



Master's Thesis

A Study of Ethical Issue in Online Journalism in Kathmandu, Nepal

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Degree Thesis

Master of Culture and Arts

Media Management

2025

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Arcada University of Applied Sciences: Master of Culture and Arts, 2025.

Commissioned by:

None

Abstract:

Nepal's media scene has been heavily touched by the digital revolution in Kathmandu through increased internet penetration, leading to an explosion in online journalism. The change has opened doors for immediacy, interactivity, and mass participation but has equally created severe ethical problems. Issues of accuracy, credibility, privacy, and professional ethics are increasingly in question as conventional regulation mechanisms are unable to keep abreast of rapid expansion in digital media. Traditionally, journalism has served democracy through adherence to truth and accountability but has shown various ethical loopholes since its transition online in Nepal. Online media operations are far from being regulated compared to print and electronic media outlets, thus producing issues of sensationalism, clickbait articles, political partisanship, and mixing ads with reportages. These have lowered people's trust in journalists and have jeopardized professional ethics in journalism. The qualitative study would explore ethical issues confronting online journalists in Kathmandu based on a mixed-methods approach involving an online survey of 15 online journalists and in-depth interviews of three veteran mass communication professionals. The research findings indicate that journalists are equally under intense pressure, leading to unethical acts of getting articles online in an unchecked manner, copying from other sources, and placement of deceptive headings. The research also identifies issues regarding an increased convergence of sponsored and editorial materials as well as continual invasion of privacy. Even though journalists are increasingly more conscious of ethics guidelines, practical adoption thereof is limited by budgetary limitations, political interference, and organisational constraints.

Keywords: Online Journalism, Ethical Challenges, Nepal, Kathmandu, Media Ethics, Digital Media, Commercial Pressures, Privacy Violations

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1 Introduction

The digital revolution has radically altered the face of journalism, most notably with the emergence of online journalism. The internet has changed the production, dissemination, and consumption of news, creating an interconnected global network for real-time coverage and two-way communication between the media and audiences. Yet, the move to digital media has also posed an array of ethical dilemmas. The dilemmas are most notable in the Nepalese context, where the accelerated expansion of digital media is accompanied by influences from commercial forces, political pressures, and the rise of sensationalist coverage of the news.

The media scene has changed enormously in Nepal in recent times, with the new rise of online media and social media websites. As noted by Koirala (2020), the spread of digital media publications has increased in Nepal, and these websites are now major sources of information to the public. Yet, as much as online media has gained popularity and acceptance, there is now fear regarding the ethical side of digital journalism. The drive for profit through adverts has promoted the elevation of clickbait and sensationalized material at the expense of precise, well-balanced, and ethical coverage (Bhandari, 2018).

Commercialization of journalism online has raised major ethical debates about the relationship between seeking audience interaction and maintaining the integrity of journalism. According to Meyer (2019), digital media tends to prioritize audience metrics and advertisers as the primary drivers of revenue, which can compromise the ethical principles of journalism, including accuracy, balance, and responsibility. In Nepal, such conflict between business interests and ethical journalism is further enhanced by the growth of social media platforms, which disseminate the news at lightning speed but often without the level of editorial review to verify the accuracy of the information.

This research endeavours to investigate the ethical dilemmas that online journalists in Kathmandu face. It discusses the influence of commercial pressures, media ownership, and the increasing role of social media on journalistic practices in Nepal. This introduction provides the framework for an objective analysis of the ethical dilemmas facing online journalists and formulating suggestions to enhance journalistic standards in Nepal's digital media landscape.

1.1 Research Problem

The recent expansion of digital media in Nepal has created new ethical challenges that are rarely confronted by regulating mechanisms in place. Among these are issues of objectivity, factuality, and fairness where editorial processes are subject to commercial imperatives and the influence of owners of media. These have resulted in growing sensationalism and a lack of distinction between editorial content and ads and thus have eroded online journalism credibility.

The main aim of this research is to analyse the ethical issues confronted by online journalists in Kathmandu in light of the influence of advertising pressure, ownership of the media, and increased use of social media in determining journalistic practice. The study aims to add to a deeper comprehension of how these ethical issues can be resolved and outline recommendations for ethical developments in Nepal journalism.

Methodology Overview

The research methodology in this study is a mixed methods design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. The mixed methods ensure that an in-depth understanding of Kathmandu's online journalists' ethical dilemmas is obtained. The research has two major methods of data collection.

- **Surveys:** 15 online journalists in Kathmandu were polled using a survey. The survey sought to get an overall perspective on the ethical issues journalists confront in daily reporting. The survey contained closed-ended questions that offered quantitative information and open-ended questions in which respondents could respond in more detail about what they were experiencing and encountering.
- **In-depth Interviews:** To understand in more depth those institutional and system factors that affect journalistic practice, 3 experienced journalists and editors were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner in order to have flexible discussion and gain rich, in-depth qualitative data on ethical decision-making in Nepali online journalism.

Although these strategies give rich findings, limited generalizability comes from having a small sample size of 15 survey respondents and 3 in-depth interviewees. The methods were suitable

for the scope of the study since they enabled in-depth investigation of these ethical issues in Kathmandu's online media.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

With the expansion of online reporting in Kathmandu comes new ethical dilemmas that have not been entirely resolved through current regulatory mechanisms. Online growth blurs the line between content development and reporting, creating disagreements regarding objectivity, factuality, as well as fairness. Newsrooms are under pressure from websites needing visitors to click through as well as from advertisements, tending towards sensationalism as well as unsubstantiated reports, undermining journalistic ethics.

Additionally, the distinction between editorial content and advertising is often blurred online due to the spread of native advertising. Not only does it confuse readers, but it jeopardizes journalistic objectivity as well. Privacy breaches are a common problem as personal details are often exposed without permission, often even in sensitive reports.

Even with increased awareness of these concerns, ethical reporting within the online media of Kathmandu is underdeveloped. It is compounded by the shortage of training, mentorship, and institutional backing, weakening the ethical framework of online media. This research attempts to address the research gap through investigating ethical dilemmas within online newsrooms of Kathmandu with a particular emphasis on how reporters perceive and handle these ethical issues.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The overall goal of this research is to investigate the ethical issues with which online journalists in Kathmandu, Nepal are confronted, as well as the systemic, economic, and institutional contexts shaping their ethical decision-making.

Specific Objectives:

- To examine the major ethical dilemmas confronted by Kathmandu's online journalists, such as sensationalism, invasion of privacy, and the influence of commercial interests.

- To analyse the impact of commercial pressures on editorial decision-making and journalistic autonomy.
- To examine the contribution of media ownership to editorial decisions and the ethical direction of online journalism.
- To discuss the effects of native ads and sponsored content on ethical journalism in Nepal.
- To put forward pragmatic suggestions for enhancing Nepali online journalism's ethical standards and addressing the ethical challenges cited in the study.

These research goals endeavour to conduct an in-depth assessment of the contemporary ethical dilemmas in Nepali digital journalism and recommend remedial measures to enhance the ethical standards of the profession. The relevance of the present research derives from bridging the knowledge gap in Nepali media ethics studies and specifically addressing the online journalism dilemmas in a developing nation such as Nepal.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is important for various reasons. First, it is an addition to the increasing body of literature on media ethics in the developing world, particularly regarding Nepali online journalism. Although much has been written on digital journalism ethics in the developed nations, much less attention has been given to how Nepali journalists approach ethical decision-making within the digital environment. As Koirala (2020) points out, Nepali journalists are confronted with challenges influenced by local cultural, political, and economic conditions, which makes the Nepali story different and worthy of specific attention.

Secondly, the results of this research will find applied relevance for policymakers, media entities, and journalists in Nepal. By studying the ethical dilemmas faced by online journalists, the research will give pragmatic suggestions to media companies on how to enhance ethical coverage and set clear ethical standards for Nepalese digital journalism. According to Bhandari (2018), since reforms are needed to assure online journalism in Nepal is credible and in the public good, such reforms need to take place.

Third, the global debate regarding the ethical dilemmas in digital journalism, particularly in developing nations, will be enriched by this research. Media ownership and commercialism are

not problems unique to Nepal, and the outcomes of the present study can be relevant to wider debates regarding the future of ethical journalism in the digital era. According to Meyer (2019), the rise in media commercialization has influenced journalism worldwide, and therefore the present study is also relevant beyond the Nepalese context.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

There are several limitations to this research. It is geographically localized within Kathmandu, so the results may be generalizable to other parts of Nepal, where the online media environment might be different. It is a small sample with only 15 interviews with journalists and 3 with key persons, so there may be a restriction of generalizability. It is mostly focused upon the views of the journalists without the views of the editors, publishers, or audience, all of whom contribute significantly to a shaping of ethical practices within the media. Lastly, the fast-paced nature of online journalism means that the ethical issues under discussion here can change, so there may need to be follow-on studies looking at changes over time.

2 Literature Review

This chapter of the thesis contains the relevant literature review for the given topic.

2.1 Introduction

With the fast-paced growth of digital media and online platforms, the profession of journalism has changed at an accelerated pace. The change is particularly visible in Nepal as established media frameworks were remodelled with the rise in online media sources, the spread of social media, and the growth in access to the internet through mobile devices to consume the news. Although digital journalism has brought greater access to information, there are various ethical dilemmas associated with it, including the issues of commercialization, editorial autonomy, and the trend of spreading sensationalism.

This chapter is designed to discuss the literature on digital journalism, media ethics, and ethical decision-making theories with respect to how these apply to the context of the Nepali media. Through an analysis of the ethical dilemmas that Nepali journalists are confronted with, the review intends to determine the guiding theories of ethical conduct in online journalism. It will also discuss how media ownership, the influence of advertisers, and the role played by social media impact the ethical conduct of journalists.

2.2 The Rise of Digital Journalism

The emergence of online journalism is a revolution from mainstream journalism, which involved the broadcasting of news mainly through print and TV. The evolution to digitalization has changed the production, consumption, and dissemination of news. According to Rosen (2018), the internet and mobile phone have democratized the consumption of news, offering real-time coverage as well as interaction between the audience and the journalists. Online journalism offers the chance for increased interaction, such as citizen journalism and crowdsourced journalism, which has permitted non-trained individuals to contribute to the media (Anderson, 2020).

But digital journalism has also posed an array of ethical dilemmas. Koirala (2020) discusses how the monetization of online news, specifically through adverts and audience figures, has precipitated the need to churn out content with high traffic. This has imposed immense pressure on online media to focus on sensationalized headlines, clickbait, and attention-grabbers which

can undermine journalistic standards (Meyer, 2019). In Nepal, as Khadka and Sharma (2021) observe, the proliferation of digital media platforms is under the pressure to churn out content which resonates with the biggest possible audience and as such is tending to sensationalize major topics.

In addition, social media is now an essential component of the media ecosystem, but at the same time, it has diluted the difference between professional journalism and amateur content creation. Media like Facebook and Twitter are now essential sources of news but lack editorial control, and the crisis of fake news and disinformation has gripped them (Sharma & Khadka, 2021). Political polarization and the dissemination of misinformation through these media in Nepal have raised critical questions regarding the use of social media in journalism and how it can impact the trust of the population in the media (Shrestha, 2019).

2.3 Ethical Theories in Journalism

The ethical decision-making of journalists is usually informed by different ethical theories. The theories act as guidelines that assist journalists in coming to the most suitable course of action when faced with challenging ethical dilemmas. The following are major ethical theories that are relevant to the profession of journalism:

Deontological Ethics

One of the strongest ethical theories in journalism, deontological ethics centres on duties and principles that determine what is good and right. For Kantian ethics, actions are ethical as long as they are in line with universal duties and principles and do not depend on consequences (Gade, 2020). From the perspective of journalists, it implies sticking to truthfulness, accuracy, and objectivity, regardless of the business consequences. Smith (2019) points out that deontological ethics in journalism necessitates that journalists put professional responsibilities ahead of external influences from advertisers or media owners. This is along the essence of the tenets of professional integrity, which requires journalists to report the truth as accurately as they can despite disagreeing with business or political interests.

In the Nepalese context, deontological ethical reasoning would contend that journalists must be able to rise above the temptation to sensationalize stories to gain clicks or views. As Bhandari (2018) has argued, Nepali media with an advertiser-dependent model are subject to temptation to compromise on factual reportage to the extent of clickbait material. According

to deontological thinking, though, journalists possess an inherent responsibility to report the truth beyond the business considerations that drive editorial decisions.

Consequentialism (Utilitarianism)

Consequentialism is another popularly debated ethical framework that considers actions in respect to their consequences. Utilitarianism is an offshoot of consequentialism and holds that an act is morally right if it maximizes the good of the largest number of people (Gade, 2020). In journalism, the theory may frame the use of sensationalized headlines or emotive reporting as acceptable, as long as the story is serving the greater good, which is bringing about critical awareness to an essential matter. Meyer (2019) argues that sensationalist reporting is sometimes acceptable when calling attention to matters previously neglected.

Nevertheless, Nepali media are frequently confronted with the dilemma of how to balance coverage with journalistically responsible reporting. According to Koirala (2020), Nepali journalists are sometimes compelled to create material that is guaranteed to drive high traffic, albeit at the cost of losing the utmost in objectivity. For instance, Nepali online publications can opt to report on scandals or controversial topics sensationally to gather large audiences despite the potential long-term impacts on the overall trust of the public in journalism (Sharma & Khadka, 2021).

Virtue Ethics

Virtue theory highlights the significance of the ethical character of the decision-maker (Bishop, 2019). The philosophy of Aristotle posits that individuals ought to develop virtues that include honesty, integrity, and bravery to conduct themselves ethically. In journalism, the character of the journalist should inform the decision-making process,

Particularly when confronted with complicated ethical dilemmas. According to virtue ethics, the character of a journalist established through ethical education and personal commitment to truth should guide them to act more than strict rules or sanctions (Bishop, 2019).

Virtue ethics in the Nepali situation requires Nepali journalists to prioritize the cultivation of personal integrity and responsibility, according to which ethical journalism is built on the values of truthfulness as opposed to the quest for sensation. According to Shrestha (2019), Nepali journalists face huge external professional demands, but most importantly, there needs

to be personal devotion to ethical journalism to help them uphold the trust and faith of the public.

Social Responsibility Theory

The social responsibility theory of journalism is the idea that media organizations are obligated to serve the interests of the public and to be held accountable to society. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) state that media organizations are obligated to serve the public interest through accurate, fair, and balanced coverage of news stories. Journalists owe the public an obligation, and the fruits of their labour should contribute to the social and political welfare of society. Media organizations in Nepal are obligated to do the same, despite the demands of the commercial and political interests.

This has implications for Nepalese online journalism specifically since it places major focus on the contribution of media to the creation of public trust and the provision of information that is beneficial to society. According to Khadka & Sharma (2021), the ethical dilemmas that Nepalese media face, including political bias and sensationalism, can be avoided once media houses take the social responsibility of providing objective and fair reportage. Media reforms in Nepal are essential to guarantee that the media houses are concerned with the public good at the expense of profit since the increasing level of commercialization of digital media has undermined journalistic integrity (Koirala, 2020).

Table 1. Comparison of Ethical Theories in Journalism.

Theory	Key Principles	Relevance to Journalism
Deontological Ethics	Focus on duties and rules; ethical actions follow universal principles	Emphasizes accuracy, fairness, and truth-telling as fundamental duties of journalists.
Consequentialism (Utilitarianism)	Focus on outcomes; actions are justified by the greatest good they produce	Justifies ethical decisions based on their outcomes, like maximizing the public good.
Virtue Ethics	Focus on moral character and virtues (e.g., honesty, integrity)	Promotes virtuous character in journalists to guide ethical behaviour in ambiguous situations.
Social Responsibility Theory	Media's role in serving the public good and providing useful, accurate information	Focuses on journalists' responsibilities to the public and their duty to maintain social trust.

2.4 Ethical Challenges in Online Journalism

With the expansion of online journalism, the number of ethical dilemmas faced by journalists has increased as well. The subsequent sections analyse some of the major ethical dilemmas facing online media, but with special consideration of the Nepali context.

- **Commercial Pressures:** Perhaps the most significant ethical concern facing online journalism is the impact of commercial pressures on editorial content. With digital media funded by advertisements, most online sources are motivated by the drive for traffic and engagement, and sensationalized reportage or the use of misleading headlines ensue. Meyer (2019) indicates that such pressure can pervert the journalist's responsibility to report accurate, fair, and balanced coverage. In Nepal, the dependency on digital ad revenue has meant that sensationalism occurs at the cost of stories that are factual and in-depth (Koirala, 2020).
- **Native Advertising and Sponsored Content:** The proliferation of native advertising—placing ads within the form of editorial content—posed major ethical problems. According to Sharma & Khadka (2021), in Nepal advertorial and news content are frequently indistinguishable, and readers are left confused since they cannot identify the difference between sponsored content and adverts. This makes online publishers less credible and less trustworthy to the public. The application of native advertising has created an element of concern regarding transparency and accountability in online journalism where the commercial interests are given room to shape editorial content (Smith, 2019).
- **Sensationalism:** The demand for traffic has resulted in an escalation of sensationalist material, where stories are distorted or inflated to garner attention. This is especially concerning in Nepal, where most online media have embraced the use of dramatic headlines that do not necessarily represent the meaning of the story. Khadka & Sharma (2021) contend that the quest for high traffic comes at the cost of compromising journalistic standards, with most stories being centered on shocking the consume rather than informing them.
- **Breach of Privacy:** The ready availability of information on the internet has increased the ease with which journalists encroach on people's privacy, particularly celebrities.

Privacy breaches are an ethical concern as journalists at times tend to focus on releasing juicy stories at the cost of respecting the rights of private individuals. In Nepal where there is much celebrity culture, the boundary between public-interest and right to privacy is usually blurred (Shrestha, 2019).

2.5 The Media Landscape in Nepal

The media environment within Nepal has undergone drastic changes in the last decade. The old media, including newspapers and TV, has gradually lost ground to digital media. The growth of digital media has democratized the production of the news, and the audience is exposed to much wider variety of voices, according to Koirala (2020). The transformation has brought new problems as well, including the issue of media ownership, political influence, and the influence of commercials. The online media websites of Online Khabar and The Kathmandu Post are the leading players in the digital market, but the former is also facing the challenge of competing for attention and reaching audiences to win ads (Khadka & Sharma, 2021).

Despite all these limitations, Nepali online media has also brought about increased access to information for the citizens, empowering citizen journalists and the growth of alternative media. The absence of proper oversight has, however, raised questions regarding the ethical conduct of online journalism in Nepal. According to Koirala (2020), the absence of an explicit code of conduct for online media has resulted in enhanced sensationalism, political polarization, and unaccountability in news coverage.

3 Methodology

This chapter of the thesis gives an overview of the methodology used during the study of the subject.

3.1 Process of Study

A detailed description of the research methodology employed to explore the ethical issues of online journalists of Kathmandu, Nepal. Research methodology defines the underlying philosophy, techniques, and methods employed for data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the research. Considering the dynamic nature of online journalism and the key ethical issues involved, the current chapter elaborately discusses the research design, research methods of data collection, sampling methods, data collection techniques, data analysis methods, as well as ethical concerns. It addresses the research limitations as well, bringing about transparency of the research process with a view to making the findings comprehensible within the appropriate context.

The research uses a mixed-methods approach, which combines both quantitative as well as qualitative methods to provide a richly detailed understanding of the research study's results up to a certain level of generality. The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach comes from the fact that it will offer a comprehensive understanding of the ethical issues of Kathmandu's online journalistic sector. The methodology ensures that there is a wide range of data (quantitative) as well as richly detailed insights (qualitative), which will provide a fine-grained understanding of the ethical issues as well as systemic drivers of the same.

This chapter is initially going to describe the overall research design, which will be followed by the specifics of the study area as well as the justification for its selection. It will subsequently articulate the population of the research, methods applied for sampling the participants, as well as the methods of data collection. It will provide a detailed description of the data analytical procedure, followed by a discussion of ethical implications of the research. It will end with a summary of the research limitations.

3.2 Research Design

This research utilizes the mixed-method approach that uses both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. This is because the mixed-method approach enables an extensive

review of the ethical dilemmas encountered by online journalists in Kathmandu, Nepal. The quantitative aspect offers an overall understanding of these dilemmas through the use of surveys. The qualitative aspect offers further insights using in-depth interviews with established media practitioners.

The study is exploratory and is conducted to reveal new information on the ethical dilemmas faced by Nepali journalists. The present study is descriptive as it reports the prevailing ethical practices within online journalism and the problems faced by the journalists. By using both the methodologies, the study guarantees that objective data regarding ethical issues are accompanied by subjective experiences and that it provides an overall perspective of the scenario prevailing in the online media of Kathmandu.

But the small sample has been employed within the current study, which hinders the generalisability of the results. Although the sample is large enough to examine trends and obtain insights, the sample size (15 survey participants and 3 interviewees) is restrictive in enabling broad assertions regarding the overall population of Nepali online journalists. This number was compatible with the scale of the research, though, which was concerned to understand the matter in-depth rather than to obtain broad statistical generalisation.

Research Methodology Flowchart

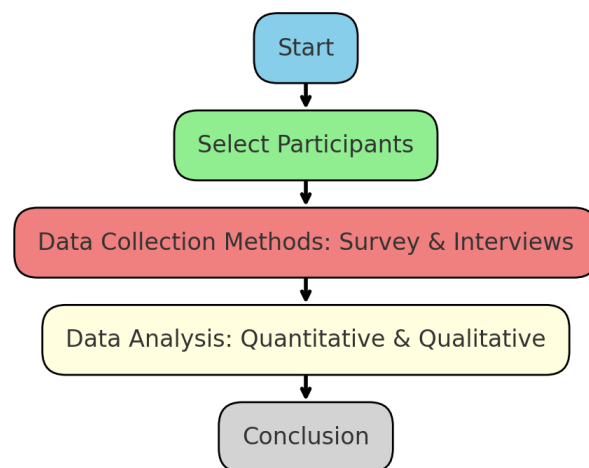


Figure 1. Flowchart of the research methodology.

3.3 Study Area and Rationale for Selection

Kathmandu, Nepal's capital city, was chosen for its centrality as a hotbed of online media in the country. The explosive growth in internet use and mobile technology has enabled online journalism in Kathmandu and provides a good place in which to examine the ethical issues related to online media. The online media landscape in Kathmandu is a hybrid of long-established conventional sources making a transition towards the use of online platforms and new, completely online business establishments serving a developing population comfortable in its use of technology.

Kathmandu also has the highest concentration of online news sites, which are under growing pressure from commerce to get traffic and generate revenues while being able to sustain editorial independence. The city offers an active context in which to observe and examine how online journalists manage these ethical dilemmas.

3.4 Population and Sampling

Target population in this study includes Kathmandu-based online journalists. Purposive sampling was designed in order to choose respondents having experience in the field of digital media. 15 online journalists from different categories were included in a survey that included junior, mid-tier, and senior journalists. By doing this, diverse sets of opinions about ethical issues they are confronted with in daily practice were included.

Alongside survey respondents, three experienced media professionals were interviewed in order to get richer insights into editorial pressure and institutional problems in Kathmandu's online newsrooms. The three interviewees were:

- Senior Editor for a national online news organization
- Digital Content Manager for a top news portal,
- Seasoned Investigative Journalist for a leading online news agency.

Limitations in Sampling Size: The sample size being limited, although large enough for conducting key theme analysis and acquiring rich findings, constrains generalizability of the findings. Subsequent studies involving bigger samples and wider geographical representation would lead to a more in-depth understanding of ethical issues in online journalism in Nepal.

3.5 Data Collection Method

This section describes the methods used during the data collection.

3.5.1 Survey

A survey was conducted involving 15 Kathmandu-based online journalists. The survey had a mix of open and closed-ended questions. The closed-ended questions captured quantitative information while open-ended questions offered qualitative information about the ethical problems journalists meet in practice.

Closed-ended questions mostly measured frequencies and categories of ethical conflicts, ranging from sensationalizing content pressure to privacy invasion and fusion of sponsored content and editorial content. The subjects rated their agreement in relation to ethical matter statements on a Likert scale (“Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” “Strongly disagree”).

Example closed-ended question:

- How often do you face ethical dilemmas in your work?
 - Frequently
 - Occasionally
 - Rarely
 - Never

Open-ended questions enabled respondents to report particular examples of ethical problems they had experienced and in what environment these problems had arisen. The depth of insight into practical issues faced by journalists in online media in Nepal increased as a result.

Example open-ended question:

- Can you tell about an instance where commercial pressures impacted your editorial choices?

3.5.2 In-depth Interviews

A side from the survey, there in-depth interviews were carried out among senior media professionals. The in-depth interviews sought a richer comprehension of Kathmandu’s online

newsrooms were conducted in a semi-structured manner that allowed for an open and flexible discussion of wider pressure experience and ethical compromise.

Interview were held in person and ranged from 45-60 minutes in duration. The interviews were structured around probing issues including editorial direction, commercial pressure and problem arising from advertising and sponsored articles.

Sample Quotes from Interviewees:

- Director of Content for National Online News Organization: *"There is tremendous pressure for delivering traffic, particularly in terms of ads since ad metrics are so crucial. There's always a tug-of-war between editorial values and revenue demands."*
- Digital Content Manager of Top News Portal: *"Sponsored content tends to blur boundaries. Even if we resist merging it with editorial content, there is always an underlying pressure to blend ads and editorial content for business purposes."*
- Investigative Journalist in Renowned Online Media Outlet: *"I think reporters in Nepal are compelled to prioritize speed and sensationalism over accuracy. The need for being first in reporting often leads to fact-checking afterwards, compromising our ethics."*

Table 2. Demographics of Survey Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	18-30	6	40%
	31-45	7	47%
	46+	2	13%
Gender	Male	8	53%
	Female	7	47%
Experience	Less than 5 years	5	33%
	5-10 years	7	40%
	10+ years	4	27%

3.6 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling design was utilized in an attempt to recruit active participants involved in online journalism in Kathmandu. It helped in ensuring that all those with applicable knowledge, experience, and first-hand exposure to ethical dilemmas in Nepali online media were included in the research. Despite the small sample size, it was suitable for the qualitative design of the research in order to gather exhaustive and insightful findings in the context of Kathmandu. However, its limited size truncates the generalizability of findings in other areas of Nepal. Future research can build on this by further employing a large sample and snowball sampling methods in order to reach a broader range of participants and perspectives across different regions.

Table 3. Sampling Strategy and Criteria

Sampling Technique	Description	Criteria for Selection
Purposive Sampling	Selects participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study.	Online journalists and senior media professionals with at least 2 years of experience.

3.6.1 Coding Process in Thematic Analysis

The survey and interview data were analysed through thematic analysis. The theme identification and coding of repeated patterns in responses were carried out through this process. The use of thematic analysis was deemed appropriate because it provides room for flexible interpretation and pattern identification in both quantitative and qualitative data. Key themes which were identified from the data included:

Sensationalism:

Journalists have described being told to prioritize sensational content to drive traffic. Several interviewees said that publishers exaggerated headings in order to get more clicks even if it resulted in compromising accuracy.

Commercial Pressures:

Survey respondents and those interviewed both named intense pressure from media owners and advertisers to prioritize content that generates profits over editorial values.

Privacy breaches were also a frequent theme, as journalists reported incidents in which confidential information had been released in a non-consensual manner. A major theme that ran through was one of blurring between editorial and advertised content. Several respondents complained that sponsored content was offered with no transparent labelling, making readers believe it to be objective reporting.

3.7 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics involving frequencies and percentages were applied in analysing quantitative data from surveys. The use of these statistics gave an accurate representation of ethical issues among Nepali online journalists.

Qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis as previously described. The process entailed capturing major themes in the form of sensationalism, commercial pressure, and invasion of privacy and labelling these under larger ethical issues in online news. The analysis also entailed cross-referencing findings from available literature in making comparisons of how Nepali online news compares against international trends in ethics in digital news.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Ethical principles were always maintained in conducting the research. The subjects were all fully briefed on what was being investigated and gave informed consent. Participants' confidentiality was preserved, and their anonymity was protected. The research also ensured responsible use of data while respecting everyone involved.

3.9 Limitation of Study

Although the study provides interesting information about the ethical issues confronting Nepali online journalists, geographical limitation and small sample size are major limitations. The findings cannot generalize to the larger population of Nepali journalists. Future studies can overcome these shortcomings by increasing sample size and studying other regions in Nepal in an effort to gain a wider perspective about online journalism practice.

4 Results and Analysis

This chapter of the thesis describes the results and analysis obtained during the research.

4.1 Analysis of Survey

The chapter outlines the results from the research conducted regarding the ethical issues for online journalists of Kathmandu. The research employed a mixed-methods design that combined quantitative surveys with qualitative in-depth interviews to examine the ethical practices, dilemmas, and awareness of online journalists. Results are discussed to determine the primary ethical issues within Kathmandu's online journalistic sector as well as the drivers of ethical decision-making.

The chapter opens with a comprehensive presentation of the survey results. Descriptive statistics are applied to the data from closed-ended questions, while open-ended questions offer a richer understanding of journalists' experiences with ethical issues. This is supplemented by a detailed examination of the in-depth interviews with senior professionals from the media. Results are placed within the framework of the past research conducted into online journalism ethics, with the analysis noting significant ethical trends and patterns that are evident from the data.

4.2 Survey Finding

The survey for the present research tried to evaluate the ethical consciousness, challenges, and attitudes of online journalists of Kathmandu. There were both closed-ended as well as open-ended questions. This section presents a summary of the quantitative data, while qualitative answers are explained subsequently

4.2.1 Awareness of Ethical Standards Among Online Journalism

One of the cores aims of the survey was to determine the level of ethical awareness of online journalists within Kathmandu. Journalists were surveyed as to whether they knew about ethical codes of their profession, as well as if they knew of any particular media ethics guidelines applied within their respective news organizations.

- **Survey Question 1:** Are you familiar with the ethical codes governing your profession?
 - **Yes:** 10 (67%)
 - **No:** 5 (33%)

The bulk of respondents (67%) expressed awareness of ethical codes that apply to the work of journalists. Still, 33% of respondents expressed that they do not have knowledge of a particular ethical code of conduct. This implies a disconnect with the formalization and dissemination of ethical practices within Kathmandu's online media market.

- **Survey Question 2:** Does your media organization provide training on media ethics?
 - **Yes:** 6 (40%)
 - **No:** 9 (60%)

A major percentage of respondents (60%) indicated that there is no formal training provided by their organizations regarding media ethics. This is a worrying fact because ethical sensitization and adequate training are of utmost importance for making sure that the media practitioners follow ethical guidelines while working. Insufficiency of training can be a contributing factor towards the ethical failures noted against the online journalism of Kathmandu.

4.2.2 Frequency of Ethical Dilemmas

To determine the frequency of the ethical dilemmas confronted by online journalists, the respondents were questioned regarding how often they had faced ethical issues through their work.

- **Survey Question 3:** How often do you encounter ethical dilemmas in your work?
 - **Frequently:** 7 (47%)
 - **Occasionally:** 5 (33%)
 - **Rarely:** 3 (20%)

Almost half of the interviewees (47%) indicated that they came across ethical challenges with regularity, while 33% indicated that they faced ethical issues from time to time. Just 20% said that they hardly ever faced ethical issues. This implies that ethical issues are a regular and frequent problem for online journalists within Kathmandu, highlighting the necessity for robust ethical frameworks as well as support mechanisms.

Table 4. Frequency of Ethical Dilemmas Encountered by online journalists

Frequency of Ethical Dilemmas	Number of Journalists	Percentage (%)
Frequently	7	47%
Occasionally	5	33%
Rarely	3	20%

4.2.3 Pressures on Journalism and Commercial Interests

One of the main issues discussed in the research was the commercial interests and outside pressures affecting journalistic practices. Journalists were surveyed regarding the effects of commercial considerations like the need to attract visitors and build revenue on their content choices.

- **Survey Question 4:** To what extent do commercial pressures (e.g., advertising revenue, audience engagement) influence your editorial decisions?
 - **Strongly influence:** 8 (53%)
 - **Moderately influence:** 5 (33%)
 - **Do not influence:** 2 (14%)

Over half the respondents (53%) said commercial pressures have a strong effect on their editorial choices. Another 33% said that commercial pressures have a moderate effect. Just 14% of journalists said these pressures did have no effect on their editorial choices. This underlines the prominence of commercial considerations as a factor in decision making, which can result in ethical dilemmas like sensationalism or making money a priority over journalistic principle.

Table 5. Pressures on Journalists and Commercial Influence

Influence of Commercial Pressures	Number of Journalists	Percentage (%)
Strongly Influence	8	53%
Moderately Influence	5	33%
Do Not Influence	2	14%

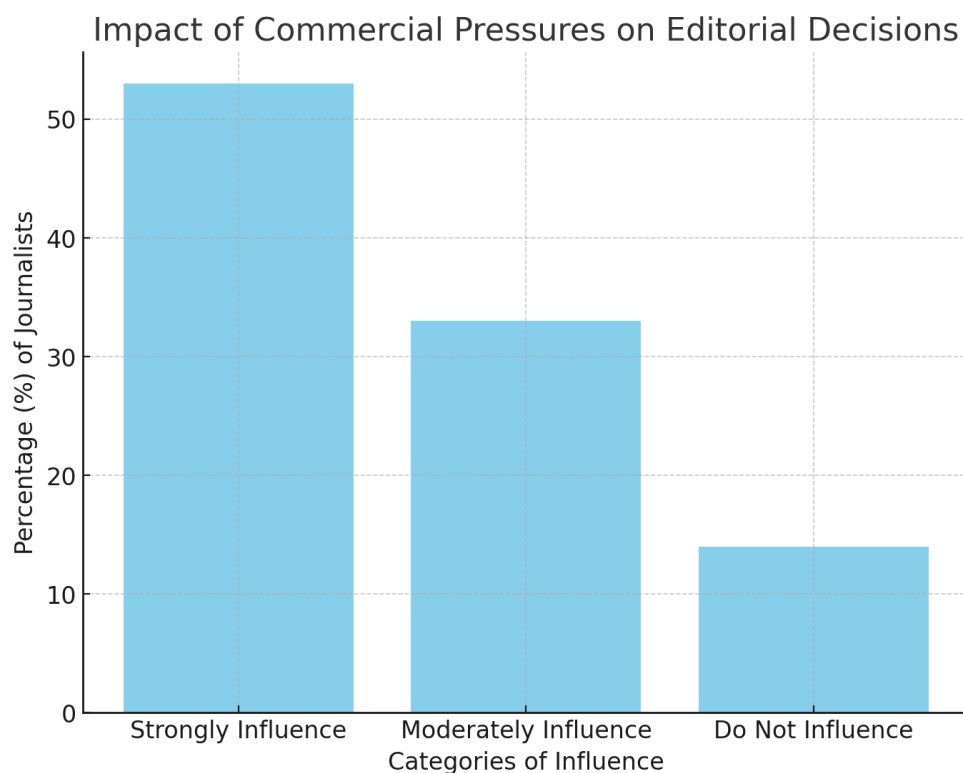


Figure 2. Impact of Commercial Pressures on Editorial Decisions

Quote from Survey Respondent 1: *"It's not uncommon for editors to ask for more sensational headlines, even if it means compromising accuracy. The higher the engagement, the more money we can make from advertisers."*

This means that journalists in Kathmandu are regularly pushed towards prioritizing audience interaction at the expense of editorial integrity based on monetary motives. These results are aligned with global trends recognized by Meyer (2019), who posits that through commercialization of the media, journalists are compromising on their ethical responsibilities in pursuit of increased profits.

4.2.4 Ethical Dilemmas and Their Impacts on Content

Online reporters were requested to provide vivid details of particular ethical challenges they encountered while working. Below are some regular ethical concerns expressed by the respondents.

- **Sensationalism:** There were a number of reporters who discussed the pressure to produce sensational reports and headlines where the material was exaggerated or unverified.
- **Plagiarism:** Several respondents indicated cases of plagiarism, either because of deadlines or because they wanted to publish as quickly as possible.
- **Privacy Violations:** Journalists reported that privacy was breached often, especially for sensitive reports where people's personal details and images were released without permission.
- **Misleading Headlines and Clickbait:** It was admitted by several journalists that they employed clickbait tactics to boost visitor volume, including writing headlines that misrepresented the content of the article.

Nearly 58% of journalists mentioned that they come across frequent instances of sponsored content being framed in a manner that makes readers believe it is editorial content. The problem has been recognized around the world as one of increasing digital media ethics concerns (Sharma & Khadka, 2021).

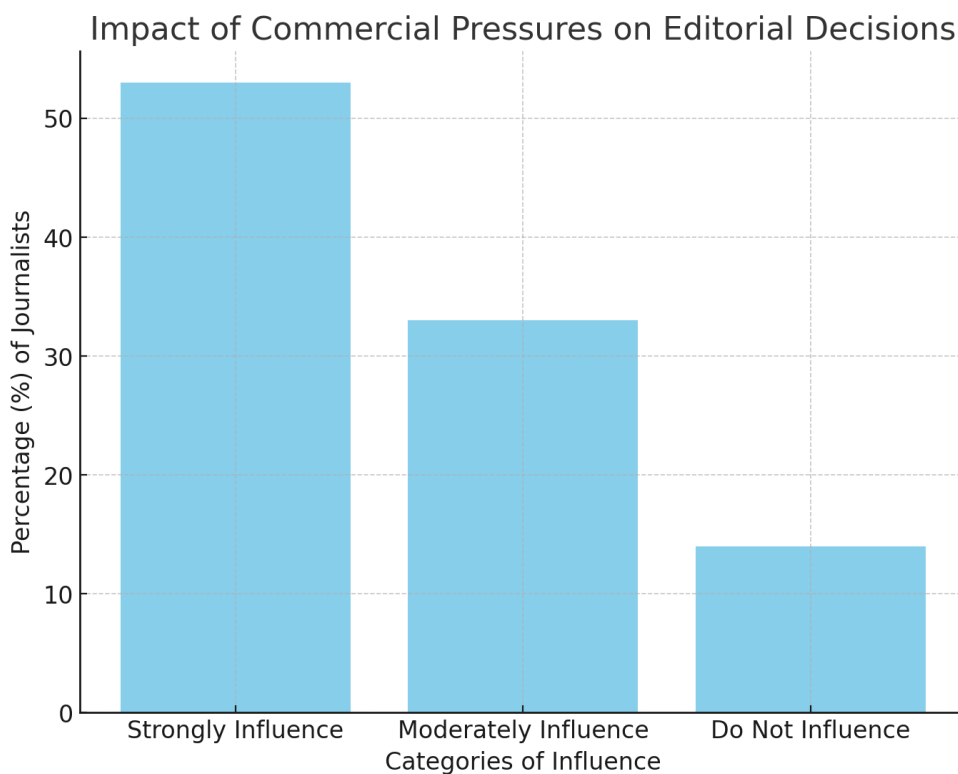


Figure 3. Impact of Commercial Pressures on Editorial Decisions

4.2.5 Editorial Independence and the Role of Media Owners

An associated concern of the survey was the role of owners of the media and the shaping of editorial practices. Journalists were polled as to their understanding of editorial independence within their organizations.

- **Survey Question 5:** How independent do you feel in making editorial decisions?
 - **Very independent:** 4 (27%)
 - **Somewhat independent:** 6 (40%)
 - **Not independent:** 5 (33%)

While 40% of respondents were somewhat independent regarding editorial choices, a substantial number (33%) were of the view that they were less than independent with regard to decision-making. Advertisers, political pressures, as well as owners of the media, are capable of affecting editorial decisions profoundly, to the detriment of journalistic integrity.

A high percentage of survey respondents (around 47%) accepted that violations of privacy are prevalent in their profession. Reporters tend to cover controversial issues, including scandals or breach of people's private information, while not fully respecting privacy rights. The violation of privacy is a central issue in new media ethics since online mediums do not have similar oversight compared to traditional mediums when it comes to privacy (Bhandari, 2018).

Quote from Survey Respondent 3: *"There are times when we publish information about individuals without their consent, especially when it's related to a breaking story. It's something we regret, but it's also what gets attention."*

This remark underlines the moral conflict between privacy and public interest, a challenge often faced in Nepali online reporting.

4.3 In-Depth Interview Findings

As a complement to the survey, interviews with three senior media practitioners were conducted in Kathmandu. Through these interviews, insight was gained into systemic, institutional, and cultural drivers of ethical issues within online journalism. The interviews

were conducted using a semi-structured approach so that the interview respondents had open discussions about different issues of the online environment of Kathmandu.

4.3.1 Ethical Decision-Making and Editorial Control

Senior professionals in the media pointed out that even though reporters are exposed to ethical issues, the decision-making is greatly determined by editorial policy and the overall ambitions of the media organization. One of the interviewees laid emphasis on the power of media owners to determine editorial content, pointing out that the desire to generate revenue overrides ethical considerations, undermining journalistic independence.

All three senior professionals concurred that commercial pressures to produce traffic and hit profit targets tend to create ethical dilemmas. Nonetheless, they underlined that the editorial team must protect journalistic standards while achieving a delicate balance of profitability against ethical integrity.

All three respondents emphasized the major impact of advertisers and owners of the media on making editorial decisions. For example, one Senior Editor for National Online News Outlet mentioned:

"It's becoming harder to maintain editorial independence when our revenue model depends so much on advertising. If a story will bring in more views, there's a tendency to lean toward it, even if it compromises our editorial values."

This is in alignment with survey findings in which most journalists mentioned experiencing commercial pressure that affects what they cover. Media ownership and editorial independence are notable issues in Nepali online media, as described by Bhandari (2018), where advertisers have undue influence over journalists' content.

4.3.2 The Blurring of Editorial and Sponsored Content

The most important concern expressed by senior journalists was the blurring of lines of editorial content with sponsored content. They clarified that paid content passing off as editorial is a widespread phenomenon within Kathmandu's online media. This trend puts ethical issues of transparency, objectivity, as well as the duty of the media institutions to keep advertising distinctly separate from journalism, into question.

4.3.3 Lack of Ethics Training and Institutional Support

The other main finding of the interviews was the inadequate ethics training for online writers. All three professionals stressed the need for extensive training initiatives to be able to provide journalists with the resources to handle ethical dilemmas of the internet age. They indicated that a majority of writers acquire ethical knowledge through practice as compared to formal training, which can result in uneven ethical practices within the profession.

4.3.4 The Impact of Sensationalism and Audience Engagement

Senior professionals also shared concerns regarding the rising popularity of sensationalism and clickbait within online reporting. One of the interviewees indicated that the media institutions typically resort to sensational titles and overstated reports to attract readers, particularly for social media. They contended that the practice, aside from compromising the professionalism of journalism, discourages people from trusting the media. Quote from Digital Content Manager: *"We are under constant pressure to grow page-views. Too often, that means highlighting stories that elicit strong emotional responses even if it means compromising on factuality."*

This is consistent with findings from the survey, in which a large proportion of journalists described being under pressure from advertisers to sensationalize news for financial gain. This is an important issue since it compromises core journalistic values of accuracy and objectivity (Meyer, 2019).

Ethical Dilemmas Faced by Journalists

Privacy Violations
Sponsored Content
Sensationalism
Plagiarism
Commercial Pressures

Figure 4. Ethical Dilemmas Faced by journalists

4.4 Analysis of Ethical Challenges

The results of both the interviews and the survey identify several ethical issues typical of Kathmandu's online journalism community. These are impacted by commercial considerations, the shortage of institutional backing, as well as the dearth of explicit ethical codes.

4.4.1 Sensationalism and the Pressure to Attract Traffic

Sensationalism is one of the most salient ethical issues for online reporters in Kathmandu. Sensationalism was indicated as a problem through both interviews and a survey, as commercial imperatives to gain attention through clicks, traffic generation, and advert revenue prioritize sensational material over fact-based reporting. This is echoed within the wider literature on online journalism, which cites a tension between commercial gain and journalistic ethics within online news outlets (Gairhe, 2008). Quote from Investigative Journalist:

"Our editorial choices are often driven by political allegiances of our owners. Sometimes it is not what is in the interest of the general public but what is in the interest of owners of the media."

This points out the tensions between journalistic ethics and media ownership in Nepal. It also raises an issue regarding neutrality in online news sources since political and business interests can easily result in biased coverage.

4.4.2 Absence of Proper Ethical Training and Sensitivity

Another key problem is the fact that there is no formal ethics training offered to journalists in Kathmandu. According to the survey, 60% of respondents indicated they had never had ethics training from their employers. Likewise, the interviews indicated that employees are generally trained for ethical issues while working, resulting in uneven application of ethical measures throughout the profession. This implies the necessity for a formal ethics education and training program for online reporters.

4.4.3 Blurring of Editorial and Sponsored Content

Another concern voiced by the respondents as well as the interviewees is the practice of mixing editorial content with sponsored content. This erodes online journalism credibility as well as

objectivity and accountability of reporting. It is compounded by the fact that there are no explicit guidelines for differentiating editorial content from sponsored content.

4.5 Key Findings

The main findings from the survey and interviews can thus be captured as follows:

- **Commercial Pressures:** Surveys and interviews showed that Nepali journalists were heavily pressed for content that would bring in high traffic and ad revenues, resulting in sensationalized headings and distorted coverage.
- **Lack of Distinction between Editorial and Sponsored Content:** Most respondents identified that sponsored content appears frequently in publications without any distinction from editorial content and thus deceives readers.
- **Interference with Privacy:** A large majority of journalists stated that often while reporting on scandals or sensitive issues.
- **Editorial Autonomy and Media Ownership:** Surveys and interviews showed the impact of political interests and media owners over editorial content, compromising journalists' independence.

4.6 Comparison with Literature

This study confirms previous research on ethical issues in digital journalism. Koirala (2020) and Meyer (2019) are in tandem in pointing out increased pressure between commerce and editorial values in online journalism. Increased use of native advertising and overlap between editorial copy and sponsored content have been extensively debated in previous literature as a key ethical issue in today's digital times. Likewise, privacy infringement in online journalism has been a common thread in media ethics literature (Bhandari, 2018).

But whereas previous research has tended to emphasize general trends in Nepal or even broader regional trends among journalists in South Asia, this study uniquely looks in depth at Kathmandu as a distinct context for understanding these issues.

5 Discussion and Recommendations

The last chapter revealed the findings of the research, elucidating major ethical issues for online journalists in Kathmandu, Nepal. These issues are commercial pressure, editorial and sponsored content overlap, privacy invasion, and effects of ownership in the media. The chapter will explain these findings against the backdrop of ethical theories offered in Chapter 2, compare them with literature in existence, and provide practical tips for ethical practice improvement in Nepali online journalism. Also included are the limitations of the research and recommendations for future studies.

5.1 Commercial Pressures and Ethical Compromise

A prevalent refrain throughout both survey and interview responses was pressure for journalists to sensationalize reports in an attempt to generate traffic and boost advertising revenue. This is consistent with Meyer (2019), who contended that in today's age of digital news, journalists are often confronted with having to uphold journalistic integrity while meeting the demands of newspaper owners and advertisers.

Commercial interests have had a particular influence in Kathmandu through increased use of clickbait and sensational headings. While not an entirely Nepal-specific phenomenon, it reflects wider trends in global online reporting as described by Koirala (2020). The widespread tendency to place sensationalism over content has had a negative effect on journalistic principles of accuracy and neutrality, compromising editorial values.

From a moral point of view, utilitarianism would support sensational content if it is for the benefit of society through increased awareness of significant social issues. Deontological ethics would counter that it would be unethical if it misrepresents reality for profit. The question for Nepali journalists is finding a balance that provides editorial independence while not compromising journalistic obligation to society.

5.2 Privacy Violations in Digital Journalism

Many survey respondents and those interviewed mentioned frequent invasion of privacy issues, especially while reporting on personal scandals or sensitive issues. The journalists usually have to struggle between making available information of interest in the public domain and respect

for people's privacy. According to Bhandari (2018), in today's era of digitization, it has been easier for people to access and share private information that may result in intrusive reporting.

The ethical conflict is evident in that while utilitarianism will condone the release of private information if it benefits the larger good, deontological ethics compels respect for people's privacy and dignity even at the expense of any benefit for the general public. Virtue ethics adds that journalists must develop virtues and habits like respect and being responsible and act in agreement with these in order not to violate people's rights in pursuit of information for a story.

In the Kathmandu online media context, pressure to get sensational content and a lack of clear guidelines on issues of privacy are among key factors in repeated privacy violations. The Nepali news agencies need to formalize more stringent ethical guidance on issues of privacy and aim for developing guidelines that can balance individual right to privacy against right of information for the general public.

Ghimire (2021) notes that privacy violations are a common occurrence with online reporting, particularly where reporters place sensationalism or audience interaction ahead of ethical issues. This can be seen in the case of Kathmandu's online media sector, where private information and sensitive content are posted without consideration for the damage it may inflict on the subject. This is due largely to a lack of explicit guidelines as well as editorial standards for privacy.

Journalists who work in Kathmandu typically work within a framework of weak or absent formal ethical norms, making privacy invasion possible with inadequate checks. It is recommended from the study that stronger editorial guidelines as well as privacy standards training can reduce such violations and protect people's privacy rights.

5.3 Plagiarism and Content Duplication

The research conducted also pointed to the problem of content duplicity and plagiarism, where a number of journalists confessed to copying material from other sources without crediting the source. Tight deadlines, with the resulting need for fast publication, was found by the research to prompt the copying of content without crediting the source. This ethical blunder is supported

by Paudel (2018), who indicated that the rise of online publication speed often translates to uncritical adoption of content from other sources.

Some journalists in Kathmandu justified their actions by saying they lacked sufficient time. Others admitted they were merely copying a model of what they learned from their peers or workplace norms. Content aggregation, where publications copy material from other websites, is widespread within the online media section of Kathmandu. If practiced without source identification, it can only contribute to undermining the credibility of the journalist as well as the faith that people have for the media.

The results highlight the necessity of strict editorial protocols for the utilization of content from outside the publication, as well as the need for ethical journalistic practices to avoid plagiarism. Training for intellectual property rights as well as copyright laws may assist in curtailing such ethical breaches.

5.4 The Blurring of Editorial and Sponsored Content

Another major concern underscored by both the survey as well as the interviews was the blurring of editorial content with sponsored content. Native advertising, where content is paid for but presented as editorial news, is a source of concern within Kathmandu's online journalistic market. It results in a deficiency of accountability as well as transparency because the readers are left confused regarding advertorials and independent reporting.

According to Palser (1999), online advertising intrusion into editorial content is a common phenomenon worldwide as digital platforms increasingly rely on revenues from advertisers. This trend is common even in Kathmandu, both with the major as well as minor media organizations, where many a time the advertisers have a say over what is published in terms of editorial content.

Media owners as well as advertisers tend to pressure the journalists to incorporate sponsored content within their reports without explicit labelling, which jeopardizes the independence of the journalism profession as well as the objectivity of news reporting. This ethical concern stems from the absence of explicit editorial policies as well as the distinction blurring between commercial content and journalistic content.

5.5 Institutional Support and Training

Among the most striking of the research's findings was the fact that there was a shortage of formal ethics training for online reporters in Kathmandu. It was found in a survey that 60% of the respondents had never undergone training in ethics of the media, and most of them confessed to learning ethics through trial by error, as opposed to formal learning. This deficiency of training is especially so because reporters may lack the resources or knowledge with which they can tackle the sophisticated ethical issues involved with online reporting.

Deuze (2003) contends that the speed of online journalism tends to push ethical training to the periphery as speed and audience attraction take centre stage. Marginalization of ethical training is further exacerbated by the fact that there is neither institutionalization of ethical practice nor a formal regulatory framework for online media channels in Kathmandu. Those regulatory institutions of online media such as the Press Council Nepal (PCN) have, as of now, failed to keep up with the challenges of online publication, leaving the reporters without guidelines of ethical behaviour.

5.6 Pressure from Owner of Commercial

Another key finding of the study was the influence of media owners on editorial decision-making. A large proportion of journalists (53%) reported that their editorial decisions were strongly influenced by commercial pressures, including the need to attract readers and secure advertising revenue. This finding underscores the tension between the goals of media organizations and the ethical responsibilities of journalists.

Deuze (2003) observes that the commercialization of the media means that the search for profit may overshadow the search for truth and accuracy. Within Kathmandu, political and commercial interests exert a strong hold over the political climate as they determine editorial agendas and contribute to ethical dilemmas. Pressure from owners for click-based content leads to a decline in journalistic ethics, as reporters are encouraged to favor sensationalism over fact.

5.7 The Role of Media Ownership in Shaping Ethical Journalism

The survey also showed the heavy impact of ownership on editorial decisions. Numerous respondents identified that owners' goals and objectives of a commercial and political nature

had diluted their editorial independence. The same can also be attributed to Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1956) social responsibility theory that states that mass communication institutions are responsible for serving public values as opposed to servicing owners or political factions.

In Nepal, concentration of ownership in the hands of business and political elites has sparked fears regarding editorial independence. The result has been that Nepali journalists tend to give precedence to serving interests of their owners rather than delivering objective and impartial news. According to Shrestha (2019), this compromises the integrity of news content and erodes credibility of the media.

6 Implications of the Findings

The results of the research have several important implications for Kathmandu's journalists as well as for its media organizations. The most immediate concern is the absence of ethical training as well as editorial guidelines that is a factor contributing to the ethical issues noted in the research. Without institutional backing through formalized training, the journalists are left to rely on themselves to solve ethical dilemmas, with journalistic ethics often giving way to commercial considerations.

Moreover, blurring of editorial content with sponsored content raises issues regarding objectivity and transparency online. To mitigate these challenges, there is a need for clear editorial policies to differentiate between sponsored content and ads and for sponsored content to be indicated.

The need to turn a profit through advertising continues to be a huge challenge for reporters. News organizations need to see how they can preserve both commercial interests as well as the need for quality reporting. This may mean using new business models that place quality reporting ahead of sensationalism and clickbait.

Table 6. Summary of key findings

Key Finding	Supporting Data
Sensationalism is prevalent in online journalism	53% of journalists report strong influence from commercial pressures
Privacy violations are common	20% of respondents reported frequent privacy violations
Editorial independence is compromised by media owners	33% of journalists feel their editorial decisions are not independent

6.1 Recommendations for Improving Ethical Journalism

On the basis of findings of this research, the following are the recommendations made towards ethical practices in online journals of Nepal.

- **Develop Clear Guidelines for Ethics:** Media outlets in Nepal need to formulate transparent editorial guidelines that outline ethical principles for sponsored content, native advertising, and privacy invasion. These guidelines should emphasize being transparent and responsible in order for journalists to make informed decisions regarding ethical issues.
- **Improve Journalistic Training:** Journalists in Nepal must undergo training in ethical journalism and editorial independence. Media institutions must invest in programs for ethical training that can enable journalists to uphold standards of integrity and accuracy despite commercial demands.
- **Encourage Media Accountability:** To minimize the impact of advertising pressure, Nepali media institutions need to have more robust accountability mechanisms in place. These can take the form of an independent ethics board or an ombudsman role to oversee content and make certain that it adheres to ethical guidelines.
- **Oversee Native Advertising:** The Government of Nepal or regulators need to implement regulations that strictly differentiate native advertising from editorial content. That would preserve public trust and help ensure that readers understand the commercial nature of some content.
- **Defend Journalistic Autonomy:** Efforts should be made towards limiting political and owner interests' impacts on editorial decisions. This can be through encouraging diversified ownership models and ensuring that different sources of news have editorial autonomy in reporting.

6.2 Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This research has some limitations that need to be addressed in future studies. The first limitation is the limited sample size of 15 survey respondents and 3 interviewees, which makes generalizing findings difficult for all online journalists in Nepal. A larger sample size and journalists from various parts of Nepal are needed in future studies in order to have a more in-depth comprehension of ethical issues in Nepali online journalism.

Secondly, this research was based in Kathmandu, and it may not reflect entirely what is happening in other regions of Nepal. A wider geographical scope would enable a more comprehensive perspective on what ethical issues journalists are experiencing throughout the country.

7 Conclusion

The goal of the current research was to identify the ethical issues of online journalists in Kathmandu, Nepal, as well as determine the context that impacts their ethical decision-making. It was motivated by the growing significance of internet media within the Nepalese mediascape, as well as concerns over the ethical effects of online journalism. Using a mixed-method method of both qualitative and statistical data, we aimed to determine the kind of ethical challenges involved as well as propose possible solutions.

This chapter synthesizes the main conclusions from the research, outlines their implications for online journalistic practice within Kathmandu, as well as suggestions for research directions for the subject area. It also considers the constraints of the research and the value it brings to researching online journalism ethics within a developing country context.

7.1 Synthesis and Main Findings

The results of the research indicate that Kathmandu's online journalists are confronted with a myriad of ethical issues, with commercialization, sensationalization, privacy infringement, plagiarism, and blurring of editorial and sponsored content being the most salient concerns. It was found that:

- **Commercial Pressures:** More than half of the journalists (53%) indicated that commercial pressures, including attracting readers and bringing in advertising, significantly affect their editorial choices. It has played a role to boost sensationalism, as well as clickbait reporting, in online Kathmandu media.
- **Sensationalism:** Sensationalized headlines and outlandish reports were often reported by both the interviewees and survey respondents due to commercial pressures. Journalists were under pressure to favor sensationalized stories over responsible reporting and factual accuracy, undermining journalistic ethics.
- **Privacy violations:** Journalists reported widespread privacy violations, especially when covering accidents, crime, and scandals. This is a conflict between the right of the people to know and the right of people to privacy, with a tendency of journalists to favor giving away a sensational story over the ethical imperative of avoiding harm.
- **Plagiarism:** During the research, it was found that there exist widespread cases of plagiarism and duplication of content within Kathmandu's online publishing sector.

Such ethical breaches are facilitated by tight deadlines and the need to put content up quickly, where reporters copy content from other publications without using appropriate credits.

- **Blurring of Editorial and Sponsored Content:** Native advertising, where paid content is marketed as editorial content, was recognized as a new ethical problem. This blurring of lines damages the credibility of online journalism as well as raises issues of transparency and objectivity.
- **Deficiency of Ethical Training:** One of the main conclusions was the shortage of formal ethics training for online reporters. Over half of respondents to the survey indicated that they had never had a single course of training regarding media ethics, while several learned about ethics through trial and error. This deficiency of formal training makes the reporters ill-prepared to handle the ethical complexities of new media.
- **Publisher Pressure:** It was discovered that media owners have enormous control over editorial content, inciting reporters to act with compromising considerations for profit instead of journalistic ethics. It results in compromising the quality as well as ethics of online journalism.

7.2 Implications of the Findings

The results of the current research have direct implications for both online journalism practices as well as the policies and regulatory environment of Nepal. The ethical issues unearthed by the current research underscore the necessity for a more systematic as well as formal approach towards dealing with ethics in Kathmandu's online journalism.

7.2.1 For Journalists and Media Organization

The results indicate that online journalists are working under a climate where profit considerations typically overshadow ethical ones. This erodes the credibility and reliability of online reporting and leads to a loss of citizen faith. It implies for media institutions that they need to redefine their business models and think through how they can balance profit-based goals with ethical duty of truthful as well as fair reporting.

There is a need for institutional support as well as editorial standards that can assist media practitioners as they grapple with ethical issues and uphold ethical standards. Editorial policies regarding the matter of using sensational headlines, privacy, plagiarisms, as well as the

distinction of editorial content from sponsored content, should be clearly set. Transparency of editorial operations is key to upholding credibility levels as well as making online journalism trustworthy.

7.2.2 For Training and Education

A major concern is the shortage of formal ethics training for online journalists in Kathmandu. For enhancing ethical conduct within the profession, it is imperative that ethics education becomes a priority for academic institutions and the media houses. Ethical training must be implemented for equipping journalists with the framework for recognizing as well as resolving ethical issues within their profession. Such training must incorporate the special ethical issues involved with online reporting, such as sensationalization, privacy, plagiarism, as well as native advertising.

7.2.3 To Regulatory Bodies

The research also exposes the inadequacy of current regulatory mechanisms for addressing the ethical issues of online journalism. While there is a Journalist Code of Conduct for conventional media as formulated by Press Council Nepal (PCN), these codes are inadequately designed for the new model of online journalism. There is a necessity for regulatory overhaul with the intention of making online mass media responsible for ethical conduct. PCN and similar regulatory agencies need to formulate guidelines designed uniquely for online media addressing issues of online privacy, sponsored content transparency, and the line of distinction between editorial content and advertisements.

7.3 Recommendations for Ethical Practice Improvement

According to the results of the current research, several suggestions are provided for enhancing the ethical quality of online journalism in Kathmandu:

- **Institutionalization of Ethical Training:** Media outlets need to institutionalize ethics training for their journalists, so they are adequately prepared with the knowledge as well as the means to handle online journalistic ethical dilemmas. Areas of ethics training must include sensitivity towards privacy, accuracy as well as fairness, transparency of sponsored content, and journalistic independence.

- **Transparent Editorial Guidelines:** Clear editorial guidelines must be put in place by the media organizations regarding issues of common concern, such as sensationalism, intrusions into privacy, plagiarism, and the distinction of editorial from sponsored content. Editorial guidelines should be laid down for all staff members and rigorously applied within the organization.
- **Regulatory Reform and Oversight:** The Press Council Nepal (PCN) and other regulatory institutions must revise their ethical codes to align with the new realities of online reporting. This may involve particular regulation of sponsored content, privacy protections, and social media postings. Oversight by regulatory institutions must be strengthened for online media outlets to adhere to ethical practices.
- **Fostering Transparency in Sponsored Content:** Sponsored content must be clearly labelled and differentiated from editorial content. This will preserve the integrity of the profession of journalism as well as help readers have faith that they are reading trustworthy content.
- **Fostering Journalistic Autonomy:** Media organizations should work to minimize the commercial pressures that affect editorial content. Journalists need to be able to shape content through editorial decision-making in accordance with the interests of the people as a whole, as well as ethical standards, instead of under the sole imperative of generating revenue.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns and Media Literacy:** Public awareness campaigns can assist in generating awareness of the ethical dilemmas of online journalism. Awareness campaigns should educate the public regarding how to evaluate the content of the news critically as well as identify sensationalized content or deceptive headlines. This awareness will assist with creating a more sensitized audience.

7.4 Contribution to Knowledge and Future Research

This research contributes to the literature of media ethics with a comprehensive examination of ethical issues for online journalists working in Kathmandu. While a great deal of research into journalistic ethics is centred around Western contexts, this research sheds light on the distinct issues of online journalism within a developing nation, where economic pressures are levied against press organizations as much as there is a dearth of regulatory control.

The research identifies gaps in training as well as institutional support that perpetuate unethical practices of online journalism. Through the identification of these gaps, as well as suggesting ways to address them, this research opens the door for subsequent research regarding ways to improve ethical standards in Nepal's expanding online media market.

Future research might investigate various issues that would help in bringing into piercing liberation ethical practices in online journalism. One of these areas of investigation is ongoing studies, which might follow trends in ethical practices in digital media in a time-bound context. Further, comparative studies of online journalists working in Kathmandu might be carried out in comparison to journalists working elsewhere in Nepal or even other countries. Such studies would reveal how ethical decision-making is influenced not just by pressures within institutions but also by cultural contexts. Public attitudes towards online journalism ethics, intersections of ethical offences in online media and what produces attitudes towards media as an informative source, is another area of research that might be pursued in the future. Lastly, it would be important to study the role of social media in determining ethical standards for online journalists and what its influence does to journalistic practices.

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Appendix A

Survey questions for Online Journalists in Kathmandu

- 1) How familiar are you with the ethical codes that govern journalism in your profession?
 - a) Very familiar
 - b) Somewhat familiar
 - c) Not familiar

- 2) Does your media organization provide formal training on media ethics?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

- 3) How often do you face ethical dilemmas while working as a journalist?
 - a) Frequently
 - b) Occasionally
 - c) Rarely
 - d) Never

- 4) To what extent do commercial pressures (such as advertising revenue and audience engagement metrics) influence your editorial decisions?
 - a) Strongly influence
 - b) Moderately influence
 - c) Do not influence

- 5) How often do you encounter situations where editorial content is mixed or confused with sponsored or native advertising?
 - a) Frequently
 - b) Occasionally
 - c) Rarely
 - d) Never

- 6) Have you ever experienced or witnessed privacy violations in your journalistic work?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

- 7) How independent do you feel in making editorial decisions within your organization?
 - a) Very independent
 - b) Somewhat independent
 - c) Not independent

- 8) Please describe an instance where commercial or political pressures influenced your editorial choices. (Open-ended)
- 9) What challenges do you face when trying to uphold journalistic ethics in your daily work? (Open-ended)
- 10) What recommendations would you suggest improving ethical journalism practices in Nepal? (Open-ended)

Appendix B

Questionnaire for interview of Senior Media Executive (Editor-in-Chief)

- 1) Can you tell me a little about your role and how you came to be in your position as Editor-in-Chief? How long have you been working in the media industry?
- 2) From your perspective, how has online journalism evolved in Kathmandu over the past few years? What changes have you noticed in terms of both the media landscape and the challenges faced by journalists?
- 3) What are the most common ethical challenges that journalists in your newsroom face, especially with the rise of digital media?
- 4) Could you describe a situation where your team had to make a difficult ethical decision? How did you approach it?
- 5) Online media outlets often rely on advertising revenue and audience engagement. How do you think these commercial pressures impact editorial decisions, if at all?
- 6) Have you ever faced pressure to make editorial choices based on commercial considerations, like sensationalizing a story or using clickbait tactics? How do you manage this balance?
- 7) How do you ensure that editorial decisions remain independent and not unduly influenced by external stakeholders, like media owners or advertisers?
- 8) Do you think the level of editorial independence in Kathmandu's online media has changed with the rise of commercial pressures?
- 9) Privacy violations seem to be a recurring issue in online journalism. How does your team handle sensitive stories, especially when it involves private individuals or controversial topics?
- 10) Do you think there is enough emphasis on ethics training for journalists in your organization? How do you ensure that your team is well-equipped to navigate ethical dilemmas?
- 11) How do you view the rise of native advertising and sponsored content in online media? Does it pose ethical concerns, and how does your team address them?
- 12) What are some of the key steps that media organizations in Kathmandu should take to ensure the ethical standards of online journalism improve?

Appendix C

Questionnaire for interview of Senior Journalist (News Reporter)

- 1) Could you briefly describe your role and experience in journalism, particularly within the realm of online media?
- 2) How has the rise of online journalism changed your day-to-day work compared to when you started in traditional media?
- 3) As a journalist, what ethical challenges do you face when reporting on sensitive issues in online media?
- 4) Can you think of a time when you had to make a difficult ethical decision in your reporting? How did you handle it?
- 5) In your opinion, how do commercial pressures like advertising or page views affect your editorial choices?
- 6) Have you ever been pressured to adjust the way you report a story to fit commercial interests? If so, how did you handle that pressure?
- 7) Do you feel that journalists in Kathmandu have the freedom to make independent editorial decisions, or is there pressure from media owners or advertisers? How does this affect your work?
- 8) Privacy violations are a hot topic in digital journalism. How do you navigate situations where reporting on a story might infringe on an individual's privacy?
- 9) Have there been any instances where you or your team had to retract or modify a story due to privacy concerns?
- 10) Do you think there is sufficient training on media ethics for journalists in your organization? What kind of support do you receive in handling ethical dilemmas?
- 11) What's your take on the growing trend of native advertising in online media? How do you think it affects journalistic integrity?
- 12) What changes would you like to see in the way online journalism handles ethical challenges in Kathmandu? Are there any specific practices or policies you believe need to be introduced?

Appendix D

Questionnaire for interview of Media Owner/Publisher

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about your background and how you became a media owner? What is your role in shaping editorial content in your organization?
- 2) How would you describe the state of online journalism in Kathmandu? What do you think are the biggest challenges for media owners in this space?
- 3) As a media owner, what ethical challenges do you face when it comes to managing editorial content and balancing commercial interests?
- 4) How do you ensure that your editorial team maintains high ethical standards in the stories they produce, especially when there are commercial pressures?
- 5) How do you manage the influence of advertising revenue and audience engagement metrics on editorial content? Are there any conflicts between profit-driven motives and journalistic integrity?
- 6) Have you ever had to make decisions where commercial interests directly conflicted with editorial independence? How do you navigate those situations?
- 7) To what extent do media owners like yourself influence editorial decisions? How do you ensure that editorial teams maintain a sense of independence in their work?
- 8) What steps do you take to foster an environment where journalists feel they can make editorial decisions free from outside pressures?
- 9) How do you address privacy concerns in online journalism? Are there any particular challenges in maintaining ethical standards while respecting privacy in your stories?
- 10) Do you provide ethics training for journalists within your organization? How do you ensure that your team is prepared to handle ethical dilemmas effectively?
- 11) As a media owner, how do you view the integration of sponsored content in your editorial output? Do you think this practice raises ethical concerns?
- 12) Looking ahead, how do you think the ethical landscape of online journalism will evolve in Nepal, and what role should media owners play in shaping that future?