

Implementation Status of Journalist Code of Conduct in Nepali Weekly Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Societal responsibility needs ethical journalism. While journalists engage in advocacy of rights, they must also fulfill their own part of the obligation. However, in Nepali journalism, especially in weeklies, the core ethics and principles of ethical journalism are very readily abandoned. They are charged with violating the Journalist Code of Conduct. To increase the credibility of the media sector, it is essential that the principles of ethics such as truth, impartiality, balance, and factuality are adhered to in a serious manner. Nonetheless, the recent trends suggest the opposite, and hence there is growing public concern about the role of the media. This research examines the usage of the Journalist Code of Conduct by Nepali weekly newspapers. Despite increasing importance being attached to ethical journalism, instabilities in following these principles are felt. The research aims to establish the current status of the usage of the code and how issues in enforcement arise. The research employed a mixed-method approach, i.e., literature review, interviews with reporters, and content analysis of the chosen weekly newspapers. This helped to provide an overview of ethical practice and concerns. Findings show that while some weekly newspapers adhere to ethical standards, others do not, and there are very large gaps in their adherence to the code. Substantial issues are poor media literacy, poor editorial oversight, and external pressures. The study concludes with the recommendation for the improvement of compliance to the code, such as more intensive training of reporters, more stringent editorial guidelines, and more importance on ethical journalism. Overcoming the issues can make Nepali media more believable and socially accountable.

Keywords: weekly newspaper, media literacy, journalist code of conduct, media responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Every profession and business has a code of conduct. It is everyone's moral responsibility to follow it. Ethical behavior is the right thing to do. The best reason to behave ethically is the personal knowledge that you have acted in a morally appropriate manner. (Wimmer and Dominick, 2005, P;65) Moreover, the media sector, which is considered as the fourth organ of the state and the voice of the voiceless, should be more restrained, dignified and well-mannered. Keeping this in mind, journalist code of conduct has been issued in every country. Journalist code of conduct has been brought for healthy competition and development so that the media which should convey healthy information in the society does not get into unhealthy competition. (Dhungel, 2069, p;202) Journalists are prone to ethical flexibility and decisive expediency if they only preach about free speech for each and everyone but limit the reach and coverage to suffocating extent. (Kharel; 2016, p;363)

The implementation status of the journalist code of conduct in Nepali weekly newspapers is therefore a subject of great importance and relevance. By analyzing the extent to which these newspapers adhere to the ethical guidelines set forth by the Press Council of Nepal, it is possible to

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assess the overall effectiveness of the code of conduct in promoting ethical journalism. This study will examine how Nepali weekly newspapers implement the key principles of the code, such as accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and balance, and explore the challenges they face in adhering to these standards. Furthermore, it will assess the role of regulatory bodies like the Press Council of Nepal in ensuring that these standards are upheld and the measures that can be taken to improve compliance with the code of conduct.

Nepal, Being a Hindu country, all activities were conducted according to Hindu beliefs. The fear of sin and hell was the basis for making people moral. Although the book was published on this basis, with the advent of Gorkhapatra, SANAD was issued as a form of journalistic code of conduct. On 15 Baisakh 1958 BS, Dev Samsheer issued a Sanad as an authority to give instructions on what to print and what not to print in the Gorkhapatra. In which it was clearly explained what should be printed and what should not be printed (Acharya: 2078)

In this way, the Nepal Journalists Association was established in 2008 BS under the chairmanship of Satyanarayan Shrestha with the aim of tying active journalists to a formula of unity. (*Roshan Puri's report: 8-9 Poush 2079, Central General Meeting of Nepal Journalist Federation, Surkhet*)

The weekly newspapers have historically formed the backbone of Nepali media. These newspapers were often produced by political parties and leaders, leading to some bias from the very beginning. The core principles of journalism, such as accuracy, balance, credibility, and neutrality, are crucial in maintaining the integrity of media; however, these principles have not always been seriously implemented in Nepal's journalistic practices. In the past, there has been a lack of research focused on the enforcement of journalistic codes of conduct in weekly newspapers. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining journalistic ethics and media responsibility. It aims to explicitly state the research problem, addressing the need for a deeper understanding of how journalistic codes are applied in the context of Nepali media. Furthermore, the study distinguishes itself by offering insights that previous research may not have fully explored.

Sensationalism accurse when the journalists offer news coverage designed to propaganda or entertain more than to inform or educate. During the period of violent conflict(1996-2006),Nepali media were accused for being sensational in some instances.(Aryal, Select Media Topics, p, 184)

Objectives

For the implication of this research, research objectives are here.

- To assess the current implementation of the Journalist Code of Conduct in Nepali weekly newspapers.
- To evaluate the extent to which ethical guidelines are followed by journalists in Nepali weekly newspapers.
- To explore the perception of the public regarding the adherence to ethical standards in Nepali weekly newspapers.

It focuses on providing a baseline understanding of how the code is currently being implemented, which is central to the research. Likewise, aims to delve deeper into the actual practice of ethical reporting and adherence to the Journalist Code of Conduct. helps identify barriers, be they organizational, societal, or legal, that prevent full compliance with the Code of Conduct. These objectives directly support broader media accountability efforts in Nepal, which aim to enhance journalistic standards, strengthen public trust in the media, and improve the overall credibility of the press. By evaluating the implementation of the Journalist Code of Conduct, the study addresses key concerns such as media ethics, transparency, and responsibility, all of which are critical components in

the ongoing media reforms in Nepal. Furthermore, the findings could contribute to the broader movement for media accountability and improve the governance of Nepali journalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The ethical standards and professional conduct of journalists are fundamental to the credibility and integrity of the media. In Nepal, as in many other countries, the implementation of the Journalistic Code of Conduct has been a subject of significant attention and discussion. These codes are designed to ensure responsible journalism, transparency, accuracy, and fairness in news reporting. However, the degree to which these codes are adhered to by Nepali media outlets, particularly weekly newspapers, remains a critical issue.

In Nepal, the Journalist Code of Conduct is largely governed by the Press Council Nepal (PCN), which was established in 1996. The Press Council is responsible for monitoring the ethical standards of the media, investigating complaints related to media ethics, and promoting the professional conduct of journalists. The Code of Conduct for Journalists, first formulated in 1997, sets out the principles and guidelines aimed at ensuring that journalists adhere to ethical standards such as truthfulness, objectivity, and impartiality. Internationally, the issue of media ethics and the implementation of journalist codes has garnered significant attention. Codes of conduct in the media are not only a national but also an international concern. Organizations such as the International Federation of Journalists and the Committee to Protect Journalists work globally to advocate for ethical journalism. Many Western countries have their own codes of ethics that guide journalists' work, including in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, with the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics being a widely recognized standard. In developed countries, however, while codes of conduct are more strictly followed, concerns about sensationalism, fake news, and the impact of digital media have raised new ethical challenges. As the global media landscape shifts, the role of codes of conduct has evolved, but the challenge of implementation persists, as seen in the struggles faced by organizations like the BBC and New York Times with fake news during elections or major events. A moral community demonstrates more than mere interdependence, it is characterized by mutuality, a will-to-community, a genuine concern for the other apart from immediate self-interest. An act is morally right when compelled by the intention to maintain the community of persons, it is wrong if driven by self-centeredness. (Griffin, EM. Ledbetter, A and Sparks G.; 2012)

The financial challenges faced by many Nepali weekly newspapers often lead to compromises in journalistic standards. In an era of declining revenue from traditional advertising models, many media houses resort to sensationalism or prioritize stories that attract more readership, even at the cost of accuracy and fairness. This problem is mirrored globally, as digital media and social networks have altered the economics of news production, leading to a decline in the resources available for investigative journalism. Many journalists in Nepal, especially those working for weekly newspapers, have limited formal training in media ethics and professional conduct. According to Khadka (2020), there is a significant gap in the education and training of journalists regarding ethical reporting and adherence to professional codes. This issue is also evident in other parts of South Asia, where the lack of formal journalism education and professional development programs hampers the ability of journalists to consistently follow ethical guidelines.

Several studies have found that the implementation of the Journalist Code of Conduct in Nepal faces numerous challenges. Several studies have found that the implementation of the Journalist Code of Conduct in Nepal faces numerous challenges. This is particularly evident in weekly newspapers, where financial constraints may limit their ability to provide comprehensive training for reporters on journalistic ethics (Sharma, 2019).

Other research, such as that by Adhikari (2020), highlights improvements in the implementation of the code. Adhikari's study suggests that there has been a gradual shift in the mindset of journalists, with more of them striving to follow the ethical standards of the Journalist Code of Conduct. This change has been attributed to increased awareness programs and workshops organized by media organizations and journalism schools (Adhikari, 2020). These initiatives have led to better adherence to key ethical principles such as accuracy, fairness, and the avoidance of sensationalism in reporting.

However, challenges still persist, particularly in rural areas where media outlets are smaller and resources are more limited. According to a report by the Press Council Nepal (2018), despite some progress, many journalists in regional newspapers continue to face pressure from political and business interests, which sometimes compromise their ability to adhere to ethical guidelines. The report also points out that a lack of effective monitoring and enforcement of the code leads to occasional breaches, affecting the credibility of news reporting in these publications (Press Council Nepal, 2018).

Despite growing research on the Journalist Code of Conduct and its implementation in Nepalese media, there remain significant gaps in the literature regarding the specific context of weekly newspapers. While various studies have explored the general adherence to journalistic ethics and the challenges faced by journalists in Nepal, few have focused specifically on weekly newspapers and their unique dynamics. Here are the key research gaps identified in existing studies:

Most research in Nepal has focused broadly on national or daily newspapers and television media, with limited attention paid to weekly newspapers. According to Sharma (2019), much of the existing literature does not consider the distinct challenges faced by weekly publications, such as limited resources, financial constraints, and smaller editorial teams. Weekly newspapers often operate differently from daily outlets, and these differences may impact how they implement journalistic ethics. More focused research is needed on this subset of media outlets to understand the specific challenges they face in following the Journalist Code of Conduct.

Research by Adhikari (2020) and the Press Council Nepal (2018) acknowledges the challenges in rural and regional newspapers but does not delve deeply into how the implementation of ethical standards varies across different geographical locations. Weekly newspapers in rural areas may face unique challenges like lower literacy rates, less media training, and stronger political or community pressures. There is a need for more comprehensive research on how these factors affect the adherence to ethical guidelines in rural and regional weekly newspapers.

While studies such as those by Adhikari (2020) and Sharma (2019) mention the existence of training programs and workshops for journalists, little research has evaluated the actual effectiveness of these initiatives in improving adherence to the Code of Conduct. The literature lacks empirical studies that assess how well these programs are received by journalists in weekly newspapers and whether they lead to measurable improvements in ethical reporting practices. Research is needed to assess the real-world impact of such training on the behavior of journalists in weekly newspapers. The rise of digital media has changed the landscape of journalism globally, including in Nepal. However, little research has been done on how the transition to digital platforms or the growing influence of online media affects the ethical practices of traditional weekly newspapers. Studies such as those by Sharma (2019) focus primarily on print media, without considering the growing role of online platforms and digital tools in the journalistic process. This gap presents an opportunity to examine how weekly newspapers are adapting to digital pressures while still adhering to ethical codes. While there has been some research on the implementation of the Journalist Code of Conduct in Nepalese media, the specific dynamics of weekly newspapers remain underexplored. Addressing these research gaps, particularly in terms of regional differences, the impact of digital media, and the effectiveness of training programs, could significantly contribute to the understanding of ethical practices in Nepalese weekly newspapers. The motivation for this study arises from the growing need to understand how effectively the Journalist

Code of Conduct is being implemented in Nepalese weekly newspapers. The scope of this study is limited to weekly newspapers particularly in Kathmandu. The research will cover print editions of these newspapers to maintaining journalistic ethics. It will also explore private weekly newspapers which played vital role for democracy and there was larger readership in the past. This study is significant because it addresses a crucial gap in the existing research on media ethics in Nepal. While previous studies have largely focused on national and daily newspapers, the unique position of weekly newspapers-with their often limited resources and community-focused content - requires separate consideration. (Ghimire, 2081)

METHODS

This study followed a quantitative methods design to collect data. An in-depth content analysis of two weekly newspapers, Jana Aastha and Ghatana Ra Bichar, was conducted to evaluate their adherence to key principles of the Journalist Code of Conduct. These two newspapers were selected as they fall under the A-class category of the Press Council Nepal. Jana Aastha belongs to left-leaning political ideologies, while Ghatana Ra Bichar pertains to democratic political parties, showing the diversity of the media sector in Nepal.

The media experts, editors, and journalists were selected based on sample size and their pertinence to the topic. Two editors of the selected newspapers were selected for content analysis. Additionally, three media experts were interviewed: the Chairman of Press Council Nepal, a professor at the Tribhuvan University Central Department of Mass Communication, and a senior journalist from an independent media house. The same set of questions, especially regarding their perception of the status of implementation of the Journalist Code of Conduct in Nepali weekly newspapers, were put to all the experts. Exhaustive interviews with cross questioning were conducted with all the experts to know their ideas more elaborately. The data thus obtained were analyzed by using common analytical methods.

CHALLENGES

In recent years, journalism in Nepal has undergone considerable change, especially with the advent of weekly papers. These papers, once used to provide news updates and critical news, are now confronted with an increased array of content such as subjective viewpoints, political agendas, and sensational reporting. This is a new kind of challenge that faces the practice of ethics in journalism.

News story diversification brings with it both challenges and opportunities to observe journalistic ethics. The Journalist Code of Conduct, a cornerstone of ethical journalism, has become increasingly indispensable in ensuring professional standards in the face of this evolving media landscape. The underlying reason for adhering to this code is to maintain the integrity of journalism by rendering news accurate, fair, unbiased, and respectful of the public right to know. These ethical principles of truth, accuracy, fairness, and responsibility serve to protect the dignity of the profession and are particularly critical in Nepal, where the media are extremely powerful in creating public opinion and political debate.

Weekly publications, though distinct from dailies, also have significant influence with the public. They are prone to bridge the gap between fast-breaking news and in-depth analysis, but this space for more meaningful reporting can sometimes be vulnerable to sensationalism and ideological bias. When journalistic integrity is violated, it undermines public trust and democratic institutions.

Although awareness of the value of ethical reporting is on the rise, application of the Journalist Code of Practice within the weekly papers in Nepal is still problematic. This is mainly because journalists receive insufficient, all-round training and political and commercial interests are much too deep-seated. Powerful actors usually are more interested in profit and political loyalty than in adhering to ethical practices, so the reporting that they commission tends to be biased or inaccurate.

Additionally, digital media and challenges that come with it, such as the spreading of misinformation, complicate ethical journalism in the country further. To counter this, there should be enhanced training, enhanced control through regulation, and greater editorial independence to guard against journalistic betrayal.

PROGRESS

The Press Council Nepal, tasked with observing media ethics and implementing the Journalist Code of Conduct, is facing severe challenges in its operations. A significant challenge is that the council is not independent, diluting its ability to observe media activities and implement remedies for breaches more effectively. This is compounded by the weak enforcement powers of the council, which constrain it from compelling media outlets to adhere to ethical guidelines. As previously indicated in reports by the Press Council Nepal (2018), violations of defamation, character assassination, and sensationalism still characterise the Nepalese media landscape despite attempts to de-enhance these issues by the council. These breaches of ethics are most evident in weeklies, where editorial supervision may be weaker and such abuses more reprehensible.

Despite these problems, every effort has been made to improve journalistic practices in Nepal's weeklies. One positive trend is increasing awareness among journalists, particularly young ones, of the necessity of adhering to ethical codes. A recent survey of the use of the Journalist Code of Conduct in weekly publications revealed that overwhelming numbers of correspondents and editors, the primary practitioners of the code, acknowledge the importance of ethics in what they do. The majority expressed a keen enthusiasm to improve professional standards and were actively seeking mechanisms to make reporting more balanced, truthful, and objective. This growing sense of moral responsibility is an important step towards correcting the media's moral shortcomings.

Further, the rivalry among media outlets has prompted some weekly newspapers to practice more responsible and ethical journalism. As these newspapers draw readers and seek to be credible sources of information, pressure is mounting to be different from sensationalized journalism. Through competition, some weekly publications have learned to adopt a culture of more responsible journalism based on maintaining professional standards and providing balanced and correct information.

In addition, there have been some attempts to increase journalistic training, particularly in the area of media ethics. The Nepal Press Institute and some journalism schools have initiated offering specialized training programs and workshops on media ethics and implementing the Journalist Code of Conduct. These initiatives are intended to equip journalists with the know-how and material they need in order to tackle the complex ethical challenges arising in the context of political and commercial pressure. However, despite such positive advancements, the effectiveness of Press Council Nepal is doubtful.

While the council may punish media organizations that violate ethical practices, such as warning, penalizing, or suspending licenses, its enforcement is typically ineffective. Past studies (Press Council Nepal, 2018) have determined that such punitive measures hardly deter media organizations from indulging in unethical practices. Political or commercial interests remain strong in undermining the council's credibility as well as its ability to act effectively. To be able to act more efficiently, the council's enforcement capabilities should be effectively strengthened and be made less responsive to external forces.

DISCUSSION

The path toward ethical journalism in Nepal's weekly newspapers is complex and requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders. By fostering a culture of accountability, transparency, and professionalism, Nepal's media can work towards creating a more responsible, credible, and

trustworthy journalism environment that better serves the public interest. As mentioned in the code of conduct, it was found that there is a problem in keeping the materials.

This study analyzes complaints received regarding the implementation of the journalistic code of conduct in weekly newspapers in Nepal, based on information from the Press Council. The research gathered opinions from 100 respondents, including publishers, editors, correspondents, printing houses, and readers, using a questionnaire.

The study also highlights that those who follow ethical rules, such as editors and civil society leaders, are often the ones who file complaints about violations. Despite the rise of digital technology, weekly newspapers continue to be valued by readers who rely on them for information. Many people still prefer to read print weekly newspapers, and the online versions are also accessed through mobile and information technology.

In terms of responsibility, the study found that editors (43%) were most often seen as accountable for the impact of news, while printers were seen as the least responsible (3%). Correspondents (30%) and publishers (10%) also played significant roles. One issue identified was that materials provided by correspondents were often not valid for publication unless approved by editors. Additionally, improper handling of materials during the printing process was noted as a problem, preventing proper publication.

Overall, the study reveals that despite the growing use of technology, challenges remain in adhering to journalistic standards in Nepal's weekly newspapers, and the code of conduct is still not consistently followed.

The findings reveal that the majority of complaints (45%) were related to the publication of news with insufficient facts, while 13% were related to errors. Additionally, 22% of complaints were about hypothetical news, and another 13% were due to errors in reporting. A significant portion of the complaints involved publishing false news influenced by external factors, which goes against the journalistic code of conduct.

Table 1

SN	Description	Number	Percent
1	Fact less	45	45.0
2	Hypothetical	22	22.0
3	Error	13	13.0
4	Confusing	20	20.0

Note. Field Study-2081

FINDINGS

Citizens are more concerned with the credibility of news reported in weekly papers. The majority of readers need the news to be true and reported ethically, with more consciousness of media standards. Citizens protest when journalists violate the code of ethics, for instance, reporting news as a form of revenge or failing to carry out thorough investigation.

There is insufficient action or inquiry into complaint, and only formal letters are done. There is some interest in theory of journalism, though application of the journalistic code of practice is poor, and many weekly papers do not consistently use ethical principles. The lower ethical standards are reinforced by journalists who are not formally qualified in journalism. City-centered news frequently are the only stories weekly newspapers can handle due to budget limitations and the lack of trained staff.

This has led to a decline in the overall quality of content despite the quantitative increase in weekly publications. The majority of weekly newspapers care less about theoretical principles or

journalistic recognition. There is apprehension regarding the future success of weekly newspapers because they care less about selfish goals. Media literacy is increasing among the public, and it becomes increasingly hard for newspapers to sway readers.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the code of conduct among journalists working in Kathmandu's weekly newspapers is weak, and complaints about unethical practice are seldom handled appropriately. There are several reasons why the quality of journalism has been deteriorating, such as financial limitations, lack of proper skilled manpower, and increasing focus on profit at the cost of ethical reporting.

But there is a silver lining. With increased media literacy and the commonality of social media, the citizens are now being empowered to make the media accountable, and that is a silver lining for the future of journalism. To this extent, the Press Council Nepal can make more frequent and focused checks on media contents to ensure effective adherence to the code of conduct.

In addition, there is a pressing need to grant journalists greater legal rights and amend the Press Council law to give it greater powers to enforce ethical journalism standards. The government also needs to invest in journalist training programs on the code of conduct, and the Press Council should be the primary agency tasked with this aim. Both journalists and policymakers need to be more accountable in ensuring that media habits are informed by ethical standards. By doing this minimum, we can hope for a future of healthy, ethical journalism in the public interest.

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