



Research Article

Role of Journalists during COVID 19 Pandemic in Nepal

Poshan Raj KC^{1*} 

*Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University Nepal

Article Information

Received: 07 December 2024

Revised version received: 02 January 2025

Accepted: 04 January 2025

Published: 09 January 2025

Cite this article as:

P.R. KC (2025) *Int. J. Soc. Sc. Manage.* 12(1): 27-37.

DOI: [10.3126/ijssm.v12i1.73514](https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v12i1.73514)

*Corresponding author

Poshan Raj KC,

Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

Email: kcposhan15@gmail.com

Peer reviewed under authority of IJSSM

©2025 IJSSM, Permits unrestricted use under the CC-By-NC license.

OPEN ACCESS



This is an open access article & it is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

Keywords: Journalisms in COVID 19, Crisis Communication, Pandemic and Journalisms, COVID 19, Journalisms, Journalisms in Nepal

Abstract

This research focuses on the contributions of Nepalese journalists during crisis with especial focus on the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal. Employing survey and interview data analysis methods, the study investigates their personal, social, and professional experiences.

The study involves data analysis in two phases. In the preliminary phase, it designs a survey form and sends to most of the journalists in Nepal and collects the responses of the first 125 journalist's data. It analyses those data and interprets using tabular methods and interpretive methods. In the second phase, it selects journalists for further investigations. In order to avoid biases, two journalists (one male and one female) have been selected from each provinces of Nepal for personal or telephone interviews. All the confusions of the first phase analysis have been further inquired in this discussion phase. Moreover, the study includes a separate 'discussion' topic and incorporated their point of views.

Finding shows that throughout the pandemic, media houses faced heightened vulnerability, leading to complete or partial closures. Many respondents reported salary reductions, highlighting the lack of commitment from media houses to employee well-being. This also underscores the inadequate market research, social responsibility, diversified income streams, and crisis preparedness among most media outlets. Furthermore, the study identifies a plethora of related topics warranting future investigation. Subsequent research could explore diverse geographical and cultural contexts in which journalists navigated the pandemic. This includes an examination of their experiences across print, electronic, and digital media platforms.

Background

Nepali journalists have experienced various challenges on their course of work. A few of them can be Cholera in 2009, Kalazaar, Plague, Encephalitis, and so on (Onlinekhabar, 17 September 2020) and COVID 19, lately. The COVID 19 was one of the major challenges among all. The Government of Nepal issued a nationwide lockdown from 24 March to 21 July 2020, prohibiting domestic and

international travel, and closure of the border. Within the country, the authority strictly implemented movement restrictions, closures of public gathering places, hotels, tourisms places and many more.

People from all walks of life were badly affected due to prolonging lockdowns and restrictions. Journalists in all seven provinces have been affected mentally and physically (PCN, 2020). They suffered financial difficulties, and some

¹MPhil Scholar

have lost their jobs altogether. There have been many notable changes to their newsgathering and news dissemination practices, including a reduction in broadcast, print, and radio outputs across the country (NPI, 2020). In addition to these, there was a wide circulation of false contents.

Falsehoods in circulation can be categorized as both disinformation (produced and shared with malicious motivation), and misinformation, when these lies are spread without bad intentions. However, in the context of COVID-19, the effects of both were equally deadly (UNESCO, 2020). The World Health Organization has described - as a -second disease accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic - a -infodemic, which is -an over-abundance of information - some accurate and some not - that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it. The information undermined effective responses to the pandemic by spreading fear, skepticism and misinformation.

The framework of journalistic roles can be categorized into four distinct concepts: normative, cognitive, practiced, and narrated roles. These categories correspond to the ideals journalists are expected to uphold, their personal aspirations, the practical actions they undertake, and their perceptions of their own roles. Inherent qualities such as honesty, dedication, and hard work are often associated with women, making them integral to the field of journalism (Aryal, 2019).

The research has been done on the basis of the Social Responsibility Theory (SRT) of the Press linking it with gender perception developed by Siebert, Peterson and Schram (1956). This theory in particular applies to the relationship between the press and the public. SRT states about the role of media towards society. Media has responsible functions in the society that responsibly connects people to their government. Their functions support to strengthen family and society. It is because, journalism is the voice of the voiceless, the watchdog of public deeds, and the monitoring of authorities that leads a journalist to be caught in behaviors from diverse people (LibertiesEU, 17 September 2022; Karadimitriou, 2022). Moreover, the concept of the study was based on framing journalism as the 'fourth estate' of state mechanism that seeks a more dedicated, honest, and responsible person as a journalist.

This study outlines how journalists and news organizations responded to the pandemic and identifies the findings on building requirements of Nepali journalists to strengthen future disaster resilience. It is focused on the situation of journalists during the pandemic. For this, it is concerned mainly with their family, social and professional status at the time of the pandemic. The qualitative questionnaire

searches over their experiences on the personal, social and professional matters of journalists.

The study employs quantitative as well as qualitative approach for the study. It tries to capture the experiences of the working journalists through oral, written interviews, and experts' validation. The study considers extensively to the FNJ data and small sample of journalists working in different provinces in Nepal, particularly equal number of journalists each province.

Statement of Problem

The reverberations of the COVID-19 pandemic cast a long shadow over diverse sectors, sparing none, including journalism. Nepal's journalistic fabric, already tugging at the seams due to financial constraints, confronted an even graver precipice as the pandemic unfurled. The seismic tremors of this global crisis amplified the sector's financial woes, manifesting as a poignant challenge in ensuring timely payments to journalists. The predicament, worsened by job cuts and delayed compensations, painted a grim picture for many media professionals.

Within this tumultuous milieu, the media industry, a crucial conduit of information, has found itself at the epicenter of vulnerability. As economic tremors reverberate, media outlets grapple with stark decisions - trimming staff, slashing salaries, and in extreme cases, shuttering operations. The resultant instability underscores the challenges besieging journalists on multiple fronts. They face a dual scarcity: the scarcity of financial resources within their outlets, and the scarcity of time and energy as they grapple with the growing workload seeping into their personal lives (Sreedharan, Thorsen, Upreti and Sharma, 2020).

Within this complex landscape, a group that is particularly affected are the emerging journalists, poised at the threshold of their careers (Tabai, Santos and Coqueiro, 2022). Just as they begin to fathom the significance of their chosen vocation, they are impeded by the stark reality of unpaid endeavors, a stark divergence from their aspirations. Many are forced to take a detour into inactivity, unable to contribute their potential to the field due to untenable financial demands.

In light of these multifaceted challenges, the resilience of Nepal's journalists shines as a testament to their dedication and unwavering commitment to their craft. This narrative of struggle amidst dual pandemics serves as a clarion call to acknowledge, support, and fortify the backbone of information dissemination (Antulov-Fantulin, Biller-Andorno, Böttcher, Berezowski, Burton-Jeangros, Blanchet, Clausin, Escher, Flahault, Fukuda and Helbing, 2021) which plays an integral role in shaping society's understanding and response to the most pressing issues of our time.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework traces the intricate pathways that define the experiences of journalists during times of crisis (Fig.1). The journalists exemplify the spirit of selflessness that journalism demands by working tirelessly in low-paying or even voluntary capacities.

Their unwavering commitment not only corrects the mistakes of state mechanisms but also reaffirms the indispensability of a free and unbiased press in times of global turmoil. They risk their own life and work truly for the social cause. Beyond their roles as unbiased conveyors of truth, they find themselves at the nexus of multiple challenges. Socially marginalized, grappling with gender-related biases, and ensnared in a web of unequal wages, women journalists face a myriad of obstacles that compound the difficulties of their profession (Bastola, 2021; Media Action Nepal, 2022). Yet, their resilience remains unbroken, their determination unswerving. Thus, journalist's contributions are undeniably higher at the time of pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

This study follows the lens of Social Responsibility Theory (SRT). Scholars such as Siebert et al. (1956) contends that media outlets should never prioritize serving economic agendas or catering solely to entertainment, instead, their

core functions should be oriented towards fostering democratic processes and enlightening the public. In light of this theoretical framework, the research assumes a critical stance in scrutinizing how media entities have balanced their social responsibility with commercial and entertainment considerations, particularly in the context of the pandemic. By delving into this intersection, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how media, guided by the principles of social responsibility, have responded to the multifaceted challenges of the pandemic. Journalist's works are social work - they delve their life into social cause, rather than economic benefits. They try to enlighten the society and give a voice to marginalize community or people.

Previous investigations have already underscored the heightened vulnerability of marginalized communities during pandemics. These studies reveal that individuals belonging to marginalized classes are often at a disproportionately higher risk, facing multifaceted challenges that are exacerbated when their struggles go unnoticed by mainstream media. This research thus embarks on the mission of uncovering how media entities have approached these journalists-specific and marginalized narratives within the context of the pandemic.

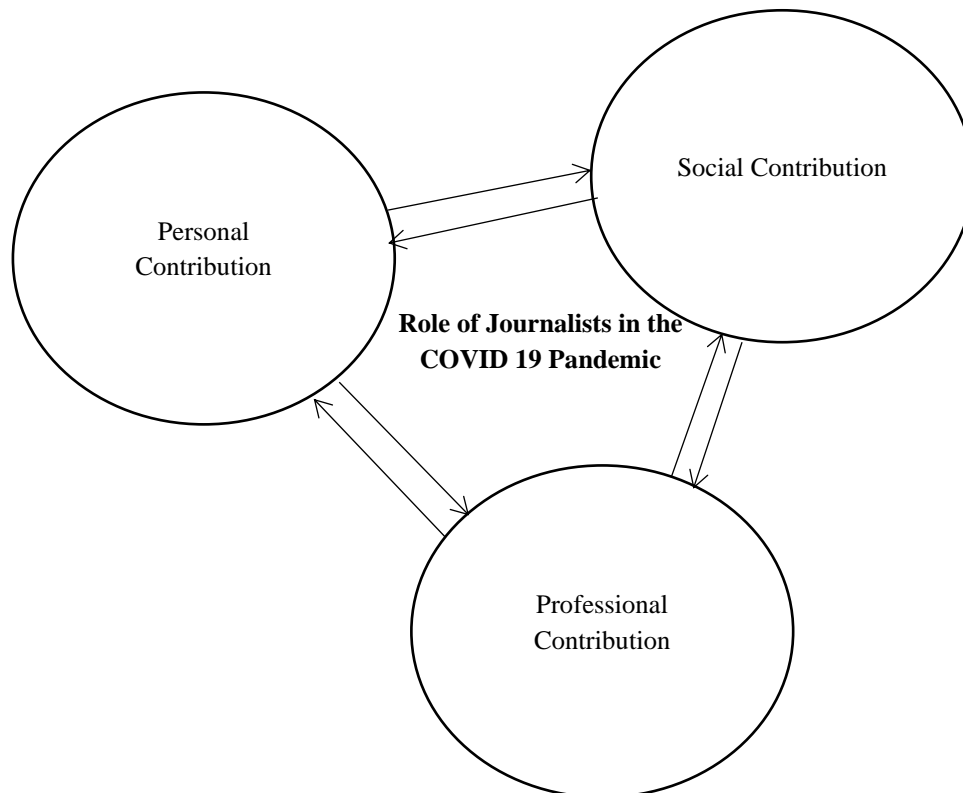


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of study.

Media's Social Responsibility Amidst Crisis

Rooted in the tenets of the social responsibility theory, the media, and its practitioners, assume a profound societal role when disseminating news. Beyond the dissemination of information, mass media and media education wield a formidable influence in championing the fight against discrimination and corruption (Kiran, 2021). This theory underscores the pivotal role of the press as a voice of accountability, a critical counter-balance that echoes the concerns of the marginalized and questions the powerful.

The social responsibility theory of the press finds resonance in the intricate fabric of journalism perception, particularly in its interplay with the public sphere. At its core, journalism isn't merely a profession; it operates as a conduit for leveraging national development. Anchored in the belief that individual efforts can collectively foster societal betterment, this theory postulates that every individual holds the potential to initiate positive change. It echoes the sentiment that even the actions of a single person can catalyze a profound difference. It seeks to frame the lived experiences of journalists against the backdrop of their profession, interwoven with their contributions toward reshaping societal perspectives.

In the reverberations of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's pioneering work (1956), the tasks undertaken by journalists in times of crisis serve as cartography of their participation in fulfilling the social responsibility of the press. The thesis delves into the intricate ways in which journalists navigated their roles, their ethical dilemmas, and their interactions with a society in flux. This encompassed therein carry the potential to unveil the multifaceted landscape of journalism's engagement with societal transformation.

It illuminates how the journalists' endeavors during the pandemic unearth their roles as purveyors of truth and agents of change. This dynamic portrayal not only underscore the relevance of the social responsibility theory in contemporary journalism but also offer valuable insights into the symbiotic relationship between media, professionals, and society, especially within the context of unprecedented challenges like the COVID-19 insurgency.

Policy Review: Media Policy and Interpretation

The promulgation of media policy in Nepal has been a pivotal aspect of shaping the nation's media landscape. The Press Commission Report of 2015 is a foundational document that paved the way for subsequent media developments. The National Information and Communication Technology ICT Policy of Nepal 2015 (i.e. ICT Bills 2015) is another comprehensive framework that encompasses crucial criteria for media establishment and operation.

Central to Nepal's media policy evolution is the National Mass Communication Policy 2015, a framework that

provides a roadmap for the establishment and operation of media houses (National Mass Communication Policy, 2015). It encompasses multifaceted aspects, including coverage across print, digital, and electronic media, investment criteria, media classification, editorial policies, and the discouragement of media monopoly or concentration. This policy serves as a guidepost for various service providerbodies, including the Press Council Nepal, Mass Communication Training Foundation, National Mass Communication Authority and Public Service Broadcasting. Notably, these entities are designed with a commitment to ensuring women's participation within their Board Committees, thus fostering gender diversity at decision-making levels.

As Nepal navigates its media policy landscape, the Press Commission Report of 2015 and the National Mass Communication Policy 2015 have emerged as pivotal guideposts. These policies, in conjunction with gender-inclusive initiatives, signify a commitment to creating a diverse and equitable media sector. By fostering women's participation and representation in decision-making processes, Nepal is forging a path towards a more inclusive media landscape that accurately mirrors its society. This ongoing journey stands as a beacon of progress, reaffirming the transformative power of policy in shaping a vibrant and representative media industry.

Mass Media and Journalism Profession in Nepal

While Nepal's Constitution of 2015 has made strides in recognizing and affirming press-related rights, the practical implementation of these provisions often faces hurdles due to ambiguous interpretations, resulting in consequences for journalists. Despite the challenges, there is a growing awareness about discrimination in the media, driven by various individuals, organizations, and authorities, leading to a gradual shift towards more equitable practices.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 addresses press-related rights across multiple articles - 17, 19, 27, and 28 - underscoring the significance of communication and its integral role. At the outset, the constitution appears to be comprehensive and inclusive from a media perspective. However, the implementation of these rights has encountered obstacles. The interpretative challenges posed by certain policies have led to uncertainties and consequences, leaving journalists vulnerable to adverse outcomes. The yawning gap between constitutional aspirations and practical realities underscores the complexity of media's role in a democratic society.

The transformation of Nepal's media landscape is a multifaceted journey marked by constitutional recognition, challenges in implementation, evolving awareness, and growing journalistic participation. While progress is being made, the journey towards achieving gender equality within the media is far from complete. The interaction of

constitutional rights, advocacy efforts, and journalistic contributions provides a comprehensive overview of the intricacies involved. The ongoing dialogue and evolving practices within Nepal's media arena represent a beacon of hope as the nation strives to overcome historical obstacles and embrace a more inclusive future.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Journalism

The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in December 2019, swiftly traversed continents, wreaking havoc on a global scale. Its catastrophic impact on health facilities and economies forced nations into stringent measures such as travel restrictions and lockdowns (WHO, 2020). While every sector felt the pandemic's grip, the media, an integral societal pillar, was profoundly affected. Amid reporting on the crisis, journalists encountered dual challenges: exposure to risk while reporting and operational disruptions due to financial strains. A National Survey Report (PCN 2020 AD) on the impact of COVID-19 on Journalism in Nepal highlighted that 83 percent of journalists reported heightened vulnerability, 75 percent experienced increased anxiety, and 62 percent dealt with grief. This article delves into the framing of pandemic news coverage and highlights the ordeal of journalists worldwide (PCN, 2020).

The pandemic's impact on media was twofold. Journalists operated on the pandemic's frontlines, braving risks while reporting, akin to crises like SARS, MERS, and Ebola. Simultaneously, media organizations grappled with operational woes, including staff layoffs and necessary shifts in business practices due to financial hardships (OECD, 2020). According to IFJ's survey, more than two-thirds of journalists endured pay cuts, lost revenue, job losses, or worsening working conditions. Freelancers faced substantial revenue loss, and over half of all journalists experienced stress and anxiety (IFJ, 2020- 2021). The pandemic magnified the critical role of journalism as an essential agent in the 21st century's health crises.

The media's influence extends beyond reporting; it shapes public perceptions and societal attitudes towards events. How the media frame the pandemic significantly influences public responses to the virus and precautionary measures. This framing can either alleviate or exacerbate the crisis, making media's role pivotal in crisis management. A comparative framing analysis of news coverage offers insight into media's impact during the pandemic.

While the pandemic affected journalists universally, female journalists faced heightened adversity. A survey by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in 2020 revealed that more than half of women journalists experienced exacerbated gender inequalities due to COVID-19. The survey, conducted among over 500 women journalists across 52 countries, indicated that the pandemic disproportionately affected female journalists. This underscores the importance of addressing gender disparities

within journalism and society at large, particularly during times of crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored journalism's resilience and vital role in disseminating information during crises. Journalists faced dual challenges of personal safety while reporting and media organizations' operational difficulties. The media's framing of the pandemic significantly influenced public perceptions and responses.

Methods

The study designs an online form with a few questions covering three main areas of study – personal contribution, professional contribution and social contributions. The questions have been sent to as many journalists in Nepal as possible following a snowball technique and to the members of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ). The first 125 replies of the national journalists have been collected irrespective of the geographical areas of their works. The form contained both qualitative and quantitative types of questions. Further to this, it employed telephone and face – to – face interviews with the fourteen journalists comprising 2 (one male and one female) from each province of Nepal. Therefore, the study follows a mixed - methods approach, blending qualitative and quantitative elements to capture a holistic view of the research topic.

Qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by journalists. Concurrently, quantitative data aids in establishing broader trends and patterns within the larger journalistic landscape, enabling a comprehensive analysis. The transcribed interviews and content analysis results undergo thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to gender dynamics, challenges, and contributions in journalism during the pandemic. In-depth interviews are conducted with a diverse group of journalists, chosen to represent different media outlets, roles, and regions. These interviews delve into their experiences during the pandemic, challenges encountered, and opportunities seized.

Quantitative is performed to assess the contribution of journalists in the COVID related reporting. This analysis explores their demographic profiles, experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding gender dynamics in journalism during the pandemic. Comparative examinations of male and female journalists' roles and representation in media content are performed to identify disparities.

An ethical guideline strictly has been followed throughout the research process. Informed consent has been obtained from all participants, ensuring their confidentiality and privacy. The research adheres to the principles of anonymity, voluntary participation, and data protection.

Data Analysis

In this study, a diverse group of 125 respondents was carefully selected among the nearly one thousand active journalists operating in Nepal. These individuals represent a cross-section of the journalistic community, spanning all seven provinces of the country. They were interviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which journalists have upheld professionalism during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our key respondents encompass a wide range of age groups, employment in various media houses, including both local and national outlets, and possess different income and social statuses. This diversity within our respondent group allows us to present a holistic view of the strategies and efforts employed by Nepalese journalists in maintaining their professional standards amidst the backdrop of the pandemic.

Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

The Table 1 presented here offers a concise overview of essential demographic information pertaining to working journalists. It encompasses key factors such as age groups, marital status, and living arrangements within joint families, showcasing how individuals have effectively managed their family dynamics while sustaining their professional commitments. Notably, the data also highlights a noteworthy trend: married women who reside within joint family settings have exhibited a heightened level of dedication to their work during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic when compared to their counterparts from single-family backgrounds. This intriguing finding underscores the intricate relationship between familial support structures and professional resilience among journalists during the pandemic, shedding valuable light on the dynamics at play within this specific demographic. The number of years the journalists have contributed in the field of journalism may be another factor that they don't want to shift the professional field.

Table 1: Demographic Analysis of Respondents

Descriptions	Number
20-30 years	13
30-40 years	17
Married	19
Unmarried	12
Living in Single Family	14
Living in Joint Family	17
Work Experiences (above 10 years)	23
Work Experiences (below 10 years)	10

(Source: Survey, 2023)

Behavior of Media House

The Table 2 shows that a majority of journalists received favorable supports from the media houses which mean they have not received any benefits but just well-wishes. The respondents expressed that 50 of them have not received

any benefits but the media houses had understood their problems. In the Good status, there are 30 respondents which mean that they received the benefits in terms of monetary and other but that was occasion and very less in terms of covering their costs. While 20 respondents said that they received full-fledge supports from their media houses. They were benefitted for the supports in terms of insurance, accidents and monetary benefits.

Table 2: Behavior of media

S.N.	Behavior Media houses – Support System	Number
1.	Very Good	20
2.	Good	30
3.	Favorable	50
4.	Not Supportive	25

(Source: Survey, 2023)

Supports and Recognition

The Table 3 offers insight into the experiences of journalists during the pandemic. Notably, only half of the total respondents reported having received family support to fulfill their journalism responsibilities amid these challenging times. Alarming, a third of the respondents received no support from their families, exposing them to additional hardships in their professional pursuits. Among this group, one-third found solace in social support networks, which played a vital role in bolstering their dedication to the journalism profession. Moreover, the data highlights that 70 journalists did not receive any additional facilities, credits, or rewards from their workplaces or relevant authorities. In contrast, thirty journalists were fortunate enough to receive extra perks such as leave, the option to work from home, and assistance with health treatment costs. Additionally, twenty five journalists were granted writing or media fellowship opportunities to address pandemic-related issues. These findings underscore the varying degrees of support and recognition extended to journalists during the pandemic, shedding light on the challenges and incentives they encountered in the pursuit of their vital work.

Table 3: Supports and Recognitions

	Descriptions	Number
Supports	Received family supports	63
	Received partial supports	21
	No family supports	41
Recognition	Awarded for their works	30
	Fellowship or scholarship opportunities	25
	Work not recognized	70

(Source: Survey, 2023)

Professional Status

In assessing the multifaceted experiences of journalists in maintaining both their social and professional profiles during the pandemic, a comprehensive evaluation encompasses several dimensions. This includes an examination of the facilities, behavior, and cooperation

extended to them by their respective offices, society at large, concerned authorities, and colleagues within the profession. These critical factors serve as essential benchmarks to gauge the journalists' contributions amidst the unique challenges posed by the pandemic. To gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics, we turn our attention to the data presented in the tables below, which illuminate the diverse array of experiences and support systems encountered by journalists in their noble pursuit of disseminating information and engaging with their audiences during these extraordinary times.

Job Status

The data presented in Table 4 provides valuable insights into the financial challenges faced by journalists during the pandemic. Among the 125 total respondents, it is evident that a significant majority experienced a significant decrease in their income, often resulting from salary reductions imposed by their respective offices. The second most common response was "same as before," indicating that a substantial portion of the respondents managed to maintain their pre-pandemic income levels. Notably, there were equal numbers of respondents who were compelled to leave their jobs involuntarily and those who chose to depart voluntarily. This finding underscores the complex and varied economic consequences that journalists encountered during the pandemic, ranging from financial stability to unfortunate job losses, highlighting the resilience and adaptability required to navigate these challenging times within the profession.

Table 4: Job Status of Working Journalists during COVID 19 Pandemic

Job Status	Salary Reduced	Lost Job	Voluntarily left job	No Change
Numbers	48	33	33	11

(Source: Survey, 2023)

Journalist About Alternative to Recovering Low Income

This shows majority 57 of the respondents minimized their expenditures throughout the pandemic after their office cut off full payment for their work. Among all the 125 respondents, 46 percent minimized their expenses, 27 percent took loans to recover for some months and 27 percent took leave with no compensation and they joined other income-generating jobs (Table 5).

Table 5: Alternative ways to recover the crisis

Topics	Loan	No salary leaves	minimize expenditure
Numbers	34	34	57

Source: Survey, 2023

Gender Discrimination or Reward

The data within Table 6 reveals a positive trend in terms of recognition and appreciation for the efforts of the respondents who worked tirelessly during the pandemic. Notably, a majority of the respondents, totaling 52 percent

individuals, received admiration or rewards from their workplaces, concerned authorities, or society at large, a testament to the recognition of their dedication and hard work. In contrast, it is heartening to note that only 33 percent respondents reported facing discrimination as lady journalists, indicating a relatively low prevalence of gender-based bias in the field. However, the data also reflects that four percent respondents experienced instances of misbehavior from society, a reminder of the challenges that some journalists, regardless of gender, encounter in their interactions with the public. Furthermore, it is concerning that one respondent faced gender-based discrimination from concerned authorities while pursuing their news reporting duties, highlighting the need for continued efforts to address and eliminate such disparities within the profession. Overall, this data offers a mixed picture, showcasing both recognition for journalistic contributions and the ongoing challenges faced by journalists in their pursuit of truth and public service.

Table 6: Gender Discrimination

Topic	Number
Discrimination or Biases from Office	42
Discrimination or Biases from concerned authorities	5
Biased from Society	14
Reward from office, authority or society	64

(Source: Survey, 2023)

Learning From the News Reporting During Pandemic

The information presented in Table 7 underscores the transformative impact of news reporting during the pandemic on female journalists, revealing a multitude of valuable lessons and personal growth experiences. A significant majority of the respondents expressed that this challenging period had a profound effect on their self-confidence and sense of social responsibility, enabling them to tap into reservoirs of resilience they had not previously explored. Moreover, many reported an increase in their capacity for risk-taking, particularly when confronted with the demands of working in unconventional and high-pressure situations. On the financial front, the hardships of salary reductions, low pay, and the threat of job loss prompted eighteen percent respondents to recognize the importance of financial savings. Additionally, thirteen percent respondents highlighted the newfound appreciation for teamwork, as they navigated the myriad challenges posed by the pandemic through collaborative problem-solving and time-sharing among colleagues. Lastly, the data suggests that the pandemic instilled a sense of unease about the future of the journalism profession in some respondents, leading them to contemplate potential career changes. This multifaceted impact underscores the resilience and adaptability of female journalists and highlights the profound and lasting effects of their experiences during the pandemic on both a personal and professional level.

Table 7: Learning Opportunities to Journalists and lessons

Topics	Number
Risk taking capacity built	22
Self Confidencee built	25
Threat to the profession	8
Team work strength	17
Social responsibility increased	25
New Technology identification	8
Need of money saving	20

(Source: Survey, 2023)

Professional Challenges of the Journalists

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic presented an array of formidable challenges for the journalists surveyed in this study. An astounding half of the respondents found themselves personally battling the virus during these trying times. Despite their affliction, many reported receiving leave from their workplaces; however, it is worth noting that additional financial security was not extended to most of them by their offices.

A predominant motivation for these journalists was their commitment to amplifying the voices of marginalized and disadvantaged communities, striving to make them beneficiaries of targeted compensation and facilities. Nearly half of the respondents shared that their reporting efforts were dedicated to exposing wrongdoing and corruption, shedding light on critical issues that demanded attention. Equally significant was their role in providing informative reporting aimed at raising awareness about the risks associated with COVID-19, contributing to public health and safety.

The economic fallout of the pandemic weighed heavily on more than half of the respondents, with income reductions and salary deductions becoming the norm. In their pursuit of covering daily expenses, many journalists resorted to taking loans and adopting stringent cost-cutting measures. Despite the challenges, their contributions did not go unnoticed, as most of the respondents received recognition and rewards from concerned authorities for their tireless efforts.

However, it is disheartening to learn that nearly a quarter of the total respondents experienced discrimination in the course of performing their official responsibilities, highlighting the persistent hurdles faced by journalists in their pursuit of truth and accountability. On a more positive note, a few respondents seized additional income opportunities through fellowships and scholarships provided by donor organizations.

Journalism has long been recognized as a demanding profession, particularly when journalists become targets of threats, intimidation, physical violence, and, tragically,

even murder due to their reporting. For women in this field, the challenges often manifest in specific, gender-based forms, including sexual smears, acts of sexual violence, and threats against their families, as highlighted by Shiva Kumar I in 'Women and Journalism: Commitment and Challenges.'

Beyond the journalism sphere, Nepali society's male ownership of private property has contributed to a pervasive sense of insecurity among women, extending to every aspect of their lives, including their chosen professions. Many women live with the uncertainty of whether their husbands may one day reject their jobs and careers. Furthermore, within Nepali society, female journalists have shared that their husbands often grapple with insecurities about their wives' moral character due to the nature of their profession, which involves frequent interactions with a diverse range of people.

In addition to these societal pressures, the low-paying nature of journalism in Nepal compounds the challenges faced by women, who are often relegated to secondary status in Nepali society. Even if they earn more than their husbands, they are not exempt from the patriarchal perceptions and dominating behavior of their husbands' families. Moreover, Nepali society traditionally frowns upon females working into the evening or night, subjecting those who do to questioning their moral character.

In summation, this study offers a glimpse into the arduous journey undertaken by journalists during the pandemic, as they navigated personal health crises, economic uncertainties, and societal biases while tirelessly working to fulfill their roles as watchdogs and informers. Their resilience and dedication in the face of such challenges underscore the vital role played by journalists in shaping our understanding of the world during times of crisis.

Nevertheless, these journalists have earned respect, trust, and positive responses from concerned authorities as reliable news sources, highlighting their resilience and invaluable contributions in a profession that continues to grapple with gender-based and societal pressures.

Discussion

Government-imposed restrictions directly impacted journalism, with some media outlets instructing their employees to remain at home unless called in for emergencies, leading to the development of a 'work from home' system. Regarding whether the crisis strengthened or weakened the journalism profession, media professionals, including editors and journalists, generally viewed it as an opportunity for growth. Crisis situations prompted fresh perspectives and fostered innovation, particularly in the virtual media landscape. Despite initial doubts about the authenticity of online news, the crisis allowed publishers and media industries to establish themselves as credible

sources in the virtual domain, marking a lasting transformation.

In-depth discussions with editors from various media houses provided valuable insights into their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the journalism profession in Nepal. Editors emphasized the pivotal role they played in disseminating information and upholding the right to information when print media faced closures. Amid the pandemic's uncertainties and the absence of a definitive cure, editors remained hopeful, drawing inspiration from global health organizations and research institutions. They channeled this optimism through their media outlets, aiming to instill courage, motivation, and hope in their readers. Editors shared their situations stating that they removed some of the employees and cut off other's salary to support economic burdens of the institutions. The organization could not generate income to run and function. So they had no other option, as a founder or the owner of the organization, they provided first priority for the survival of the organization, intuition, only then they have thoughts for the employee. Regarding salary cuts and other benefits during the crisis, editors candidly acknowledged the tough decisions they had to make. Some employees were let go, and others saw reductions in their compensation packages to alleviate the economic burdens faced by media organizations. Editors, often serving as founders or owners of these organizations, expressed their commitment to ensuring the survival and continuity of their media outlets. They viewed this as a necessary step to safeguard the institution as a whole, with the well-being of individual employees being considered once the organization's stability was assured. Editors' perspectives underscored the challenging choices made to navigate the crisis, emphasizing the priority placed on the survival of media organizations, which they saw as vital conduits of information and support for the broader community.

Journalism is not merely a pursuit of personal gain but a solemn commitment requiring sincerity and social responsibility. Often referred to as the "Fourth Estate" and recognized as a watchdog over authorities, journalism serves as a robust monitoring mechanism in society. Consequently, the field demands dedicated, responsible, and honest individuals to serve as journalists (Personal Communication with editor, Kapil Kafle). A unanimous consensus among the stakeholders was that the professionalism of journalism faced unprecedented challenges during the crisis. The physical medium of journalism experienced a decline, primarily due to economic burdens and operational constraints. The media industry grappled with severe financial hardships, pushing it towards the brink. Simultaneously, the virtual medium emerged as a robust and active platform for news dissemination. Media outlets lacking a strong virtual

presence struggled to survive, underscoring the importance of a dual presence in both physical and virtual realms.

The crisis forced a reevaluation of journalism's dynamics, with journalists recognizing the need for new approaches and safety measures. They also became acutely aware of the vulnerabilities within society. When asked about their activity during the crisis, journalists noted that their responsiveness often mirrored that of society as a whole. As society became less active, so did the journalists, reflecting the interconnectedness between media and society.

Human rights activists, when asked about the frequency of human rights violations during crises, acknowledged a rise in violations during such times. Whether it was the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2015 earthquake, or insurgencies, the state often imposed unnecessary restrictions due to various interpretations of orders, disproportionately affecting the common populace. The pandemic, for instance, led to journalists facing salary delays and media house closures, which were intrinsically tied to human rights issues. Some journalists even found themselves under custody due to restrictions, further exacerbating human rights concerns. Moreover, human rights activists pointed out that individuals requiring special care, particularly gender-based violence victims, suffered significantly during the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic resulted in the exclusion of outside workers from households, leading to family members maintaining physical distancing, even when not directly affected by the virus. These circumstances highlighted the multifaceted impact of crises on human rights, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and inclusive responses.

Amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, women emerged as integral players in preserving the core values of journalism. Nitu Pandit, an esteemed journalist in Nepal and Immediate Past President of Sancharika Samuha Nepal, shared insights in an interview with this thesis writer. She revealed that women exhibited remarkable proactiveness in the post-COVID-19 era, attributing this to the professionalism and confidence they had cultivated during the pandemic. Sancharika Samuha Nepal conducted numerous discussions and studies during the pandemic, shedding light on the formidable challenges faced by women journalists. These challenges included grappling with patriarchy, misconceptions, increased workloads, salary reductions, excessive household chores, backbiting, underestimation, and job insecurity. Nevertheless, these dedicated women journalists persevered in fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

Ms. Pandit further opined that women journalists remained highly active during the pandemic, not solely for personal satisfaction but due to their unwavering commitment to their professional duties and societal welfare. Echoing this sentiment, Akhanda Bhandari, Editor-in-Chief of the renowned Annapurna Post Daily, noted that journalists, in

the face of adversity during the pandemic, came to realize that journalism's core value lies in its service to society rather than individual gain. He acknowledged the ample opportunities available for personal growth in journalism, particularly for women writers at national and global levels, through avenues like writing fellowships and research grants. To seize these opportunities, he emphasized the importance of a dedication to issue-based and content-driven writing.

Editor Bhandari observed that during the pandemic, the number of women journalists with bylines in his media house surpassed pre-pandemic levels. He commended the honesty and dedication displayed by female journalists, suggesting that the demand for women journalists has consequently surged.

Interestingly, the Press Council Nepal, the regulatory body overseeing media houses, media personnel, and journalists, reported no instances of media outlets run by women ceasing operations during the pandemic. In contrast, a number of male-run media houses closed during the COVID-19 pandemic due to severe financial crises, as highlighted by Deepak Khanal, an officer at the Press Council Nepal.

Conclusions

The Nepali media sector has experienced significant challenges as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown imposed by the government from March 24, 2020, to July 21, 2020, had a profound impact on newspapers, many of which were forced to suspend operations. Distribution of newspapers was hampered due to concerns about the virus transmission through paper, exacerbating the crisis. Printing presses were also non-operational during the lockdown, leading to further disruptions in the publication of newspapers.

In contrast to previous research findings, this study sheds light on the fact that journalism in Nepal is yet to be acknowledged as a secure occupation. Nonetheless, it underscores the existence of a considerable number of journalists who continue to pursue their profession without pause. Their motivation extends beyond mere financial gain; instead, it is driven by a deep-seated commitment to assume social responsibility as dedicated citizens working towards holistic development.

Regrettably, journalism still lacks the assurance of long-term job security. The COVID-19 pandemic further heightened vulnerabilities, resulting in the partial or complete closure of numerous media houses. A significant majority of respondents reported salary reductions, casting a spotlight on media organizations' apparent lack of commitment to their employees' well-being. The closure of newspapers and printing presses had a cascading effect on media workers, including journalists; media house

employees, distributors, stationers, wholesalers, and retailers. Revenue from advertisements and newspaper distribution plummeted to near zero, leaving many struggling to make ends meet. Even newspapers that continued to publish, like Gorkhapatra Daily, Annapurna Post, and Naya Patrika Daily, faced a drastic reduction in advertisement revenue. In the radio sector, which plays a crucial role in disseminating information, FM Stations saw a severe financial crisis. A study by the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) revealed a 75% decrease in regular income for radio stations, primarily due to reduced advertisement revenue and the inability to collect revenue during the lockdown. Broadcasters Association of Nepal (BAN) estimated that 80% of the revenue for radio stations was lost during this period. Television broadcasters, both satellite and terrestrial, were not spared either. They experienced a loss of one-third of their annual revenue during the pandemic, with monthly losses ranging from 10 million to 40 million rupees. Despite the revenue downturn, they continued to bear the regular expenses of production, distribution, and marketing. Moreover, the data also points to the prevalence of media houses operating without conducting adequate market research, addressing their social responsibilities, diversifying income sources, or creating savings to weather crises. This phenomenon suggests that some media outlets prioritize rapid popularity and personal interests without the implementation of robust monitoring mechanisms. Consequently, journalists found themselves increasingly vulnerable and uncertain about their job security, particularly during the pandemic.

However, in the face of these challenges, journalists exhibited remarkable resilience. The data reveals that despite experiencing heightened financial strain during the pandemic, they earned the trust and support of both society and their families. This newfound support bolstered their confidence, dedication, and sincerity in a profession they have diligently pursued for many years. Through their unwavering dedication and extensive commitment, journalists gained a profound understanding of the true worth of journalism as the "Fourth Estate." This newfound perspective brought about positive personal transformations, deepened their comprehension of their role, and imparted valuable lessons that continue to guide their contributions to the field in the future.

To support online media survival, government agencies should consider using online media for notices and information dissemination. Operators emphasized the need for recognition and understanding of online media's importance at the local level. While most newspapers resumed publication in mid-June 2020, weekly newspapers required dialogue with stakeholders when implementing the Working Journalists Act, given their reduced workdays.

References

- Antulov-Fantulin N, Biller-Andorno N, Böttcher L, Berezowski J, Burton-Jeangros C, Blanchet K, Clausin M, Escher G, Flahault A, Fukuda K and Helbing D. (2021) Building societal resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics: A synthesis of the literature and a governance framework for action. Preprint. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.28623.51360.
- Aryal I (2019) *Women in news room in Nepal*. CIJ Nepal.
- Bastola R (2021) Gendered Inequalities in the Domestic Sphere: A Study of Nepalese Women's Situation During COVID-19 Lockdown. Retrieved from https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/181142/bastola_rina.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y.
- ICT Bills (2015) *National Information and Communication Technology ICT Policy of Nepal – 2015*. Retrieved from https://ifex.org/images/nepal/2017/01/23/nepal_national_mass_communications_policy_freedom_forum.pdf.
- IFJ (2020) *COVID 19 Increased gender inequalities in media*. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/exposed-the-crisis-facing-journalism-in-the-face-of-covid-19.html>.
- IFJ (2021) *Truth in a time of contagion: South Asia Press Freedom Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/reports/detail/truth-in-a-time-of-contagion-south-asia-press-freedom-report-2020-21/category/publications>.
- Karadimitriou A, von Krogh T, Ruggiero C, Biancalana C, Bomba M & Lo WH (2022) Investigative journalism and the watchdog role of news media: Between acute challenges and exceptional counterbalances. In: Trappel J & Tomaz T (Eds.), *Success and failure in news media performance: Comparative analysis in the Media for Democracy Monitor 2021* (pp. 101–125). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855589-5>.
- Kiran K (2021) Interview: *Mero ichhya prabidhik sichhya*, Radio Magazine. Right4Children.
- LibertiesEU (17 September 2022) *DEMOCRACY & JUSTICE: What Is Watchdog Journalism: Definition, Examples, Effects On Democracy*. Retrieved of <https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/watchdog-journalism/43959>.
- National Mass Communication Policy - 2073 (2016) *National Mass Communication Policy – 2073*. Retrieved of : <https://www.fnjnepal.org/en/resource/34>.
- Nepali Times (2020) *Pandemic stress grips Nepali Journalist*. Retrieved from <https://www.nepalitimes.com/here-now/pandemic-stress-grips-nepals-journalists/>.
- NPI (2020) *Impact of COVID 19 in Journalism of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Nepal Press Institute.
- OECD (2020) *Coronavirus (COVID-19) SME policy responses*. Retrieved from: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=119_119680-di6h3qgi4x&title=Covid-19_SME_Policy_Responses.
- Onlinekhabar (17 September 2020) *History of epidemics in Nepal (Part I): 6 deadly diseases that killed hundreds*. Retrieved from: <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/history-of-epidemics-in-nepal-part-i-6-deadly-diseases-that-killed-hundreds.html>.
- PCN (2020) *National survey report on impact of COVID-19 on journalism in Nepal*. Press Council Nepal.
- Sancharika Samuha (2021) *Women journalist and COVID -19: research on professional status of women journalists in Nepal*. Sancharika Samuha.
- Siebert F, Peterson TB and Schramm W (1956) *Four theories of the press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do* (Vol. 10). University of Illinois Press.
- Sreedharan C, Thorsen E, Upreti L and Sharma S (2020) *Impact of COVID-19 on journalism in Nepal*. Nepal Press Institute.
- Tabai, BJ, Santos, TB and Coqueiro, JM (2022) When one cannot stop reporting: journalists' work process during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Saude Debate-Rio DeJaneiro*, V. 46, esp. 1, p-93-104. DOI: 10.1590/0103-11042022E106I.
- UNESCO (2020) *Journalism, Press Freedom and COVID 19*.