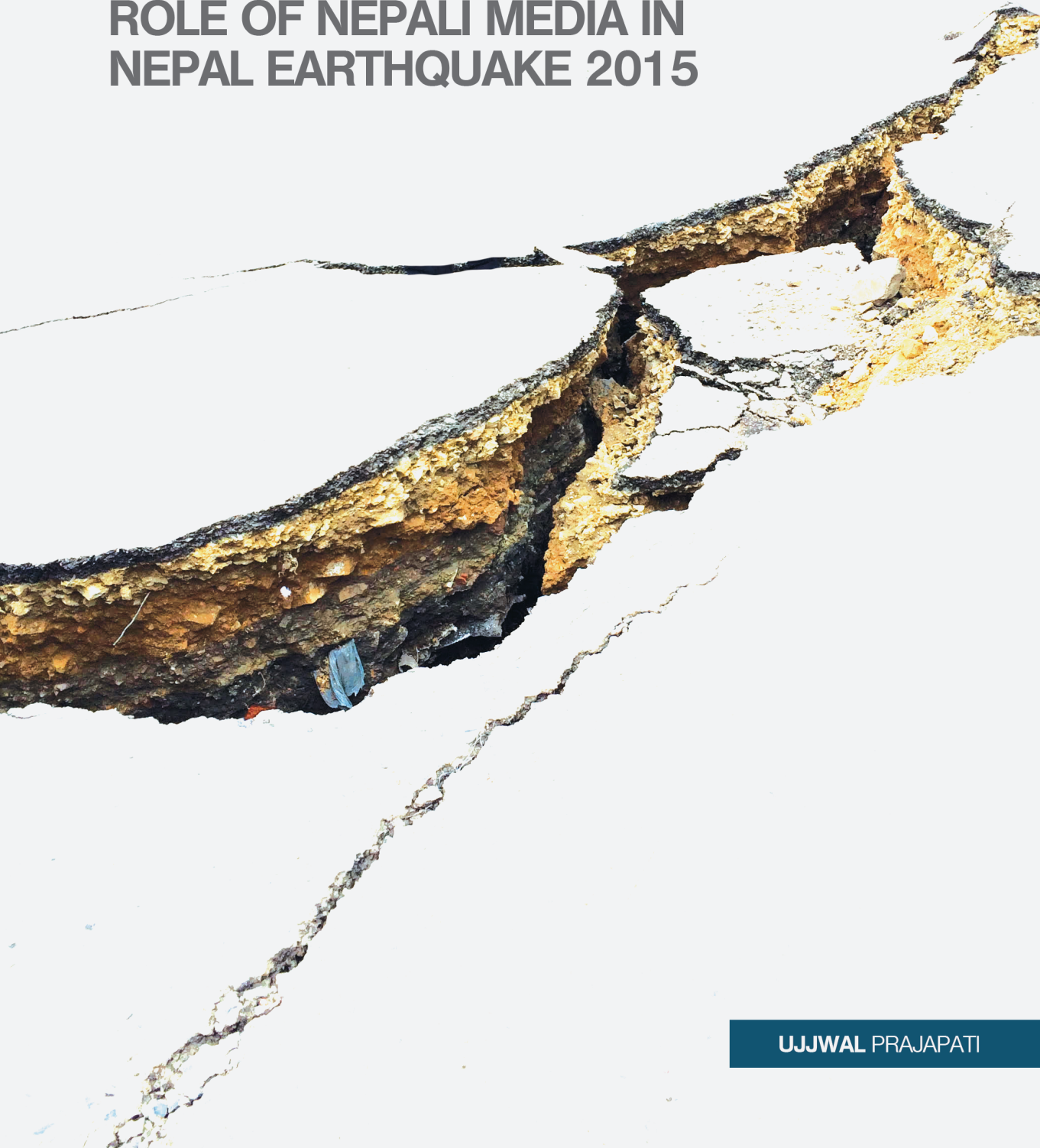


MEDIA IN DISASTER

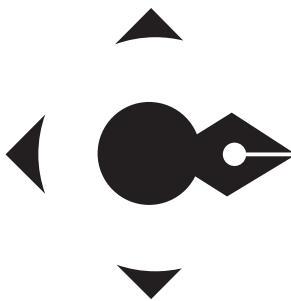
ROLE OF NEPALI MEDIA IN NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015



UJJWAL PRAJAPATI

Media in Disaster

Role of Nepali Media in Nepal Earthquake 2015



Center for Media Research - Nepal

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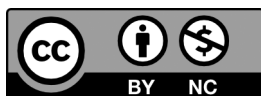
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Abbreviation and Acronyms

ACORAB	Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal
CDO	Chief District Officer
DDC	District Development Committee
FM	Frequency Modulation
FNJ	Federation of Nepali Journalists
GD	Gorkhapatra Daily
KD	Kantipur Daily
KTV	Kantipur Television
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOICT	Ministry of Information and Communication Technology
NST	Nepal Standard Time
NTV	Nepal Television
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
PSA	Public Service Announcements
VDC	Village Development Committee
DDC	District Development Committee
DDRC	District Disaster Relief Committee

FOREWORD

When a crisis hits an entire community or a nation, shared experiences and memories are to a large extent shaped by the media. *Media in Disaster: Role of Nepali Media in Nepal Earthquake 2015* is an assessment of media operation and performance in the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake 2015.

Assessing the role of media during the crisis situation is important to understand the level of preparedness among the media to deal with unanticipated challenges and to look into ways to improve media performance and preparedness in the future.

This study report is based on analysis of media content, interviews with media managers and journalists, and a public survey. The study was conducted between August to December 2015. The report writing was completed in February 2016.

It aims to analyze media operation and performance in the aftermath of the natural disaster with the overreaching goal of helping media, media development agencies, and other stakeholders to better equip themselves and the media to function in the best way possible in case of similar disasters. This report will also help the media to reexamine their performance.

The Center for Media Research - Nepal acknowledges the support of the survey respondents, all expert interviewees for their valuable insights, and media stakeholders for their valuable input in assessing the role of media in the aftermath of the earthquake.

We would like to thank the Alliance for Social Dialogue (ASD) and its team for providing the necessary support needed to conduct the assessment and complete the report. We would also like to thank Itisha Giri for her support in editing the document.

CMR-Nepal is indebted to Ujjwal Prajapati, the researcher who carried out the study. His hard work, diligence, and skills made this study possible.

We would also like to thank CMR-Nepal secretariat and members for their valuable support and inputs.

Center for Media Research- Nepal
25th April 2019

A photo journalist takes stock of the damaged heritage site of Basantapur Durbar Square on the first day of the Nepal-earthquake.

Photo Courtesy : Bikash Karki



Introduction

On April 25 2015, at 11:56 NST, a massive earthquake of 7.6 Richter scale struck Nepal. The earthquake's impact was felt in more than thirty districts of which fourteen were severely affected. The earthquake caused indiscriminate damage to private and public property and resulted in a large number of casualties. Nearly 9,000 people died, 22,000 were injured and over half a million houses were fully or partially damaged.

During times of disasters like the earthquake in Nepal, the media has a critical role to play. Not only is it responsible for disseminating reliable information to the public, it can also be an effective bridge between the citizens and the government. By using its reach and its resources media can leverage rescue and relief efforts while playing a crucial role in avoiding chaos and fear. In this context, assessing the role of Nepali media in the aftermath of the earthquake is important to understand its role and its contribution in disaster management. The analysis can reveal the maturity of the media landscape in terms of preparedness, skills and resources. The findings of the analysis could highlight the areas that require improvement in order for Nepal's media to be better prepared to deal with future calamities. The effects of the earthquake were felt by the operating media houses as well. While the state-owned Nepal Television continued its transmission, many of the privately-owned television stations experienced disruption to their services because of the damage caused to their infrastructure. They were able to resume transmission by setting up temporary newsrooms and studios in open spaces in Kathmandu. Likewise, while the state-owned Radio Nepal continued its transmission, most of the community and privately-owned radio stations that were affected by the earthquake took some time before they could resume their transmission. The FM stations outside of Kathmandu valley that suffered heavy losses were only able to resume services a few days after the earthquake while many remained closed for months. With respect to print media, most of the national newspapers continued their publication despite damages to their buildings, but distribution was affected due to lack of accessibility to remote areas. However, internet services remained largely functional making online media one of the main sources of information for the public.

This report has assessed the role of media in the aftermath of earthquake with the following objectives:

- To understand the state and performance of radio, print and television.
- To assess media's policy on content delivery.
- To understand the public perception of media and its performance.

It is evident that despite damages and constraints, the velocity of information produced by different media outlets was phenomenal, largely aided by the emergence and domination of new media. Public demand for information was high as people searched for information on whatever medium was accessible to them. The available mediums such as mobile phones, radio, television, internet services, newspapers, as well as word of mouth were the major ways in which information was accessed and shared. While the damage to infrastructure caused severe disruptions to traditional media outlets, new media channels were relatively unaffected.

The relationship between the audience and the media outlets was tested in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. In one instance, people in Chautara of Sindhupalchowk district wanted to burn the local FM station, as it was unable to provide its services when the people needed it the most. The people wanted more information about what was happening around their area, including information about the rescue and relief works. However, due to the damages resulting from the earthquake, the FM station had to halt its services. When the locals became aware of the situation, they helped the station staff retrieve equipment from the rubble and create a makeshift space to resume transmission.

The resumption of radio services meant that people could receive regular updates about the impact of the earthquake and the ongoing relief and rescue efforts. The radio stations were also able to draw attention to people who needed immediate support, and soon became the medium of connectivity for most of the people in the remote areas of Nepal in the absence of other types of media.

The study also reiterates the fact that media's role is essential to disaster management and looks at how it has been supported by state institutions to better execute its functions in the post-earthquake scenario.

However, there are problems that have been outlined by media operators and need to be addressed by the government through suitable policy level decisions. Taking these concerns into consideration, the study has made several recommendations which could be useful in supporting the media in dealing with similar crises in the future. The recommendations focus on the formulation of a media policy for disasters, clarity around the role of the government in supporting media, initiatives to better prepare media outlets and media personnel for dealing with future disasters, clear plans for media operations in the case of an emergency, incorporating new media in disaster management, role of stakeholders, and the nature of media content.

Research Methods

To meet the aforementioned objectives, the study has adopted the following methods: *interview, content analysis and survey*. The study has used both primary and secondary sources of information to analyse the state of media in the aftermath of earthquake.

Content Analysis:

Content analysis of television news reports and newspaper reports has been conducted to understand the type of content prioritized by media. The content analysis is based on two daily newspapers - Kantipur Daily (KD) and Gorkhapatra Daily (GD). The selection of the newspapers is purposive, where one represents the state-owned news media (GD) and the other represents the privately owned news media (KD). The content analysis of newspapers is limited to first page news reports, photographs, and editorial between 26 April and 10 May 2015. The analysis is limited to content related to the earthquake.

With respect to television news reports, content analysis of four news reports have been purposively chosen based on two national television stations - Kantipur Television and Nepal television.

In-depth Interviews :

In-depth interviews have been conducted with major stakeholders within media organizations such as FM radio station managers, television news chiefs, central and local representatives of the FNJ, media experts, and media campaigners. The field visit and interviews were conducted in the months of September to December 2015. The following respondents were selected for the interviews:

1. Radio Station Managers / News Chiefs (3 FM stations)
2. TV News Chiefs (2 News Chiefs from Nationals and 1 News Chief from local TV)
3. FNJ local representatives (1 FNJ Chairman and 4 FNJ representatives)
4. Media experts, campaigners and Journalists (3 media experts and 1 media campaigner and 3 Journalists)
5. Chief District Officers (2)

Interviews with editors from media houses have been focused on in-house content policy, the specificity of programmes targeted during the time of crisis, content delivery and impact on journalists, their working conditions and morale.

Survey :

Public opinion surveys were conducted among 100 respondents in seven districts to understand media performance and the choice of media during the time of crisis. A structured closed ended questionnaire was conducted with different groups of people such as teachers, students, political activists, and earthquake survivors living in temporary shelters.

Field Visits :

Out of the thirty-one districts affected by the earthquake, fourteen have been identified as being the worst affected. They are Gorkha, Dhading, Nuwakot, Sindhupalchowk, Kavrepalanchowk, Dolakha, Rasuwa, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Ramechhap, Sindhuli, Makwanpur, and Okhaldhunga. The report is based on field visits to seven of these districts, namely, Sindhupalchowk, Kavrepalanchowk, Nuwakot, Bhaktapur, Dhading, Lalitpur, and Kathmandu.

The earthquake caused major damage to Kantipur Publications building in Kathmandu. The building was later demolished.

Photo Courtesy : Prakash Chandra Timilsina



Media Operation

The coverage of the earthquake and its impact was indeed one of the biggest news stories that the Nepali media has covered in the country's recent history. The earthquake was at the centre of the news cycle for over three months. However, the continuation of the services was a challenging task as media houses themselves felt the brunt of the earthquake.

The total damages to the communication sector has been estimated to be around US \$36.1 million. With respect to media (television, radio and newspapers), the total damages as estimated by PDNA stands at US \$4.67 million.¹ At least seven television stations and nine newspapers have reported their losses to the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology. The Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) has reported damages to 59 FM stations.

“
I would say the earthquake is the biggest news story in the history of Nepalese journalism, with respect to the velocity of information and development of modern journalism. The gravity of work we performed...it was wonderful. I would say, remarkable.

*Rajendra Dev Acharya -
 New Chief NTV on the news coverage of the earthquake*

..... ”

Table 1. Damages to Media

Television	Value of Damages		
	Public	Private	Total US \$
Araniko	-	16,910.00	16,910.00
Space Time Network	-	130,000.00	130,000.00
Avenues	-	N/A	-
Image	-	N/A	-
Tarai TV	-	20850.00	20850.00
News 24	-	65,473.54	65,473.54
Himalaya	-	50,000.00	50,000.00
Bhakti Darshan	-	-	-
Mountain	-	-	-
Kantipur	-	500,000.00	500,000.00
Nepal Television (Public)	1,400,000.00	-	1,400,000.00
Sub total	1,400,000.00	783,233.54	2,183,233.54

1 PDNA Report 2015

Newspapers	Public	Public	Total US \$
Aviyan	-	6,020.00	6,020.00
Kantipur Publication	-	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
Kamana News	-	350,000.00	350,000.00
Himalaya	-	50,000.00	50,000.00
Rajtilak	-	5,600.00	5,600.00
Abhiyan Weekly	-	4,700.00	4,700.00
Arthik Bazar	-	6,800.00	6,800.00
Indreni	-	6,750.00	6,750.00
Gorkhapatra (Public)	-	-	500,000.00
Sub total		1,429,870.00	1,929,870.00
Radio Broadcasters	Public	Private	Total US \$
Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB)	-	288,065.00	288,065.00
Broadcast Association of Nepal (BAN)	-	58,700.00	58,700.00
Radio Nepal (Public)	215,000.00	-	215,000.00
Sub total	215,000.00	346,765.00	561,765.00

Source: Ministry of Information and Communication Technology

In addition to damages to the infrastructure of media houses, the operation of various media channels was further disrupted by the level of unpreparedness within media houses. The lack of back-up plans and an emergency service delivery mechanism affected media operation and dissemination of information to the people.

Unprepared Media

The major constraint to operating news media was the unpreparedness of media organizations. Most of the infrastructure was not earthquake-resilient leading to extensive damage to buildings, with some even collapsing. FM stations were forced to stop operations for days and some even for weeks and months. FM stations were seen operating from makeshift tents. Media Managers have clearly mentioned that they were unprepared for such a scale of disaster with no alternatives in place for emergency media operations. In many districts, power supply was disrupted for months and telephone and internet services were affected. However, the Media Managers shared a similar view when it came to journalists. They asserted that despite multiple challenges, their reporters



Journalists of Nagarik Daily working in the make shift tents in Kathmandu.

Photo Courtesy : Keshab Thoker

were on the field reporting live on the devastation of the earthquake in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.²

At the time of writing this report, Radio Sindhu and Sunkoshi FM of Sindhupalchowk district were still operating from tents, even after six months of the earthquake. Kantipur Television one of the largest private television stations, was

compelled to shift its operations to a temporary station on the street, citing possible risks attached to entering their work building and a building of its sister publication had to be demolished.³ The level of disaster preparedness in Nepal has been a concern for a while. A report published by USAID on the same topic in 2011 suggested that that key infrastructures in Kathmandu were vulnerable to disasters and attention was lacking in the area of risk reduction.⁴

The Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal (ACORAB) has enlisted 59 community FM stations as affected by the earthquake. Transmitters, towers, office spaces, power back-up systems, and radio operating equipments such as microphones, headphones, computers, and compressors suffered major damages.⁵

For television stations, the broadcast continued even during and after the earthquake because of automation technology. Nepal TV and Kantipur TV News Managers said that there were no obstructions to broadcasting. However, the News Manager of one of the local television stations, Araniko TV, that operates from Kavre district, said that they could only broadcast for one hour after the earthquake and resumed their regular service from the following morning. But another aftershock on that day caused them to

2 Ratna Shrestha, Yagya Dangal, Rajaram Sharma, Dil Bhusan Pathak and Rajendra Dev Acharya, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati, (Sindhupalchowk, September 18, 2015), (Sindhupalchowk, September 15, 2015), (Dhading, September 23, 2015), (Kathmandu, November 5, 2015) (Kathmandu, November 6, 2015).

3 Pathak, interview.

4 USAID Nepal 2011.

5 ACORAB 2015.

stop operation. They were able to resume service the following day. Equipments such as cameras, television sets, and lights in the studio were damaged by the earthquake.

With respect to NTV, they claimed that their transmission towers were badly affected in different parts of Nepal. The signals of the broadcast media were disrupted repeatedly during the continuous aftershocks.

With respect to newspapers, the FNJ district chapters mentioned that the publication of some newspapers stopped for weeks and some even for months.⁶ While the national dailies escaped a similar fate, their daily editions had limited number of pages.

Most of the local FM radio stations were left in no condition to broadcast their programs. Their buildings were either partially damaged or collapsed completely. In many of the severely affected areas people were living out in the open and in the absence of basic infrastructures and disruption to electricity and telephone services, radio was the only available medium. However, due to the damage caused to local FM stations, the only means of communication was the public-owned Radio Nepal, which continued its broadcast despite continued aftershocks. In many of the severely affected districts, FM Station Managers reached out to national and international agencies for support in order to resume transmission. As a result, some received transmitters, recorders, computers and other forms of technical support in the beginning, whereas some received support for constructing new buildings to house the FM stations.

The level of disruption caused by the earthquake to the various media outlets could have been reduced if the infrastructures were resilient to earthquakes. For an earthquake prone country, this seems like a pre-requisite especially for the media sector that has a critical role to play during times of emergencies. Moreover, if there were a back-up plan for emergencies that included a systematic response to expected risks of natural disasters, the level of disruption to media services could have been minimised. Media managers have admitted that they have learnt the need to have a strategy in place to provide uninterrupted media service during a disaster by building stronger infrastructure and mitigating risks for the future. But the unpreparedness of media organizations cannot be limited to just poor infrastructure, even the media personnel; especially journalists were lacking the required training for disaster reporting.

⁶ Narayan Sapkota, Prakash Adhikary and Navaraj Chatkuli, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati, (Kavre, September 26, 2015), (Nuwakot, September 24, 2015) and (Dhading, September 23, 2015).

Unprepared Human Resource

The responsibility of reporting on disasters and their impact lies with journalists. They are often the first on the ground as witnesses to such tragedies, however in the context of Nepal, they do not necessarily receive the necessary support required, considering the risks attached to disaster reporting. According to a report by the Dart Centre while public safety workers are offered debriefings and counseling after a trauma, journalists are merely assigned to another story.⁷

“
disseminating critical information to concerned authorities and the public remains more important, and taking risks is part of a journalist's profession
..... ”

The initial days of reporting on the disaster showed that the journalists were not prepared, especially in regards to safety measures necessary for them to carry on with their jobs. Journalists put themselves at risk and travelled around the devastated areas with very little organizational support. It is always necessary for both the media house and journalists to carefully plan for the field reporting with consideration for safety of the reporters in the field. These safety measures could include safety kits and emergency contacts.

In times of disaster, journalists can also find themselves in situations that puts them in a moral or ethical dilemma. The first journalist that reached the epicenter of earthquake, Sudeep Kaini, who filed the story on the fifth day after the earthquake revealed his personal dilemma in the reporters' diary published in Kantipur Daily. He was caught between the need to report on the situation in Barpak and go to his grandmother's, whose house was destroyed by the earthquake.⁸ According to Kaini, he left for Barpak to report on his motorbike with some noodles, biscuits, and medicines in his bag, despite learning that he had lost his grandmother. Such accounts of journalists in the time of disaster where they have to deal with personal loss while trying to meet the demands of their jobs with little organizational support poses a high risk of emotional stress and trauma.

Ganga BC, the District Coordinator at Kantipur Daily agreed that sending reporters to risk-prone zones is indeed a difficult decision for the media house, especially when the journalists do not have adequate training in disaster reporting. But, he also mentioned that disseminating critical information to concerned authorities and the public remains more important, and taking risks is part of a journalist's profession.

7 Dart Center 2003

8 Kaini 2015

Disaster reporting requires certain skills, but majority of Nepalese journalists lack such skills. Mahendra Bista, President of FNJ, clearly said that capacity building for journalists for reporting on disasters has been provided but special training for earthquake reporting prior to the earthquake was not offered.⁹ Bista emphasized that television journalists were at higher risk and he appreciated their fearless reporting from areas that were dangerous due to the earthquake and the aftershocks. However, they were still lacking in the type of interviewing skills required during a disaster. Some of the questioning conducted by the journalists on the ground with earthquake victims who had lost their loved ones and their homes was ethically unacceptable. Bista asserted that the tone and nature of questions lacked a certain level of sensitivity, which could be attributed to lack of training in disaster reporting.

Relatively affluent media houses such as Kantipur TV, also admitted that training on specialized form of disaster reporting had not been conducted by the organization but accepted that it was a necessity for the future.¹⁰ However, some media organizations argued that journalists were trained and had reported on the incident based on their knowledge and the situation. NTV's Rajendra Dev Acharya argued that journalists should always be ready to report on unexpected events, and the NTV journalists performed their task in the aftermath of the earthquake. "I would say the earthquake was the biggest news in the history of Nepalese journalism, with respect to the velocity of information flow and development of modern journalism. The gravity of work we performed was wonderful. I would say, remarkable."

This might also have to do with the long experience in broadcast news reporting. He argued that journalists at NTV have had the experience of reporting on the 1990 earthquake, and disaster reporting is common in Nepal but it is necessary to 'identify the gravity of news' or the scale of the devastation caused by the disaster.

FM stations such as Radio Sindhu also highlighted previous experiences of reporting on natural disasters such as landslides and floods each year. Station manager, Ratna Shrestha pointed out that journalists have received training on safety measures, and necessary protocol for disaster reporting.

Despite positive signs of the workforce receiving training on disaster reporting to a certain level, one cannot ignore the unpreparedness of media as indicated by the disruption to the services and the level of risks journalists were exposed to in the aftermath of the earthquake without any adequate training.

9 Mahendra Bista, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati, Kathmandu, November 4, 2015.

10 Pathak, interview.

Learning by Doing

The Nepal earthquake was a huge learning curve for journalists and media organizations in Nepal. Reporting and delivering news in the context devastation and trauma was in itself a learning experience. KTV news Chief Dil Bhusan Pathak said, "The major challenge was psychological. With the situation at hand, maintaining the physical and mental wellbeing of our staff was difficult. They had low will power and suffered from physical weakness. I bought some bananas and juice to the journalists so they could retain glucose and save energy. A shift system was maintained to ensure that all had a chance to rest."

Journalist Dhurba Dangal from Nagarik Daily of Sindhupalchowk said that reporting in the situation where there was no electricity, limited telephone and internet services was a challenge. "In

the beginning the news reports were sent to the news stations in Kathmandu with journalists who had arrived in Sindhupalchowk. We were unable to send pictures for several days."

“
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..... ”

Editor of Lok Priya Daily, Netra Bahadur Basnet, informed that the newspapers had to be printed in Kathmandu and sent to Sindhupalchowk for distribution as local press were in no condition to operate.

In a situation of chaos, when the district administration was largely cut off from the central administration, the role of radio was very crucial in Sindhupalchowk. Ratna Shrestha explains that the situation was very precarious. At least for a week or ten days, it felt like the administration was run by radio. He said, "It felt like the radio was everything."

“
At least for a week or ten days, it felt like the administration was run by radio. It felt like the radio was everything.
..... ”

In Sindhupalchowk, Kavrepalanchowk, Nuwakot and Dhading, some local media organizations came together and organized a common working area for themselves by pooling their resources. They set up collective workstations and shared the back-up electricity, internet services and the support extended by the government in order



Yagya Dangal, the station manager of Sunkoshi FM operates radio program in Sindhupalchowk on 18th September, 2015

Photo : Ujjwal Prajapati

to deliver news on behalf of their respective organizations. This was a great example of camaraderie during a time of crisis. The role of the local FNJ chapter was also crucial in this regard. But it was not the case with all the FM stations operating in the districts as revealed by Media Managers in Dhading and Sindhupalchowk. There were instances where some FM managers were unable to work together. Despite limited resources between themselves, the underlying competition between rival stations became an obstacle.

However, it is clear that to a large extent, media organizations took upon their social responsibility

of disseminating news and information to the general public in the aftermath of the earthquake despite multiple challenges. It was interesting to learn from the Media Managers that information and news were prioritized over commercial advertising for weeks after the earthquake. FM stations in Sindhupalchowk and Dhading ran public service announcements, free of charge in the beginning. Sacrificing revenues despite the heavy losses incurred because of the earthquake was a positive indication of the media's attitude towards its responsibility to the general public. Prakash Dangal, the Station Manager at Sunkoshi FM in Sindhupalchowk, said that they carried out PSAs that were broadcast via FM stations in Kathmandu. He recorded information on the safe demolition of houses and other safety measures. "We asked permission from the makers of PSAs and did not demand any revenue for the broadcast."

Even big media houses that operated from Kathmandu like Kantipur Publications and Gorkhapatra Daily replaced commercial advertising with PSAs for several weeks.

FM stations ran phone-in programmes where citizens themselves participated in providing information about the situation in different earthquake-affected areas. Public participation in delivery of information was widely practiced and utilized by the media houses. Information on the rescue and relief efforts was broadcast by FM stations. There were several instances whereby Media Managers from various FM stations mentioned the level of public engagement in reporting information via media outlets. Some people even thanked the media for making their voices heard as it led to them receiving relief and aid. Therefore, despite difficulties and some initial disruption, media outlets tried their best to resume their services and help the general public in the best way possible.

However, the experience of reporting on the earthquake opens up necessary areas for consideration. The level of preparedness required to deal with such scales of disaster has been a big learning experience, which can inform future strategy for dealing with similar situations. While the ability of media to operate can be attributed to preparation, the type of content produced by the media in the post-earthquake period has also been open to criticism.



A journalist operates a radio program from the make-shift tent in Radio Sindhu of Sindhupalchowk district on September 18, 2015.

Photo : Ujjwal Prajapati

Media Content

The level of unpreparedness of media was represented in the flow and type of content as well. Although news reporting was praised for presenting human angle stories and stories about humanitarian efforts, it was also condemned and criticized for presenting sensational views and for not following the ethical code for journalists. Ram Krishna Bhandari said that in the aftermath of the earthquake, news reporting in Nepal in most instances was defined by sensational news that could contribute to further chaos.

There were news stories that created fear, for example, interviews of astrologers who predicted the time of the next earthquake. Some of the field reporting also involved further victimization of the victims.¹¹

Media Managers had mixed views regarding the type of content that their organization chose to release. Some said that the type of content was determined by necessity whereas some pointed to their internal organizational policies that determined the type of news content that was prioritized. Some of the reporting was also criticized for following the same style of reporting on floods or landslides though the scale of the disaster caused by the earthquake was completely different and perhaps demanded a different approach. But, Ratna Shrestha explained, "We have been practicing such reporting from before. We have reported from small accidents to big problems such as the *Jure* landslide and even in the aftermath of the earthquake we did the same."

With respect to television broadcasting, the internal policy of NTV was to broadcast live, unedited, visual reports, but some editing was unavoidable as mentioned by Rajendra Dev Acharya. "We did not edit much. We followed the rules of grammar of broadcasting that did not allow for us to depict some visuals. Any visuals with bloodshed was censored but other than that nothing else was omitted."

Despite efforts to stop visuals depicting bloodshed and dead bodies, there were some instances of leakages while broadcasting unedited footages. "I am saddened that some visuals of amputated people, and dead bodies were leaked. We were not able to control it. We had no intention to show such visuals of devastation. As our system was not

“
The weakness of the journalists in the situation of disaster was displayed in the content...They were not prepared on how to present the content.
Mahendra Bista
FNJ President
..... ”

11 Bhandari 2015

functioning properly and we were operating from the streets, majority of the visuals were broadcast raw and unedited," said Dil Bhusan Pathak of KTV.

In regards to the reporting stance taken by the media while covering news related to the government and its institutions, the content was largely angled towards showing the ineffectiveness of the state. While trying to create pressure on the government, there were instances when reporting of the earthquake, both in national and international media was distorted. The media outlets were seen to be more focused on reporting stories that focused on the suffering of the victims. Cuny points out that, "confusion is often depicted as ineptitude, and cautious, deliberate planning is often viewed as foot-dragging incompetence or failure to react rapidly."¹² Elaborating on Cuny's point, it would be appropriate to question whether the media's reporting was one sided. By solely focusing on the victims and not on ongoing relief efforts, the media may have contributed to more confusion and could have led to a distorted view of the ground reality of the disaster.

The earthquake affected the government institutions as well and the immediate aftermath was marked by the evident confusion within the government agencies. This state of confusion was seen as a sign of ineptitude on the government's part. Dil Bhusan Pathak said, "Our clear-cut agenda was that the government should proactively work to rescue those who were trapped under rubble and debris. The state has to work to save the lives of the people in any way possible."

“
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..... ”

Pathak argued that the government did not respond well to the situation and it was the role of the media to show where the government's attention was needed. "I have limited resources; I have certain priorities, in the aftermath of earthquake. I have limitations, and I will show where the government has not reached, where there are victims. I have to show those things and make the government aware. As I have not been able to show the full scale of the disaster and I am trying to bring those events into the limelight to highlight the need of rescue efforts and that people are dying under the rubble. Should I be showing the adventures of the government? It is nonsense; none of the media outlets in the world does that."

12 Cuny 1983

The range of media content about the role of government mostly focused on the areas that the government had yet to reach after the earthquake as pointed out by Pathak. There was very little focus on what the state had been doing or what the state should be doing during a crisis. The media outlets selected for this research made the editorial decision to focus on the inefficacies of the government while putting a focus on the victims in need of immediate assistance from the government.

Tilak Pathak, the Op-Ed Editor of Kantipur Daily shared his experiences related to editorial discussions about how the government should be portrayed in Kantipur Daily, Nepal's largest selling daily. The editorial room in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake was of the opinion that the government's efforts should be criticized for lacking in preparation in the rescue and relief efforts demanded by the scale of the disaster. But the newspaper decided to take a softer stance, in the immediate aftermath, and take a more critical stance in observing the long-term state policy with respect to rescue, relief, and reconstruction efforts.¹³

“
the media content, in the name of being critical of the government, revealed the immaturity in the quality and flow of information. For instance, the reporters applauded the security personnels' efforts in rescue and relief but said the government was doing nothing. This is a blunder. I call this immature analysis on behalf of the media person
..... ”

The reporting was also tilted towards covering destruction. Senior Journalist Tirtha Koirala observed that the media mainly presented information on the level of destruction but did not focus on what had remained unaffected by the earthquake.¹⁴ “This sort of information resulted in creating a perception of chaos and fear among people outside Nepal - they felt that everything was destroyed, there was nothing left in Nepal, which shows the weakness of the flow of media content.” He was also of the opinion that the media content, in the name of being critical of the government, revealed the immaturity in the quality and flow of information. For instance, the reporters applauded the security personnels' efforts in rescue and relief but said the government was doing nothing. “This is a blunder. I call this immature analysis on behalf of the media person,” said Koirala.

The following section presents a content analysis of print media by delving into the agenda and frames used by the two print media selected for this purpose. The subsequent section analyses four broadcast news reports on how survivors were presented in broadcast news.

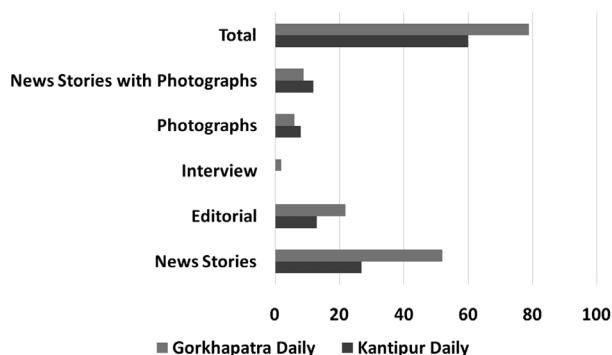
13 Tilak Pathak, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati, Op-ed editor Kantipur Daily, Kathmandu, September 12, 2015.

14 Tirtha Koirala, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati, Kathmandu, December 8, 2015.

Content Analysis

This section examines the framing of news stories and editorials by two newspapers, Kantipur Daily and Gorkhapatra Daily, and how they set the agenda in their post-earthquake coverage. The content analysis is limited to first page news and editorials published between 26 April and 10 May 2015. There were 139 news articles published in the two newspapers in that time duration, of which seventy-nine are news stories, twenty-four are editorials, one interview, fourteen photographs, and twenty-one news reports with photographs.

Figure 1. Types of News Materials Published



To analyse the news frames, Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) method of factor analysing 20 frame questions was used and a principle components factor analysis using five frame factors was applied.¹⁵ They are human-interest frame, conflict frame, attribution to responsibility, economic consequences, and morality frame.

Table 2. Framing of the Story and Editorial

News Story/ Editorial	Kantipur	Gorkhapatra	Total
Human Interest Frame	16	8	26
Conflict Frame	7	0	7
Attribution to Responsibility	16	25	41
Economic Consequences	4	3	7
Morality Frame	4	3	7
Others	17	37	54

(A multiple choice question)

Note: 'Others' refers to stories that do not fall under the frames picked for the analysis.

15 Semetko, H.A. & Valkenburg, P.M. 2000.

As shown in the table above, the framing of the first page news stories and editorials in both the newspapers fell under the *attribution to responsibility* frame. These news stories within this frame ranged from assessment of government's ability to carry out relief, rescue and reconstruction efforts to calling on the government to take urgent action. The news stories also looked at how the responsibility of these efforts were split across individuals, groups and the government.

The second frame mostly used by the newspapers was the human-interest frame. There are 26 news articles that refer to this frame. The *human-interest* frame includes variables that use stories with a human angle and use language that evokes emotions. The emphasis in all these stories was on the personal lives of the victims.

There are seven news articles each under the *conflict, economic consequences and morality* frame. The conflict frame uses variables involved in disagreements between groups, criticism of one party by another, and the presentation of two sides of an issue. The economic consequences frame uses variables that mention financial losses or gains, scale of cost/degree of expenses, and economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action. The morality frame, uses variables that look at whether the story contained a moral message, if it referred to religious tenets, and whether the story suggested social prescriptions on how to behave.

Table 3. Topic of News Stories and Editorials

News Story/ Editorial	Kantipur	Gorkhapatra	Total
Rescue and Relief effort	32	46	78
Rebuilding / Repair	6	7	13
Timeliness (Negative)	10	1	11
Timeliness (Positive)	2	2	4
Government's Promises	1	0	1
Economy	8	5	13
Human Concern	7	8	15
Crime	0	2	2
Others	10	9	19

(A multiple choice question)

The study also explored the agenda set by the newspapers. The newspapers focused on the rescue and relief efforts as the major focus in their reporting. This agenda was

used in seventy-eight news articles. However, the context also has to be taken into consideration as in the first week and second week; the events that unfolded in the aftermath of the earthquake were basically centered towards rescue and relief efforts. The editorial and news stories in the first page focused on this topic. The categorization of the remaining articles under the set agenda can be seen in the table above.

Table 4. Percentage of Each Framing and Attribute Agenda Setting Variables

	Frame Indices	Percentage
<i>Human Interest Frame Index</i>	Human example or “human face” on the issue	92%
	Adjectives or personal vignettes that generate emotions	81%
	Individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem	96%
	Personal or private lives of the actors	42%
	Visual information that generates emotions	54%
<i>Conflict Frame Index</i>	Disagreement between parties/individuals-groups-countries	100%
	Party-individual-group-country criticism of another	71%
	Two or more sides of the problem or issue	57%
	Reference to winners and losers	0%
<i>Attribution of Responsibility Frame Index</i>	Some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem	73%
	Some level of government is responsible for the issue/problem	41.5%
	Solution(s) to the problem/issue	63%
	An individual or group is responsible for the issue/problem	7%
	Problem requires urgent action	100%
<i>Economic Consequences Frame</i>	Financial losses or gains now or in the future	86%
	Cost/degree of expense involved	29%
	Economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action	71%
<i>Morality Frame Index</i>	Moral message	100%
	Reference to morality, god and other religious tenets	0%
	Specific social prescriptions about how to behave	87%

Frame Indices		Percentage
<i>Relief/ Rescue</i>	Example of relief/rescue efforts	63%
	Need for relief/rescue efforts	97%
	Relief/rescue attempts or failures	73%
	Rescue attempts going well, or highlighting a positive rescue story	14%
<i>Economy</i>	Loss of property	38.5%
	Insurance issues	0%
	Cost to rebuild	38.5%
	Any level of government financial support	85%
	Loss of jobs or unemployment caused by the earthquake	0%
	Loss of private business revenue (stores, shops, etc.)	0%
<i>Negative Timeliness</i>	Need for timely response	82%
	Lack of timeliness of government response	0%
	How slowly any type of reaction or response occurred	73%
<i>Rebuild/ Repair</i>	Plans to rebuild/repair	92%
	Present rebuilding/repairing	69%
	Some organization, group, or institution is making efforts to rebuild/repair	54%
	Citizens will permanently return to rebuild/repair	8%
	Nepal will/will not be able to rebuild	100%
<i>Human Concern</i>	Health issues	60%
	Dying or deceased victims	73%
	Missing or lost relatives/friends	20%
	Earthquake victims' struggles/losses	47%
	A positive personal outcome due to the earthquake	7%
<i>Government Promises</i>	Any level of government making promises	100%
	Absolute statements made by government or public officials	0%
	A positive and optimistic future	0%
	Broken promises	100%
<i>Positive Timeliness</i>	Timely response from any form of government occurred	50%
	Timeliness of government response was adequate	0%
	How quickly any type of reaction or response occurred	75%
<i>Crime</i>	Acts of violence/crime	100%
	Police/government efforts to resolve crime issues/problems	50%
	A need for police	50%

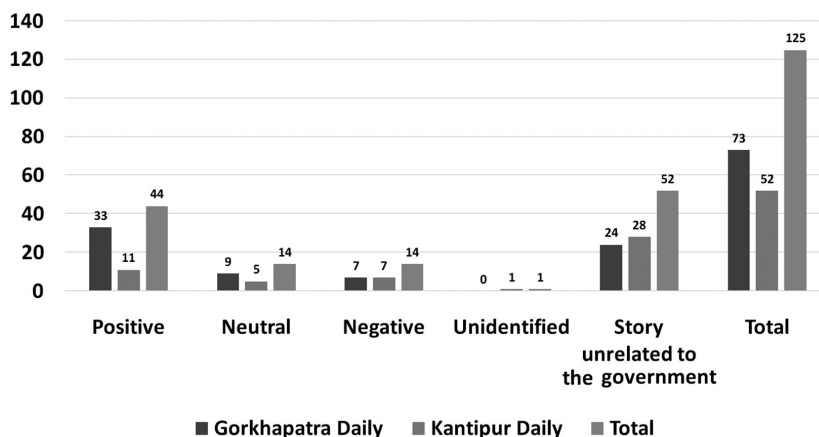
Media framing of the news in the first page and the editorial clearly indicates the need for the government to respond to the situation in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake. The content puts an emphasis on the government's role in the relief and rescue efforts. The content appeals for urgent action to address problems such as people living in open spaces without food and water. The content clearly indicates that the rescue and relief efforts are not going well, and are actually a failure.

Apart from informing about the government effort, the use of the human frame portrays the severity of the conditions of living for people in remote areas and even in the capital. The news articles have used personal stories that appeal to the readers and give them a sense of the gravity of the situation. Fewer articles in comparison were focused on economic losses but that may have been because it was hard to estimate the total cost of the damages within the short time frame. The news stories in the first page also did not cover other issues such as insurance issues, loss of jobs or losses to private businesses.

The use of the conflict frame is minimal. This frame has only been used after a week's time in the first page. This also indicates that the newspapers tried to use the first page as a way to inform the public, considering the gravity of the situation, rather than focusing on issues that may have been contentious.

The media content has also portrayed human concerns such as health, injuries and casualties and other losses caused by the earthquake. The stories on rebuilding have laid an emphasis on the need for a plan for the future, the need to rebuild and repair, and the need for support from businesses and organizations in rebuilding and repair.

Figure 2. Tone of Content towards Government

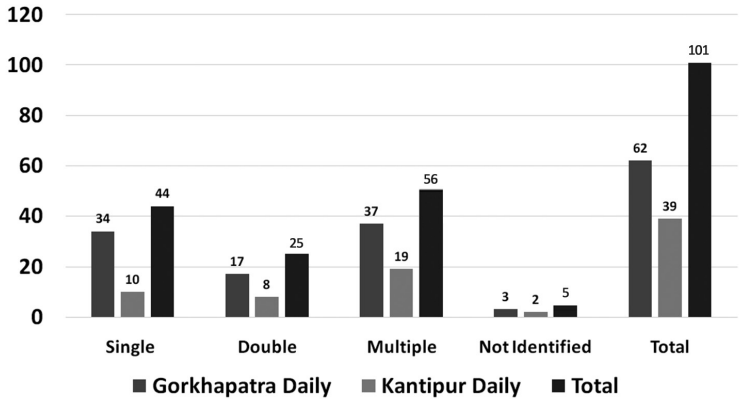


While assessing the tone of the news stories, it was interesting to observe that majority of the news articles that were published in the two daily newspapers tone were positive towards the government. There are forty-four news articles that use a positive tone towards the government. One of the reasons may be the internal editorial policy decision taken by Kantipur Publications to take a softer stance towards the government in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake whereas Gorkhaptra Daily is government-owned news media so the positive stance is expected.

Most of the news accounts were either field-based or reports about foreign aid pouring in, which were not directly related to the government.

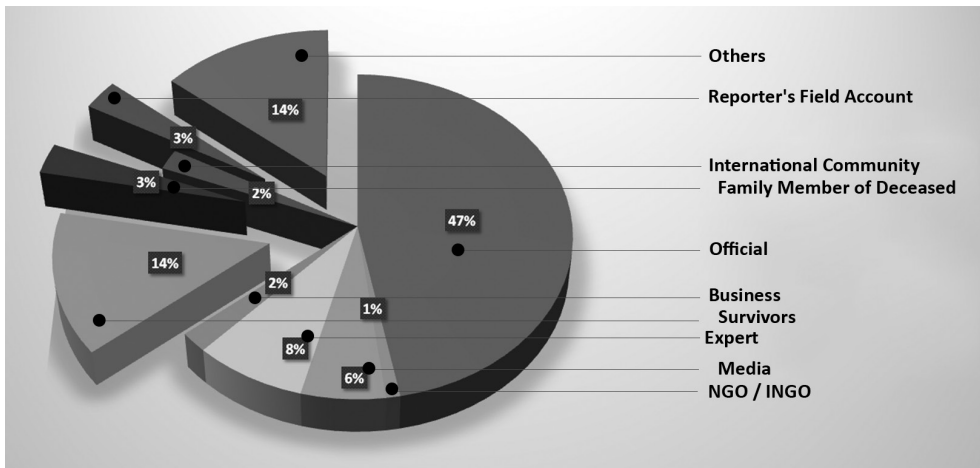
Use of News Sources

Figure 3. News Sources



The use of a single news source was comparatively higher than using multiple sources for the news stories. Gorkhapatra Daily mostly depended on a single source as compared to Kantipur Daily.

Figure 4. Types of News Sources



The use of official news sources was high during the time of the crisis. It is natural to use information released by the government on death tolls or exact details of rescue and relief efforts to avoid any possible confusion. The use of official sources has contributed to the news stories being framed within the attribution to responsibility frame. The second widely used source were the survivors themselves that also explains the prolific use of the human-interest frame.

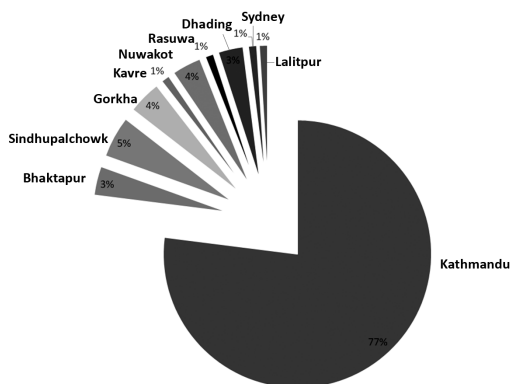
Table 5. Photographic Portrayal

Portrayals	Kantipur	Gorkhapatra	Total
Destruction of Historic Monuments	2	6	8
Destruction of Houses / Property	5	2	7
Rescue Efforts	4	1	5
Relief Distribution	1	0	1
Women and Children	2	0	2
Others	6	6	12

Note: 'Others' means: Graphics, photos of reconstruction, photos of political leaders travelling to earthquake-affected districts

As shown in the table above, majority of the photographic images showed the destruction of historic monuments, houses and property and rescue efforts. They showed the range of devastation that the earthquake had caused.

Figure 5. Dateline of News Report



81.5% of the news stories published in the front page were from the Kathmandu valley, i.e., Kathmandu (77%), Bhaktapur (3.5%) and Lalitpur (1%). The rest (18.5%) of the news reports were from outside of the Kathmandu valley. This shows the uneven distribution of news datelines that make up the first page news reports in the two daily newspapers. Only one news report related to an issue outside of Nepal.

The reason behind the news reporting being so heavily tilted to the Kathmandu valley could be due to the fact that both the media houses are based here and it is easier for reporters to cover events in the nearby area than from far away.

Table 6. Editorials with Similar Stance

Published Date	Kantipur Daily	Gorkhapatra Daily
April 26	Special Editorial 'People's participation for rescue and relief'	Special Editorial 'National grief'
April 27	'Need coordination in rescue and relief'	'No delay in rescue and relief effort'
April 28	'Fast pace rescue and relief'	'Keep calm and patient'
April 29	'Lend a helping hand in rescue and relief effort'	'Black marketers should be punished'
April 30	'Be Cautious of epidemic'	'Join hands against the crisis'
May 1	'Call Parliament for public participation'	Foreign Support in the time of crisis
May 3	'Stop politics in relief effort'	'This is not the time for politics'
May 4	'Show the existence of state'	'Beware of health problems'
May 5	'Focus on long term rehabilitation'	Lessons learnt from mega-earthquake
May 6	'Cracked high rise buildings a threat'	'Question of managing hospital'
May 7	'Foreign force should return'	(Not available)
May 8	'Aid should come from government funds'	'Time for rehabilitation and shelter'
May 10	'National government for crisis'	'Let's unite to stand up against crisis'

Note: The editorial titles have been translated from the Nepali language.

Editorials in both the newspapers have a similar stance on different subject matters and issues that were raised in the fifteen days period as summarized below:

Rescue and relief	Raises concerns about the government's relief and rescue efforts
	Suggests the government to coordinate between government agencies
	Suggests that rescue and relief activities are not adequate and should extend to rural areas
People's participation	Calls for people's participation in the time of crisis. Gorkhaptra writes that people have become spectators rather than engaging in rescue efforts.
Health and hospitals	Calls for proper management of hospitals
	Need to be cautious against epidemic and health hazards
Politics in relief	Both editorials appear on the same day and call for political parties to put their politics aside and focus on the relief and rescue efforts
Rehabilitation	Calls for rehabilitation
	Calls for long-term solutions rather than addressing the short-term challenges
	Focus on the need for shelters for the victims

However, there was also an instance of an editorial published in Kantipur Daily that was misinformed. The editorial published in Kantipur Daily on April 26, 2015 clearly stated that the government had declared a state of emergency for a period of month in the affected areas. But the decision of Council of Ministers clearly stated in its press release that the government had imposed a 'Declaration of Disaster Areas' as per the Natural Calamity (Relief) Act. 2039 B.S. (1982).¹⁶ It is even interesting to note that the same editorial also mentioned the Declaration of the Disaster Area, but did not differentiate it with the state of emergency that it claimed the government had announced.

¹⁶ Decision of Council of Minister. April 25, 2015

Table 7. Death Toll: Newspapers' Fact Check

Date	Kantipur Daily				Date	Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)		Date	Gorkhapatra Daily			
	Page	Death	Injured	Source		Death	Injured		Page	Death	Injured	Source
26th April	1	1382	4482	Police Headquarter	25th April	820	-	26th April	1	688*	-	MoHA
27th April	1	Over 2500	6000	-	26th April	2430	5936	27th April	1	2423	5926	MoHA
28th April	1	4264	6862	-	27th April	3862	7119	28th April	1	3733	7200	-
29th April	16	4769	8547	-	28th April	4680	9239	29th April	3	4731	9239	The Government
30th April	2	5310	7390	-	29th April	-	-	30th April	-	-	-	-
1st May	18	6166	13232	-	30th April	5844	13393	1st May	-	-	-	-
2nd May	-	-	-	-	1st May	6192	13861	2nd May	-	-	-	-
3rd May	14	7040	14100	-	2nd May	6968	14100	3rd May	-	-	-	-
4th May	1	7276	14267	-	3rd May	7366	14159	4th May	1	7250	14267	-

* Death toll only in Kathmandu valley

Note: MoHA report is based on the press release from its web portal, http://www.moha.gov.np/news/category/3/index?q=qstart_date=end_date=%20keywords=&per_page=20

As shown above, majority of the mentioned sources used in reporting on the death tolls were state institutions. During the nine days of reporting on death tolls and the injured, the numbers varied greatly between official sources and what was reported in the papers. Gorkhapatra, the state-owned media house mostly used the Ministry of Home Affairs as its primary source. But, Kantipur Daily does not refer to any sources. Some news reports published by Gorkhapatra have also not cited any sources. Such discrepancies in reporting on casualties and the injured is a concern, posing a serious question on the credibility of the newspapers.

Television News Reports



News room in the street.

Photo Courtesy : Sudheer Sharma

The following section analyses the general trend of television news reporting in the aftermath of the earthquake. By exploring the available television live reports posted online, the news reporting trends have been analysed. In the analysis four news reports of NTV and KTV have been used.

The news reports posted via YouTube, show live footage of people on the streets after the earthquake and the devastation caused by the

earthquake in different parts of Kathmandu valley. It was broadcast within thirty minutes of the earthquake. The field reporter reports on the chaotic situation in the immediate aftermath in the nearby area. The visuals presented in the reports were unedited and show the scale of destruction along with people being rescued.¹⁷

The television channels broadcast visuals that are considered to be ethically wrong, such as visuals of amputated bodies, blood, dead bodies and in some instances KTV even showed visuals of people being cremated. In some instances private TV channels were also involved in giving coverage to astrologers who were spreading rumours. The

17 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CF9x4niUHP8>

astrologers were involved in giving predictions regarding the next earthquake, creating a sense of fear among the general public.

Press Council Nepal in this regard had issued a statement for the press to abide by the professional code of ethics. It called for the press to be responsible and follow the code of ethics. It warned that, "Earthquake, its effect, and amputated bodies and sensationalist broadcasting, unscientific, and unproven news could affect the credibility of the fourth estate..."¹⁸

To serve the analysis, the available television news reports have been categorized under four types of reporting:

- Where did the event occur?
- What was the situation on the ground related to people and the rescue efforts?
- What was the situation in the hospitals?
- What were the types of obstructions caused by the earthquake?

The following analysis of the TV reports are based on news stories with different dynamics. Among the four news reports, two stories are based on rescue and relief efforts, one story on marginalized groups, and one on debris management.

Table 8. Analysis of Rescue and Relief Efforts

Media	KTV	NTV
Time	6 min, 34 sec	3 min 34 sec
Place	Ghumfang VDC, Sindhupalchowk	Sankhu, Kathmandu
Visuals	Portrays devastation of the area, people on the roads being rescued on helicopter	Portrays devastation of the area, people living in streets, army personnel searching for people under rubble
Sources	Nine sources - all local people	Five sources - four local people and one local authority
Frame	Human Angle	Responsibility
Victims/ Survivors	Shows pain and suffering	Shows suffering
Message	Calls for immediate relief efforts to the people in the area and rescue the injured	Rescue and relief effort is on progress, but as destruction is of massive scale, calls for more support, and people are still yet to receive relief materials

KTV's story has used a human angle whereby it relays personal stories regarding the impact of the earthquake on the lives of the victims shown on TV. It portrays how personal lives have been affected and tries to invoke an emotional response from its

18 Press Council Nepal 2015.

viewers. The story begins with a powerful image of a small girl crying aloud. One of the survivors explains that the little girl is in unbearable pain as she has lost her mother when the house collapsed on her. Moreover, the girl's leg is broken and she is yet to receive treatment. The reporter had reached the area on the eighth day after the earthquake and the girl's story was a reminder of the fact that relief and support had yet to reach that area. Of the 800 houses in that locale, over 90% had collapsed. Each story of the survivors used in the footage supports the claim of the story that the state had not reached the area even after eight days of the earthquake and how the victims were in need of immediate assistance. This story is a perfect example of how television used survivors' accounts to highlight the needs around rescue, relief, health facilities and plans for rebuilding.

However, there are some instances in this news report that shed a negative light on the journalist. The reporter is seen running towards an injured, old man who is being carried by the army personnel after being rescued from the rubble. The reporter presses the old man to answer his questions despite the evident fact that he is in a lot of pain. Even though the injured man is in no condition to speak, the reporter persists with questions about what happened to him and if had received any medical attention yet until someone in the background tells him that the old man is in a lot of pain. This type of insensitive persistence shows a lack of empathy especially when the reporter is seen smiling in the next shot as he walks away from the old man.

The news report broadcast by NTV, the state-owned television station, was shot three days after the earthquake and used the attribution of responsibility frame in its report. The report shows the journalist walking around Sankhu Bazaar describing the range of destruction in that place. The narrative also appeals to the government to take action and extend relief and rescue efforts to the area.

Table 9. Analysis on Marginalized Groups and Debris Management

Media	KTV	NTV
Duration of Report	3 min 07 sec	3 min 29 sec
Place	Kathmandu	Kathmandu
Visuals	Pregnant women/ hospitals, people in makeshift tents outside the hospital in fear of earthquake	Debris management by Nepal army and destruction of heritage sites
Sources	Six sources used- 4 pregnant women, one doctor and one health department official	One official source -Deputy Director of Department of City Development
Frame	Human Angle	Responsibility
Victims/ Survivors	Fear of living inside the house, problems related to caring for a new born baby and post-natal care	-
Message	Problems in caring for a new born, destruction of health institutions have hindered services, calls for government to address the problem	Government work in progress to manage the debris of the buildings

The news story of KTV focuses on the problems faced by pregnant women and delves into the destruction of hospitals and maternity wards. The story shows four new mothers who speak about the difficulties they have been facing in offering proper care to their newborn babies in the makeshift tents outside the hospital where they are living. The story uses the human angle by using personal accounts of women who have been directly affected by the earthquake's impact on the service delivery mechanisms of the health institutions. While it does not offer any solutions, it does call the state to take responsibility of the situation and solve the issue of healthcare facilities.

The story run by NTV focuses on the government's role in debris management in heritage sites. It uses an official source that elaborates on how the debris and rubble is being managed. However, the report fails to touch upon any policy-level decisions regarding debris management in the aftermath of the earthquake. These four news reports show how a state media and private news media have framed their broadcast news. While the human angle element seems primary for both stations, the private broadcaster has focused only on problems and concerns of the victims whereas the state-owned NTV focuses on what the government is doing while also appealing for quick action regarding aid and relief.

In a nutshell, the content across TV and print reflects various challenges the media outlets have to deal with. It is evident that media houses and journalists were not prepared to respond to a natural disaster as destructive as the recent earthquake. For a country which is vulnerable to calamities, such levels of unpreparedness should be a concern. However, with the limited resources available, the media was able to resume its services after initial disruption. Despite certain level of weakness in content delivery, the content of the front-page news story in the print media clearly outlines the frame of responsibility of the government to act upon the issues raised in the aftermath of the earthquake. They pressurize the government to respond in the wake of slow rescue and relief activities in remote areas. Apart from this, the human angle is another central frame used in majority of the news reports whereby personal narratives have been used to highlight suffering and portray the impact of the earthquake on individuals.

In regards to sources, majority of the news stories depended on a single source, which in most cases was a government institution. However, there was a clear discrepancy in the statistics reported on death tolls and number of injured.



People seek information about the damages on the second day of the Nepal-earthquake.

Photo Courtesy : Keshab Thoker

Need and Use of Media

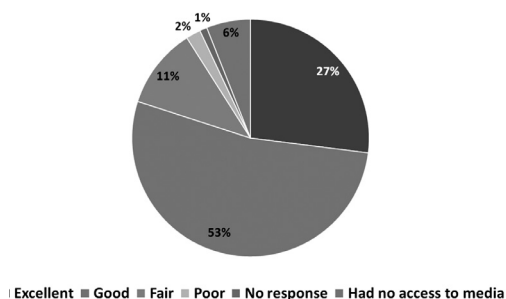
In the context of media reportage in the aftermath of the earthquake, it was evident that the flow of information was limited while demand was high. The damages to the infrastructure of media houses obstructed their services and in some instances the general public displayed their frustration at the media for its inability to resume its services and offer much needed news to the general public.

Ratna Shrestha shares his experience in Sindhupalchowk where the locals were frustrated with the inaction of the administration and wanted the media to urgently voice their concerns and demands. But, the local radio station could not resume its services due to the damage to their infrastructure. "This experience was very pressurising for us, as there was no media in the district during the time. The means of communication was totally disturbed and cut off. The administration did not know what to do," said Shrestha. However, later with the help of the locals, Radio Sindhu was able to operate from makeshift studios in open spaces.

The demand for information, and role of media to function as a mediator between the public and state agencies was vital. Public trust in media was such that they asked the media to send helicopters for rescue operations and in many such instances information shared by the public via local radio networks helped in directing relief and aid to the injured in remote areas.

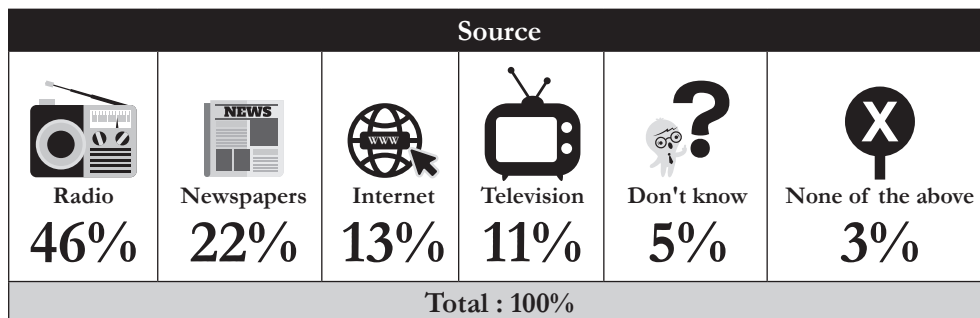
A survey conducted among 100 respondents in seven of the most earthquake-affected namely Sindhupalchowk, Kavrepalanchowk, Dhading, Nuwakot, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur, showed that people were highly dependent on the media for information and updates. According to the survey, 53% of the people said that the news reports on the earthquake were good whereas 27% said that the coverage was excellent. This also points out the fact that the public was largely satisfied with the media content during the time of crisis.

Figure 6. Public Perception of Quality of Media Content Related to the Earthquake



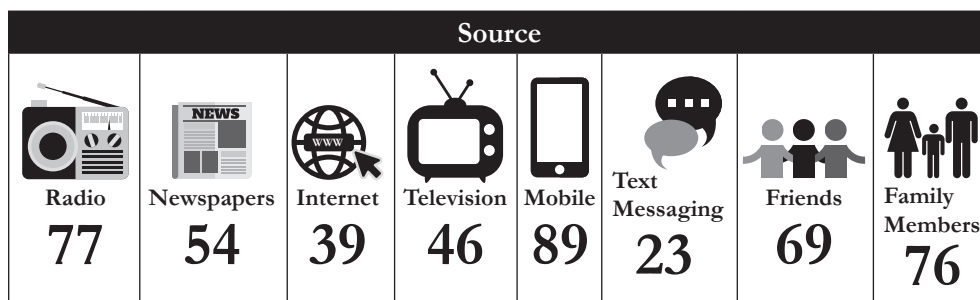
Survey Results

Infographics 1. Most Effective Medium for Information



According to the survey, 46% of the respondents felt that radio was the most effective medium for information during the crisis. However, those who had access relied on multiple mediums as sources of information.

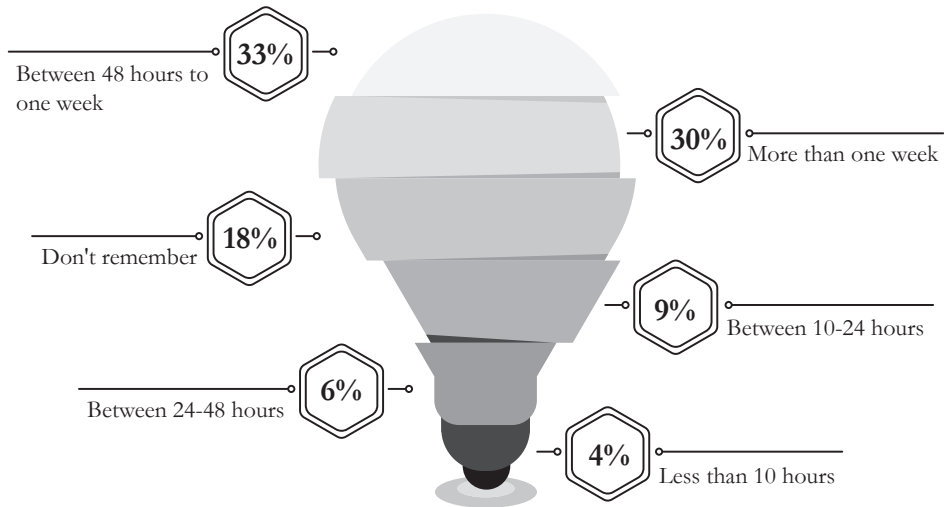
Infographics 2. Multiple Sources of Information



(A multiple choice question)

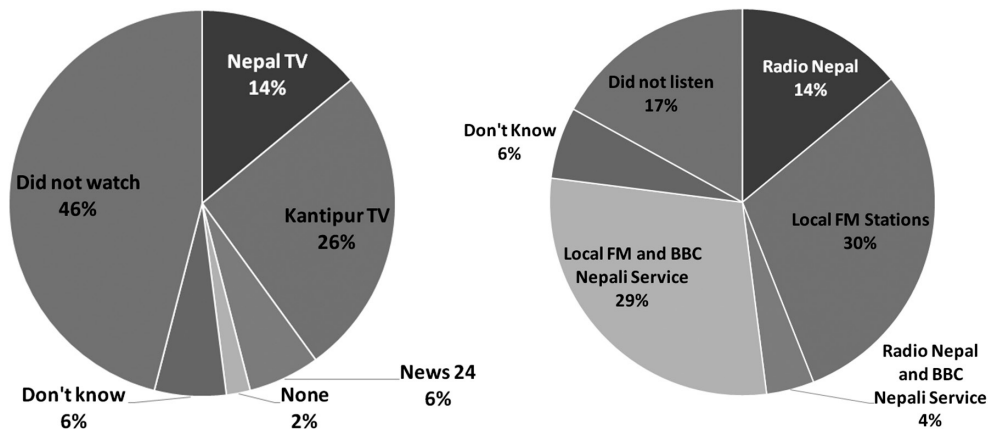
Among those surveyed, 89 of the respondents claimed that they used mobile phones to communicate with their family members and relatives who were also reliable sources of information. They listened to the radio as a matter of priority and even used the internet to obtain real time information through online news portals and social media sites. This points out that access to mobile and radio was high among people in the aftermath of the earthquake. One of the reason behind high use of mobile phones was because the mobile service provider like Nepal Telecom provided free unlimited calls, SMS and data facility to its users. Family and friends were also sources of information. However, the availability of multiple mediums was determined by factors such as power supply in the area.

Infographics 3. Power Supply



People were not able to watch television because of the lack of power supply in the area. 33% of people said that they did not have power supply from 48 hours to one week and 30% of the people said they had no electricity for more than one week. This obstruction to supply of power did not allow them to watch television even if they wanted to.

Figure 7. Most Informative Reporting on Earthquake by Television and Radio Channels

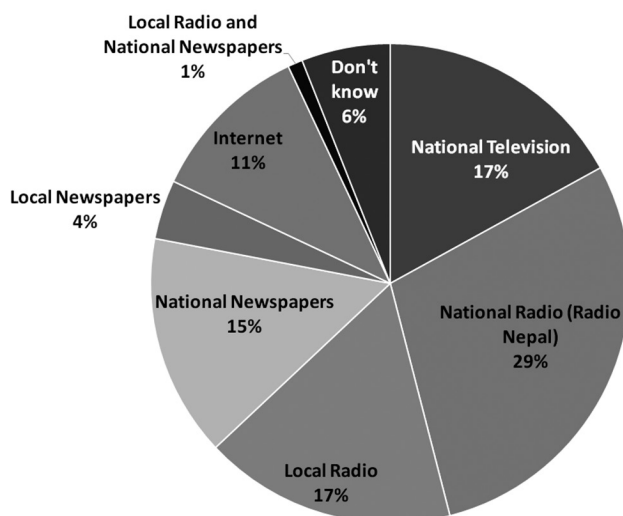


Of the 46% of respondents who watched television at least once, 26% found Kantipur Television most informative followed by 14% who favoured Nepal Television and 6% who favoured News 24.

In the case of radio, local FM stations were considered most informative. 69% of the participant said local FM radio stations' reporting was informative, followed by BBC Nepali service and then Radio Nepal.

However, it is necessary to consider the fact that local radios were not able to continue their broadcast in areas highly affected by the earthquake for at least three days to a week. Most of the FM stations that were interviewed during the course of the study said that they had very little content of their own in the beginning, but broadcast the content produced by the national radio (Radio Nepal) and other radio networks' programmes for nearly a month after the quake. Though people tuned on to local radio, most of the programmes that were aired were produced by Radio Nepal and radio networks.¹⁹





Figure 8. Most Favourable Media Type



Radio Nepal was considered to have provided the information of the best quality in the aftermath of the earthquake. 29% of the respondents rated Radio Nepal as their first preference, national television (17%), local radio (17%), national newspapers (15%), internet news portals (11%) and local newspapers (4%).

19 Shrestha, Dangal and Sharma, interview.

Table 10. Reasons and Use of Media within One Week's Time After the Earthquake

Reasons		Percent	Frequency of Use	Percent
	Television			
	To keep up with current issues and events	44	Most of the time	14
	Not to feel lonely	2	Sometimes	32
	Did not watch TV	54	Never	54
	Radio			
	To keep up with current issues and events	76	Most of the time	35
	To pass time	1	Sometimes	42
	Did not listen to radio	23	Never	23
	Internet			
	To keep up with current issues and events	49	Most of the time	16
	To pass time	1	Sometimes	34
	Did not use internet	50	Never	50
	Cell phone			
	To keep up with current issues and events	90	Most of the time	44
	Not to feel lonely	3	Sometimes	50
	To time pass	1	Never	6
	Did not use cell phone	6		

The major reason behind media consumption for the respondents was to keep up with current issues and events. Very few said they used media to avoid loneliness or to pass time. Cell phones were used by most of the people *most of the times*. This indicates the popularity of cell phones and its reach and access even during a crisis.

The audience survey report clearly indicates that radio is the most popular media in the times of crisis. The supply of information is mostly fulfilled by the local radio, though the national radio (Radio Nepal) emerged as the most preferred choice in the aftermath of the earthquake. However, more than 3/4th of the people used mobile sets for information, including listening to the radio. The survey also indicates that people use multiple mediums to obtain information, and new media is certainly gaining popularity as a medium.

Online News Portals

New media has emerged as a major source of information for the people after the disaster. The data provided by two online news media portals, *ekantipur.com* and *pahilopost.com*, reveals the fact that online visitors to their news portals have grown both globally and particularly in Nepal.

Table 11. Online visitors before and after Nepal Earthquake

Online portal	25 th March- 24 th April		25 th April- 24 th May		Increase percent
	Total	Average per day	Total	Average per day	
Ekantipur.com	2,507,153	80,875	4,431,157	147,705	77%
Pahilopost.com	634,986	20,483	1,176,162	39,205	85%

Source: *Ekantipur.com* & *Pahilopost.com* - information based on Google analytics.

Overall online visitors to both the portals have increased by 77% and 85% for *e-kantipur* and *pahilopost* respectively during the two-months time frame (25th March- 24th April to 25th April- 24th May)

According to the information provided by another online media, *setopati.com*, their unique visitors have increased from 17.3 million to over 30 million after the earthquake.

The data clearly indicates that online news media visitors have increased exponentially in the aftermath of the earthquake, as the demand for information was high worldwide and new media was an instant source of information. Even in the context of Nepal, in severely hit districts, internet was one of the major sources of information, for regular updates in the aftermath of the earthquake, especially when access to traditional news media was difficult.

Table 12. Online Visitors in Nepal Before and After the Nepal Earthquake

Online Portal	25 th March- 24 th April		25 th April- 24 th May		Percentage Increase
	Nepal Users %	Numbers	Nepal Users %	Numbers	
Ekantipur.com	32.67	819,086	30.87	1,367,898	67
Pahilopost.com	32.02	143,206	33.8	281,625	97

Source: *Ekantipur.com* & *Pahilopost.com* - information based on Google analytics.

As shown in the table above, after the earthquake the online visitors to *e-kantipur* from within Nepal increased by 67%. In the case of *pahilopost.com*, visitors to this online news site increased by 97%.



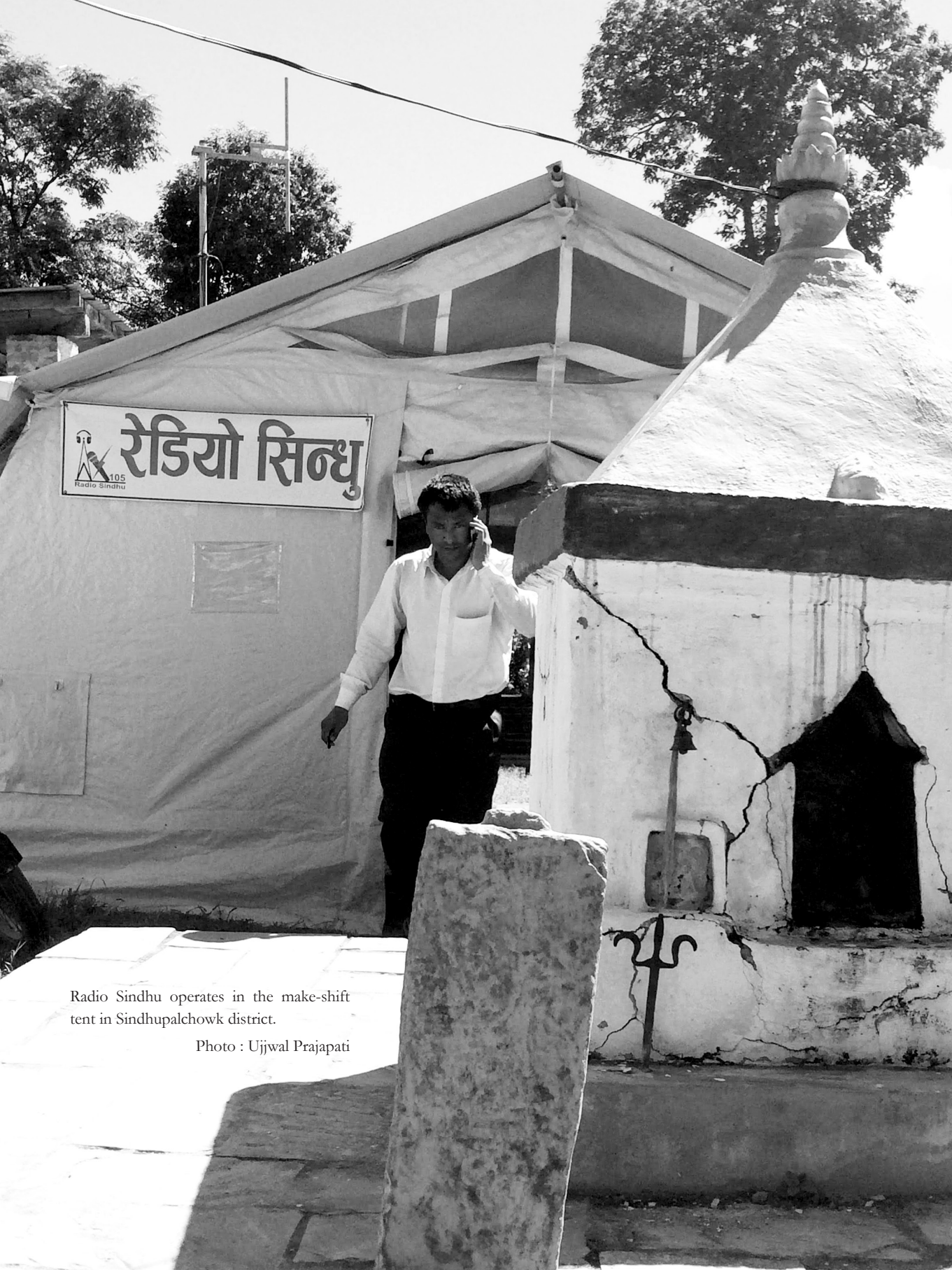
Journalists of ekantipur set their online desk in the street.

Photo Courtesy :
Sudheer Sharma

The exponential growth of online news visitors clearly indicates that people searched for information online for major updates after the earthquake. The surge in number of visitors to online news portals is a huge advantage and opportunity for the medium as it proves its utility in times of crises. Online media expert Krishna Prasad Acharya emphasized that it is high time for policy makers to think about incorporating online media in disaster reduction strategies and it is the best time for online media to prove its credibility.

According to Acharya, online media could play a useful role in providing factual information and exercise restraint when it comes to news events that could trigger mass anxiety. It could encourage people to extend their support towards the relief and rehabilitation work and provide information that would prove useful in coping with the impact of the disaster. He pointed out that it is a good time for online media portals to establish themselves as a credible media while taking on a responsible stance towards post-disaster recovery.²⁰

20 Ujjwal Acharya, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati, December 28, 2015.



Radio Sindhu operates in the make-shift tent in Sindhupalchowk district.

Photo : Ujjwal Prajapati

Media Support in Disaster: Government and Stakeholders

Whenever a disaster strikes a nation, the state's response is vital and crucial. The state is responsible for helping victims of the disaster indiscriminately and offering them all of the support allowed by the resources at the disposal of the state. In a similar manner, due to the crucial role that the media plays in times of disaster, it has been argued that if the media also suffers from the impacts of the disaster, the state should extend its support so that the media can resume its services to the general public as soon as possible. The concerns regarding the state's support towards the media have been raised by media houses and journalists' organization such as FNJ. The state's priority should be to formulate appropriate policies for disaster management and as argued by media organizations, the state should also consider offering support to the media outlets.

A recent study shows that there is a policy gap that fails to address the inclusion of media in disaster risk strategies. "In spite of the frequency of disasters, the media in Nepal has limited focus on a disaster management that can contribute to risk reduction by using multiple mediums and improving operations. The lack of attention on policy level to incorporate media in a national-level disaster strategy has also contributed to that..."²¹

The challenge is to include the diverse media outlets within the disaster management framework. The state would have to address issues related to media's role such as information dissemination and economic support to the media in the light of the experiences from the recent earthquake. As mentioned above, the earthquake affected many local radio stations that were unable to broadcast after the earthquake due to the damages to their infrastructure. The role of the media during a crisis is vital; however, state policy is silent towards how local media such as FM stations could be used in crisis management. The PDNA document reveals the total damages borne by the media houses, but its recovery and rehabilitation plan only includes state-owned media. Moreover, the document is silent towards other private and community media organization.

Despite the services offered by private media outlets in the aftermath of the earthquake, the state has not shown any indication of offering support towards their rehabilitation. This has led to the community broadcasters demanding to be included in the national policy of post-disaster reconstruction. Ratna Shrestha pointed out that people rely on

21 Poudel et.al. 2015.

community radio stations for information in the times of crisis and the state should offer support to ensure they can carry on offering their services.

“.....
there is a need for a clear policy on the rebuilding of the private media organizations, specially defined by media type
.....”

Some district-level media organizations affected by the earthquake have suggested that a way for the government to support them would be by exempting them from any tax and royalties. Some have asked the state for land so they can establish radio stations whereas some have asked the government to increase Public Welfare Advertising to affected radio stations.

Media experts are of the opinion that there is a need for a clear policy on the rebuilding of the private media organizations, specially defined by media type. While they are against monetary support to private media houses, they are in favour of other forms of support that can be extended based on the type of media.²²

Despite problems at the policy level, there were some instances of disagreements between local media personnel and administration in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, though relationships between media and administration have improved a lot. Rajaram Sharma of Dhading FM was involved in a conflict with the local administration, as the administration wanted to start a new FM station because Dhading FM's transmission could not be accessed in one of the remote areas of *Rellapa*. “I asked the DDRC whether it was more important to find out why the radio could not be accessed in that area instead of opening a new one. The decision was later withdrawn by the DDRC.” According to Sharma, since their transmitter with 500 Watt capacity had been destroyed by the earthquake they were forced to use the 30-Watt transmitter and resumed their services on the third day after the earthquake. Lower transmission meant that some areas could not access their services. Sharma asserted that the local administration should have helped them by offering them support to get a new transmitter as opposed to initiating a new FM station. The Chief District Officer of Dhading district, Basudev Ghimire shared his experience of working with the media in a "constructive way", whereby the information was not "distorted." Ghimire said that in the chaotic circumstances after the earthquake, the only support he could extend to the local radio stations was offer them tents so they could resume their services from outside. He would have wanted to do more as he felt that information dissemination in an emergency situation at the local level was crucial.

22 Tirtha Koirala and Binod Bhattarai, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati, (Kathmandu, December 8, 2015) and (December 13, 2015).

The local government agencies have played a supportive role in helping radio stations operate after the earthquake. In Sindhupalchowk, radio operators were given fuel for generators to operate the radio station, whereas in Dhading, the DDC supported the local station by helping them build a temporary studio, for which the radio ran PSAs in return.

The government has pledged to waive the annual renewal charges for the local FM stations in the coming fiscal year as announced in the yearly budget of 2015-16. The government has also offered a 50% concession on royalties as a way to show its appreciation to the media outlets for their work after the earthquake. ²³

In regards to newspapers, the district FNJ chapters have said that the Press Council Nepal has pledged to reconsider the newspapers of the disaster-affected regions during the classification process to allow them a chance to receive public welfare advertising.

Moreover, at the national and local level, the security forces airlifted journalists to affected areas for reporting. Most of the stories that were published and broadcast in the media from different parts of the affected areas would not have been possible without the support of the security forces. In most instances, the journalists were accompanied by security forces to remote areas affected by the earthquake so they could report on the situation on the ground.

“.....
the army airlifted 760 national and international media persons to different affected areas within a month from Kathmandu valley
.....”

According to the Spokesperson of Nepal Army and Chief of Directorate of Public Relation (DPR) Tara Bahadur Karki, the army airlifted 760 national and international media persons to different affected areas within a month from Kathmandu valley. Karki even informed that the Nepal Army had also taken journalists via road and from the western front they had airlifted more than 100 journalists to reach out to the affected regions in the Western part of Nepal.²⁴

While the support extended to media by various state institutions is laudable, the state level policy on media's role in disaster management is still weak. Special attention on addressing the concerns of media and use of media in disaster needs to be addressed at the policy level. It is the responsibility of the state to adopt specific disaster risk reduction communication policies, support early warning systems, stimulate a culture

23 Nepal Budget 2015

24 Tara Bahadur Karki, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati on telephone, Kathmandu, December 2, 2015.

of prevention and strong community involvement, and the media can play a crucial role in all of these areas.

Future challenges at the policy-level have been observed with respect to establishing emergency radio services in the times of disasters. Radio campaigners have observed the necessity of establishing emergency media services to run portable radio service during the times of crisis. Raghu Mainali, radio promoter and activist explained the problems in establishing such services in Nepal. “There are no provisions to provide licenses to establish portable radio transmitting services. We have discussed about such possibilities with the ministry, when we learnt about such technology. It is necessary to talk about them again.”²⁵

It is undeniable that local radio stations did a great job after the earthquake despite the damages caused to their infrastructure. A group of twenty-one national and international organizations working in radio formed a Radio Concern Group. This group conducted assessment of impact of the earthquake in different areas and coordinated support to severely affected community radio stations. The affected radio stations were offered equipment like sound mixture, antenna, computers, and recorders, which allowed them to resume their critical service.

Radio Sindhu and Radio Dhading received support from the Japanese company BHM for reconstruction of their stations. Various stakeholders have continued their support to radio in the post-earthquake scenario. Mainali pointed out that they are trying to establish model radio stations in different parts of the country with strong infrastructure and manage portable equipments that could be rushed during emergencies.

Similarly, FNJ has also played a crucial role in supporting the journalists in the post earthquake scenario. According to a report presented in the sixth full meeting of FNJ Central Committee, Rs. 926,000 was given as support to FNJ district chapters and journalists affected by earthquake. FNJ has provided monetary support to the journalists who suffered injuries or lost members of their family.

The government machineries and stakeholders have played a crucial role in the times of disaster to support the flow of information to the public when they needed it the most. But, it is necessary to adopt a long-term strategy to address media concerns at the policy-level to adopt specific disaster risk reduction communication policies. Both the media stakeholders and government agencies should coordinate in developing policies that are suited for future disaster management purpose.

25 Raghu Mainali, interview by Ujjwal Prajapati, Kathmandu, December 17, 2015.

A journalist takes pictures of the ravaged village of Barpak, the epicenter of 2015 Nepal-earthquake.

Photo Courtesy : Prakash Chandra Timilsina



Conclusion and Recommendations

Assessing media performance in the aftermath of the earthquake, it becomes evident that media outlets have several challenges to deal with. The lack of an emergency plan meant that the media outlets could not respond quickly enough to the damage caused to their infrastructure. The disruption to media services during disasters can be very harmful as the public relies on media for information and news. Moreover, some instances of reporting show that journalists in Nepal do not have adequate training for disaster reportage but the commitment of the journalists is commendable as they tirelessly reported on the impact of the earthquake. However, another issue of concern was the safety and security provisions for the journalists. Despite the continued aftershocks, journalists were reporting about rescue efforts, sometimes with just a helmet on as protective measure. They were even seen entering houses and narrow alleys, despite the risks involved. Some journalists even continued reporting despite losing family members because of the earthquake.

The reported infrastructure damage to media houses is estimated to be around \$ 4.67 million but despite the large-scale damage, the media outlets bounced back to the best of their abilities and were able to resume their services. Local FM stations attempted to resume their services within a week. National and local newspapers were printed, though they were limited in terms of the number of pages. Most of the local newspapers could not go to print and some remained closed for months. Within this context, determining the public's access to media in the first week of the disaster is difficult due to power cuts and blocked roads. The audience survey reveals that at least 30% of the respondents did not have power supply for more than a week and 33% did not have power supply for two days to a week.

These findings pose a serious question regarding the management of communication systems in the times of severe disasters. Despite a high demand for information, the public remained cut off from different mediums. Telecommunication services were made free by Nepal Telecom and N-cell service providers, but in many of the affected areas their services could not be delivered because of the damages to the transmission towers. The need for an emergency media operating system is thus necessary to be better prepared for similar situations in the future.

The content analysis has provided an insight into media's role during a natural disaster and the way they have framed and presented the news. It is necessary to understand media's use of framing, and tone in their delivery of disaster reportage because such tools shape the type of news consumed by the public. As shown by the frame

analysis, the print media heavily framed its news reporting to push the government to take responsibility and take urgent steps towards the relief and rescue efforts. The news frame appeals for an urgent response to aid the earthquake victims. Apart from this, another central frame of the news reports was the human angle, which used the survivors' accounts to build empathy and portray their dire circumstances. However, it was also noted that the news reporting was limited towards Kathmandu valley with a lesser focus on areas outside of the valley in the front page coverage.

In regards to the use of sources, majority of the news stories used a single source, which in most of the cases was a government source. However, the reporting on death tolls varied greatly from what was reported on the government's websites. One of the reasons behind such difference in the official accounts and the newspaper accounts might have been because newspapers depended upon their district reporters for facts but did not verify those facts with government sources.

Despite a certain level of weakness in content delivery, the media's role was perceived positively by the public as indicated by the survey results. The survey also clearly indicated radio and especially the local FM stations as the most popular media at the time of the crisis.

The analysis also illustrated the rising popularity of new media as illustrated by the large increase in visitors to online news portals. Moreover, mobile was central to consumption of news, as well as staying connected with family. This points out that online media, the penetration of mobile phones, and radio could be major forms of communication and information dissemination systems in the times of crisis in the future.

There is a lot the media can learn from the reporting experience after the earthquake and there is a lot for the government to consider as well with regards to how media can be supported and used more effectively for disaster management and risk reduction. Media managers and FNJ representatives look to the government for support in the rebuilding process and future preparations to deal with a large scale disaster like the earthquake. But the PDNA document is silent about how the government could support media to recover the losses in the earthquake specially in the case of private media operators.

Recommendations

The level of unpreparedness in the media was evident in many of the highly affected districts of Nepal after the earthquake. People were deprived of information, as local FM stations were not able to resume their services due to the damage caused to their stations. Despite their efforts to operate, the flow of information was obstructed for days. With the level of devastation and loss of life and property after the Nepal earthquake, it is necessary to develop a strategy that is focused towards the future and is attainable. Below are some recommendations to consider in order to strengthen the role of media in Nepal during times of crisis:

Formulate a Media Policy for Disaster:

The state needs to adopt a specific disaster management and risk reduction communication policy that outlines the role of media. The state should co-ordinate with the media to install early warning systems and encourage a culture of prevention by involving local communities. However, the media policy should not be prescriptive and compromise the independence and integrity of media but should instead focus on utilizing the multiple mediums for communicating with the general public.

Clarity in Government's Support Policy:

There is a clear need for the government to outline how it aims to support the media houses that have suffered crippling damages as a result of the earthquake. The policy should address what type of support the affected media houses can expect from the government. Despite certain policy decisions made by the National Budget 2015-16 regarding the waiving of renewal charges and offering concessions on royalties, any support towards rehabilitation and reconstruction of private media houses is not mentioned. Even though the PDNA has assessed the overall damages to the media sector, its recovery plans are only focused towards state-owned media. However, private media outlets contributed equally to the coverage of the earthquake and suffered similar damages. The policy needs to distinguish media by type and should outline whether they are entitled to support from the state or not.

Preparedness Initiatives:

The media must be prepared for any future disasters by coming up with an emergency back-up plan that caters for any possible damages to equipment and other factors such as loss of power. It means media managers should be prepared to continuously operate media services without any disruptions. Strengthening their infrastructure should be prioritized; back-up studios, power and other supplies, trained work force and standby technicians are necessary to be prepared for disasters.

Emergency Media Operation:

Emergency media kits are also recommended at times of disaster. The initiative can either be taken by the media operator or local administration to have a portable suitcase radio set that can be used in case all of the other options are not available.

Use of new media:

Users of new media have increased by more than 70% in the post-earthquake scenario in Nepal. It is high time for the state and the media houses to incorporate online media strategy to disseminate information in the affected areas.

Role of Media Stakeholders:

Media stakeholders such as FNJ, ACORAB, BAN and others have played a crucial role in supporting media people and FM stations in the times of crisis. They have played an important role as a support system to the media, specially helping FM stations to resume their services in different parts of Nepal, by providing them with equipments and technical support. Their role would be very useful in the future in supporting the media houses for preparedness in disaster and training the manpower on how to work in disaster.

Content policy:

The level of unpreparedness within the media shows that in-house content policy on reporting disaster must be developed. The content should reflect multiple uses of sources to inform the public. The data regarding death tolls should be based on verified sources. The content policy should provide more information to the people. It should be based on providing factual information, rather than triggering mass anxiety, and encouraging people to participate in the rescue and relief efforts.

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About the author

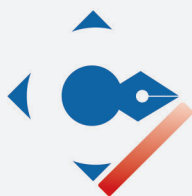
Ujjwal Prajapati is a founding member of Center for Media Research-Nepal, a Kathmandu based media think tank. He is an experienced print and television journalist and has worked as a visiting faculty member with Tribhuvan University and Kathmandu University.

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Center for Media Research – Nepal (CMR Nepal) is an autonomous, research and policy-oriented, not-for-profit non-governmental policy think tank registered with Nepal Government. The main focus of the institution is to contribute in knowledge development through research in the field of media development.

It aims to support freedom of opinion and expression on every platform and enable Nepali citizens to access information without hindrance and engage in public discourse. CMR-Nepal conducts studies and research on various aspects of media; develop, design, manage and conduct skill development trainings, workshops; and work to uplift journalism standards and practices.



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