoids controversies as that could be associated with the government position. In the case of the private papers, one can argue that there could have been understandings involved with the telecom company on coverage and advertising, which the data indicated.

5.6.2 Advertising (ad) Content in Five Newspapers

Advertising by two large telecom companies were compared across newspapers to understand the general trend of telecom advertising at a time when newspapers were still relevant as carriers of news (as against the situation in 2022 following the growth of Internet platforms). The findings are tabulated below (Table 5.12).

Table 5.12

Advertising by Ncell and Nepal Telecom (NT)

Newspaper	Ncell	NT
<i>Kantipur</i>	43.70%	0.00%
<i>Naya Patrika</i>	14.17%	25.64%
<i>Annapurna Post</i>	12.50%	15.38%
<i>The Himalayan Times</i>	30.00%	17.95%
<i>Gorkhapatra</i>	0.00%	0.00%

Source: Fieldwork 2022

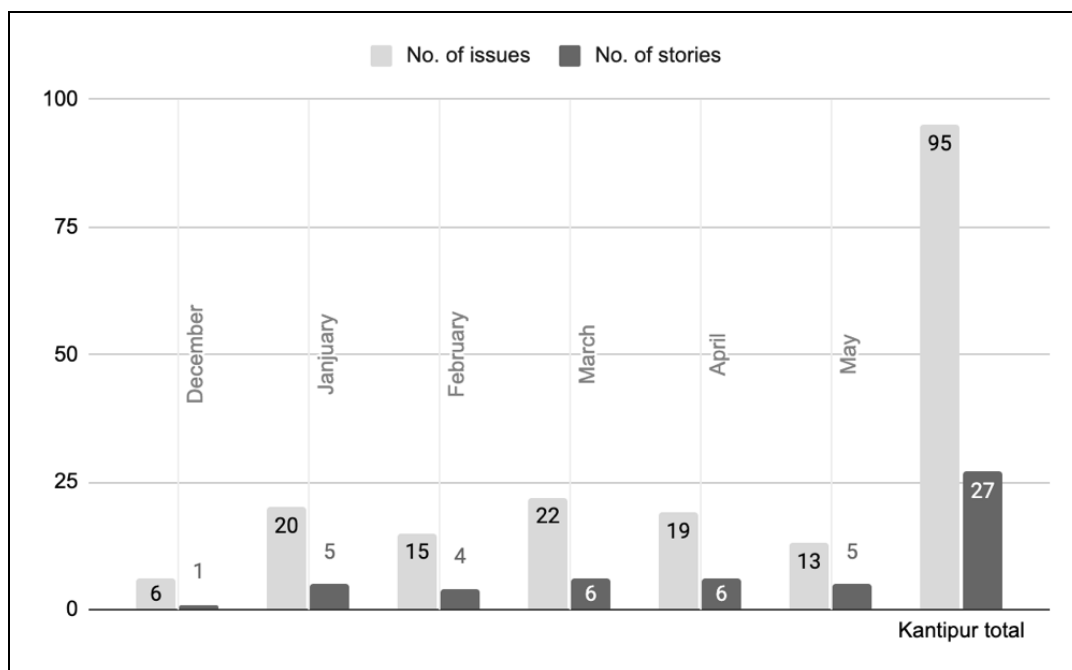
Table 5.12. shows that the highest Ncell advertising had gone to two newspapers, *Kantipur* and THT. While there were no Nepal Telecom (NT) ads in *Kantipur* during the review period, the proportion of Ncell ads was 43.7%, the highest, and that in the THT was double the proportion of NT ads.

One can conclude that the high advertising by Ncell in *Kantipur* and THT, the largest dailies in Nepali and English, were carefully planned, while those in other newspapers could reflect the increase that took place after the PR crisis. The other

papers with NT advertising appeared to be regular advertising platforms for the publicly owned company, where the government is a majority shareholder. Given the major shareholding, one cannot rule out that the advertising from the company was directed to at least two media as return for favorable coverage, because these were not newspapers with highest readership and therefore did not have compelling marketing argument to justify why the large telecom company should advertise in them when the competitor was advertising in the newspaper with the largest readership. The largest readership can deliver the best value for money in terms of reach of the advertised messages. This could also be explained partially by *Kantipur*'s anti-communist positioning – real or perceived – that could have prevented the flow of NT ads as the period referred to had governments led by two communist prime ministers. Even though there were instances in the past when Ncell had not delivered against the advertising contract after critical stories had appeared (KII-13), the post-CGT controversy volume could have increased after the matter surfaced. Another reason for high advertising in *Kantipur* was the fact that the newspaper was still important at the time, compared to the 2020s which has seen a proliferation of Internet-enabled platforms that provide alternatives to advertisers.

5.6.3 Coverage of the Ncell CGT Evasion Allegation by Five Newspapers

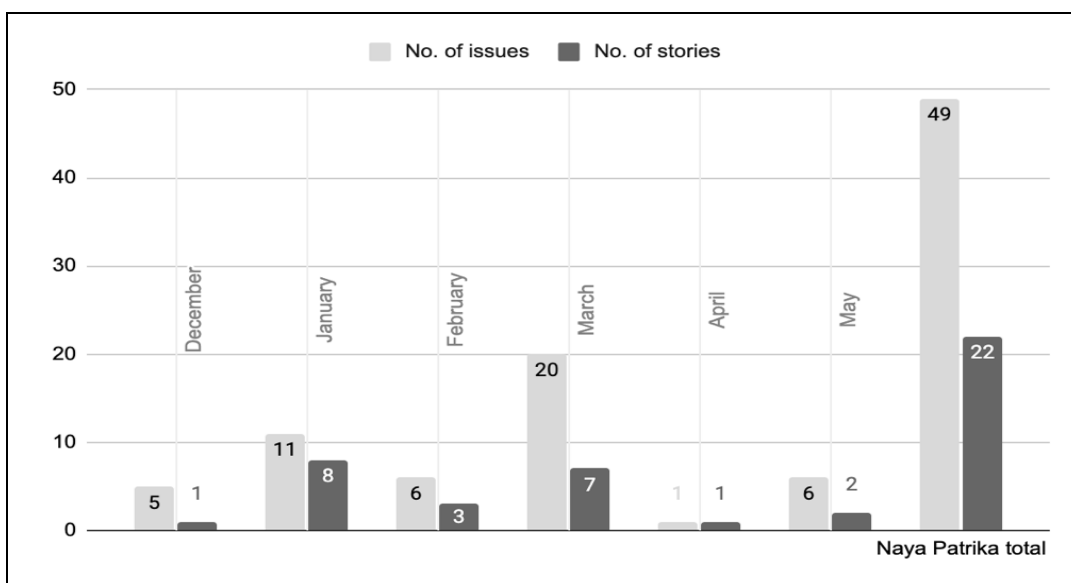
The five newspapers studied had covered the alleged tax fraud case variously, as discussed in the following section. In the case of *Kantipur*, it had a total of 27 stories (including PR content) during the review period and 95 advertisements as shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1*Number of Stories by Month – Kantipur**Source: Fieldwork 2022*

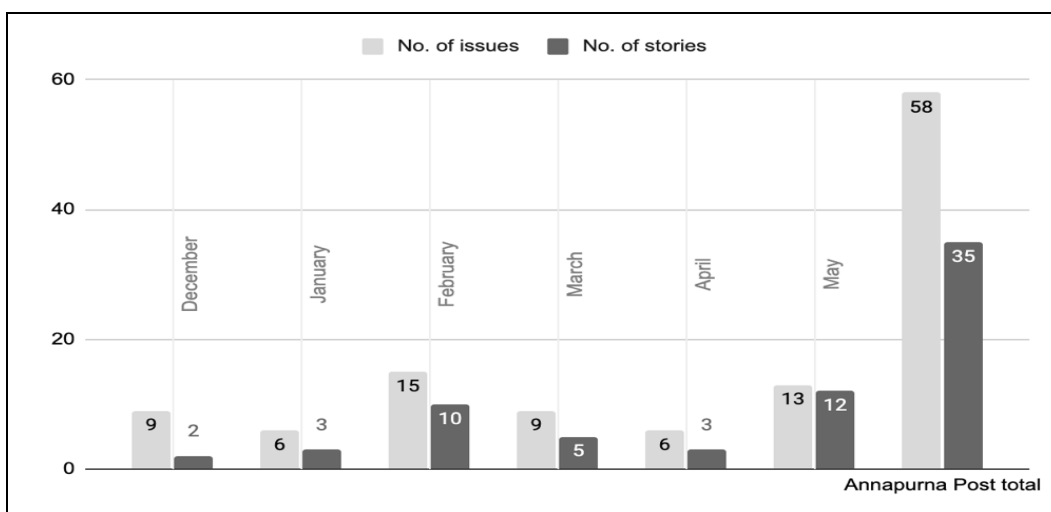
The bars for advertising remained much higher for *Kantipur* throughout the study period, while the number of stories remained below six, averaging at 4.5 stories each month (including PR stories) (Figure 5.1). The monthly average for advertisements was 15.8.

Similarly, the highest number of stories in any month in NP was eight, against advertising, which was much higher than the news-related content. Overall, NP had 22 stories against 49 advertisements in the review period, averaging at 3.6 stories each month (including PR stories). The monthly average for advertisements was 8.1.

(Figure 5.2)

Figure 5.2*Number of Stories by Month – Naya Patrika**Source: Fieldwork 2022*

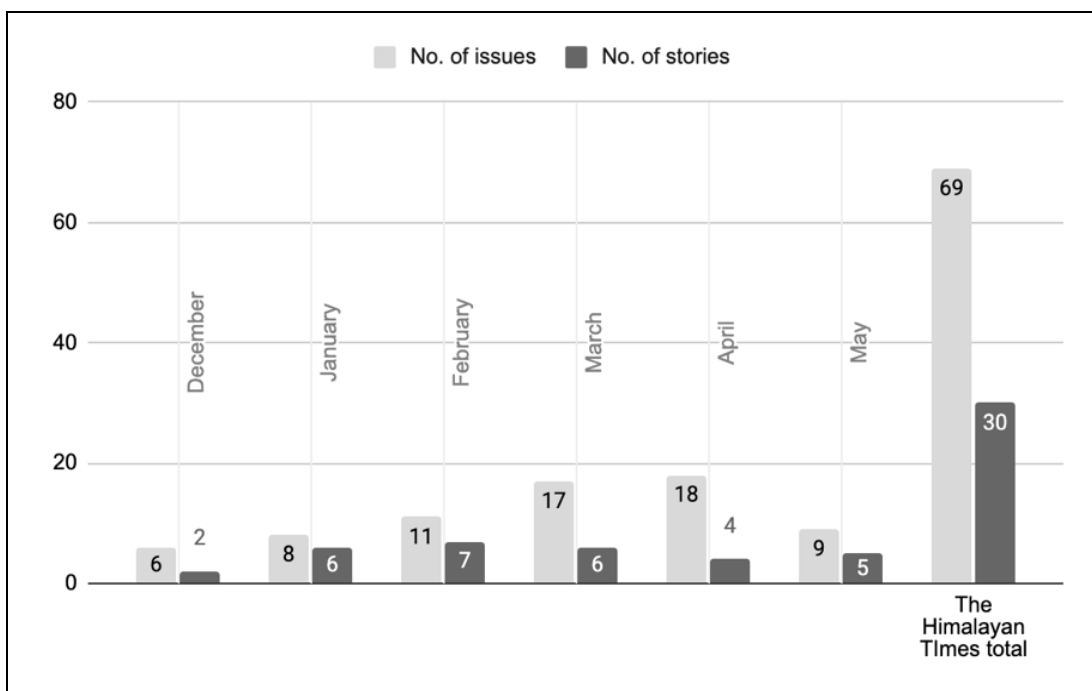
The AP had the highest number of Ncell stories (35) and not as many ads as *Kantipur*. The average number of stories (including PR content) was 5.8 – the highest among the papers. The monthly average for advertisements was 9.6.

Figure 5.3*Number of Stories by Month – Annapurna Post**Source: Fieldwork 2022*

The average number of monthly advertisements in THT was 11.5 and the average number of stories each month was five. Advertising remained high from February to April in the THT, a pattern similar to that observed in *Kantipur*. An informant said, “I would think more advertising came after (tax) controversy, there was more PR, they used cash to dilute public attention” (KII-15).

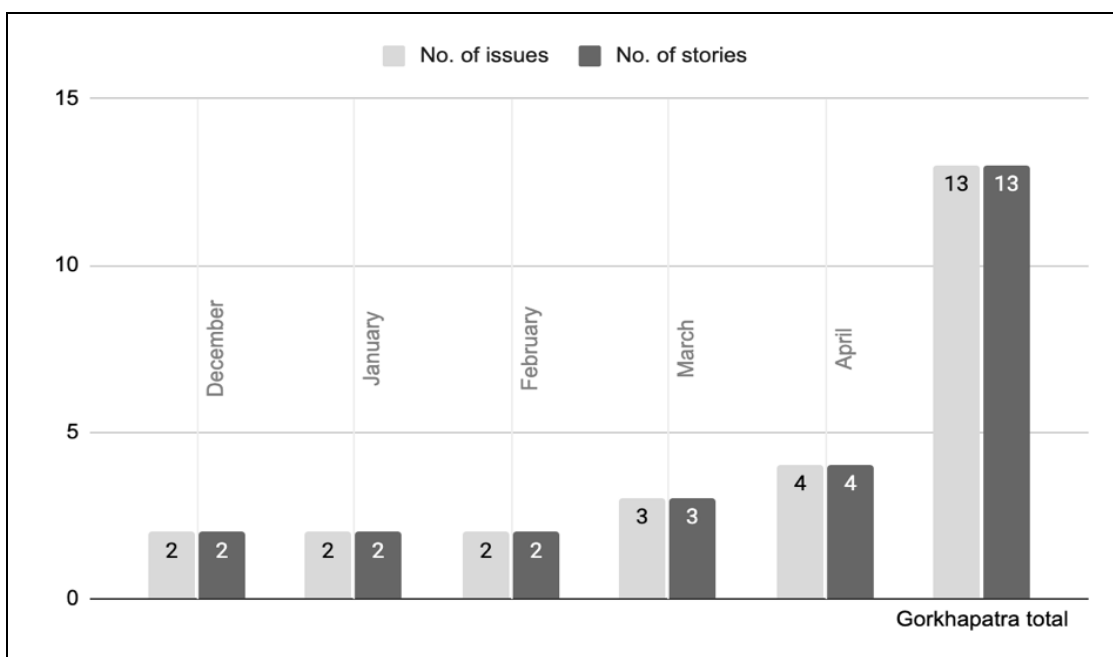
Figure 5.4

Number of Stories by Month – THT



Source: Fieldwork 2022

Gorkhapatra had 13 stories during the review period, an average of 2.16 – the lowest number of both among the newspapers that were studied (Figure 5.5) It had no advertising.

Figure 5.5*Number of Stories by Month – Gorkhapatra**Source: Fieldwork 2022*

Two newspapers *Kantipur* and THT had the highest advertising, and even though the monthly average for AP was higher than NP, the stories in the AP were more critical of the CGT fraud allegation among all newspapers. But the critical stories were not consistent and were “balanced” with occasional PR content, and even though advertising disappeared for brief periods they returned, which could indicate negotiations that were taking place between the newspaper’s advertising department and the advertiser during periods with no ads. According to an informant, most of Ncell reporting was not something that emerged from investigations by journalists but had been brought to the papers by vested interests, such as those interested in securing shares of the company. In other cases, it had been instigated by tax officials who believed the best way to bring the issue out was to seek media willing to report the fraud (KII-15).

5.6.4 Space Allotted for News and Advertising Content

All newspapers included in the study, except AP and *Gorkhapatra*, had allotted more space to advertising compared to news content (both on the issue at hand and PR stories) as shown in Table 5.13

Table 5.13

Space Allotted for ad. and News Content by Number of Columns

Newspapers	No. of Ad. Columns	% of Total	No. of News Columns	% of Total
<i>Kantipur</i>	299	41.82%	74	22.02%
<i>Naya Patrika</i>	112	15.66%	63	18.75%
<i>Annapurna Post</i>	83	11.33%	108	32.74%
<i>The Himalayan Times</i>	223	31.19%	63	18.75%
<i>Gorkhapatra</i>	0	0%	26	7.74%
Total	715	100%	336	100%

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Overall, the total space allotted to advertising in terms of number of columns was almost double that of news content or 715 and 336 columns, respectively. In terms of the newspapers, *Kantipur* had 299 advertising columns against 74 news columns, which was 41.82 percent of all ads in the five papers. The same for *THT* was 223 ads (31.19%), NP 112 ads (15.66%) and that for *Annapurna Post* was 83 ads or 11.33 percent.

The higher number of advertising columns against news columns in three newspapers *Kantipur*, *THT* and NP came with lower coverage of telecom stories – which at the time were mainly those related to Ncell and had remained an issue of high public interest. The discrepancy between reader interest and coverage, especially

during a period when the company was facing a reputation risk, could either be associated with lower independent coverage of the public debate on the issue (such as the “No tax, No Ncell” campaign of activists), or carefully calibrated news and PR content done to ensure that advertising flows remained uninterrupted, while the audiences also received some information on the controversy, particularly the type that was covered by all the newspapers. Similarly, the higher number of news columns in AP, while indicating higher coverage had included some stories that were unique across the newspapers or had broader reportage on the public debate related to the alleged tax-fraud. Therefore, while the data are inadequate to indicate a definitive cause-and-effect or give-and-take relationship, the patterns discussed above allude to certain influences – in this case of advertising – that could have caused the outcome.

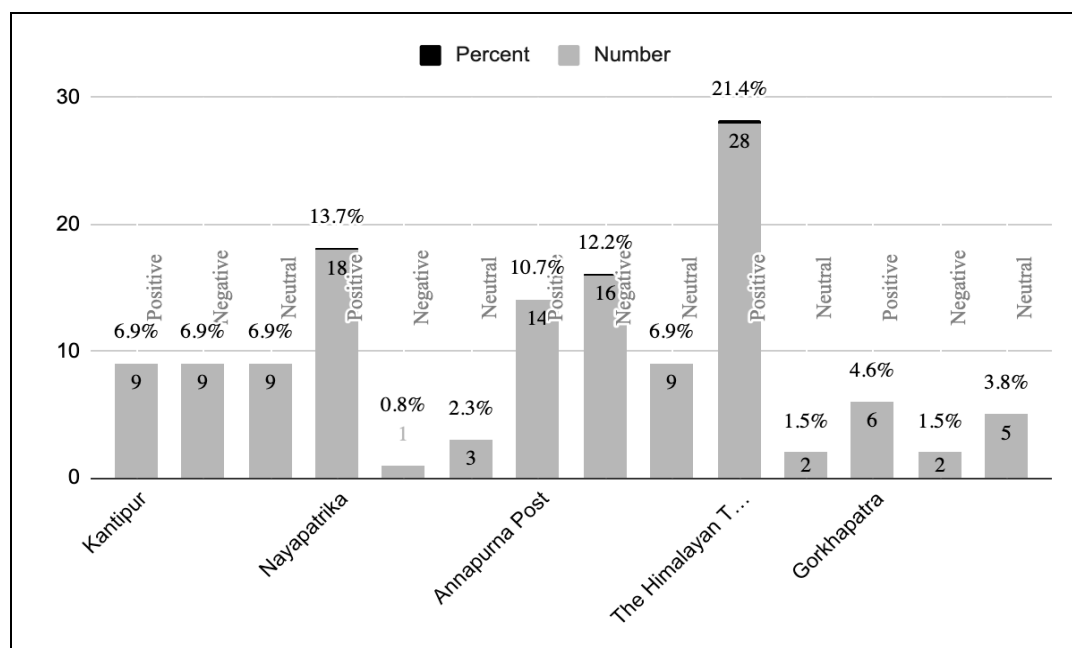
The lowest coverage by *Gorkhapatra* can be explained in terms of lack of clarity on the motive of publishing the newspaper – either for public service or profit, which in the former case would have resulted in higher number of stories as it would have been in the public interest. In the case of the latter, the newspaper could also have had more PR stories like other newspapers (possibly) in exchange for increased advertising, if it was operated with a profit motive. The public service motive could also have been better served by continued coverage of alleged losses to the public exchequer and ongoing efforts (or lack of) to ensure that the loss was recouped. The assumed lack of a profit motive at *Gorkhapatra* can also be explained by the annual grants it receives from government to cover its costs (see: Chapter-4, Section B); another explanation for the low reporting on the story could either indicate complacency resulting from government funding or also “playing safe” by reporting only official pronouncements or parliamentary discussions and not those that could allude to collusion between the company and decision makers in government.

5.6.5 Tone of Coverage of Ncell Stories in Newspapers

The tone of Ncell stories in the newspapers provided an indication of how the content was slanted or whether it was positive, negative, or neutral to the company. Overall, there were more positive stories in all newspapers (21.4%), while the proportion of negative and neutral stories were similar (21.4%). The outcome for individual newspapers is displayed in Figure 5.6

Figure 5.6

Tone of Coverage of Ncell Stories by Five Newspapers



Source: Fieldwork 2022

As shown in Figure 5.6, the coverage of *Kantipur* was balanced in terms of the tone, with nine stories in each category. However, adding up the positive and neutral stories, one can conclude that the coverage was overwhelmingly positive for the company. Similarly, in the case of NP, the proportion of positive stories was 13.3%, the highest, while the same for those with negative and neutral slants was 0.8% and 2.3%, respectively. The overall outcome for the company was also largely positive. AP had the highest proportion of stories with a negative slant (12.2%), a fairly high

proportion of positive stories (10.7%), and 6.9% neutral stories. Overall, therefore, the coverage was also largely positive. THT had the largest proportion of stories with a positive slant (21.4%) and 1.5% neutral stories – it had no stories with a negative tone. In this sense, THT was the most ideal newspaper for the company at the time. The positive coverage by THT could be explained by its motive to profit and also possibly because it was a company with alleged foreign ownership, and therefore, the CGT issue could have also been a matter of interest. Finally, *Gorkhapatra* had fewer stories overall, 4.6% were positive, 1.5% negative and 3.8% were neutral in term of the tone.

Cumulatively the tone of all stories that were reported during the study period suggested that the coverage of Ncell in all five newspapers was positive, overall, even though the papers had also carried varying proportion of negative stories, except for one newspaper (THT). This possibly explained the high advertising in newspapers with higher number of stories, and even though there was no direct relationship between positive stories and advertising in terms of absolute numbers (in the case of NP, for example), one can still conclude that coverage of major advertisers in newspapers – whether by coincidence or by intent – was largely positive. Further, even if there were occasional stories negative for the advertiser they were subsequently “balanced” with the higher number of positive and neutral stories, which could explain the trend in the coverage particularly by AP (Figure 5.6).

One informant said, misdoings of private companies are usually reported (unwritten policy, perhaps) after the government initiates actions against them or announces its suspicion (KII-11). This is something that contradicts the overall the purpose of media, of serving society as a watchdog, maintaining continuous watch, and alerting it of misdoings. Reporting after the government has already investigated

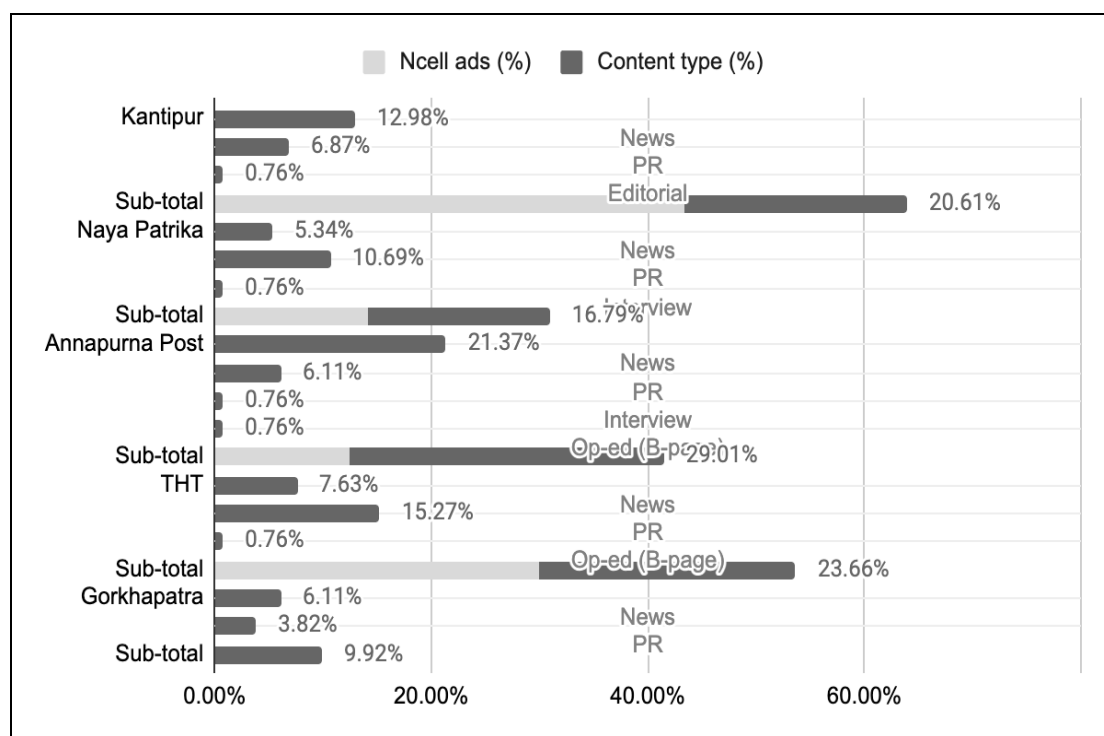
and initiated action, is a situation where the media have no choice but to report to remain credible among audiences. As explained by a key informant, even in the case of the Ncell tax fraud allegations, the editor and publisher had a discussion on the coverage after they had uncovered the information. At the meeting the publisher is said to have told the editor, wait to see how other papers deal with the story (naming one, particularly) as that would give it reason to explain to the advertiser that they “had” to cover the story “because others had also done the same”. (KII-17)

5.6.6 Type of Content on Ncell Stories in Five Newspapers

Figure 5.7 shows the type of content on Ncell during the review period. There were five types of content across the newspapers studied: news, PR, interviews, editorial, and opinion.

Figure 5.7

Type of Ncell Content and Total Advertising Across Five Newspapers



Source: Fieldwork 2022

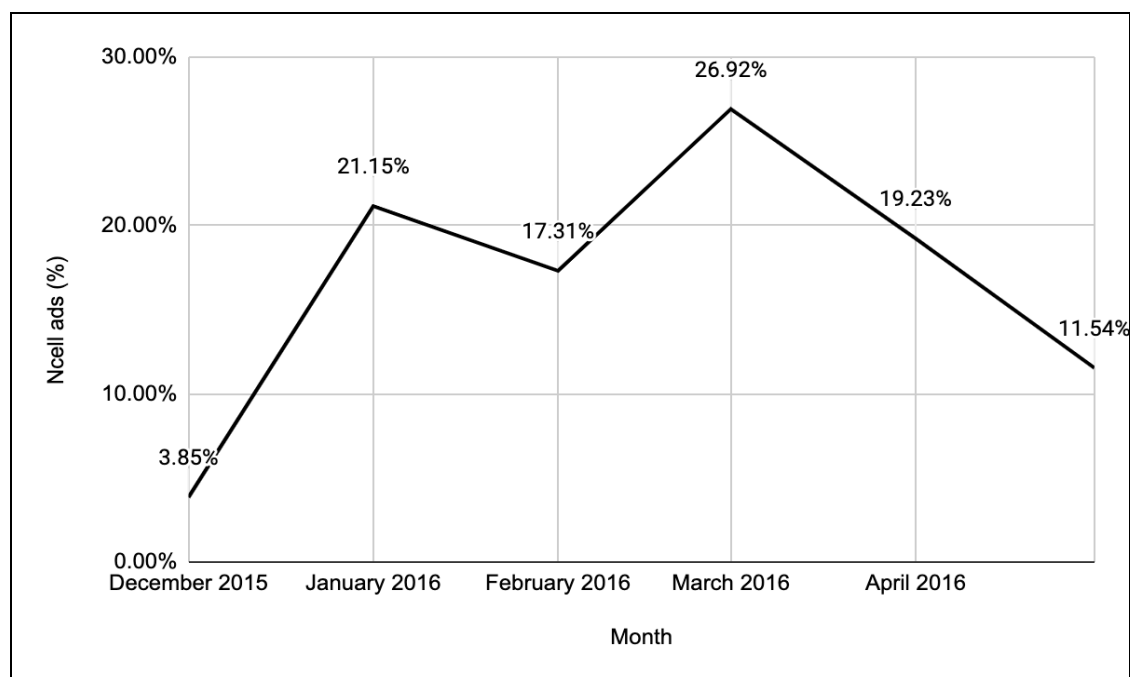
The type of content in the newspapers explains the overwhelmingly positive coverage during the period when the issue they were reporting was the Ncell tax evasion allegation (Figure 5.7). The high number of PR stories and interviews with company officials resulted in high positive coverage, and even though the newspapers did have some content that was critical or negative to Ncell. Such content was balanced out by the number positive and neutral stories, usually fact-based reporting on major announcements, etc. The PR content included company press statements on products, which were also advertised in the papers. What also stood out in the coverage was the lower number of editorials and opinion pieces (the newspaper's editorial, op-ed/opinion pieces, interviews with critics, etc.), which shows that the newspapers had made efforts to distance themselves from been seen as taking a position on the matter. The only critical op-ed piece that appeared during the period was in the AP, which was based on a conversation two of its reporters had with a pro-taxation advocate, which also possibly explains the generally lower advertising in the newspaper compared to those that did not have such content.

The only newspaper that had an editorial opinion on the matter – also critical to the company – was *Kantipur*. However, for some reason the editorial on the largest business transaction in Nepal ever, took a little over two months to find space in the newspaper. In the case of *Kantipur*, the advertising by the company had peaked in March and had begun to decline in April, which is when the critical editorial had appeared (15 April) (Figure 5.1, 5.8). A key informant said this might have been an oversight given that editorials on important issues either appear on the same day (mainly for political stories such as the dissolution of parliament in 2020 that had appeared the next day, or within the next few business days after the issue is reported and followed-up) (KII-13). It was not possible to confirm if the delayed editorial was a coincidence or done purposefully for ensuring regular advertising flows (i.e. bargaining) (See: Chapter 4).

The researcher also analyzed Ncell ads. to understand the relationship, if any, with PR content and advertising in four newspapers that had advertising. The purpose was to understand if PR content was exchanged for advertising. The advertisements from the telecom company under discussion in different newspapers are discussed below.

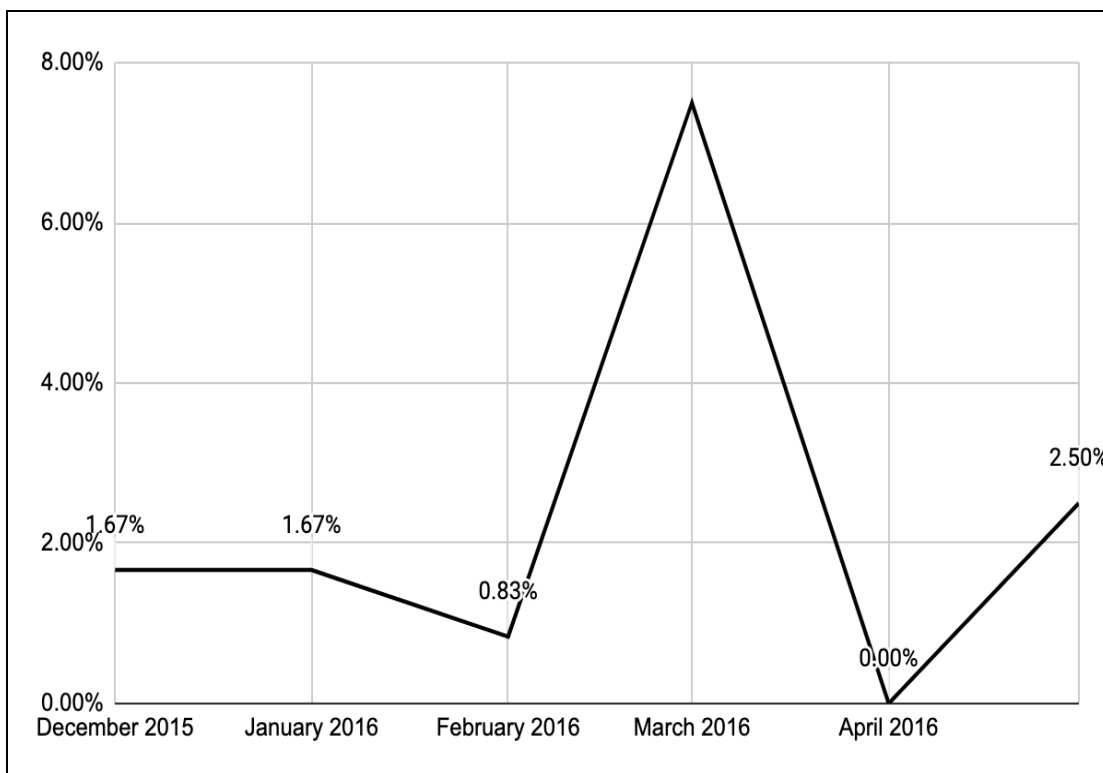
Figure 5.8

Ncell Advertisements in Kantipur



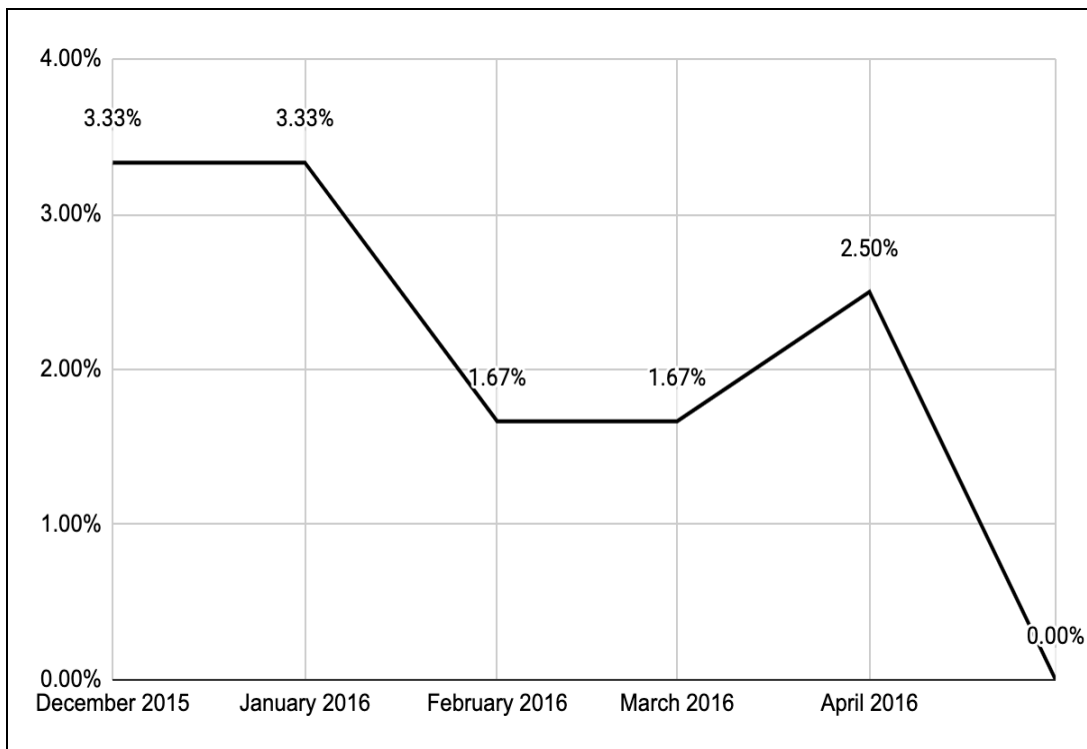
Source: *Fieldwork 2022*

In the case of *Kantipur*, most Ncell advertising appeared in the period appeared between December 2015 and March 2016, when they began to taper (Figure 5.9). The timing of the appearance of the editorial opinion and the declining advertising can be observed in the chart above. Similarly, in the case of NP, which had a disproportionately high number of stories (both news and PR) the volume of advertising was lower than other newspapers. However, the advertising began to grow sharply after February 2016, when an interview of a senior Ncell official had appeared in the paper, suggesting a trade-off. The advertising peaked in March and came down to zero in April before it began appearing again the following month.

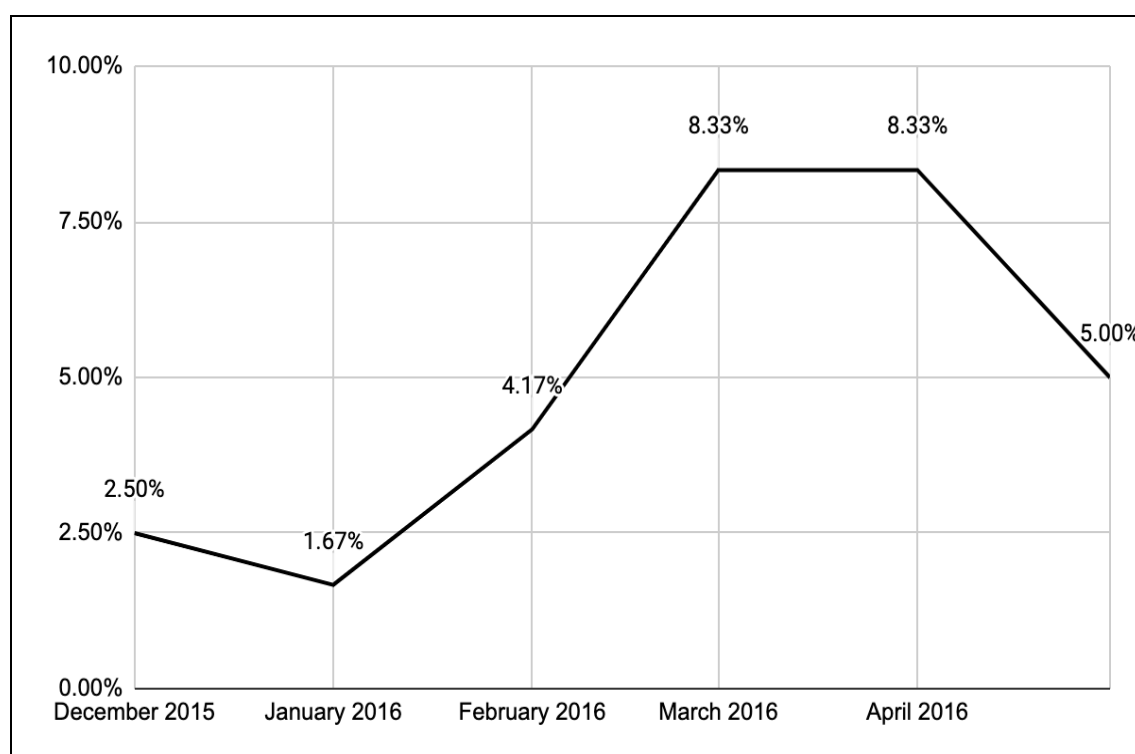
Figure 5.9*Ncell Advertisements in Naya Patrika**Source: Fieldwork 2022*

AP carried an op-ed piece, with a former tax official who had argued that the company was liable to pay the CGT. This opinion was not a spontaneous write-up by the author but solicited by the reporters as it was based on the conversation (as the accompanying information suggested). It had appeared on 6 February 2016.

Advertising by Ncell remained low for both February and March before it began to increase again but did not reach the advertising levels the newspaper had in December 2015 and January 2016.

Figure 5.10*Ncell Advertisements in Annapurna Post**Source: Fieldwork 2022*

THT that had mainly positive and neutral stories on the Ncell tax fraud allegation and had a fairly consistent growth in advertising, which peaked in March and April, and also remained on the high side in May, when that for other newspapers other than *Kantipur* had declined. THT not only had the PR stories sourced from the company but also explanatory articles citing sources that made arguments supportive of the Ncell position, which was essentially that CGT would have been applicable had the transaction had taken place in Nepal and not with a company registered in a country with double taxation avoidance treaty – which had been the company’s position.

Chart 5.11*Ncell Advertisements in The Himalayan Times**Source: Fieldwork 2022*

Exchanges made between newspapers and companies through advertising are difficult to discern. However, data, as shown above, suggested a trend in advertising and news flows, which taken together with the overall tone of the coverage, has provided a basis to assume that some exchange was involved, given that some “bargaining” does take place between advertising departments of companies and newspaper editors/owners (KII-13).

The tone of coverage of newspapers (or media, in general) – particularly, the consistently positive coverage largely ignorant of public discourse around the issue as in the case of Ncell – indicated a bias favoring advertisers or lack of effective independence from them. Therefore, advertising and type of content carried by media as discussed above suggested a relationship as payments for advertising to media can also serve as tool for businesses to bargain for positive or neutral coverage,

particularly in a media market with only a handful of large advertisers. Where such exchanges take place – more likely in small media and advertising markets such as Nepal – the tendency can be an indicator of captured media, which key informants have also validated. One can, therefore, argue that Ncell used advertising to influence coverage.

According to one key informant, advertisers who support a media with advertising also expect something back, which is to protect them in their bad times by limiting critical coverage and highlighting or glorifying their successes (KII-21). Among strategies that advertising agencies use to assist clients in damage control when they face reputational risks is to “create” events to deflect coverage, and tip or pay media to cover them. Such alternative facts, confuse the public and, according to the informant, help to protect the company’s brand. In return, media are provided with regular advertising and access to company officials when they want to interview them for lifestyle stories.

As a matter of fact, the newspapers had begun covering the Ncell story only after it had appeared in some online portals, which too had been “leaked” by businesses interested in getting a share (KII-15). The issue caught media particularly after one article written by a senior government official was published on an online news portal (L. Paudel, 2016). The news portal had published the article submitted by the author, after deleting a line that said media had not covered the issue because they had been paid (KII-22), which, as this study shows, remains a malaise that media has tried to keep hidden.

5.7 Discussion

This section discusses the major findings as they relate to the how capture manifested in texts and content. The manifestations were observed in two ways: by analyzing discourses in the headlines and sub-headings after two political events, and by analyzing the content – both news and advertising – in five newspapers following

tax fraud allegations against a private telecom operator. Sample texts and content were derived from five newspapers, and five online news portals. The two key findings in response to the question “how does capture manifest in content?” are discussed below:

- a) The discourse strategies revealed the position of the newspapers – those opposed and supportive of different political actors.
- b) Both governments and advertisers influence content in small media and advertising markets, particularly where there are a large number of non-viable media.

The first finding has been derived from the use of terminologies and constructions used for expression. A preferred strategy of those opposed to the political decision in question/political side were otherization, reinforced through the use of negative tropes against opponents, minimizing them, presenting opinion as fact and use of unqualified descriptors/ generalizations; those in support sought refuge in strategies like normalization, self-preservation, contextualization (explanation) and deflection. These finding confirmed that media texts may not always convey straightforward meanings but can be manipulated, under various influences, including the ideology of journalists/owners and interests of media institutions. Presumably, favor exchanges – both financial and non-financial – are also involved and manipulations resulting from favor exchanges represent media capture in the classical sense. Further, since bias is also an indication of capture (See: Chapter 4), one can postulate that the positioning pro- and anti-establishment could have resulted from capture by the different sides in the political dispute, while neutral presentation of both sides, indicated the professional middle path.

Language used in media can convey different meanings (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005). In the context of capture, one can argue that the language use can also signal possible incentives behind the production and use of certain texts. For example, the

motivation for selecting certain examples from history and mythology to explain what is happening in the present (demonization in the case of this study) and not something else, could have resulted from a clear decision on what the media considered right or wrong. This is because as proposed by van Dijk (1998), “the ideologies and opinions of newspapers are usually not personal, but social, institutional or political” (p.2). The strategies for supporting one side and opposing the other observed in the study, were also a fit to the ideological square discussed by van Dijk: “1. Emphasize our good properties/actions 2. Emphasize their bad properties/actions 3. Mitigate our bad properties/actions 4. Mitigate their good properties/actions” (p. 10). The different strategies media may use to co-opt, diffuse, bury or distort information are instigated by capture, for which there was some circumstantial evidence in this study. The findings relating to the manifestation of captured content has assisted to confirm that media texts can be manipulated, and when media are partisan by design, it is more visible or obvious – as was evident in the coverage strategies of partisan news portals of the election manifestoes of different parties.

In terms of the second finding, on the influence of governments and advertisers in content, there was some evidence suggesting that such influence existed. Assuming that most media in Nepal are not viable – based on FNJ regular statements seeking government support to sustain its membership – Nepal’s major advertisers exert disproportional influence on content in media where they advertise, which was observed by analyzing the content of five newspapers. The issue in question was coverage of tax fraud allegations against the advertiser, a telecom company, alongside the flow of advertising. Advertising is a major tool with which the Government can also influence media content in Nepal, and its use or influence is likely to grow following consolidation of advertising under the newly established Advertising Board.

The influence of advertising on media can be both positive and negative. It can be positive as in the West where it had helped to free newspapers from the influence of political parties (Petrova, 2011) or negative, where it could steer the slant in content, which is what happens following advertiser capture (Atal, 2017b; Beattie, 2020; di Tella & Franceschelli, 2011). The study has produced evidence suggesting a correlation between advertising and coverage in newspapers, and also more advertising for uncritical coverage, and that suggesting lower advertising following the publication of critical content. One can, therefore, argue that it has been easier for the few large advertisers in the private sector to influence media through advertising because of the large number of non-viable media, most of which are very small operations. Hence, the findings of the content analysis was not surprising, and it was similar to advertiser influence observed in other geographies. The findings related to advertising and content, particularly the appearance of an editorial in a newspaper only after advertising had begun to decline, and the lower number of ads for the newspaper that had some critical reporting, is in line with the observations of Herman & Chomsky (1988) on the influence of advertising on media, which capture can exacerbate. Advertising was one of four filters in their Propaganda Model that explains media behavior, particularly that favoring the rich and the powerful in terms of the discourses disseminated. One can thus argue that the boundaries between editorial and advertising departments, which Herman & Chomsky had found to have weakened, have been further undermined by capture in Nepal as suggested by the analysis in Chapter 4, particularly the references to the prevalence of paid content, editors brokering advertising for owners and assignment of reporters in the districts also with the responsibility of soliciting ads.

CHAPTER-VI

CAUSES OF MEDIA CAPTURE IN NEPAL

The term “cause” means an influence that triggers some action or leads to a situation or phenomenon that could not have resulted in the absence of the influence. For example, in the case of journalism the political affinity of the journalist can be a cause or influence leading to bias in content favoring his/her political conviction, other things remaining the same. This section aims to respond to the question “why is media captured in Nepal?” or to understand the main drivers of capture, by exploring the power relationships of politics and business and media/journalists. Power for the purpose of the analysis is understood in the broad sense where it includes State power and that emanating from finances or money or financial power.

By definition, media capture involves secretive (Dragomir, 2017; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2008) and hence, evidencing the actual give-and-take is difficult as it is in the interest of both the capturer and the captured to keep the transactions hidden. Governments that capture media would, arguably, keep information on payments and favors exchanged away from citizens because disclosure would directly affect their credibility and public standing. Further, any leader calling himself/herself democratic would not like to be perceived as someone working to prevent free and independent journalism. Capture, thus, is more convenient for governments than, say, the use of brute force as witnessed say during King Gyanendra's takeover in 2005.

Similarly, it is also in the interest of media not to disclose their affinities with particular political and other interest groups, and government, as that could cause them to lose credibility and eventually audiences/readers. The decline in audiences/readers of media can subsequently result in lower advertising, and low profitability.

The same is true for businesses, because those who admit to capture by businesses dilute the credibility of information they seek to disseminate as news and current affairs through media. The PR material from companies that appear in the business pages of the newspapers is one example of compromised content. These endogenous disincentives for disclosure make media capture very difficult to isolate but can be postulated through interpretation. Based on the analysis of data in Chapters 4 and 5, the main postulations on why media in Nepal is captured or the causes of capture are: (a) Incomplete democratization and political development, (b) Clientelism and commercialization, (c) Market domination by a few large advertisers, (d) low professional standards among journalists, and (e) high political partisanship.

6.1 Incomplete Democratization and Political Development

Nepal's journey towards liberal democracy began in 1951 but it has not been smooth, owing to what Baral (2006) has described as "extra systemic" (p. 21) evolution or one that had neither evolved from the Rana regime that had been replaced nor was it fully the product of the democratic revolution, which had contributed to the change. In other words, democracy was a brand-new concept to Nepal and as result, within the first 10 years the democratization effort was interrupted by a royal takeover and replacement of the elected government and polity, with direct monarchy (under the Panchayat System) which lasted for 30 years (Baral, 2006). To date, this remains the longest politically stable period in Nepal's history after the overthrow of 200 years of Rana oligarchy on 18 February 1951.

The first 10 years after 1951 saw a number of unstable governments leading to the first general elections held in 1959. However, the king dismissed the elected government, and outlawed political parties and political competition in 1960. Thereafter, the king's government maintained a tight grip on private newspapers

opposed to the takeover. Many journalists – and media because many editors were also publishers – sanctioned by the regime were co-opted by the banned political parties (Baral, 1975), or joined their ranks and began functioning as tools for partisan propaganda – often described by journalists of the era as “mission [for establishing democracy] journalism”. The king’s government also consolidated state-run media and used them as official mouthpieces. The then government relaxed controls over the press after 1981 when a referendum was held and voters were asked to choose between monarchy and a reformed Panchayat system, and multiparty democracy, which was when the pro-opposition media/journalists began showing their true partisan colors as democrats and communists (Baral, 1975; Devkota, 2051 B.S.; Savada, 1993).

Therefore, the foundational argument that there was no independent journalism in Nepal in first 40 years after the 1951 revolution, and therefore, this was a period when the media functioned in an intermediate state without effective independence and in the service of the different forces in power and politics. There was little or no advertising to support media during these 40 years which made them vulnerable to capture. Even though some newspaper and radio journalism (and later television) did exist, they were beholden either to the government or opposition political interests for sustenance, where the media can be assumed to have made trade-offs.

In the case of government media, one can argue, it was a case of direct control. The direct controls on private newspapers came in the form of restrictive policies and laws aimed at making both publication and circulation difficult as it also extended to even controls on newsprint availability (Baral, 1975). Direct control was the preferred method of keeping the newspaper content in check before 1990; indirect influences came alongside the democratization efforts in the 1990s.

The polarization of media along pro- and anti-government lines and proximity of journalists with political parties/ leaders began in the 1960s, where they were exposed to ideological indoctrination. Overtime, political convictions of journalists mixed up with their journalism which shifted from public service to service for the party, and in the case of full-time cadre, it also became a job for which they received stipends (Birahi, 2073 B.S.; Dhakal, 2052 B.S.). The partisan journalists, many also party members, had one assigned duty which was to publicize the party line. That has changed today, and other than journalists working at State-run media, most journalists are employed by private companies or non-profits in the case of, say, “community radio”. And even though all of them may not have formal party memberships, many continue to engage in party-assigned publicity and propaganda duties with government-issued press credentials, with the expectation of return favors from different political parties, and/or also for eventually securing party memberships (KII-19).

A popular pro-democratic uprising following the pulling down of the Berlin Wall reverted Nepal to a democracy with a constitutional monarchy in 1990 and the Constitution guaranteed civil and political rights, including freedom of expression comparable with international standards (The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990; Human Rights Committee, 2011). This period also saw the arrival of private daily newspapers in broadsheet – before this only government-run newspapers published in the size – in a market dominated by private tabloid-sized weeklies with partisan and/or sensational content, with limited advertising that forced them to rely extensively on government and political benefactors for handouts.

In 1991, Nepal had a literacy rate of 26 percent, while there were a little over 400 newspapers for a population of 19.8 million, with newspaper readers largely

concentrated in Kathmandu Valley. The Gross National Product per capita was US\$180 (Freedom House, 1992). Therefore, Nepal had neither a sizeable readership for newspapers nor adequate industrialization and advertising to support independent journalism. In fact, 1992 and 1993 have been the only two years when Freedom House rated Nepal's political and civil rights situation as "Free" – an indicator also of the press freedom situation (Freedom House, 1993, 1994). In 1993, the government had charged three journalists of "offending" the royal family after which Nepal's rating fell to "Partly Free", which has remained unchanged. Even in 2022 Nepal was rated "Partly Free" with 57/100 points (Freedom House, 2023). Arguably, therefore, both democracy and journalism in Nepal remain works-in-process, which explain the contradictions observed in media operations by this study.

Despite this, the 1990s were the best years for journalism and media development as this was when private ventures in broadsheet publishing and broadcasting (both FM radio and television) began. Journalists at these institutions were trained on liberal journalism values and skills by numerous training programs supported by international donors. This was also a period of growth and expansion of civil society organizations (CSO) and increased advocacy on social issues. Many of the issues raised by CSOs were in the public interest and were reported by media,, contributing to shaping public policies. Typically, the CSOs flagged public concerns, which the media carried, and some of those issues even triggered policy changes (KII-20), including and not limited to, the criminalization of caste-based discrimination, emancipation of *Kamaiyas* (debt-bonded laborers) in Mid- and Far-western of Nepal, and commitments to ensuring equal rights for women in Nepal's still highly patriarchal society (Fujikura, 2001; Informal Sector Service Centre, n.d.). However,

while the media-CSO complementarity and the resulting discourses had served a democratic purpose, the narratives on public policy shortfalls and, particularly, the failures of the political leadership to deliver socioeconomic changes to match the public expectations, also shaped the public's perception of the "inability" of democratic leaders to deliver change leading to questioning of the democratic bubble created by the euphoria over the toppling of the Panchayat system in 1990.

Rather than encourage more critique, debates and discussions, which are said to be signs of a viable democracy, the political response was to find ways to control the critical narrative. This became apparent when political parties began organizing "like-minded" journalists into unions and associations and using them as vehicles to influence public discourses. Ironically, it was the Nepali Congress, a party known for its liberal democratic credentials that was also the first to organize a partisan union of journalists under the party's trade union in 1992. This was later replicated by main left-of-center party the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (UML), thus, sowing the seeds for party-controlled and directed journalism. The organization of journalists into party-affiliated units began with the Nepal Press Union, which has been part of a trade union under the Nepali Congress Party. It was in the mid-1990s that UML followed suit backing the formation of Press Chautari Nepal (KII-1, KII-2, KII-4).

The values learnt from exposure to liberal journalism trainings were soon subsumed by growing political influences that prevented independent journalism from taking a firm root. Another factor that prevented the growth of professional journalism was the strong feudal and kinship relations in a society that was still highly traditional. The early 1990 was a period when there were about 400 newspapers and periodicals, each of which sold a few hundred copies. Their estimated combined

circulation in 1991 was about 125,000 (Savada, 1993). One reason for rapid politicization of journalists and media was the dominant “power-worshipping culture”, which in Nepal is not limited to deities but extends to mortals in positions of influence and authority to reward clients – such as government, political parties, and businesses (KII-20).

The growing political influence on journalism through indirect control (capture) – via partisan organizations – assisted the parties to create alternative truths to influence citizens’ perceptions using co-opted media/journalists to help them to cover up their misdeeds, including corrupt practices. The resulting partisan content was not just paid/sponsored narratives, but in many cases, was also defamatory, libelous and dis-informative, which were rarely challenged and sanctioned. For example, in one case the Supreme Court had found both politicians of the UML party and journalists supporting the party in contempt of court proceedings but had deferred sanctions for politicians (Dahal & Ghimire, 2013), effectively conveying a message that the same law applied differently to politicians. The alternative facts/truths resulting from the growing proximity of politicians – often corrupt – with journalists/media, and their public images as messiahs of democracy, and the strong relations of patronage partly explained the high impunity for their excesses (Bhattarai et al., 2005, 2010). Not surprisingly, it did not take corruption to reach endemic proportions:

The political elites have link(s) with businessperson(s), decision makers and control media personnel, development workers and human rights activists through their contact(s). They hold a major share in private schools and colleges, and nursing homes, pharmaceutical companies, transport, and media and many more ventures.

(Shah, 2019, p. 278)

In 2013, Transparency International's South Asian survey of perceptions suggested corruption had increased. One reason for this was the "strong political influence across institutions" (Transparency International Nepal, 2014, p.1). The remedy, Transparency International suggested, was enhancing the capacity of watchdogging institutions such as the judiciary. What it did not mention as another probable cause was the erosion of professionalism, and dereliction of media from their duty as public watchdogs – an outcome of the growing political influence (Shah, 2019) – which, arguably, is the other reason.

Corruption in this study is understood to include all its basic forms such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, etc. (Stephenson, 2019). He had argued that a free press (also in the sense of independence from influences) coupled with other accountability mechanisms such as periodic elections could help reduce corruption.

However, in the case of a captured media environment where that independence does not exist, it is not surprising to have public perceptions of high corruption, which could not be far from truth, given the corrupt practices that are said to even exist in media (See: Chapter 4). The situation underlies the frustration of one key informant who said, "if the trunk (political parties) is rotten, what can you expect from the branches and leaves (party-linked journalists' associations and journalists)?" (KII-20). Therefore, arguably, political influence on media through journalists' associations and favors extended remains the predominant cause of media capture in Nepal.

6.2 Clientelism and Commercialization

What one can conclude by studying the evolution of the private press in Nepal before 1990, is that it was created essentially for political advocacy and not to earn profits (Devkota, 2051 B.S.), possibly, the public service motive did exist but was not discernable owing to its politicization. This began changing after large investors –

whose motives were, presumably, profit – and political influence – appeared on the scene. In the mid-1990s, there even was an attempt by the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) to publish one Nepali and one English newspaper in broadsheet, and had required the paper to follow its dictates for counterbalancing the party's perceived support of *Kantipur* to the Nepali Congress party (Aryal, 2016; Onta, 2001).

Journalists were also very much involved in politics. Interestingly, in the mid-1990s, it was an editor who claimed to have facilitated the nexus between the owners of *Kantipur* and the leader of the main opposition party (Nepal, 2070 B.S.). Not a coincidence – perhaps – another company run by the owners of *Kantipur* later received a license for a F.M. radio with the most powerful transmitting capacity ever allowed to the private sector.

Newspapers with the motive to profit – also from other ventures owned by the media owners – have generally been careful not to upset power holders, as doing that could be detrimental to their earnings both from media and their other ventures (See: Chapter 4, Section C). Therefore, the owners have an interest to ensure that criticisms of government and political parties in their media is “just right” and does not threaten their relations with power holders, which is required for protecting their businesses. They also ensure that the support to political actors is “rightly” directed by influencing content through editors, and sometimes even by bypassing them and directly communicating with heads of reporting and the news sections, in anticipation of return favors through public policies or political concessions (KII-9; KII-17). The weekly newspapers, particularly those where editors were also involved in partisan associations, did not hesitate to advocate one-sidedly for their patrons – mainly politicians and political parties – with total disregard of those considered as “others”.

Such patronage was mutually beneficial for both politicians and journalists where parties in government handed out state funds and jobs to supportive media associations members, media, and journalists, while the recipients paid back by providing favorable coverage and/or managing PR for the patrons. Until around 2010, only prime ministers were known to hire journalists as press/media advisors, which over time has almost become a norm for almost every minister to employ journalists in such positions using public resources. The tendency spread further after the election of local governments in 2017/2018 resulting in a situation where elected office holders in the seven provinces and heads of the 753 municipal governments have also begun appointing press advisors and news coordinators (KII-19) (also see: Chapter 4: Section A). Many of these appointees remain simultaneously active in media, which is a case of clear conflict of interest, which, however, seems to have been normalized. The federalization of Nepal has resulted in other distortions in media, where local governments have even begun funding supportive media, or using public resources to appease all media (Onlinekhabar, 2021) Such proximities of journalists and media owners with politicians is a condition conducive for capture, which one can argue has been the case in Nepal much of the time.

6.3 Market Domination by a Few Large Advertisers

Advertising is said to have freed media in United States of America and the West from dependence on politicians and parties in the early 20th century (Petrova, 2011), which, however, has not been the case for Nepal after 1990. Instead, what has developed is a relationship of brokerage and clientelism where media/journalists serve the interests of their benefactors in both politics and business. Nepal's major advertisers comprise of a handful of large businesses with multiple interests across sectors from manufacturing, financial institutions, hydropower development and

trading. Therefore, media critical of such businesses or their products – in terms of quality, etc. – could face their wrath, which some key informants had experienced (KII-12; KII-13; KII-17). This also explained why media hesitate to report on allegations against large companies, as evidenced in the case of Coca-Cola. Such advertiser influence is possible in small media markets with a large number of non-viable media (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2008). Nepal's total annual advertising spending ranges between Rs.8-14 billion (Dhital, 2022; Mishra, 2020) in an economy of about Rs. 3,209 billion (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Further, most of the advertisements have typically gone to a few large television stations, and, to the new digital platforms leaving little for other media, particularly newspapers. One can argue that this could have forced many newspapers to make compromises to remain viable. In 2023, even the largest newspaper began retrenching staff following a steep drop in advertising revenues (*Journalists Protest against Kantipur Media Group*, 2023), which is an example of how the decreasing advertising can affect media.

During direct monarchical rule (before 1990), an editor of one of the few independent weekly newspapers of the time is known to have told his reporters that they could write anything against the politicians of the day but should not even think of raising eyebrows or hinting at complicity of the royal family in any misdeed (Sharma et al., 2017). A similar type of unwritten stricture prevails in media, where large business houses/advertisers occupy the high pedestal once occupied by the monarch. Any hint of negativity about the advertiser's brand, even in background photographs of unrelated events, are, therefore, avoided. Indications of this can be observed in media coverage, where newspapers go to great lengths to please advertisers by placing native adverts (company logos, product branding, etc.) within news stories in the business pages. Another indication is the non-coverage of negative

issues related to businesses. One recent example was the silence over alleged tax fraud by the Nepali bottling franchise of Coca-Cola by major newspapers and media for more than six months after it had been investigated and reported by a newsmagazine (*Taksar*). The story appeared in the major newspapers only after the government formally charged the company of tax-fraud (Kantipur correspondent, 2022, 11 March). Coverage only after formal charges provided the newspaper a reasonable explanation to the advertiser, something along the lines of we had no choice but to cover because others would also do the same.

The Coca-Cola case is an example of what the major media are not reporting. As another example, media reports on accidents by those receiving automobile advertising rarely name the brand of the vehicle involved, as it could displease the seller of the brand (KII 19). Another sign of advertiser capture is sponsored content published in newspapers, where the mandatory identification of the paid content is published in very small font size to make it almost unnoticeable and also in English (in the case of one Nepali language newspaper) (Salokya, 2021). It was an example where the newspaper had published a half-page “interview” without identifying the interviewer, of the Chief Executive Officer of an online retailer with “advt.” (abbreviation for advertisement) in a small font at the bottom of the paid content. Had the advertisement been identified upfront readers would have had the choice of skipping it, if they so desired, but it was not the case. Instead, it appeared that the ad had been purposively designed to resemble a regular newspaper interview with a standard news-type headline and layout. This is one example of paid content, where the identification of it being paid content was almost masked, which has become normal for newspapers; in other cases, the paid content cannot be separated from normal journalistically produced content.

Even advertising has not been corruption free. According to informants, kickbacks in advertising range from 50 percent for government ads and 25-30 percent for those coming from the private sector (KII-19). This cut goes to people writing and signing checks and staff at marketing departments of companies who make media selection decisions. Undercutting by media on advertising rates has become another “normal” in the Nepali media market. One radio station that started broadcasting almost 16 years ago has not revised its per-minute ad charges for a prime-time program and has instead been offering discounts on the rate (KII-19). Such influence of business is no longer something only known within Nepal. In a recent report an international press freedom monitoring organization said, “under-the-table payment in exchange for favorable coverage of private interests is common” (Reporters Without Borders, 2023, p. 1). It also commented on government advertising, saying that the system tended to promote bias, “because the government favors channeling its advertising funds to media outlets that support its policies (Reporters Without Borders, 2023, p.1). The domination of the market by a few large advertisers in Nepal, is therefore another cause of media capture, as this situation allows businesses to have disproportionate influence over media.

In the course of interviews for this thesis, one informant said advertising agencies even “plant” content in newspapers and online portals or get reporters to do certain stories in desired ways. When there is advertising by a large advertiser in a media, the media would not go against such wishes (KII-21). Such a give-and-take is possible only in markets where a few large advertisers can determine the viability of media.

6.4 Low Professionalism

Professionalism was introduced to Nepali journalism in the 1990s, when there was an increase in international support for promoting democracy and human rights.

Journalism trainings in the 1990s included instructions on basic journalism skills (e.g. newswriting, features, and later radio production, etc.) (Parajulee et al., 2009) and also introduced journalists to liberal journalism values and standards, including independence, fairness and accuracy. However, while journalists did sharpen their skills in content production resulting in coverage of diverse issues, they did not fully adopt the notions of impartiality, fairness, etc., owing largely to political partisanship that had also begun taking root at about the same time. Journalism has stagnated at this level and has, generally, been unable to graduate towards critical thinking and analysis. The slow adoption of liberal journalism values, particularly professionalism, is also an outcome of highly disciplinary and theory-focus journalism education in Nepal that does not encourage independent thinking. Further, since the profession has also been financially unrewarding – because of low advertising – many journalists sought part-time, non-conflicting parallel vocations such as PR services for agencies, teaching, consulting, etc. – to augment incomes.

By the turn of the century both the number of media (and journalists) had increased without corresponding changes in the media economy, which has instead shrunk further for traditional media after advertisers began moving to digital platforms. As a result, the already small advertising market began changing as advertisers moved to newer online platforms to sell their wares, making even the once successful media ventures unviable. This made the journalists/media more pliable to external influences, which manifests in increased sponsored content and PR coverage. This has caused even large media companies such as Kantipur and Himalmedia to seek partnerships with private companies where the media provide the businesses branding support in return for advertising and sponsorships. This has been the case even for media and journalism conclaves (Eventmx, 2023; Kantipur Conclave 2022, 2022). Further, many media organizations – particularly those run by journalists,

which are already conflicted in terms of motives – do not pay minimum wages to journalists forcing them to seek other, even, non-ethical ways to argument incomes, such as brokerage, sponsored and paid content, and even blackmailing of businesses as discussed in Chapter 4.

The introduction of specialization in reporting at the larger newspapers was another turning point in Nepali journalism. Beat journalism allowed reporters to specialize in specific areas – education, health, business reporting, etc. – but in the absence of rotation, and professional scrutiny of their reports by editors, the beat reporters began to socialize and “become friends” with the sources. Eventually, many of these beat reporters began functioning as “gatekeepers” deciding what events of the sector should be covered and what should not be to protect the interests of their sources as return favors for perks received for their services. As pointed out in Chapter 4, many journalists ended up becoming so close to sources that they even began thinking like them [cognitive capture according to Stiglitz (2017)] and advocated on their behalf rather than examine the sources. Next, the journalists working on different beats formed their own associations, ostensibly to promote a certain type of journalism but many of such organizations turned into PR fronts for agencies they were supposed to be reporting about. This is exemplified best by business journalists in Nepal who have been accused of not reporting “on” businesses but “for” businesses, and businesses reciprocating with favors and advertising. One example of the favor is free premiums provided to members of one association of economic and business reporters by an insurance company. The insurance was free (Himalayan News Service, 2017; *My Republica*, 2017). The provision of insurance premiums by an insurance company to journalists reporting about such businesses is a form of payment, and hence a cause of capture.

6.5 High Political Partisanship

The politicization of media/journalists that began in the early 1990s is a major reason for partiality in Nepal's journalism. This partisanship, and the resulting influences in content, is the form of media capture that can still be observed in some countries in the neighborhood such as Afghanistan and Bangladesh (Cárdenas et al., 2017; Relly & Zanger, 2017). Appointments of party faithful rather than the qualified, independent candidates to public media positions and regulatory bodies is what partisan journalists get in return for coverage favors they provide to politicians and their parties. This is evidenced by the hurry with which governments appoint and remove heads of state media after a change in the leadership, which sometimes also ends up in the courts (Nepal Television, 2022; Online Khabar, 2078b B.S. 2078a B.S.; Setopati, 2018). In effect, journalists have begun finding more value in picking the side of the powerful and the rich rather than reporting on them independently and critically on matters of public interest. One informant admitted that it had become "increasingly difficult" to do journalism, or any other vocation for that matter, without having a political benefactor. Where you have one benefactor, you have access to everything "money, awards, recognition, and even opportunity to extract resources from public agencies for your journalists' association, provided you end up as a ministerial advisor (KII-19). The political support has been used as a tradeable service in exchange for favorable coverage.

The high political partisanship among journalists and media they run is now almost public knowledge, and one editor has publicly stated that the affiliation of journalists in partisan organizations could be as high as 90 percent (Pradhan, 2072 B.S., 2073 B.S.). When asked to rate the influence of different interests on media content, an informant said, it would be 7-8/10 for individual ideology, 6.5/10 for political organizations, and 5.0/10 for publishers/owners. The score was lower for

smaller businesses but high for large advertisers (KII-12). The partisanship intensifies during elections, when media/journalists take sides of parties they support as has been evidenced by an election monitoring report published by the PCN. The report said 75 percent of the total broadcast time and 74 percent of the total print space had been devoted to covering matters related to the three main political parties (Press Council Nepal, 2008), which also have the three large journalists associations supporting them. Partisanship, therefore, is a major cause of media capture in Nepal as has made journalists vulnerable to political influences.

Partisanship has worked for the journalists because they receive favors from politicians once their preferred parties are in government, again, a “you-scratch-my-back, I-will-scratch-yours” type of relationship. For the politicians, the partisan journalists’ association provide them platforms where they can articulate their views to pliant audiences without the risk of critical interrogation by professional journalists, as there are many examples where politicians have used such platforms. Many former FNJ presidents and members well-known for partisan affiliations have been appointed repeatedly to state media institutions and/or have been nominated for government journalism awards and recognitions. One former FNJ president even made it to the list of nominees as parliament member in the proportional representation list of candidates of a major political party in 2017/2018. Another former president had contested elections on a party ticket and lost. The FNJ has essentially turned itself into a political organization, where political parties decide and vet candidates even for its elections. One former FNJ president said, during one such election in the 1990s, the prime minister himself had favored a particular candidate and had invited the voting members of FNJ close to his party to tea at his residence (KII-2). The partisan influences in the FNJ elections that followed have been widely reported by media. In the first few FNJ elections after 1990, candidates without party backing had also won,

which informants said has now become impossible (KII-1, KII-2, KII-3, KII-4, KII-5, KII-8). In 2023, Reporters without Borders has aptly summarized its understanding of political partisanship among Nepal's journalists saying that every major party has "a voice through a trade union or a journalists' organization", a situation of conflict of interest, which was more in local media because journalists were also often active members of the parties (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). The partisanship in journalism in Nepal is a dark secret that remains well-known but ignored, which this researcher argues, is one of the major causes of capture.

In conclusion, the inability of media to pay journalists adequately for reasons discussed above and high political partisanship are main reasons that have made Nepal's newspapers, and journalism for that matter, vulnerable to capture. Further, the already small media market has become more competitive in the 2020s compared to the late 1990s or the first decade of the new millennium, particularly after the spread of broadband connectivity and the arrival of Internet-based platforms. This has further affected the incomes and profitability of legacy media. As result, even in 2023, journalism in Nepal remained "financially unrewarding, straining journalists' independence and their respect for ethics" (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). This is a situation that makes them easy targets for capture, which this study argues, has been the case and will continue to be the situation unless there is a thorough overhaul of the sector for undertaking remedial measures.

6.6 Discussion

This section discusses the major findings relating to the research question: Why media is captured in Nepal or its causes and how they compare with studies done elsewhere. Media capture is essentially a situation where "media can no longer function independently but is controlled by vested interests" (Dragomir & Aslama

Horowitz, 2021, p.1). Capture is operationalized by secretive deals, and this makes it difficult to demonstrate the actual give-and-take involved. Such situations require the use of circumstantial evidence to arrive at conclusions. The following section discusses some of the main postulations on why media is captured in Nepal: a) Incomplete democratization and political development have resulted in an environment conducive for media capture, b) high political partisanship remains a unique contributor to media capture, and c) the presence of a few advertisers has made it easy for businesses to capture media.

- a) Incomplete democratization and political development have resulted in an environment conducive for media capture

Dragomir and Aslama Horowitz (2021) have used a four-part model to explain capture – regulatory, control of public service media (PSM), state financing as a control tool and ownership takeover – which they say “must” be present for “full extent of capture”. In their model,

... a group of interests formed around a country’s political and business power takes over and abuses the key regulatory and funding mechanisms, the public media, as well as a majority of the privately owned media to control the journalistic narrative with the long-term purpose of maintaining their grip on power and, with it, access to public resources.

(p.3)

Nepal may not be a case of “full” capture, but there are indications that some form of that also exists. For example, in terms of regulation even though the Constitution has provisions for free expression, media freedoms and Right to Information (Articles 17 2(a), 19 & 27) it also gives the government powers to impose “reasonable” restrictions for conditions for which are worded broadly (The

Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The restrictive provisions also remain to be tested against the international standard that requires them to be a) prescribed by law, b) pursue a legitimate aim, and c) are necessary in a democracy (and proportionate). Further, even though Nepal has a PSM law, the functional independence of the institution remains to be tested because it is to operate under policy direction of a council headed by the minister, and has a board of government appointees, including a senior government official (Sarbjani Prasaran Ain, 2081 [Public Service Broadcasting Act, 2024]). In addition, even privately owned media in Nepal are not fully independent, given particularly the partisan connections of journalists (See: Chapter 4). Nepal's media is also overly dependent on a few large advertisers and the government (also an advertiser) for sustenance, which also makes them vulnerable to capture.

All of these conditions suggest that the media is captured but the level of control exercised by the capturers may vary across individual outlets. The conditions observed by the study in Nepal were comparable to those described by Mungiu-Pippidi (2008) and Dragomir and Aslama Horowitz (2021) at the theoretical level, and by other scholars in Ukraine (Ryabinska, 2014), Afghanistan (Relly & Zanger, 2017) and Hong Kong (Frisch et al., 2018), among others. Capture in Nepal is also unique, particularly in terms of partisan affinities of journalists, which had some similarities with how political capture operated in Afghanistan.

At a broader level, the situation in Nepal is, arguably, an outcome of the incomplete democratization – a process which began in 1951 and has had several interruptions in-between – including the slow institutionalization of democratic institutions, and the failure of democratic governments to support the establishment of an independent media to foster a culture of informed debate.

Nepal began democratizing in 1951, and this was a time when literacy was low and inadequate to support the new newspaper industry through subscriptions; it was also a period of low industrialization and hence there was little or no private advertising (Savada, 1993). The longest period of political stability after 1951 was during the 30-year rule by the king under the Panchayat system leading to the establishment of democracy 1990, but this was also a period when media was strictly monitored and controlled leaving little space for the development of independent journalism. Instead, this was the period when the media began picking sides, between the government and the oppositional political forces (Baral, 1975, 2006; Devkota, 2051 B.S.). It was also a period of some private newspaper journalism, but the newspapers were beholden either to the government or to the opposition political forces for sustenance, which, one can assume, is when the newspapers began making compromises.

Democracy was established in Nepal in 1990, and the new constitution guaranteed freedoms of expression and media freedoms leading to a spurt in newspaper publishing and the introduction of private radio and television stations. However, one political party also began organizing journalists under its trade union as early as 1992, which other parties emulated. The partisanship in journalism that was institutionalized after the 1990 has become stronger under the watch of politicians of all parties, which one can argue is for the purpose of capturing content to reduce as Besley & Prat (2006) contend to reduce political turnover – which appears to be true for Nepal if one is to review the list post-1990 prime ministers, many of who are still active in politics and could be prime ministers again (Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, n.d.).

Except for the first two years in the 1990s, Freedom House had categorized Nepal's press as "Free" (Freedom House, 1993, 1994) after which, it has always remained "Partly Free", which is a sign of the incomplete institutionalization of independent media. Despite the beginnings of partisanship in journalism, the early 1990s was also a time where civil society organizations dug up and advocated on social issues, which the media reported and helped to foster debate and bring about policy changes, as things are supposed to be in democracies. This began to change after partisanship among journalists deepened. One can argue that the rapid politicization of journalists resulted from a power-worshipping social ethic, which also opened doors to perks and patronage for those who picked sides. One outcome of partisanship was content manipulation, which became increasingly biased, even dis-informative and libelous, as evidenced by some cases that had reached the courts (Dahal & Ghimire, 2013). Underreporting and not reporting on "our" political excesses and exaggeration and manipulation of "their" perceived lapses, was another outcome. Support, including non-transparent financing for such media and media associations, has ensured the continuity of the capture.

b). High political partisanship remains a unique contributor to media capture in Nepal

Media in the West are said to have been able to detach themselves from political party controls after the industrial revolution and the growth in advertising (Petrova, 2011), which was not the case in Nepal largely because of low industrialization, low production and low advertising. Instead, what is evident in literature is that the earliest private newspapers were essentially created for political advocacy (Devkota, 2051 B.S.) and thrived on political support, while the larger newspapers that appeared in the 1990s were driven by profits, and possibly the desire

to influence politics (media power) for gains in other sectors of interest to media owners (see: Chapter 4, Section C). In fact, one newspaper had become so successful in the 1990s that the main communist party of the day even promoted two broadsheet dailies (Nepali and English) to counterbalance the other paper's influence and support to the Nepali Congress party. Further, while media owners have their own political interests, in Nepal even journalists are organized along partisan lines as evidenced by their membership in partisan journalists' associations organized under different political parties. These associations are platforms that serve to extend the patron-client relationships between politicians and journalists, which, one can argue involve favor exchanges both ways: journalists can provide positive coverage, and politicians can provide journalists favors (including financial, through their associations) and paid appointments to state media institutions, as advisors and to regulatory bodies and other committees. It would, therefore, be naïve to expect independent coverage by media in an environment where various interests are intertwined and conflicted. The resulting relationship of patronage and clientelism has certain similarities with Latin American and Southern European media systems marked by low newspaper circulation, a tradition of advocacy reporting, and "limited development of journalism as an autonomous profession," (Papathanassopoulos & Hallin, 2002, pp. 176-177).

The capture resulting from influence of political actors – including political party and political corruption capture – could have parallels with the capture by political actors in Afghanistan (Relly & Zanger, 2017). Interestingly, what the two found was that most political capture was related to "threats or dictates by proxy actors on behalf of political actors" (p.11), which one could argue, is a role likely to be played by partisan journalists' associations in the absence of direct contact of the

members of journalists' associations with the main political actors. Some of the statements of Relly & Zanger's key informants also sound applicable to the Nepali context, for example one that said, "One of the biggest problems that exists really is that heads of the media outlets themselves are connected to some political party. They always try to advance their own interests..." (p.12). Similar statements were made by informants of this study, and also in the publicly available interviews that were analyzed.

- c) Presence of a few advertisers which makes it easy for businesses to capture media.

A sound advertising market is critical for independent journalism to flourish, but a market with few advertisers and dominated by a few large ones could result in capture because of the disproportional financial power businesses get to exercise over media. The fear of antagonizing advertisers could cause media to avoid reporting on topics sensitive to the companies, such as the non-reporting of the alleged tax fraud by Coca-Cola by large media in 2022, even after a small magazine had broken the story. The larger media reported on the matter only after the government had pressed charges because not doing so would have harmed their credibility. There have also been no follow up stories on what is happening in the case, which is quite unusual given the gravity of the charges. The only explanation why larger media have not reported on the matter, is that the company is also among the larger advertisers alongside telecom companies, banks and financial institutions, and a handful of large business houses.

Media that report on the misdoings of such companies face the risk losing advertising, and with that their ability to stay afloat. Given that the total advertising in Nepal is said to be between Rs. 8-14 billion and most of it goes to television stations

and new digital platforms, other traditional media need to think twice before pointing fingers to lapses by businesses. This was indicated by the higher number of positive stories on one company that had faced allegations of tax fraud in four private newspapers (See: Chapter 5), and the negligible number of critical stories on the matter. In fact, only one newspaper had editorialized or published its opinion on the allegation, and that too had had occurred only after the advertisements it had been receiving from the company had begun to decrease. Atal (2017b) and Beattie (2020) have discussed how advertisers influence business news and coverage of climate change, respectively, and di Tella & Franceschelli (2011) have demonstrated how government advertising can result in lower stories on corruption in government. These are findings which also help to contextualize advertiser influence and how that could influence content in Nepal. However, this is also an area for further investigation because financial data on advertising by businesses was not available for this study.

CHAPTER-VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Summary

Private newspaper publishing began in Nepal about seven decades ago, in 1951, when the country emerged from hereditary Rana rule. This was when the country began laying the foundation for building a modern society. The seven decades since encapsulate a sociopolitical environment with a few comparators – nine prime ministers, a democratic election and a brief tryst with parliamentary democracy (1951-1960); direct rule by the monarch with a democracy of convenience (Panchayat System) (1960-1990); reestablishment of a Westminster style democracy with a constitutional monarch and a decade long Maoist insurgency (1990-2004); reversal to direct rule by the king (2005-2006) and promulgation of a new Constitution and the establishment of a federated polity in 2015. Newspaper/media content ebbed and flowed with the political tides, stemming from the controls and influences that came with the different dispensations, and ranged from free-for-all, interest-driven coverage (1951-1960), propagandist coverage with a subdued opposition, and later, increased partisan coverage (1960-1990); professional with partisan undercurrents in coverage (1990-2004); and increased partisanship and commercialism (2005-onwards).

The account above is a snapshot of the political context for this study on media capture, a paradigm that helps to explain why seemingly independent media in democracies fail to deliver impartial, accurate and fair content even in legal and policy environments that allow them to engage independently in their watchdog role to bring power holders (including financial power holders) to account. Media capture in simplest terms is a state of journalism that does not exhibit independence, accuracy and fairness in content production and dissemination despite existence of formal laws

guaranteeing media freedoms. This results from secretive and non-transparent monetary and non-monetary influences on media, journalists, editors and media owners by both government and businesses, sometimes in collusion.

This study has taken a constructivist approach and has used a mix of methods and data collection tools to generate and analyze data, to arrive at the conclusions. Largely qualitative methods have been used for analyzing and interpreting data obtained from (1) publicly available interviews of individuals from the media industry, which were used for isolating attributes or their descriptors of present day journalism for thematic analysis; (2) discourse/textual analysis of purposively selected texts of particular political events to understand bias and partisanship; (3) review of records/documents, particularly one on government financing to explore non-transparent and non-competitive public funding of media/journalists; (4) consolidation and analysis of publicly available information on media ownership and concentration, and (4) a case study based on a content analysis of five newspapers on coverage and advertising of a company facing tax fraud accusations to understand the influence of advertising on content. The findings from data were triangulated, validated, and complemented, using information obtained from key informant interviews (KIIs) and media reports.

The research aimed at understanding the forms and causes of media capture in Nepal, and how capture manifested in newspaper content to seek answers to three research questions:

- (1) What are the forms of media capture in Nepal?
- (2) How does capture manifest in the newspaper content?
- (3) Why is media captured in Nepal?

This chapter discusses the main conclusions in relation to the research objectives: to explore: (a) the forms of media capture in Nepal, (b) how capture manifests in newspaper content? and, (c) why the media captured? Or its causes. It also discuss the contributions of the study to scholarship and indicates areas for further research. The chapter is broadly organized in the following broad sub-headings: Conclusions, contributions to scholarship on media capture, and recommendations for further research.

7.2 Conclusions

The main conclusions have been discussed under three sub-headings, forms, manifestation in content and causes of media capture, which sometimes overlap across the three sections.

Generally, the main forms of media capture in Nepal manifest in selective, biased and unprofessional and unethical practices in coverage induced by monetary and/or non-monetary exchanges or both between powerful interests in politics and business, and journalists. The monetary exchanges were not possible to evidence owing to legal protection of private company finances and has been postulated based on circumstantial evidence. Some non-monetary favors extended by government to journalists have been jobs in various state-paid positions in state-run media and regulatory agencies, as well as advisors to elected officials, (See: Chapter 4). The outcome of capture in newspaper content manifested in the biased and partisan coverage, paid/ sponsored coverage, under-coverage and exaggerated coverage of public relations (PR) content of businesses, and ignorance and non-coverage of events and issues not conducive to those who had influenced the media (see: Chapter 5). The causes of capture have been interpreted in the context of the larger political economy issues and the democratization process underway and includes the still incomplete

democratization in terms of the political development, clientelism and commercialism alongside market domination by a few advertisers, low professional standards among journalists, and high political partisanship (see Chapter 6).

The main conclusions of the research have been grouped in three areas: 1) forms, 2) manifestation in content, and 3) the causes of media capture. The main conclusions in these three groups are discussed below:

7.2.1 Forms of Media Capture

The growing partiality and inaccuracy in media content and the resulting – often significant – biases are attributable to political party affiliations of journalists, and they indicate the presence of capture in Nepal. The proximities of journalists with political parties are evidenced by their membership in partisan media associations and also the selective coverage of events and framing of content as evident in this study. Biased or selective information, and the suppression or prevention of certain content from appearing in media, effectively denies citizens their right to informed participation in a democracy, and this can severely undermine democratic governance and slow down the efforts towards building democratic institutions in Nepal.

Framing and tonal choices in coverage, as well as the selection and suppression of content, result from unprofessional conduct – often induced by secretive (covert) monetary or non-monetary favors (exchanges) between various interest groups and media/journalists. Such practices compromise the integrity of news content. Journalists have resorted not just to manipulating the slant and tone of content, but as suggested by the study, also introduce alternative facts, delay or even block publication of stories that could potentially harm their political and business patrons. Such practices are undertaken at the behest of sources, interest groups, or benefactors, as observed in geographies where media capture is prevalent.

The influence and interference of owners in editorial-decision making at media was partly responsible for unprofessional and unethical conduct, and the low capacity of media/journalists exacerbated such tendencies. One clearly unprofessional arrangement fairly widespread in smaller newspapers/online portals in Nepal is the owner-editor, a position which by definition comes with inbuilt conflict of interest where the profit motive (of the owner) conflicts with the public service motive (of the editor), which in this case is the same person. Pursuing the profit motive could cause media to be influenced or captured, while pursuing public service could be unrewarding and make newspaper/media unviable and force them to rely on a few advertisers.

At larger newspapers, editors often performed in accordance with the wishes of owners. In rare cases, where the editors did not fully abide by owner dictates, they were bypassed and the owners reached out to journalists lower in the institutional hierarchy to get things done as they wished. Another form of infringement in the editorial domain was requiring district-based reporters/correspondents to also function as local ad-collection agents, as evident in the study. This is a role that conflicts with independent reporting, which is required for making the powerful and the rich accountable. Reporters responsible also for selling advertisements cannot critically report on the sources, particularly if they are also advertisers. One example would be municipal governments, which also advertise. In addition, the study has suggested that owners even used editors to access the political sources of journalists for seeking and negotiating favors. The influence of owners on content and eroding editorial independence have caused newspapers/media to stray from their duty of informing citizens independently, accurately and fairly, to assist them in making informed choices, which needs to be corrected for ensuring a stable and viable democracy.

The integrity of information in newspapers/media has been compromised; this can be attributed to various influences that interact with news production and dissemination, or media capture. The study has demonstrated numerous tendencies which depart from established norms and standards of liberal journalism, notably the lack of attention to producing and disseminating accurate content. This was evidenced by the references to “paid news” (where paid content is published), “non-verification” of information (against the standard requirement of verifying information with at least three independent sources) and “readymade” news (written/ prepared by sources). Ready-to-print stories usually originated from the benefactors of journalists/ media in both politics and business, and the media – arguably – complies by publishing such stories in exchange for the largesse (advertisement, sponsorship, favors) provided by the patrons.

Governments use funding from state coffers to support compliant media and journalists, the payback for which is positive coverage or ignorance of issues that could project the benefactors in a negative light. The study shows that the government has been using non-competitive public funding to support partisan journalists’ association and media the purpose of which has been to nurture influence. Content produced by journalists under such influence cannot be independent but is biased because their preferred ideological worldviews guide their work, and such journalism content can severely undermine efforts to strengthen democratic institutions for ensuring accountability and democratic governance.

Both government and businesses use advertising to influence content, and this tendency is dominant in media environments with few large advertisers and a large number of non-viable media. The number of media organizations in Nepal has grown after 1990 and more recently following the spread of Internet connectivity resulting in

an environment where there is intense competition for securing advertising. The advertising pie has not expanded but has rather fragmented with advertisers shifting to online platforms, including social media. Hence, unlike the West where advertising had helped in freeing journalism from political influence, that has not been the case in Nepal where both businesses and even governments have used advertising to influence newspaper/media content.

Nepal's newspapers (and other media) provide a highly fragmented version or representation of reality, which has resulted from multiple influences on journalists/media. Political content, for example, is influenced by proximities and affiliations of journalists/media with political parties, a relationship that was supported and institutionalized by the post-1990 politicians who have organized journalists in formal party-affiliated associations. The notion of independence disappears when individuals have strong views on how the world should be organized or ideology, which in turn influences their cognition of issues and events and expressions. This explained the partisan bias observed in political journalism content, which has generally been all positive for "our" side and negative for "others" or those considered "them". Another manifestation of this bias was evident in the magnification of the positives and minimization of the negatives of "our" side. It was the opposite for those considered others – magnify the negatives and minimize the positives. There was also evidence that successive governments had provided cash grants to the partisan journalists' associations and selected media for vaguely stated purposes, which one can argue is the payback for favors in coverage.

A similar relationship was evident in the coverage of businesses by media/journalists and here the driver was advertising or sponsorship, and in some cases even ownership. Overall, the content has been biased to favor the elite (politicians and businesses) who journalists/media are supposed to be keeping a watch

over on behalf of citizens. The resulting coverage, therefore, has not contributed to advancing democratization but has instead led to frustrations among citizens, reflected in the occasional protests demanding restoration of the monarchy that was abolished in 2008. One can also argue that the highly biased and unprofessional media share some blame for the still incomplete institutionalization of democracy in Nepal, as they have failed to make politicians accountable, which in turn has lowered the political turnover. Instead, journalists/media have continued to pander to their own short-term interests by functioning as channels for spreading political propaganda, alternative facts and disinformation.

Conglomeration and concentration of media and other businesses of the owners can make media targets for capture, while also making media powerful and giving them more bargaining power for non-professional exchanges. The study has uncovered both tendencies: concentration of media ownership and conglomeration of businesses owned by media owners. One can argue that this structural arrangement can mutually benefit both the political actors and media owners. Concentrated media can provide media owners “bargaining” power as that can provide capturers wider reach for content (that is manipulated after capture) through multiple platforms. This is the discursive power that media owners can trade with politicians in exchange for favorable government policies to their other businesses – which in the case of Nepal extended from education, banking and real estate to hydropower, telecoms and aviation. In such a situation, one can argue that it makes sense for media owners with such varied interests to remain on the “right” side of the government and to provide it favorable coverage in their media in exchange for policies favoring the various sectors where they have interests. Hence the postulation that such exchanges have been taking place, and argument, that this could explain why media owners influence

content through editors and journalists (discussed above). Further, owners also have their own political affinities and favorites that also need to be factored in to understand capture.

7.2.2 Manifestation (Coverage) of Media Capture in Content

Unprofessional media embody and exude low independence, partisan loyalties, bias and manipulation and create obstacles in shaping public perceptions for democracy-building. Tendencies such as manipulation of content was evidenced in the discursive strategies. Four of five newspapers studied had positioned themselves either as supportive or in opposition of the government in relation to one political event that was analyzed. Both the supporters and opponents used different discursive tactics such use of unattributed declarative statements as facts, presenting opinion as fact, deflecting from the issue at hand, undermining or minimizing the ramifications of events and issues, and even adjudicating or making judgements. Also obvious were efforts to normalize, minimize or underplay the lapses or excesses of “our” side and/or amplify, magnify and exaggerate the positives. Presenting “us” positively and “them” negatively, was the underlying strategy of the media studied, and this was more pronounced in online portals identified as partisan. Plurality of Nepal’s media does counterbalance the impact of partisan bias on audiences because multiple media can present multiple versions of the truth, but such coverage can also confuse and mislead audiences particularly in societies with low literacy, particularly low media literacy.

Compromises in the fundamental tenets of professional journalism—namely, impartiality and independence – by media/ newspapers causes their credibility to erode and result in public distrust. Newspapers had clear pro- or anti-establishment positions while reporting politics, and the pro-business stances while reporting about

large businesses. Such tendencies are likely when there are strong clientelist relations between media/journalists and their patrons in both politics and business and when there are regular exchanges taking place between the two sides. Arguably, the resulting, highly charged, partisan coverage could be one of many factors that have contributed to the prolonged political instability Nepal has had since 1990.

A similar pattern was evident in coverage of businesses, where the newspapers had demonstrated a tendency to turn a blind eye to possible lapses by advertisers or even ignored stories that could result in negative coverage. One example was the non-coverage of alleged tax fraud by a multinational company even though the story had been published repeatedly by a small magazine – or was public knowledge. The large newspapers had covered the accusation only after the government had pressed formal charges against the company. The media have also tended ignore coverage of the impact of unscrupulous business practices on public health and overall social wellbeing, particularly when they have also been advertisers. In situations business malpractices have either been toned down or done in ways that would not cause harm to the companies. For example, the tone of coverage of a business that had allegedly evaded billions in taxes was largely positive or neutral, and even though there were a few critical stories they were soon “neutralized” by company-promoted PR or decreased after the advertising had increased. Newspapers with fewer stories on the tax evasion had higher advertisement overall, and this exemplified how advertising could be used to influence coverage. In conclusion, a society where media have picked sides – “us” and “them” in politics – does not allow independent debate and instead contributes to widening the schisms between people supporting different ideologies undermining efforts towards both democratization and state building. Similarly, uncritical coverage of advertisers can also result in cover ups harm on the public and society.

7.2.3 Causes of Media Capture

Nepali journalism has been unable to sever ties with partisan journalism – often touted as “mission” journalism – and adopt professionalism, resulting in manipulated, biased and distorted content. The mission – a euphemism used to justify the historically partisan journalism – was reinforced by political parties after the 1990s by organizing journalists’ associations as party organizations. With over two-thirds of all journalists said to be members of such partisan associations – the steppingstone for journalists to access political favors and finances – one can deduce that political influence remains the major cause of media capture in Nepal. The capture is not only cognitive or that taking place in mindsets and at the ideological level but is also a result of favor extended by politicians to journalists when they assume power in return for support they receive from journalists and their associations. One can argue that partisanship in journalism is deeply entrenched and has been normalized, and this remains the main cause leading to the erosion of both independence and impartiality. Members of partisan associations have been rewarded with jobs in state media and as advisors of elected officials that many perform even while still working as “journalists”. In fact, many journalists even take pride at being appointed to party election campaign committees and/or as members of party publicity/propaganda departments as these provide them access to politicians and even political offices.

Partisanship in journalism becomes more visible during the FNJ election which is contested along political party lines with party publicity departments involved in vetting and nominating candidates. In a sense journalists reporting on both politics and business have lost the control they had on the narrative – angling, analysis and perspectives in reporting and content production – which they have surrendered to their patrons. This explains why news on an event that had occurred in February 2023

and already known to the public re-emerged in media in September 2024 when the issue was important to two political parties in parliament that were seeking to initiate impeachment proceedings against an elected parliamentary official. Such occurrences in media suggest that someone, somewhere wanted the issues to reappear in the media. Such directed journalism does not assist towards making power holders accountable but propagandizes on their behalf and does not contribute towards democratic development. Instead, it fosters more partisanship and clientelism, which one can argue has been the case in Nepal after 1990.

The struggle to remain profitable compels unprofessional media outlets, particularly newspapers and other traditional media forms, to make significant compromises in the coverage of advertisers, particularly when the market has a limited number of major advertisers. There was anecdotal evidence suggesting that large advertisers exerted disproportional influence on media. There were suggestions that advertisers delivered information on rival company misdoings to selected newsrooms, often in ready-to-publish formats, which media have been accused of having published or broadcast. The proximity of media/journalists with businesses/advertisers was also evidenced by the little or no critical or investigative coverage of private sector activities (with some exceptions), while the papers have been profusely populated with company announcements on product launches and routine events. When newspapers have reported on alleged businesses malpractices, it has happened only after the government had pressed charges or announced formal investigations – suggesting that this has been their policy about how such issues are to be covered. The coverage of tax allegations against a company during the study period is one example. Hence, one can conclude that such coverage was done because not doing so even after charges had been pressed would have caused major credibility

issues for media. Further, such coverage tends to be carefully curated to include barebone facts and have also been followed up with interviews with personnel from concerned businesses or op-ed pieces by their leaders to allow them to have uncontested platforms to state their versions.

Captured media lack critical commentary or editorial perspectives on both government and business malpractices. For example, the only editorial critical of the telecom company – a major advertiser – accused of tax fraud had appeared in one of the five newspapers studied almost a month after the story had first appeared. This was unusual because newspapers usually editorialize on major events either on the same day, the day after, or within a week of the event. Further, the editorial had appeared only after the newspaper in question had begun to experience a decline in advertising from the company. Another example of non-coverage of business-related issues was the lack of critical analysis of companies listed in the stock market, or explainers on the unnatural fluctuations in the prices, while media do report the day's market operations. There have also been very few reports in major newspapers (or other media for that matter) on the poor-quality consumer goods in the market. Instead, newspapers/media have extended themselves to serve businesses as PR platforms, where they unquestioningly publish company statements with prominently displayed brand identities. In a media market where content is compromised to please advertisers, there is little information on how businesses function, including on matters directly related to public health and wellbeing. Such coverage leads to erosion of credibility and trust in media, and mistrust of citizens on both government and private enterprise a situation conducive for different interests to stoke public disenchantment with democracy and spread negativity about the private sector.

Finally, the lapses in professionalism and ethical conduct can escalate media capture. The study suggested existence of various unprofessional and unethical practices that explained the biased, inaccurate and manipulated content, which one can argue has resulted from various influences. Content of captured media is both biased and uncritical of interests they seek to protect, in this case both in government and business. One major cause of media capture in Nepal is political partisanship, which has been condoned by all political parties and is also something that has been willingly embraced by a majority of journalists. Another reason for capture is the disproportional influence businesses/advertisers have over newspapers/media in an advertising market that has shrunk further for traditional media after the arrival of internet-enabled media and other social platforms.

7.3 Contribution to the Field of Study

This study is the first attempt to study media capture in Nepal. Scholars have studied different facets of journalism practice and the media environment and reported on the practices, many of which are symptomatic of capture. As a study focusing on media capture in Nepal, this contributes to existing area/country studies globally and also provides a foundation for research along this line of questioning. Media capture in Nepal is unique in some respects and also has some parallels with the *modus-operandi* in other geographies. What makes the capture in Nepal unique is the deeply-rooted partisanship that all political parties have condoned and encouraged by rewarding their followers through the misuse of public resources, something that is rarely discussed in Western scholarship where it is no longer the case or is no longer as important.

Methodologically, most studies on media capture done so far have used two approaches, economic modelling and political economic analyses. Some others have

studied specific conditions of the media environment such as media and ownership concentration to arrive at the conclusions. This study attempted to study capture using a multiple tools as a response to the poor financial data availability on media in Nepal, borrowing from political economy analysis, critical media studies, and discourse studies. The results suggest that such tools can be used to examine media capture in data-poor geographies, because the approach has provided reason to conclude that media in Nepal remains captured or remains in an intermediate state where it does not exercise a will of its own when it comes to making publication decisions to serve the public interest.

Another contribution to scholarship on media and journalism in Nepal, is an article written by the researcher based on the knowledge derived while reviewing literature on media development and practice. The article traces the antecedents of media capture based on experiential statements and concludes that Nepal's media were never fully independent but have always existed in an intermediate state with their decisions influenced directly or indirectly by political interests made possible by compliant media and journalists, and businesses in an economic environment that was never able to support media to be independent from political financing before commercialization took over after Nepal embraced economic liberalization in the 1990s.

7.4 Areas for Further Research

The study was done in a data-poor context, where information on private media finances and the media market were not available. Even data on public financing of media that was available and had taken multiple efforts to secure, covered only a limited period and was incomplete in terms of who had approved the funds, when it was distributed, etc. and whether or not the purpose for which the

money was earmarked was achieved. Such information is required for establishing direct links of the public money with capture. Therefore, one area proposed for further research is examining the misuse of public funds to influence media. Data for such a study could be sought using Right to Information petitions, which this study has shown does exist in one form or another.

Another related area for further study is advertising and capture, on which no studies were available in Nepal. Even though advertising has been studied under business studies, it has been analyzed from a business lens and not in terms of its interdisciplinarity and the impact it could have on media content, and by extrapolation, on the information reaching society. Hence, the proposal that there be focused studies linking advertising and news content in media to obtain insights on the role of advertisers vis-à-vis media capture. The third gap that constrains media capture studies in Nepal is lack of data on the media and advertising markets, for which only anecdotal and descriptive data are available. Given that Nepal now has regulators of both the press (printed media) and advertising, future media capture studies can also focus on market size and dynamics.

APPENDICES

Appendix-I: List of Key Informants

- a) Tara Nath Dahal, Freedom Forum (former president, FNJ), 5 May 2021.
- b) Suresh Acharya, former President, FNJ, 6 May 2021.
- c) Gajendra Budathoki, Editor, Taksar (magazine), 8 May 2021.
- d) Mahendra Bista, former president, FNJ, 8 May 2021.
- e) Shiva Gaule, former president, FNJ, 8 May 2021.
- f) Ms. Nirmala Sharma, former president, Sancharika Samuha, 9 May 2021.
- g) Ram Prasad Dahal, FNJ, 11 May 2021.
- h) Govinda Acharya, former president, FNJ, 14 May 2021.
- i) Yubaraj Ghimire, former editor, Kantipur, 15 May 2021.
- j) Tirtha Koirala, journalist, 17 May 2021.
- k) Prakash Rimal, former editor, The Himalayan Times, 18 May 2021.
- l) Prateek Pradhan, former editor, The Kathmandu Post (www.barhakhari.com),
30 May 2021.

Post analysis
- m) Sudheer Sharma, former editor, Kantipur, 1 June 2023.
- n) Krishna Murari Bhandari, former chairperson, Gorkhapatra Corporation, 9
May 2023.
- o) Sujit Mahat, journalist, www.ukaalo.com (formerly, Annapurna Post), 13 May
2023.
- p) Krishna Gyawali, journalist, Kantipur, 11 March 2023.
- q) Rajan Sharma, former editor, Rajdhani, 13 Feb 2023.
- r) Umesh Shrestha, (www.mysansar.com) 25 May 2023.

- s) Gopal Guragain, Chairperson, Ujyaalo News Network, 7 September 2023.
- t) Madhu Acharya, Executive Director, Sharecast Initiative P. Ltd. 8 October 2023.
- u) Ranjit Acharya, Prisma Advertising, 3 November 2023.
- v) Lilamani Poudel, former Chief Secretary, Government of Nepal, 7 July 2023.

Appendix-II: Checklist of Interview Questions

(a). Fact Checker

1. How would briefly describe present day Nepali media?
2. Do you think Nepali media in general is independent and professional?
Journalists? Why?
3. Have you done any analysis of partisan coverage by journalists/media identified of being affiliated with a political party?
4. Have you found different facts on the same stories in the different papers/stories by partisan reporters? These events could be press-conferences by major leaders/prime ministers, as I am trying to explore government funding of partisan organizations and possible influences that can be traced in content.
5. What about business coverage, any specific fact-check of stories of similar issues appearing in different media by different journalists?
6. What about the Ncell tax-controversy case? Any interesting insights on the coverage and Ncell advertising during the period?
7. Is there any other characteristic of Nepali media you want to discuss that I may have missed?

(b) Partisan Organization Leaders and FNJ

1. How did you become associated with ... (organization name) and when?
2. What services does your organization provide to the membership?
3. Why should a journalist seek membership with organizations such as yours?
4. Is political orientation/ideology a consideration for membership? How is it that the memberships of organizations such as yours appear to have a binding political belief?

5. How would you explain the affiliation of your organization with political parties?
6. How is your organization funded?
7. Do you think partisan membership in journalists' association allow your members to do professional journalism?

(c). Editors/ journalists

1. When did you join the newspaper/media and what has been your overall experience doing journalism there?
2. How would you describe your experience reporting about businesses in Nepal?
3. What was your experience reporting the Ncell tax fraud allegations?
4. Looking at your paper's coverage and advertising during the period, it is apparent there was some effort to keep a close watch on content by advertising departments..., were there instructions from publishers /owners / advertising departments on Ncell coverage?
5. Why did you editorialize/ not editorialize on the tax controversy, which was perhaps the largest business story in Nepal ever in terms of the transaction amount and the alleged tax avoidance?
6. Even the rare news stories with information value – on the government's positions, etc. – seemed to be accompanied by bland balancing paragraph towards the end, which seemed to create doubts among readers... was that intentional?
7. Another observation is that most public relations material seemed to appear almost simultaneously with advertising – sometimes on the same day – was it a result of some standard operating procedure or was it a coincidence?

8. How would you rate Ncell as an advertiser before and after the ownership change?
9. How are stories on businesses handled by your newspaper? Who assigns, who reports, who decides...
10. How you work with stories relate to business compare to your handling of stories related to government and political parties?
11. Can you describe instances of attempts by both government and businesses to influence your decisions related to content?

(d) Other Questions (Depending on the Interviewee's Area of Interest/Expertise)

1. How would you describe the political/business journalism in Nepal these days?
2. What type of subjects do you cover in the preferred "beat", please provide some examples?
3. What types of subjects does your media cover mostly and what type of content is rarely covered?
4. It is said that critical reporting is vanishing from media in both business and politics, is this true? What do you think are reasons for such a perception?
5. Do you have anecdotes when someone from business or politics tried to influence your decision-making on content, with inducements?
6. Is there anything you would like to add to the conversation we have had so far?

Appendix-III: All Descriptors Derived from Text for Analysis

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Selective, power driven, exaggeration, business interest (in news), interest driven, interest driven, interest driven coverage, interest driven, "Don't see" critical issues (as they are paid), block news on corruption (media advisors), multiple interests of media owners, nexus (politicians, journalists & businesses).	These words and phrases indicate erosion of impartiality, even corrupt practices because the implication is that both power and money are involved.	Bias – selective coverage

Descriptors	Interpretative Analysis	Theme
Paid (by leaders), brokering-dealing, unethical, unethical, unprofessional, conflicted interest (owner-journalist), dual role (journalist/owner), unethical/immoral, paid (salaried by colleges), paid, paid, conflicted interest (owner/journalist), brokering-	These words and phrases almost overlap with those suggestive of power, money induced bias and also demonstrate how professionalism has eroded in journalism in general. The fact that	Unprofessional and unethical practices exacerbated by power and money. Sub-themes: Paid journalism-source directed stories

<p>dealing, conflicted interest (friends of investors), brokering-dealing, conflicted interest (with businesses), bargaining, blackmailing, block/kill news for money, conflicted interest (beat journalists-media advisors), unprofessional, money-driven, conflicted-interest (seeking appointments), cover/hide malpractices, brokering-dealing, paid coverage, influence peddlers (contracts, jobs), influence peddlers (political journalists preferred by investors), paid news, fabricated scoops, paid coverage, kill/block critical news only praise, brokering (in beat journalism), Bargaining (money for asking easy questions for candidates), paid news (media advisors), Block news on corruption (because journalists are also media advisors)</p>	<p>journalists openly talk about this suggests it is not a secret either. These activities of journalists are both unprofessional and unethical. There are issues related to conflict of interest, where, again, money seems to be the medium of exchange of favors.</p>	<p>Brokering-dealing/ influence peddling Unethical/unprofessional practices (conflict of interest, proximity to sources)</p>
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Descriptors	Interpretative analysis	Theme
<p>Compromising, ad-dependent, no verification (of given content), powerless, compromised, commercialized, market-driven, influenced (by owner), influenced/directed (business journalism), readymade news, influenced private media (by business), influenced/directed, influenced (by business), influenced (by business), PR-agents, paid (salaried by sources), PR agents, influenced (by owner), PR agents (Govt. media journalists), used (editors for business purposes), influenced (editors & owners), used (editors & owners), used (editors for soliciting ads), used (editors by owners), influenced (by businesses), used (by owner), financed (by leaders & businesses), party-business controlled (used by interests),</p>		<p>Media and journalists are influenced by sources – mainly businesses</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <p>This has made journalism compromising, unquestioning, commercialized and market driven</p> <p>The influencers are businesses (on both media and journalists), owners (on editors and journalists),</p> <p>Non-transparent finance (politicians and businesses)</p>

pretend not to know of things they want to avoid covering, Directed news (of sources), bought (by leaders, businesses), "pocket journalism", sold (to banks), local government ads. for news.		
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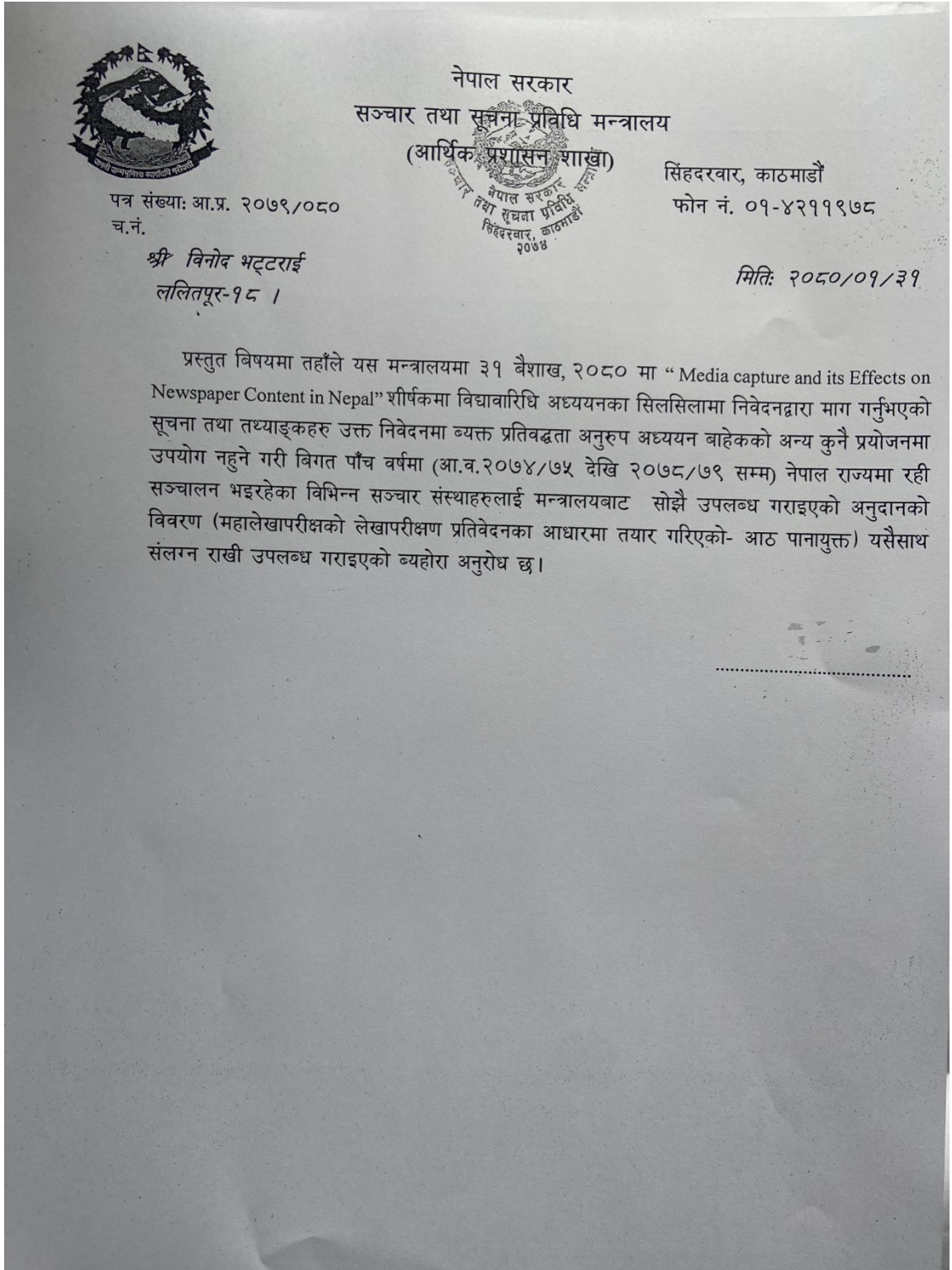
Descriptors	Interpretative analysis	Theme
Partisan bias, party journalism, big party journalism group, party cadre, partisan bias, partisan bias, submissive, unquestioning, partisan bias, partisan bias, party influence (Assn. chair selection), partisan, partisan bias, partisan (dominance of some parties), journalists. (campaigning during election), cadre 'journalists' (govt. media), partisan bias, party affiliations, partisan (appointments in Gov. media), power pleasers (govt. media), partisan bias (aligning to power), partisan and pro-corporate journalists, partisan, business ownership (of media), partisan	The partisanship in media was among the most evident meanings conveyed by the statements in the data. Both ideological indoctrination and favor exchanges seem to be at work here. Most political parties have "sister" organizations of journalists where they have reporters who don't ask tough questions. These organizations can be instructed to organize such events where they make one-sided	Partisanship in media remains, and has seemingly been stronger two decades after Nepal began democratizing Sub-themes: Partisan bias in content Party influence in journalist associations More propaganda less journalism

<p>bias, Close relations (with business), close relations no questioning (of businesses, take sides (of businesses), partisan bias (in story angling/focus)</p>	<p>statements, which are reproduced by media. Favors extended by parties include political appointments of party journalists to public positions when they are in power, including hiring them for jobs at government media.</p>	
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Descriptors	Interpretative analysis	Theme
<p>Unreliable, two types of journalists (real & pretenders), Assumption-driven news, (Unreliable)/ interest-driven, hurried/ click-baiting, Declining trust</p>	<p>These words and phrases explain the overall outcome of both unprofessional practices and also the influences on media and journalists or capture. Media cease to serve democracies as the fourth and vital pillar that makes power holders accountable when they are deemed to unreliable and unworthy of trust.</p>	

Descriptors	Interpretative analysis	Theme
<p>Elitist, feudal, uninterested, unlawful behavior, low paid, multiple vocations (<i>dhandā</i>), non-transparent media funding, spying, ad agents (dist. Reporters), local govt. ads for news, low editorial freedom, limits to government coverage (govt. media), power centers, non-transparent investment (in media), multiple business interests of owners, nexus (politicians-businesses-journalists), elitist, poor understanding</p>	<p>The words and phrases resulting from the statements suggest that journalists rather than bring those in power to account identify with them, have multiple vocations alongside journalism – including serving as ad. agents for the publications. The situation is clouded by the non-transparent investments in media and multiple interests of media owners. There was also one mention of a nexus between politicians-businesses and journalists, which is worrying because this is what is at the heart of the media capture paradigm.</p>	<p>Problems associated with the political economy of media</p>

Appendix-IV: Government Grants to Media Organizations and Journalists



(Source: MOICT)

नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय, सिंहदरवार, काठमाडौं

बिगत पाँच वर्षमा सञ्चार संस्थाहरुलाई मन्त्रालयबाट सोझै उपलब्ध गराइएको अनुदानको विवरण (महालेखापरीक्षको लेखापरीक्षण प्रतिवेदनका आधारमा तयार गरिएको)

सि.नं.	आर्थिक वर्ष	सञ्चार संस्थाको नाम, ठेगाना	बापत	अनुदान रकम रु.	कैफियत
१	२०७४/७५	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	सान्ताहिक सवैधानिक शिक्षा र पाक्षिक कार्यक्रम	५९९८७१३	
२	२०७४/७५	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	डिजिटल अर्काइभिड्ग	९७४००००	
३	२०७४/७५	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	समावेशी प्रकाशन	५००००००	
४	२०७४/७५	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा बिकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	समावेशी प्रकाशन- बिभिन्न भाषामा समाचार प्रसारण	१७५००००००	
५	२०७४/७५	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा बिकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	आ.व.०७२/७३ सम्मको नवीकरण शुल्क बक्यौता तिर्न	१५९२१०००	
६	२०७४/७५	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा बिकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	अडियो अर्काइभिड् तथा पूर्ण डिजिटलाइज्ड गर्न	८५००००००	
७	२०७४/७५	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा बिकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	तारिणीप्रसाद कोइराला सञ्चारग्राम भवन निर्माण	५००००००००	
८	२०७४/७५	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा बिकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	सःशर्त पूँजीगत अनुदान	७००००००००	
९	२०७४/७५	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	प्रादेशिक प्रसारण कोहलपुर भवन निर्माण	१००००००००	
१०	२०७४/७५	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	बिराटनगर वेभ अफसेट प्रेस मेशिन खरिद गर्न	५००००००००	
११	२०७४/७५	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	केन्द्रीय कार्यालयलाई सिट फेड मेशिन खरिद गर्न	३००००००००	
१२	२०७४/७५	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	डिजिटल अर्काइभिड्ग	६८६००००	
१३	२०७४/७५	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	समावेशी प्रकाशन	४५०००००००	
१४	२०७४/७५	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	प्रादेशिक प्रसारण बिराटनगरको भवन निर्माण	४००००००००	
१५	२०७४/७५	चलचित्र बिकास बोर्ड	बक्स अफिस प्रणाली र चलचित्र नगरी निर्माण	२००००००००	
१६	२०७४/७५	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति	सःशर्त पूँजीगत अनुदान	१२६४०००००	

१७ २०७४/७५	प्रेस काउन्सिल	सःशर्त ढुंजीगत अनुदान	७००००००००
१८ २०७४/७५	प्रेस काउन्सिल	सःशर्त चालु अनुदान	३५०६००००
१९ २०७४/७५	नपाल पत्रकार महासंघ ताप्लजुङ्ग, लम्जुला, इलाम, बाँके, गुल्मी, कपिलवस्तु, काभ्रे र रामेछाप	भवन निर्माण अनुदान- प्रत्येकलाई ५ लाखका दरले	४०००००००
२० २०७४/७५	बिभिन्न ३८ वटा FM रेडियोहरू	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	३०७५००००
२१ २०७४/७५	नेपाल प्रेस युनियन	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	३००००००
२२ २०७४/७५	बिभिन्न ११ वटा संघसंस्थाहरू	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१४२५००००
२३ २०७४/७५	लोकतान्त्रिक छापामाध्यम राष्ट्रिय समाज	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	५०००००
२४ २०७४/७५	नेपाल आदिवासी जनजाति महासङ्घ	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	२००००००
२५ २०७४/७५	नेपाल पत्रकार महासङ्घ	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१०००००००
२६ २०७४/७५	सम्पादक समाज	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	५०००००
२७ २०७४/७५	प्रेस चौतारी नेपाल	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	६००००००
२८ २०७४/७५	नेपाल प्रेस इन्स्टिट्यूट	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	२००००००
आर्थिक वर्ष २०७४/७५ को जम्मा			
२९ २०७४/७६	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	समावेशी प्रकाशन- बिभिन्न भाषामा समाचार प्रसारण	४८१५६५७१३
३० २०७४/७६	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	समावेशी प्रकाशन- बिभिन्न भाषामा समाचार प्रसारण	५००००००००
३१ २०७४/७६	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	समावेशी प्रकाशन- बिभिन्न भाषामा समाचार प्रसारण	३४०००००००
३२ २०७४/७६	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	कार्यक्रम निर्माण र प्रसारण	३४०००००००
३३ २०७४/७६	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	ABU MEDIA SUMMIT विषयक सम्मेलन	३००००००००
३४ २०७४/७६	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	प्राथमिक कार्यक्रमको लागि अनुदान	६०००००००
		नपाल टालाभजनमा रहका महत्त्वपूर्ण दृश्यका	
		बिद्युतीय अभिलेख तयार गर्न	
		समावेशी प्रसारणको लागि अनुदान	६५०००००००
			१७५०००००००

३५ २०७५/७६	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	पाश्र्विक रेडियो कार्यक्रमको लागि अनुदान	१११७९५
३६ २०७५/७६	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	स्थापनाकालदाख हालसम्म रकड गारण्टीका आडया सामग्री अडियो अर्काइभ गर्न	६५००००००
३७ २०७५/७६	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	तागणप्रसार काइराला सञ्चारग्राम भवन नमाणका लागि सः शर्त पूँजीगत अनुदान	७००००००००
३८ २०७५/७६	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	सःशर्त चालु र पूँजीगत अनुदान	११०००००००
३९ २०७५/७६	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	बिभिन्न भाषाको लेख रचना प्रकाशन	४५०००००००
४० २०७५/७६	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	कोहलपुरमा भवन निर्माण प्रकाशत आभलख अडकहरलाइ व्यवस्थत बहुताय अभिलेख तयार गर्न	२०००००००००
४१ २०७५/७६	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	विराटनगरको लागि मेशिनरी औजार खरिद	६५००००००
४२ २०७५/७६	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	विराटनगरको लागि फर्निचर खरिद	७५००००००
४३ २०७५/७६	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	बक्स अफिस प्रणाली	१०००००००
४४ २०७५/७६	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	चलचित्र नगरी निर्माण	१०००००००००
४५ २०७५/७६	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	डिजिटल अर्काइभिङ्ग	६६००००००
४६ २०७५/७६	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति	सःशर्त पूँजीगत र चालु अनुदान	४३००००००
४७ २०७५/७६	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति		
	नेपाल पत्रकार महासङ्घ पाँचथर,		
४८ २०७५/७६	बाँके,काभ्रे,बागलुङ्गा,बाजुरा,कास्की र कञ्चनपुर	भवन निर्माण- प्रत्येकलाई ५ लाखका दरले	३५००००००
४९ २०७५/७६	प्रेस कारुन्सिल	सःशर्त चालु र पूँजीगत अनुदान	१६४००००००
	आर्थिक वर्ष २०७५/७६ को जम्मा		३५४२११७९५
५० २०७६/७७	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	अडियो अर्काइभिङ्ग तथा पूर्ण डिजिटलाइज्ड गर्न	५०००००००

५१	२०७६/७७	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	समावेशी प्रसारणको लागि अनुदान	२००००००००
५२	२०७६/७७	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	ताप्लेजी प्रसाद कोइराला सञ्चारग्राम भवन निर्माण	३७५००००००
५३	२०७६/७७	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि कार्यक्रम प्रसारण	१५००००००
५४	२०७६/७७	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	सःशर्त चालु र पूँजीगत अनुदान	३४५०३५०००
५५	२०७६/७७	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	डिजिटल अर्काइभिङ्ग	५०००००००
५६	२०७६/७७	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	समावेशी लेख रचना प्रकाशन	४५०००००००
५७	२०७६/७७	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	कोहलपुरमा भवन निर्माण	२००००००००
५८	२०७६/७७	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	बाराटनगर क्षत्राय प्रकाशन शुरू गान भूकाना बाका अनुदान	९७००००००
५९	२०७६/७७	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	केन्द्रीय कार्यालयलाई सिटफ्रेड मेशिन खरिद गर्न	५००००००००
६०	२०७६/७७	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	डिजिटल अर्काइभिङ्ग	१२५२५००००
६१	२०७६/७७	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	समावेशी प्रसारणको लागि अनुदान	६०००००००
६२	२०७६/७७	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि कार्यक्रम प्रसारण	५०००००००
६३	२०७६/७७	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति	डिजिटल अर्काइभिङ्ग	६०००००००
६४	२०७६/७७	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति	मिडियो सेवा सञ्चालन	५०००००००
६५	२०७६/७७	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति	सःशर्त चालु र पूँजीगत अनुदान	१२२४४०००००
६६	२०७६/७७	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	छायाङ्कनको लागि नेपाल कार्यक्रम सञ्चालन काठमाडौं उपत्यकामा अत्याधुनिक सुवधासम्पन्न स्टुडियो निर्माण	२०००००००००
६७	२०७६/७७	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	सःशर्त चालु र पूँजीगत अनुदान	३३००००००
६८	२०७६/७७	प्रेस काउन्सिल	पत्रकार नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम सञ्चालन	५१९००००००
६९	२०७६/७७	नेपाल पत्रकार महासङ्घ	पत्रकार नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम सञ्चालन	२०००००००
७०	२०७६/७७	प्रेस चौतारी नेपाल	पत्रकार नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम सञ्चालन	१०००००००

७१ २०७६/७७	प्रेस युनियन नेपाल	पत्रकार नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम सञ्चालन	१०००००००
७२ २०७६/७७	प्रेस सेन्टर	पत्रकार नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम सञ्चालन	१०००००००
७३ २०७६/७७	नेपाल बालावस्था पत्रकार समूह	भवन निर्माण अनुदान	४५५९९३६
आर्थिक वर्ष २०७६/७७ को जम्मा			
७४ २०७७/७८	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	समावेशी लेख रचना प्रकाशन	४५०००००००
७५ २०७७/७८	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	डिजिटल अर्काइभिङ्ग	३०००००००
७६ २०७७/७८	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	सातवटै प्रदेशमा फिल्म छायाङ्कन स्थल निर्माण	८०००००००
७७ २०७७/७८	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	चलचित्र सङ्घको भवन निर्माण	३३००००००
७८ २०७७/७८	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	काठमाडौं उपत्यका आसपासमा अत्याधुनिक सुविधासम्पन्न स्टूडियो निर्माण	२००००००००
७९ २०७७/७८	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	स्टूडियो निर्माण	१७००००००
८० २०७७/७८	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	तारिणीप्रसाद कोइराला सञ्चारग्राम स्थापना	६००००००००
८१ २०७७/७८	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	समावेशी प्रसारणको लागि अनुदान	२०५००००००
८२ २०७७/७८	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि कार्यक्रम प्रसारण	१०००००००
८३ २०७७/७८	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	डिजिटल अर्काइभिङ्ग	३०००००००
८४ २०७७/७८	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	समावेशी प्रसारणको लागि अनुदान	६०००००००
८५ २०७७/७८	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि कार्यक्रम प्रसारण	५०००००००
८६ २०७७/७८	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	डिजिटल अर्काइभिङ्ग	१८५००००००
८७ २०७७/७८	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति	भिडियो सेवा सञ्चालन	५०००००००
८८ २०७७/७८	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति	अर्काइभ निर्माण	६०००००००
८९ २०७७/७८	विज्ञापन बोर्ड	बोर्ड स्थापना सम्बन्धी अनुदान	२७४६६०००

१० २०७७/७८	रेडियो दिदी बहिनी	अनुदान	५००००००
११ २०७७/७८	ब्रोडकास्टिङ्ग एसोसिएसन नेपाल	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	१००००००
१२ २०७७/७८	नेपाल छापापत्राध्यम राष्ट्रिय सञ्जाल	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	१५०००००
१३ २०७७/७८	चरिकोट मिडिया फाउण्डेशन	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	५०००००
१४ २०७७/७८	प्रेस चौतारी नेपाल	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	७००००००
१५ २०७७/७८	बाँपीझ्याल मिडिया फाउण्डेशन	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	५०००००
१६ २०७७/७८	सञ्चारिका समूह	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	१००००००
१७ २०७७/७८	नेपाल साहित्यिक पत्रकार सङ्घ	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	५०००००
१८ २०७७/७८	नेपाल चाइना मिडिया फोरम	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	१००००००
१९ २०७७/७८	नेपाल पत्रकार समाज	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	३००००००
१०० २०७७/७८	शिक्षा पत्रकार समाज	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	३००००००
१०१ २०७७/७८	सोतुशन परामर्श तथा अनुसन्धान केन्द्र	नागरिक सम्बाद कार्यक्रम	१००००००
आर्थिक वर्ष २०७७/७८ को जम्मा			
१०२ २०७८/७९	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	समावेशी प्रकाशन	२३५९६६०००
१०३ २०७८/७९	गोरखापत्र संस्थान	डिजिटल अर्काइभिङ्ग	४५०००००००
१०४ २०७८/७९	चलचित्र विकास बोर्ड	सःशर्त चालु र पूर्जागत अनुदान	६०००००००
१०५ २०७८/७९	रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति-रेडियो नेपाल	सःशर्त चालु र पूर्जागत अनुदान	३२७५०००००
१०६ २०७८/७९	नेपाल टेलिभिजन	सःशर्त चालु र पूर्जागत अनुदान	६७८१७९४६
१०७ २०७८/७९	राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति	सःशर्त चालु र पूर्जागत अनुदान	५९१६१०००
१०८ २०७८/७९	बिज्ञापन बोर्ड	सःशर्त चालु र पूर्जागत अनुदान	२४०००००००
१०९ २०७८/७९	नेपाल आदिवासी जनजाति पत्रकार सङ्घ	महाधिबेशन गरी अनुदान	१२६२७७९५१
			२००००००

११० २०७८/७९	चलचित्र पत्रकार सङ्घ दरगा ङकारसका लागा सञ्चारमाधुञ्जयमका परिचालन नेपाल	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
१११ २०७८/७९	दिशानिर्देश प्रेस क्लब	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
११२ २०७८/७९	नेपाल चाङ्गना मिडिया फोरम	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	५०००००
११३ २०७८/७९	नेपाल पत्रकार महासङ्घ	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
११४ २०७८/७९	नेपाल प्रेस इन्स्टिट्यूट	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	२००००००
११५ २०७८/७९	नेपाल प्रेस युनियन	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
११६ २०७८/७९	नेपाल फोटो पत्रकार महासङ्घ	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	७००००००
११७ २०७८/७९	प्रेस चौतारी नेपाल	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	५००००००
११८ २०७८/७९	बाँपीङ्ग्याल मिडिया प्रा.लि.	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
११९ २०७८/७९	मिडिया एड्भोकेसी गुप	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
१२० २०७८/७९	मिडिया नेपाल	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
१२१ २०७८/७९	राष्ट्रिय अपाङ्ग पत्रकार सङ्घ नेपाल	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	५०००००
१२२ २०७८/७९	राष्ट्रिय दलित पत्रकार सङ्घ नेपाल	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	२००००००
१२३ २०७८/७९	रिपोर्टर्स क्लब नेपाल	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
१२४ २०७८/७९	रेड्याण्डा न्यूज नेटवर्क प्रा.लि.	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	५०००००
१२५ २०७८/७९	शिक्षा पत्रकार समाज	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
१२६ २०७८/७९	सञ्चारिका समूह	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००
१२७ २०७८/७९	साप्ताहिक पाक्षिक पत्रिका राष्ट्रिय सञ्जाल	पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान	१००००००

१३० २०७८/७९ अल्टरनेटिभ फाउण्डेशन

पत्रकारिता सम्बन्धी संघसंस्थालाई अनुदान

५,०००,०००

आर्थिक वर्ष २०७८/७९ को जम्मा

३७१,४५,६८९७

आर्थिक वर्ष २०७४/७५ देखि २०७८/७९ सम्मको कुल जम्मा

२२२९७०८३४१

द्रष्टव्य नोट: १- उपरोक्तानुसारको विवरण मन्त्रालयबाट भएको बितरणको मात्र हो र यसमा मातहतका अन्य निकायहरूबाट बितरण हुने रकम Consolidate भएको छैन।

२- आर्थिक वर्ष २०७७/७८ मा रिपोर्टर्स क्लबलाई सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभागबाट उपलब्ध गराइएको १० लाख रुपैयाँ अनुदान समावेश छैन।

३- आर्थिक वर्ष २०७८/७९ देखि काठमाडौँ उपत्यका बाहिरको लोककल्याणकारी बिज्ञापन बापतको हुलाक कार्यालयहरूबाट बजेट ब्यवस्थाका माध्यमद्वारा खर्च गरिने १३ करोड रुपैयाँ जतिको विवरण यसमा समावेश छैन।

४- रेडियो प्रसार सेवा विकास समिति, राष्ट्रिय समाचार समिति तथा प्रेस काउन्सिललाई नियमित रूपमा तलब-भत्ता लगायतको सञ्चालन अनुदान बापत उपलब्ध गराइने रकम यसमा समावेश छैन।

Appendix-V: List of News Headlines in Five Papers on 13 July 2021

Kantipur

1. *Loktantrako pakchyama Sarboccha ko faisala* [Decision in favor of democracy]
2. *Ijlas gathanbatai naya mode lyaye* [New turn began with bench formation]
3. *Pragyik faisala: rastrapati ra pradhanmantrilai pathai-path* [Academic decision: Multiple lessons for the president and prime minister].
4. *Sarbocchako margadarsan* [Guidelines of the Supreme Court]

Inside page blurbs

5. Page 5, interview: *Rastrapatilai mahaabhiyog lagaunu parcha: Anup Raj Sharma, purba pradhan nyayadhis* [President should be impeached: Anup Raj Sharma, former Chief Justice]
6. *Deubako pachau inning, sano mantriparishad gathanke tayari* [Deuba's fifth innings, readying for a small council of ministers]
7. *Oli: Dui-tihaibata sadakma* [Oli: From two-thirds (majority) to the street]
8. *Sarbocchako faisalapachi e-ma-le ek rahala?* [Will UML remain one after Supreme Court verdict?]
9. *Bishesh sampadakiya: Bhasmasur path rokne aitihasik paramadesh*
[Historical order by Supreme Court to stop Bhasmasur path]

Kantipur Publication Pvt. Ltd; publisher and distributor; Central Business Park, Thapathali; Chairperson and managing director: Kailash Sirohiya; Editor: Umesh Chauhan, Chief editor, Sudhir Sharma

Naya Patrika

1. *Bishesh sampadakiya: Sanakmathi bidhiko jeet* [Victory of law over whim]
[signed by chief editor]
2. *Sambidhan bachaune paramadesh* [Order that saves the constitution]
[subheading: details of court decision]

3. *Panch nyayamurti jasle aitihasik faisala diye* [Five justices that delivered the historical verdict] *Aja 5 bajebhitra Deubalai pradhan mantri niyukta garna ra 3 Shaun bhitra sansad adhibeshan bolauna adesh* [Order to appoint Deuba as prime minister by 5 p.m. and to convene the parliament by 18 July]
4. *Adalatlle prasta pareko mukhiya bishaya* [Major subjects clarified by the court]
5. *Sarbochhako faisala pachi: E-ma-le ma jhan baliyo banera gathabandan bata bairiye Nepal* [After court decision: Nepal leaves alliance after becoming strong within UML]
6. *Nepalle jiteko rajnitik muddha* [Nepal's political victory]
7. *Sanjog: 19 barshaaghi pratinidhisabha bigatan gareka Deuba Olile bigatan gareko punasthapith sansad bata pradhanmantri bandai* [Coincidence: Deuba who had dissolved the House of Representatives 19 years ago, becoming prime minister in reinstated house, dissolved by Oli]
8. *Ajai sano akar ko mantriparishad:* [Small council of ministers (to be formed today)]
9. *Congress ra Maobadi sahabhagi mantriparishad* [Council of ministers to have Congress and the Maoists]

Inside page blurbs:

10. *Spasta bhashako aitihasik faisala: Bhimarjun Acharya* [Clearly worded historical verdict: Bhimarjun Acharya]
11. *Ke hunchan Oli sarkarle gareka sambaidhanik ra rajnitik niyukti?* [What will happen to constitutional body and political appointments done by Oli government?]
12. *Oliko ahankaar ko abasan: Hari Roka* [Oli's pride shattered]

Published by Naya Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. Executive director: Sushil Thapa;

Chairperson, managing director and chief editor: Krishna Jwala Devkota; Star Mall,

Putalisadak.

Annapurna Post

1. *Puna: stapahna Bhag-2; Deubalai pradhanmantri banauna paramadesh, Dhara 76(5) ma daliya whip na lagne byabastha* [Reinstatement]
2. *Rananiti banaudai bipakchi* [Opposition discussing strategy]
3. *Shakti santulan khalbaliyo: e-ma-le* [Power balance disrupted (Oli's photo)]

Inside page blurb:

4. *Na attinuhos, na mattinihos* [Don't panic, don't intoxicate (in victory)]
5. *Ke garlan e-ma-leka 23 samsad* [What will the 23 UML MPs do?]
6. *Nepal, jasle Oli Sarkar dhale* [Nepal who toppled the Oli government]

Nepal News Network International Pvt. Ltd, publisher and distributor; Corporate

Tower, Tin-kune; Chairperson: Captain Rameshwor Thapa; Editor Akhanda Bhandari

The Himalayan Times

1. SC reinstates House of Representatives
Tells Prez Office to appoint Deuba the PM by this evening; Fixes July 18 deadline for convening the House session
2. Lightning strikes in India kill 38 people in 24 hours
3. Speaker can call meet of Lower House: Apex court
4. Budget under cloud (after court verdict)

Published by International Media Network Nepal Pvt. Ltd., APCA House, Baidiya

Khana Road, Anamnagar, Acting editor: Rajan Pokhrel

Gorkhapatra

1. *Pratinidhi Sabha bigathan badar: Nepali Congresska Savapati Sher Bahadur Duebalai Pradhan mantri niyukta garna paramadesh* [House of Representative dissolution voided: Order to appoint Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress as prime minister]
2. *Faisalalai jeet har ko bishaya nabanau: Deuba (with photo)* [Let us not make the verdict a subject of victory and defeat]
3. *Pradhan mantriko niyukti ra sapatth ajai* [Appointment and swearing in of prime minister today]
4. *Mantriparishadko akar sano hune* [Council of ministers to be small]
5. *Americadwara 15 lakh matra khop sahayog* [U.S. provides 1.5 million vaccines as aid]
6. *Prathinidhi Sabha punasthapanako swagat* [Reinstatement of House of Representatives welcomed]
7. *'Loktantrako adharstambha hallayo'* ['Democracy's foundation shaken' (UML spokesperson, not attributed)]

Gorkhapatra Corporation, executive chairperson: Krishna Murari Bhandari,

Gorkhapatra Chapakhana, Dharmapath; Officiating Chief editor: Shreedhar Acharya

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ⁱ The Nepali *Bikram Sambat* (B.S.) has been used where the Gregorian dates are not available. The Nepali B.S. is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian year. The conversions where they have been made are approximations.

ⁱⁱ The information was compiled from publicly available sources, mainly the websites of their organizations.



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i FORMS AND CAUSES OF MEDIA CAPTURE IN NEPAL AND ITS MANIFESTATION IN NEWSPAPER CONTENT A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Tribhuvan University in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION By BINOD BHATTARAI TU Regd. No.: 073/24 Ph.D. Roll No.: 24/2073 (Shrawan) TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY KATHMANDU, NEPAL January 2025 ABSTRACT Media capture is the sellout by media/journalists of their responsibility in exchange of monetary and non-monetary favors from the government, businesses, and other interest groups. Captured media produce and disseminate content that is neither accurate and fair, nor impartial, or they disregard the basic standards for journalism production. Instead, they produce and disseminate information – even, disinformation – as desired by the capturers. In practical terms, capture in democracies substitutes brute force that authoritarian states use to rein media for the purpose of accessing or remaining in power. Most studies on media capture by economists have resorted to quantitative analysis and economic modelling methodologies, while others have undertaken political economy analyses to isolate and explain capture. This study has attempted to understand capture, using a qualitative approach – analysis of attributes of journalism drawing data from published testimonies, interviews and document reviews. The study has also undertaken critical discourse analysis of media texts and a case study – to understand the forms of capture and its manifestation in newspaper content. Key informant interviews have been used to validate the findings from data analysis to arrive at inferences. This approach primarily builds on the media capture paradigm, underlying which are multiple streams of scholarship such as political economy analysis, Critical Theory, and the Foucauldian understanding of power and how it influences social interactions. The main findings are summarized as follows: (a) Political capture has resulted from partisanship among journalists and party-affiliated journalists' associations where politicians in government reward compliant media/journalists with handouts from state coffers, and by appointing journalists as public relations advisors or staff at state media agencies; (b) another form of capture takes place through advertising using which both government and businesses can influence viability and profitability of media in a market that is dominated by a few large advertisers, of which the government has a roughly one-third share. Circumstantial evidence suggests that advertisers even pay for content in addition to exchanging advertising for favorable coverage. Some media willingly participate in capture, because it allows the owners to extract policy favors