Chapter 15
Re-Evaluation of Nepali Media, Social Networking Spaces, and Democratic Practices in Media

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ABSTRACT

This chapter first analyzes the Nepali mainstream media and social media's effect upon its relationships with audiences or news-receivers. Then, it explores how social media is a virtual space for creating democratic forums in order to generate news, share among Networked Knowledge Communities (NKCs), and disseminate across the globe. It further examines how social media can embody a collective voice of indigenous and marginalized people, how it can better democratize mainstream media, and how it works as an alternative media. As a result of the impact of the Internet upon the Nepali society and the Nepali mainstream media, the traditional class stratifications in Nepal have been changed, and the previously marginalized and disadvantaged indigenous peoples have also begun to be empowered in the new ways brought about by digital technology. Social networking spaces engage the common people—those who are not in power, marginalized and disadvantaged, dominated, and excluded from opportunities, mainstream media, and state mechanisms—democratically in emic interactions in order to produce first-hand news about themselves from their own perspectives. Moreover, Nepali journalists frequently visit social media as a reliable source of information. The majority of common people in Nepal use social networking sites as a forum to express their collective voice and also as a tool or medium to correct any misrepresentation in the mainstream media. Social media and the Nepali mainstream media converge on the greater issues of national interest, whereas the marginalized and/or indigenous peoples of Nepal use the former as a space that embodies their denial of discriminatory news in the latter.

INTRODUCTION

The putative assumption about media ethics is that media and journalists are always guided by the motivation of uplifting democratic norms and values, human rights like freedom of speech, as well as the basic right of access to information, and of disseminating true news and information. A government, and other professional and civic societies of a democratic nation, inherits a filial responsibility to assure a fearless environment in which journalists can work professionally. Concomitantly, the development of journalists' professional career depends upon how honestly they devote themselves to generating true and unbiased news, and also upon how they play a role in uplifting democracy and fundamental human rights. Moreover, the relationships among media, journalists, their professional activities, and audiences have been affected by digital technology, mainly by the advent of Internet. Social media plays a creative role to complement the mainstream media to produce news and to oppose it when it deviates from the media ethics.

As a two-way medium of communication, social networking sites offer an opportunity for discussions, corrections, and consensual consequences about news, events, and information, which the mainstream media cannot do because its structure is hierarchical. In such inclusively democratic interactions and user-oriented content lies the power of social networking spaces that can oppose the unidirectional and imposing structure of mainstream media so as to redefine it towards a process of democratization to create news and information for dissemination. Such a dialogic relationship between the Nepali mainstream media and social media is propitiously dynamic. Indeed, the People's Revolution-1990 marks the beginning of an inclusive democracy in Nepal, so all the socio-cultural, political, economic, ideological, media, and state-mechanisms are on the way of becoming better democratic and participatory practices.

Based on the discussions, this paper analyzes the Nepali mainstream media and social media's effect upon its audiences and news-receivers. Then, it explores how social media as a virtual space creates democratic forums, generates news, shares among NKCs, and disseminates it across cultures. It further examines how social media can embody a collective voice of the common people, how it can democratize mainstream media, and how it can work as an alternative media. Structurally, media is hierarchical and correlative with the vertical stratifications of Nepali society. The impact of Internet upon the hierarchal media and society is immensely promising towards the kind of more inclusive democracy and participatory practices in all institutions including the mainstream media. The previously marginalized indigenous peoples of Nepal are emerging as a dominant class in the new hierarchy of digital divide. The virtual online communities, such as NKCs and networked knowledge societies (NKSs), are of paramount importance to address real offline problems because the former embody a kind of collective voice of the common people, collective voice of marginalized people, and generate a kind of collective power. Though social media works mainly as a complementary media to mainstream media, it also works as an alternative media when the latter deviates from its filial and professional responsibility.

HEGEMONIC CLASS HIERARCHIES AND MEDIA BIAS

Media prejudice that ensued from the traditional class hierarchy can still be seen in Nepal despite the fact that the nation embarked on the republican set up in 2007. From the very inception of modern Nepal in the eighteenth century, Hindu ideology remained as the state ideology until the People's Revolution-1990, and Hindu male elites remained dominant in all the state-mechanisms (Gurung, 2007; Hangen, 2007), including the Nepali media. As the Nepali media industry is still

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