

Media Autonomy in Cross-road in Post-Conflict Democracy of Nepal

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Abstract

Nepali media intend towards neutral projections of their institutional stance covering politics in a balanced way despite a long practiced political parallelism in the country. The media also project both dark and bright sides of Nepalese politics for strengthening democracy in post-conflict period of Nepal. This study has examined editorial contents covered by two leading Nepali newspapers: The Kathmandu Post daily and Nepali Times weekly, both published in English language.

The focus of this research has been to examine the editorials appeared during election campaign of Constitution Assembly, 2008. The study has chosen two dominant framing concepts: thematic vs. episodic framing, in order to explore the phenomenon of media autonomy in the Nepalese context. The findings show a mixed result where the media appear more likely to an instrumentalized phenomenon while projecting government/political parties' policies and decisions. Their issues and activities were framed thematically putting public issues in general context, and also detracting political issues from negative stereotyping in their institutional viewpoints. At the same time, media portray the issues and activities focusing on particular events and occurrences while framing political parties/governments and their leaders with negative attributes of conflict and personalization frame. It can be

argued that some external forces such as increasing dispute among political actors and increasing volume of impunity against journalism could be the consequences of media's less likely instrumentalized appearance to political forces.

Keywords: democracy, editorials, media autonomy, media framing, political parallelism, post-conflict Nepal.

Introduction

Media institutions support political parties to achieve organizational rights like right to publication and freedom of expression for institutional development. Political parties on the other hand, intend to take support of media for political gain particularly to play democratic exercises deliberating political messages without any barrier for gaining public support. Hence, covering political news in the media means it provides political information to the public and vis-à-vis projects Newspapers' own rights to the institutional autonomy (Schudson, 1995) where media projects detached position to the political activities.

Assessing media autonomy involves two dominant logical tools, i.e. media logic and political logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979). Media logic seeks newsworthiness of the information for the benefit of the institution and the public, while logic of politics intends to cover news/views as per interest of the political parties/leaders. Such media practice projects their responsibility towards either political parties/governments or the public and also project the level of independent of media institutions (Stromback, 2008). The media coverage with

critical perspective towards the events and issues of the politics is less likely to project dependent position of the media. Similarly, the news/views that frame politics without assessing, evaluating and exploring facts and figure, reveals more likely to perform detached position from the political parties and the leaders (Stromback, 2008).

In this background, the history of media and politics across the globe show that almost every political party whether they were in advanced or in new democracy, have their own media institutions for dissemination purpose of political information (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Media had contributed to establish democracy and in return, gained political and legal autonomy. Consequently, the circumstances changed from political parallel institution towards politically detached institution (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002). Today, media houses are not only the instruments of political parties; they perform their autonomy framing politics in line with the logic of media to achieve organizational benefit (Stromback, 2008). Since 2008, the political scenario of Nepal also shifted from authoritarian to republic state. In such context, how Nepali media are performing their responsibility to political parties/leaders in the republic systems is the crucial but unexplored research area. To reduce the gaps, the aim of this study is to assess the role played by Nepali media for strengthening democracy in the country. Hence, how the media in Nepal are practicing their institutional autonomy while covering politics is the research question.

Autonomy and media coverage

Media autonomy, the concept, intends to describe the situation of media organization that relates to know the

question of how media utilizes the publication rights while projecting news in a democratic society. Media autonomy encourages them to cover politics with the notion of media logic where media evaluates news value of political issues or actors considering benefit of the media (Altheide & Snow, 1979). The political logic, on the other hand, influence journalists giving priority to the political parties/governments evaluating news value in line with political support (Stromback, 2008). Political parties, government and the leaders who are in power, intend to control media instrumentalizing its powers to reach out among the public supplementing positive coverage of their issues and events (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

There seems a kind of cohesive tendency that shows when the level of autonomy in the media houses decreases, the level of tight row of political parties increases (Schudson, 1995). Losing media autonomy corresponds with the increasing news value of political issues or actors giving benefit to the political parties/leaders (Stromback, 2008).

Researches show that the changing political and legal system toward liberal democracy of a country reveals a high level of media autonomy and also serves the interests of organization for building 'public trust' (Schudson, 1995). Scholars found that media lost their political legacy in the highly advanced democratic countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In newly established democracy in the European countries, Gunther and Mughan (2000) observed that the independent news media were aligned against the authoritarian regimes by fostering political pluralism. News media of these countries were presenting diverse opinion and perspectives rather than

the statement made by the particular political parties or power holders (Gunther & Mughan, 2000).

In a democratic society, non-instrumentalized media can perform social functions playing the roles of civic forum, watchdog and mobilizing agent (Norris, 2000). Media's civic forum focus serious and extended political coverage for all voices in society; as a watchdog they can frame politics checking abuses of civil and political liberties; and, as a mobilizing agent, the media encourage public to learn, stimulate their interest, and encourage public to participate in political affairs (Norris, 2000).

Framing theory

Framing is becoming a significant theory to study the relationship between media and politics (Bryant & Miron, 2004). Framing involves 'selecting and highlighting some facts of events and issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution' (Entman, 2004, p. 5). Hence, framing is the way of presenting texts, images or issues in journalists' interpretation and evaluation projecting their autonomy in which the media can influence how people think about that event or issues (Iyengar & McGrady, 2006). It assists to examine how media are presenting their autonomy while covering political issues (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) describes that to frame politics is to select some aspects of a perceived reality of political issues and activities and make them more salient in

communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation for the item described.

There are several types of framing in use for analyzing media content, for instance, thematic vs. episodic news frame (Iyengar & McGrady, 2006); horse race vs. strategy game frame (Patterson, 1993); and issue frame vs. strategy frame (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). These framing types can be categorized according to response value of news content to politicians and the public as responsible and less responsible framing dimensions (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This notion is similar to Iyengar's (1991) arguments that media coverage of political issues comes into two distinct genera of presentation corresponding to thematic and episodic news frames. Iyengar (1991) suggests the following operational attributes while analyzing framing. Accordingly, the thematic news frame response a political issue in a general context and usually takes the form of in-depth coverage emphasizing context and continuity with detracting from negative stereotyping. On the contrary, the episodic frames, depicts political issues in terms of individual instances, focus on describing single events or occurrences and tended to involve the use of negative stereotypes (Iyengar, 1991). The thematic framing attributes responsibility for issues to political parties, government and society and the episodic frames, on the other hand, attribute responsibility not to societal or political forces, but to the actions of particular individuals or groups (Iyengar & McGrady, 2006). In this process, Iyengar and McGrady (2006) argue that the episodic frames for political news activate cynical responses to politicians, politics, and governance and projects independent situation from politics.

Besides two thematic and episodic framing, numerous other framing types can be described as conflict frames and personalization frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). It can be assumed that news that relate to conflicting issues between individuals, groups, institutions, regions or nations to capture the audience's attentions; for instance, issue of violence, kidnapping, fighting, threatening and creating terror, can be categorized in the conflict frame (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Personalization frames include the portraying political leaders as active subjects in the news stories, for game perspective, strategies and scandals (Iyengar & McGrady, 2006). Both conflict frames and personalization frames can be studied with the coverage pattern of the news that projects media logic rather than the political logic (Stromback, 2008).

Framing is inescapable and can be done by the media crafting a message whether it is in news format or editorial according to institutional goal (Rees, 2001). Hence, media unavoidably selects and presents media texts either in political logic, or, in media logic, which make it possible to analyzing editorial according to framing framework in Nepali context.

Editorials in Nepali media

Unlike news, for which the basic principle is to tell facts as they are; the editorial is the collective opinion of the newspaper (McQuail, 2003). Moreover, newspaper editorials are the media's own views and stands on relevant topics or issues, their positions on particular policy options, their opinions about certain events or actors and arguments in support of these (van Dijk, 1992). Due to the distinctive

characteristics between news and editorials; Nepali media, like other news media in democratic countries, also present their organizational opinion through the editorials as regular editions (Kharel, 2010).

Structurally, editorials can be observed into three schematic categories (van Dijk, 1992). They define the situation and give a summary of the news event. They present and evaluate the situation - especially of actions and actors. They advance pragmatic conclusions in the form of expectations, recommendations, advice, and warnings. Thus, editorials not only represent the opinion of the particular media organization; they present news events, evaluate the situation and conclude with the opinion (van Dijk, 1992). It can be assumed that newspaper's editorials in Nepali media also present the news events, evaluate the contemporary situation, and comment the events or issues on behalf of the media organizations.

Media and political landscape of Nepal

While talking about the development of media and politics of Nepal, there is a parallel consequence between the two entities. During *Rana's* period (1854-1951), there was only one print media 'Gorkhapatra' (1901). It was a state-owned newspaper under the control of the autocratic *Rana* family regime. Function of media in this half century period (1901-1951) was basically a medium of dissemination of government notices and information (Malla, 1983).

The revolutionary movement of 1951 against *Rana* regime changed the country's political setting from autocratic to democratic system and established King with absolute power in the throne (Thapaliyal, 2006). With the imitation of the very first electronic media, Radio Nepal started to air from 1951 consequently opening media space for private print medium under new found system of governance (Malla, 1983). Some however, observed differently as Savada (1993) marked the tense relationship of media with governments in this open democratic political system; journalists performed a responsible societal role in the first time in Nepali society (Ramprasad & Kelly, 2003).

Unfortunately, the new found democracy could not last long and peoples' political rights was forcefully ended in 1960, when the King Mahendra terminated democratic government and imposed authoritarian non-party *Panchayat system*. However, the *Panchayat system* was defined as the preliminary democratic form of government where a pyramid system of local bodies actively worked. Savada (1993) noted the *Panchayat era* restricted citizen's political freedom and the press freedom. Many newspapers were shut down in this authoritarian political system (Ramprasad & Kelly, 2003). Media were obliged to either support the systems or close the operation of the production. Journalists' self-censorship tool was to escape the financial and personal consequences of defiance including denial of state subsidies and newsprint quotas as well as imposition of jail terms (Savada, 1993).

After the referendum in 1980, some scholars argue that media's restriction gradually replaced with liberal press and publications related legal provision that removed most of the

past restriction on the press (Pokhrel & Koirala, 1995; Ramprasad & Kelly, 2003). However, journalist's partisan alignment was divided into *pro-Panchayat* and the *anti-Panchayat system*; the number of newspapers grew dramatically. In the same period nations first ever television broadcast, a state-owned national television, Nepal Television was established in 1985. In such partly press-free environment, pro-democratic media organizations supported the opposition's struggle for multi-party democracy and gave voice to its leadership (Paudyal, 1995).

People's successive democratic movement against *Panchayat system* established multi-party democratic systems in 1990. Under the constitutional monarchy, people were free to elect their representatives for the parliament. Constitution of Nepal 1990 guaranteed press freedom restricting the cancellation of newspaper registrations, censorship and newspaper closures. For the first time after 1990, National Communication Policy was formulated in 1992 and promoted to establish private print and broadcast media (Aditya, 1996).

Constitution Assembly Election 2008

Agenda of Constitution Assembly was one of the major demands of every political movement of Nepal since 1950 when the country for the first-time cherished democracy. Unfortunately, the political analysts claimed that the demand of Constitution Assembly was not fulfilled due to active monarchy in the country. People's second political movement (2006) opened a platform for dialogue between align of seven political parties¹ and the rebel Maoist for peace deal, as a

result, these parties signed a 12-point agreement that later culminated into signing of a Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA)ⁱⁱ on 21 November 2006 taking the country into the path of sustainable peace. This included scheduling for CA election for writing a new constitution. The Maoists included Interim Parliament suspended the monarchy and announced the country as a republic state in 2006.

The Constituent Assembly is the body of representatives authorized by the Interim Constitution 2007 to draft a new Constitution for Nepal. The purpose of CA election was to restructure the nation according to the aspirations of the People's Movement-II (2006). Hachhethu (2007) points out the aspirations, among others were as to reach a decision on the future of monarchy, to ensure democratic rule of law, to ensure proportional representation in all the bodies of state, to institutionalize the people's sovereignty and to create an atmosphere for all the citizens to exercise equal rights (Hachhethu, 2007). The Interim Constitution legislates for the creation of a 601 member Constituent Assemblyⁱⁱⁱ, with 575 of these members being directly elected (335 through Proportional Representation and 240 through First-Past-the-Post) and 26 being appointed by the Cabinet after the election.

A glimpse of Nepali media

Media systems of Nepal marked dual model; newly established private owned commercial media and a century old state-owned public service media. State possesses print as well as broadcasting media, for instance, Gorkhapatra Corporation (1901) published several newspapers including

Gorkhapatra national vernacular daily and the Rising Nepal in English medium. Nepal Television and Radio Nepal broadcast news with wider reach in the country.

Despite strong state-owned media system in Nepal, a great number of private owned media came in front after 1990, when the Constitution has guaranteed right to publication for the first time in the country. Press Council Nepal reports that there were fewer than 300 newspapers including two government-owned newspapers during 1990s beginning. But, by April 2008, more than 600 newspapers and periodicals were publishing regularly along with 136 radio stations and of which 5 percent have satellite uplink. Similarly, seven private television stations were operating in the country.

Such increasing numbers of media institutions not only indicate their concentration for attracting private investor rather shows wider reach of media programs disseminating political information across the country. Several leading media institution's daily editions were publishing from different places within the country and abroad. For instance, the Kantipur Publications House is publishing same news edition from several urban areas like Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Pokhara inside country; and abroad, from the Gulf country - Qatar. Other media houses like the Kamana Prakashan Samuha, the AAPCA Group, and the Himalmedia were publishing several newspapers within the country.

However, there exist geographical and literacy barrier; radio, television and newspapers are the main communication mainstream medium to reach into the mass public for political parties and the government. It was obvious that the practice of journalists on political communication was limited; media

played a significant role in the Parliamentary elections of 1991, 1994 and 1999 in multi-party democracy (Kharel, 2010). There was a common practice even in public radio and television for political parties who got free space and time during election campaigns.

Research question and hypothesis

Reviewing the available literature in the field, the present research intends to explore the relationship between politics and media in Nepali context. Hence, the research question is:

- To what extent private media of Nepal are instrumentalized while covering politics in their editorials in post-conflict period of Nepal?

Prior researches on news media framing effect suggest that the media frame has thematically enabled the viewers being responsible to the issues of political parties, government and society. The viewers attribute responsibility not to societal or political forces, but to the actions of particular individuals or groups in episodic framing (Iyengar, 1991). In Nepali context, the news media are performing a critical stance on projecting politically detached position, enabling viewers' responsibility not to political parties and the governments despite mission-oriented journalism culture. Hence, we can assume that the editorial contents, that intend to show their independent position, would like to make the political issues salient attributing responsibility not to the political parties and the leaders. Thus, the first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: the editorials related to CA election 2008 will be dealing more in number with episodic rather than thematic framing of the issues of the political parties/leaders.

Since the King's takeover from October 2002 and later on the royal coup of February 2005, the issue of monarchy was very controversial (Thapaliyal, 2006). These events opened up a new political equation in Nepal. In this new power equation, the democratic parties and the Maoist came together against the monarchy. The result was the restoration of House of Representatives and stripped the monarchy of all powers and announced the country as a republic state (Hachhethu, 2007). Hence, we can assume that the contents which support to monarchy or appear with positive consequences of the King's activities that will demolish the power of the political parties and the leaders who had taken decisions earlier to establish republic state. Such media projection can also be interpreted as an independent media not being responsible towards political parties and the governments. Thus, the second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: There will be more positive than negative frame description of monarchy in the editorials.

The Constitution Assembly was the first election in free press environment after a decade long Civil-War (1996-2006) when 17 thousand Nepalese people including 24 journalists were killed (Freedom House, 2007). After the election announcement, however, peace deal was on the process; there were several pressure groups, for instance, Tarai based regional political parties^{iv} were protesting against

government, demanding separate federal state, and during their movements, 21 people including 2 journalists were killed (CS Centre, 2009)^v. Furthermore, it is a common trend in Nepali press that there is a heavy number of content coverage of conflicting issues in the political news (Lloyd & Howard, 2005). Conflict cases can be found between cadres of political parties, individuals, social groups, and securities personals in local, regional and national level. Obviously, election related conflicting issues such as blocking leaders' campaign activities, and threatening opposition's supporters were the common practices during election of Nepal (Kumar, 2010). In CA election 2008, there were several casualties such as one CPN-UML candidate of Banke District was killed in the campaign^{vi}. Despite such incidents, we can assumed that it is a responsibility of the press that conflicting issues, though was coverage in news reporting, such issues should not be make salient in editorials in politically dependent organization. Because political leaders who were committed to democracy and participating to CA election in order to establish peace, in such a situation referring to them with conflicting issue in editorial content might create cynicism to public towards political parties and the politicians (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Thus, observing such effect of media content, it can be assumed that editorials content, which is opinion section of the media organizations, may give more importance to conflict frame referring to the political leaders, while projecting their organizational autonomy. Thus, the third hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 3: There will be more number of coverage related to conflict framing in reference to political leaders in the editorials.

Methods

This study used content analysis as methods for analyzing the hypothesis. The same approach was applied in for getting answer to the research question. In this context, the editorials were selected on the basis of quality, circulation, language and availability of the newspapers. Those newspapers which were available on the online version with coverage of Constitution Assembly Election of 2008 related editorials, was availability criteria. For newspapers quality and the circulation; the paper selection criteria followed the annual report of Press Council of Nepal, which is an authorized government's institution that evaluates media's quality and circulation. For this criterion, two independent leading private media houses: the Kantipur Publications, Pvt. Ltd.^{vii} and the Himalmedia Pvt. Ltd.^{viii} were selected. It was assumed that these media houses may represent other media houses of Nepal because of their leading roles for other media organization to build up media agenda in the country.

According to the language criteria, English medium was chosen because it was available and easy to identify the key words of framing concept. There were hardly any researches have been conducted before based on the framing concept in Nepali media. On these criteria two newspapers from each media houses were selected: the 'Kathmandu Post' daily and the 'Nepali Times' weekly. The Kathmandu Post is a sub-publication of the leading private media house the Kantipur Publication, which has a television channel: Kantipur TV, radio: Kantipur FM, and the highest circular national vernacular: the Kantipur Daily, weeklies and fortnights. The Nepali Times is another English language weekly news

magazine of the Himalmedia, which is one of the reputed publication houses in Nepal. The circulation of the weekly can be observed with a sizable number among elite readers in the country and abroad in South Asia. The publication house also published other newspapers like online daily: himalkhabar.com, an online vernacular; Himal, a fortnightly magazine in Nepali language; and the Wave, the monthly magazine for youth in English language.

Both newspapers - the Kathmandu Post and the Nepali Times - were available on the Internet in electronic version. According to the circulation record of the Press Council of Nepal (2007)^{ix}, both newspapers possess 'A' category, which means the newspapers have wider reach and reputation in the country. Ideologically partisan alignment cannot be observed directly in these media houses but the content of both newspapers can be examined with tilting towards pro-democratic alignments. It is obvious that the owners and the journalists of these media houses were taking part in the democratic movements even in 2006 political move making align with the political parties.

Similarly, newspapers editorials, by their content and placement presentation variations (van Dijk, 1992), can be expected to express entire media organizational views, whether the content is daily published or weekly, because the views is important rather than the number of frequencies of the news and the published editions.

Editorials were selected from a seven-week time period from Feb 21 to April 10, 2008. The date was selected because this was the high time when Election Commission of Nepal had officially announced CA election campaign period. Hence,

the purpose of the study was to analyze editorials which published during election to identify the relationship between politics and the media.

In terms of the article's selection, editorials that contained with one of the following references as the 'CA election' or to 'CA polls' or 'Election Commission of Nepal' were key words that were included for the study. It was assumed that election related all editorials can be covered with these key words. According to the criteria, 22 editorials were selected out of 49: seven editorials from the Nepali Times magazine and 15 from the Kathmandu Post. The column of editorials was easily founded in each newspaper's homepage, where hyperlink assisted to follow the concerned full text pages.

Coding

The coding sheet included with the number of framing variables mentioned above, following the several steps. First, it was coded for title of the newspaper, exact date of publication, and title of editorials. Next, editorial's each paragraph was coded on the basis of presence and absence of framing identification. To identify the frames, for instance, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) mentioned that 'it is especially evident in news media content which is replete with metaphors, catchphrases, and symbolic devices that provide a shorthand way suggesting the underlying storyline' (p.49). Then, a number of predefined framing variables were included in order to capture the framing of editorials. Two of these variables – thematic framing and episodic framing –

were coded on a dominant frame basis, as explained earlier. The unit of analysis was each paragraph of editorials.

With regards to the conflict framing, first, editorial's each paragraph was chosen with presence and absence of political parties and the political leaders. Second, it was coded for the 'conflict framing' based on predefined propositional attributes on the editorials referring to political parties and the leaders whether the content was conflict framing or other framing, since it is possible to have presence of political parties and the leaders without conflict framing. The editorial's analysis unit was referential unit following Krippendorff's (1980) and Holsti's (1969) approach of content analysis of each paragraph (i.e. introduction, body and conclusion). The referential unit 'involves some physical or temporal unit (e.g., event, people, objects, etc.) referred or alluded to within content that measure the meaning attached to a particular person, event or issue' (Riffe et al., 1998).

In regards to personalization framing of the King; first, the referential content of king or monarchy was chosen in the framing paragraph of the editorials. Second, it was coded the referential unit with three variables whether the theme of content refer to the King possesses with positive attributes (any event or consequence which support to king's rule or his name and fame - in Nepali society the King was understood as a 'symbol of unity', 'cultural identity' and 'the absolute power holder'), negative attributes (any incidents, or consequences which do not support rather criticize the King's rule or name and fame), or neutral attributes (the content which do not clearly state neither positive nor negative). The analysis unit was a referential naming text of the King or

monarchy that emphasized the things or people being discussed.

Because of small number of editorials pieces and the author has involved in all steps of the coding process no reliability test was conducted.

Findings

The *first hypothesis* of this study predicted that the editorials relate to CA election 2008 would be dealing more in number with episodic rather than thematic framing. It was assumed that instrumentalized media would give more preference to episodic framing coding political issues in order to social responsibility frame in their editorial content. The findings clearly show that the English medium Nepali newspapers' editorials content portrays the politics with thematic framing that accounted 54% and episodic framing 46%. Hence, the first hypothesis which predicted more coverage to episodic framing is not supported (see Table 1).

Table 1: Coverage of thematic framing and episodic framing in editorials of English medium Nepali newspapers

Description	Number of framing* (n = 107)	In total Percentage** (n=22 items)
Thematic framing	57	54%
Episodic framing	49	46%

- * Number of framing is accounted with each paragraph of the editorials
- ** Percentage is calculated from 107 number of framing item as a 100% of 22 editorials.

Source: The Kathmandu Post and the Nepali Times; editorials coverage of CA election; date of publication: February 21 to April 10, 2008.

The second hypothesis predicted that there would be more negative than positive personalization frame of monarchy in the editorials. Regarding kings or monarchy reference, the news media of Nepal should have to be portrayed king's negative image for positive treatment with the political parties because seven political parties and the rebellion, the Maoist; aligned government had suspended the King and announced the country as a republic state through Interim Constitution 2007. In such a case monarchy's positive description might not be supporting to political leaders, who were committed to democracy and decided according to public's interest of republic state and also depicted media's autonomy projecting no responsibility to political parties and the leaders. The findings show that the Nepali media do not support to monarchy. The negative portrayed of the King is accounted 84% and the neutral description is only 16%. No positive description about the monarchy was found in the editorials. Hence, the second hypothesis is also not supported. (See Table 2)

Table 2: Personalization framing of monarchy in English medium Nepali newspaper's editorials coverage:

Description	Personalized framing of monarchy* total framing **	
of monarchy	(n = 25/in percent)	(n = 107)
Positive	-	-
Negative	21(84%)	21%
Neutral	4 (16%)	4%

* Each naming text of king or monarchy is included as a separate item of analysis

** Percentage is calculated from 107 numbers of items as 100%.

Source: The Kathmandu Post and the Nepali Times; editorials coverage of CA election; date of publication: February 21 to April 10, 2008.

The third hypothesis predicted that there would be more conflict framing in reference to political parties/leaders in the editorials. Prior research shows that independent media give more importance to news values as per media logic rather than the political logic (Stromback, 2008). It was assumed that the political parties' particularly the leaders with negative attributes like conflicting issues such as kidnapping, blocking, killing and fighting, correspondence with more news value. While projecting the relationship between media and politics, the political leaders' involvement in conflicting cases might

be spread cynicism to the public towards political parties and the leaders themselves. The findings support the hypothesis. Presence of conflict framing in reference to political parties and the leaders have more in number that accounted 67% followed by 33% with absence of conflict framing. However, the item of conflict framing that accounted 29% out of total number of 107 framing of editorials; the presence item of conflict framing in reference to political parties and the leaders was extremely high that accounted two-third coverage in the editorials. Thus, the third hypothesis is positive. (See Table 3)

Table 3: Presence and absence of conflict framing with reference to political parties and political leaders in editorials of English medium Nepali newspapers

Description	Conflict framing* (n = 48)	In total conflict framing (n = 107)
(In reference to political parties and leaders)		
Presence of Conflict framing	32 (67%)	30%
Absence of Conflict framing	16 (33%)	15%

* The number of item is included the each paragraph of naming item of political leaders and the political parties

** The percentage is calculated from 107 paragraphs item as a 100 percent from 22 editorials.

Source: The Kathmandu Post and the Nepali Times; editorials coverage of CA election; date of publication: February 21 to April 10, 2008.

Discussions

This study was focused on to investigate the editorials of two Nepali-English medium newspapers i.e. the Kathmandu Post daily and the Nepali Times weekly during CA Election 2008. The main purpose of this investigation was to know how the media of Nepal frame politics in order to acknowledge their organizational autonomy. The content was investigated between episodic and thematic frame; issues of monarchy whether the monarchy is depicted in positive, negative or neutral frame; and the conflict frame where political parties and the leaders whether refer to conflict issues or non-conflict issues. The results presented above clearly show the mix results.

The significant presence of thematic framing in newspaper's editorials, reveal a clear picture that Nepali media give more priority to political information for public issues and place it in the form of in-depth coverage. Editorials content concentrate on the context with continuity in volume giving priority to public issues. However, in advanced democracy media are depicting issues in terms of individual instances, focusing single events or occurrences tending to involve the use of negative stereotypes (Iyengar & McGrady, 2006; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993). Nepali media support political parties and leaders giving more space

making salient political issues and agenda in line with political logic in the opinion pages like editorials in the post-conflict period of Nepal.

However, the monarchy has witnessed centuries long cultural tie up with Nepalese society; the media of Nepal support the governments/parties' decisions that had seized king's power and announced the nation as a republic state. Actually, kingship was the 'symbol of unity', and 'symbol of culture' before the announcement of republic state, but, the King's active power was also depicted as 'Black Law' in Nepalese democratic history (Hachhethu, 2007), and media portrayed such anti-democratic ruler with negative attributions. It indicates that there is no place for anti-democratic forces whether they possessed glorious history or respected in all sector of society.

However, the kingship or monarchy was not the case of Hungary or Poland; media practice during democratization process of these countries had also depicted former anti-democratic leaders with the negative attributes (Gunther & Mughan, 2000). Hence, it might be argued that Nepali media more likely to project supportive role to the political move rather than promoting so called cultural symbol like monarchy.

However, media of Eastern European countries such as Spain, Portugal and Greece, supported political leaders in the democratization process of the country (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Interestingly, in Nepalese context, media organizations do not support to political parties and their leaders remaining biased on their misdeeds. There is a limit space for positive description about political parties specially their leaders who

involved in conflicting issues. Media portray the leaders with the negative consequences even they were committed to democracy and peace.

Nepali media have covered the activities of political actors who were, in different aspects, involved in violating, threatening, misbehaving, kidnapping and demonstrating of weapons during the election time. The actors have themselves mentioned their personal involvement in the misdeeds without a feeling of fear and bias on the news. Such personalization practice of individual candidate with conflicting issues is relevant in neutral professionalism (Mughan, 2000). Due to high news value journalists often intend to attach to conflicts with the political leaders as per media logic (Stromback, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). However, Iyengar (1991) has a differing argument; he mentions that 'during the heat of crisis, journalists tend to cover the story exactly as it is given to them' (Iyengar, 1991, p. 87). The above statement is common during the War reporting.

Conclusions

Nepal has been moving ahead after a decade long conflict. In such post-conflict context, covering the activities of political parties and their conflicting issues needs to be observed in the media. However, it is noted that Nepali private owned news media are practicing institutional autonomy detaching themselves from the political parties and their actors in the democratization process of the country. In such case, the findings of present study open the door for further

investigation of the news media practice towards neutral professionalism. The author, therefore, highly recommends for further investigation to explore the news media practices towards neutral professionalism in the Nepalese context.

Notes:

ⁱ Seven political parties are: Nepali Congress (NC), Nepal Communist Party -Unified Marxist and Leninists (CPN-UML), Nepali Congress Democrats (NC-D), Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party (NWPP), Janamorcha Nepal (JN), Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Anandidevi) (NSP-A), and Nepal Communist Party – Marxist and Leninist (NCP-ML).

ⁱⁱ http://www.peace.gov.np/admin/doc/CPA_eng-ver-corrected.pdf, retrieved on 30 May, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.undp.org.np/constitutionbuilding/constitutionnepal/constitutionfile/Interim_Constitution_bilingual.pdf, Nepali version is original and English version is translated copy from United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Constitution Building Programme, retrieved 30 May 2009.

^{iv} The regional political parties were Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), Nepal Sadhabana Party (Anandidevi) (NSP-A), Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (Goit) (JTMM-G), and Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (Jwala Singh) (JTMM-JS) and Terai Madheshi Loktantra Party (TMLP).

^v Conflict Study Center is an independent non government organization of Nepal. Online retrieved http://www.cscenter.org.np/uploads/book/110623070128_War%20and%20Human%0Rights.pdf

^{vi} <http://www.nepalelectionportal.org/EN/news/details.php?id=604>, online retrieved from Election Commission Portal of Nepal on 30 May 2009.

^{vii} <http://www.kantipuronline.com/aboutus.php>, online retrieved on 30 May 2009.

^{viii} http://www.himalmedia.com/about_us.html, online retrieved on 30 May 2009.

^{ix} <http://www.presscouncilnepal.org/files/ka.pdf>, online retrieved on 30 May 2009.

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