Increasing Distrust in Mainstream Media and the State of the Online and Social Media in Nepal

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Abstract: *The impact of mainstream media is declining globally in this age of digital technology. It is not the obstruction of technologies but the mainstream media themselves that detach them from common people. They obstruct the role of the "Fourth Estate" in a society. As a Gallup poll shows, the USA has a high percentage of distrust of mainstream media. In Nepal, social and online media have been gaining a strong presence. Like in other countries, mainstream media did not change them based on changing context in society; second, they have ignored the role of representing the voice of common people; and third, they have not prepared to deal with the aggressive posture of social and online media. But, due to less formality and no regulated framework, misuse of social and online media has increased exponentially. The finding of this paper is that misuse of social and online media poses a threat to the peace, order, and harmony of society. So the initiative of the government aiming to make social and online media socially responsible is certainly a positive effort. Relevant legal provisions to regulate social and online media are inevitable. This paper is based on qualitative methods, and secondary data are used in it. Due to the descriptive nature of the paper, it analyzes all relevant and related perspectives and comes to a pragmatic conclusion of the research questions.*

Keywords: *Mainstream Media; Distrust; Social and Online Media; Nepal Government; Regulation; Media Responsibility*

1. INTRODUCTION

Even before the reestablishment of democracy in Nepal in 1991, some media outlets, some at the government level and some through private and informal means, were launched. At the time of the Rana Regime (1846–1951), then-Prime Minister Dev Shamsher took the initiative to launch the first government-owned newspaper, Gorkhapatra, in 1901. During the autocratic Rana period, some literature-based people informally published magazines and tried to make people aware. With the fall of the Rana Regime in 1951, democracy was established for the first time in Nepali history. The Nepali government had formally established the first radio station in February 1951. Between 1951 and 1960, progress was made in terms of media development; a number of newspapers, magazines, and news agencies were established. When King Mahendra took power in 1961, the democratic system was derailed and the autocratic Panchayat era began. It had been gone for 30 years. It hampered hampered the fast leap of media development. During the Panchayat era, though there was no political freedom and no rights to the press, some efforts were made to launch print media, mostly from social and political groups and a few from governmental efforts. Nepal Television, was formally launched in 1984; it was a momentous event in media development. Definitely, with the reestablishment of democracy in 1990, people got complete political freedom, and the media sector has a tangible environment for flourishing qualitatively and quantitatively. Today's major newspapers, like Kantipur, Annapurna, Nagarik, Naya Patrika, and major television networks and online media are all the product of the 1990s political, economic, and social reforms. The new constitutional provisions and related laws became the foundation for the media's development, even though they were not enough. When we see data from the Press Council Nepal, just in 1991–2001, 1620 newspapers were published; among them, 230 were daily newspapers (Press Council Nepal, 2001). Especially since 2010, an era of modern

telecommunications and the Internet began. The advent of news online, access on a smartphone, multiple channels through YouTube, and optimal use of social sites have actually reduced the scope, impact, and space of mainstream media. People now search on social sites for news and other information and directly participate in the interaction and opinion-forming processes. Mainstream media also adjust to the Internet world, but their influence seems very low in comparison to other popular online news portals. According to a study carried out in 2018, the mobile phone is the most common device for communication in Nepal, and 90% of respondents said that they have their mobile phone and that it is used for multiple types of information (Sharecast Initiative Nepal, 2018). Mobile phones are by far the most common communication device in Nepal today, with an overwhelming majority of 96% of respondents owning one at the household level, and individually, they are owned by 90%. Due to the unraveling crime scene around the world using social media, many governments around the world took the initiative to regulate and supervise. The Nepali government also concluded that it should regulate and supervise social media sites (Nepali Sansar, 2019). For some years, there have been a dozen cases of linchpins in India using social media propaganda. In these cases, on the one hand, civil society groups blame the government for not doing anything to stop violence and chaos, and on the other hand, when the government tries to regulate social and online media, they raise a loud voice against it, accusing it of curtailing freedom of expression. Civil society needs to stop this double standard. Further, they need to begin a discussion on how to make social and online media systematic, friendly, and responsible in an era of information technology. This paper has found that governments around the world should not delay in formulating policies to regulate social and online media. It is for upholding social order and harmony. This research paper is based on the qualitative method and is exploratory. Secondary data are used to maintain authenticity and validity in the analysis and findings.

## 1.1. Communication Infrastructure and Procedural Change

Modern journalism took a vehement shape by ripping up the industrial revolution. Journalism supports the expansion of the international system and the liberal economic-political order. Modernization has shaped the roots based on major factors in societal spheres (Appadurai, 1990; Albrow, 1996; Friedman, 1990; Gilpin, 2000). Some academics link journalism with the democratic ideological tradition, but history shows that both democratic and autocratic regimes use the strength and arena of journalism to achieve their interests and missions. In modern times, the media has become a powerful tool to control, manage, regulate, and retain the public sphere. Most of the media history books lack the real media growth of the world. They just focused on Western media development. There is a long history of using various instruments to disseminate information. Since the height of the Cold War, debate on the impact, influence, and fairness of the media has been front and center (Boyd-Barrett and Thussu, 1992; Galtung and Vincent, 1992; Gerbner and Nordenstreng, 1993; Herman and Machesney).Print media since the invention of the modern printing press in the 16th century, the development of radio and FM systems, particularly with the end of WWI, TV channels established following the end of WWI in many countries, the use of the internet since the end of the 20th century in a larger space, and with advanced technological development increasing the social media, online, and sites as a directly participatory sphere for an audience. The media's responsibility in society is greater, and they need to be revised based on changing context (Hafez, 2007; Curran and Seaton, 2003; Hamelink, 1984; Mankekar, 1978). From a business point of view, the media and information sphere has become a lucrative area for investors. Another aspect is that when a big business group runs the media house, it can influence political power and fulfill their parochial interests. For some years, due to highly advanced social media and sites, the market for large-scale media has been declining, advertising are low, scope is dwindling, and people's support is also declining. The media provides further support to liberalize society, and the state needs to create an environment for media development (Flournoy, 1997; Hernandez and Schramm, 1989; Learner, 1958; World Association of Newspapers, 2011). Though some media experts opined that the scope of mainstream media would not be decreased, the reality is very different. The audience has many fast and usable options now. They prefer what is simple, quick, and allows them to express themselves. In America

too, studies show that Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have a bigger role in public opinion building and influencing national politics. Mainstream media are struggling to retain their existence and access. Like in the global media context, the Nepali mainstream media is also not in as good a condition as before due to the massively increasing pace and utility of social media sites and online outlets. The qualitative development of the Nepali media has always been an issue of concern for concerned parties. The government is still not working hard to build communication infrastructure around the country. Legal and institutional arrangements are properly established. The Nepali constitution, laws, and regulations fully support press freedom, freedom of expression, and flexibility in media development. Professional development of the media began after 1991 with the formulation of new flexible acts and regulations (Dhungel, 2012). The Press and Publication Act 1992, Broadcasting Act 1992, and Press Council Act 1991 opened the door for Nepali media developments in terms of all spheres like institutions, management, print/broadcast/online, professionalism, and qualitative leaps. Nepal became the leader of community radio in South Asia (Adhikari, 2002). Many colleges and institutions are opening to teach communication and media studies, which helps build a strong workforce in the media sector (Sharma, 2018).As a liberal nation with active civil societies, Nepali people are highly influenced by the modern globalization trend, global political, economic-technological changes, and their cultural ramifications. Acknowledging this reality, the Nepal government has, in the last decade, particularly carried out major reforms in the telecommunication sector. Liberal policy and institutional arrangements of the Nepal government have supported the tangible development of the media sector, particularly in the post-1990 scenario (Onta, 2006). The Nepali diaspora is also believed to be a dominant promoter and push factor to create more demand and force the government to bring more telecommunication facilities. 's government has carried out massive changes in terms of telecommunication and Internet facilities in comparison to its previous record, but the reality is that when we compare it with other advanced nations, Nepali people are still very far from using modern information technologies and other related facilities. The High Level Media Commission has suggested that the government create a favorable environment for the media's development and similarly try to regulate unnecessary and harmful information using media outlets (Adhikari, 2006).

1.2. Social Media Trend in Nepal

Mainly, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Viber, Instagram, IMO, and WhatsApp have been popular social media in Nepal for some years. Increasing Internet access and the use of smartphones have made it possible to have connections with all of social media. People are directly connected with the global community through the Internet. Data as of today shows that there are around 12 million social site users in Nepal (Sharma, 2018). With reasonable and easy Internet access and many people buying smartphones, the new age of digital media has gained momentum (Prasain, 2018). According to the Nepal Telecommunications Authority's Management Information System, almost 86 percent of Nepal's population is now linked to the Internet. It has been because of the commercial use of social media, also increasing at a wonderful pace, for some years. Mainly YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are more prevalent sites for social marketing. Nowadays, it is common to allocate a certain budget for social marketing to social and private agencies to disseminate their information, interests, and values about products. According to them, traditional media are expensive and have not had much impact on the people (Ibid.). For them, social media gives them the best platform to link with many people and customers. The industrial revolution and the present information revolution both have significant impacts on expanding communication networks globally in a broad sphere (Ferguson, 2003; Machesney, 1999; Stevenson, 1993; Thomson, 1995; Giddens, 1990). Now, Facebook and TikTok have been the most used social media in Nepal. From young to older people, most of them prefer Facebook for communication and exchanging their views, experiences, and activities. According to the recent studies of Global Stats in Nepal, among users of social media, 94.35% use Facebook as their prime social media choice (Global States, 2019). It was depicted that the use of social sites is increasing in large numbers. Even the other informal studies show, interestingly, that remittance has become supportive of expanding the use of

smartphones and having Internet access. Due to the remittance support, per capita income is increasing diametrically, not vertically, so these people can buy new phones or communication devices. Similarly, there has been discussion on social media about the negative impact of social media on society, particularly on the younger generation, including the psychological impact, waste of time, loneliness, arrogance, an increase of hatred, and manipulation.
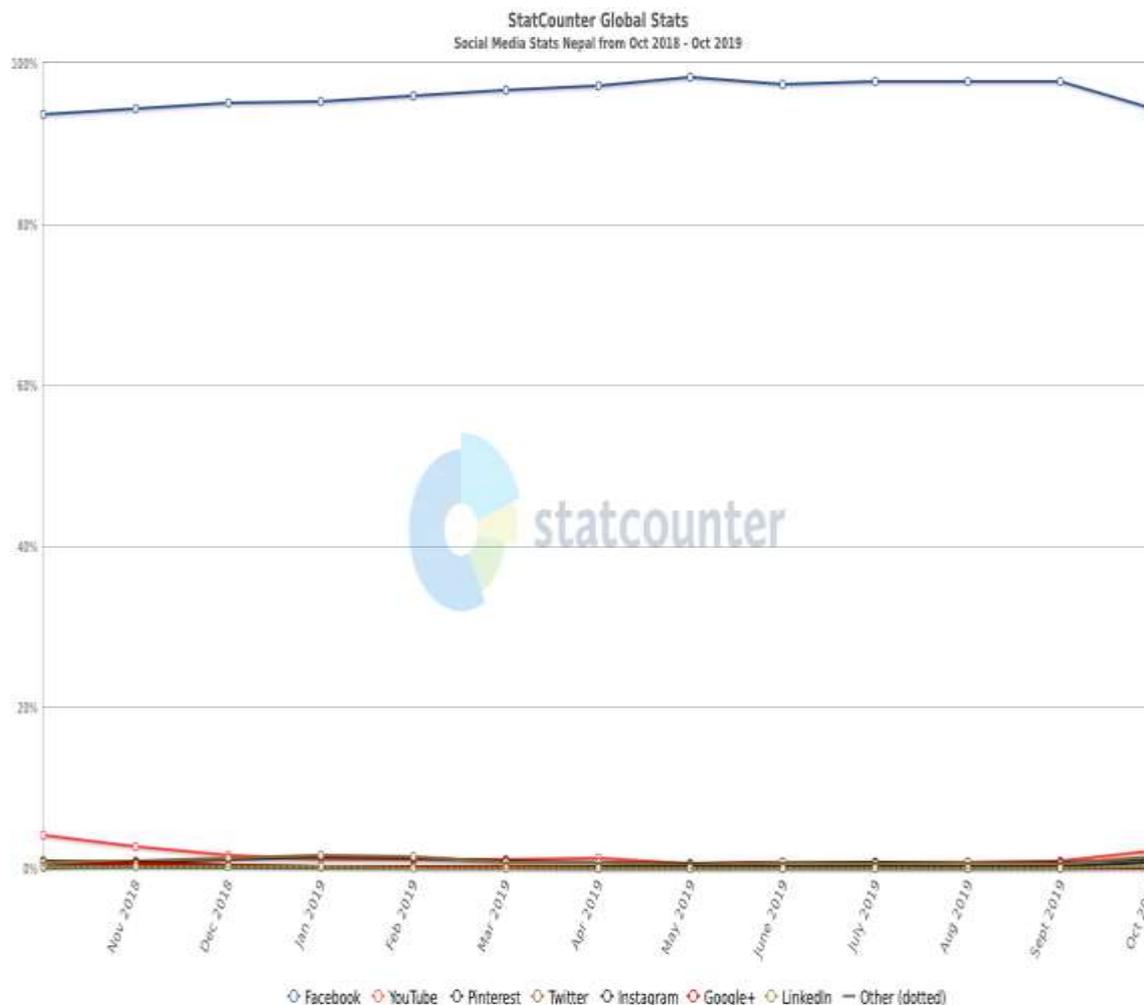
(Source: GlobalStats, 2019)

With the increased use of smartphones, Nepali social media users make significant issues and events trending on the national level. On several occasions, they used the online platform to vehemently express their agendas and dissatisfaction. It is said that at the time of the destructive earthquake on April 25, 2015, online users shared a lot of information to support victims. They launched multiple trends to make a louder voice on behalf of the people. "Help for Sindhupalanchowk, Earthquake Action Nepal, Let's Join Together to Help Nepal. Team Greeley from Colorado to Help Nepal, Black Day, 25th April 2015, for Nepal, Nepal Earthquake Survivors Fund, Rise Up Nepal, Strictly Missing Person Only—Earthquake 2015, Kathmandu Earthquake Volunteers, Go Home Indian Media, Kathmandu Living Labs, Black Saturday Nepal, and Help Earthquake Relief Nepal were some of the major initiatives taken by various groups, and they used social media as a wonderful platform to enhance these programs (The Rising Nepal, 2016). Strong communication infrastructure is required to increase interaction and exchange with a large community, which could be productive to address structural issues (UNESCO, 1996; Barney, 2004; Gillmor, 2006; McLuhan, 1962). There are some concerns by medical experts about addiction of social media. On one side, it supports the sharing of health-related information and methods, and on the other side, it creates multiple health problems too. Medical expert Dip Narayan Thakur (2017) writes that research regarding possible menaces of social media use and relative efficacy of social media

over other communication channels is required to develop necessary strategies to overcome possible threats to health and apply social media for health to its full conceivable potential. There is no doubt that social media are strong sources of information and a platform for sharing, learning, and exchanging views, ideas, and thoughts. But like in other open societies around the world, increasing addiction to social media, particularly by the younger generation, is becoming problematic and a threat to innovation and creativity in Nepal. The role of mass media should be to support positive change in society by raising the issues of common people and disseminating information based on the requirements of common people (Dahal, 2011). But since some years ago, the situation has become different. Further, psychologists warn that the government needs to make more awareness campaigns to control misuse of particularly social and online media and use of it just for constructive works. Some months ago, the Nepal government banned the porn sites, aiming to stop misuse of the social sites and stop addiction to negative sites on the Internet. Mass media should not forget their basic responsibility, and maintaining balance in their reporting helped them to expand their credibility (MacBride, 1980; Padovani, 2005; Seibert, Peterson and Schramm, 1963).

1.3. Decreasing Trust and Scope of Mainstream Media

The structure of society and political context depict the people's psychology and perception of taking historical initiative for change (Kennedy, 1989; Marx and Engels, 1848; Durkheim, 1982; Foucault, 1979; Keohane and Nye, 2000). When social media has a significant presence in Nepali society, the scope and use of mainstream media are dramatically decreased. These mainstream media, like newspapers, TV, and radio, have failed to transform their working methods and qualitative development and are unable to acknowledge the interest of the people. With the changing context, television should formulate new programs to address the expectations of the audience (Sharma, 1997). Most of the mainstream media misuse the norms of the voiceless and notoriously take benefits from elite groups. In the words of writer Noam Chomsky, mainstream media owners have an unofficial understanding with powerful elites, and they never disseminate information that is against the core interest of the elites. There have been many questions and doubts from many segments of society on contents of media with later's more indulgent with elites (Zhao, 1998; Bakardijeva, 2005; Straubhaar, 1991; Castell, Mireia and Qiu, 2007). In the last five years, with the increasing pace of social media, the mainstream media has faced an existential threat in Nepal. In every national event or accident, social media now leads in all spheres like disseminating information, discussion, depiction, speedy flow, and presentation. There is also a trend among media professionals to leave mainstream media and open up or work on social and online media. Recognizing the changing scenario, the related ministry of the Nepal government has issued some acts, regulations, and procedures to guide, supervise, and bring all social media under the legal system. We cannot announce that the end of the mainstream media will come soon. But one reality of the ground and media practice is that trust, scope, influence, and impact of mainstream media are at a very low pace and also in a decreasing way. According to the Knight Foundation and Gallup Poll of 2018, the majority of Americans have lost trust in the media (Ingram, 2018). Actually, in reality, that poll's result was not an issue of wonder for many. People think that corporate media only serve corporate interests, and these media are far behind the representation of voiceless people. One reason behind the increase in the use of social media is also the grand weakness and failure of mainstream media to represent the common people. American President Donald Trump openly criticized the media for lying to people and providing huge amounts of fake news to the people. His term 'Fake News Media' for American mainstream media is quite popular since his ascendancy at the White House. According to media critics, most of the media reports are based on inaccuracy, bias, fake news, and distorted facts. Due to the increasing distrust of media reports, the role of fact-checkers also increased in a large number, who support testing shared news and information (Funke, 2018). According to another poll conducted in America by Axios and Survey Monkey, which was released on June 27, 72 percent of Americans believe traditional news sources tell them things they know to be fake, false, or intentionally confusing (The Hill News, 2018). Jeffrey McCall, a professor at DePauw University, says that the deterioration in trust of the media is upsetting because an effective republic necessitates citizens who are informed and have adequate, accurate news on which to base self-governance decisions (Fox

News, 2019). "Nobody expects the media to be perfect or 100 percent accurate, but obvious and high-profile lapses in professional judgment, like we saw in the New York Times, remind the public that the news industry is in chaos," he said (Fox News, 2019). The news industry needs to play a balanced and accurate role based on facts and evidence. If they look to the interest of a few elite groups, don't separate news from opinion and distort the facts, then the trust of common people in them declines, and they just become the areas of blame and hatred.

There have been some patterns in the research around the world about the declining trust in mainstream media. As mentioned in previous sections of this paper, the large 'democracy' United States has a high rate of distrust of mainstream media. It is the mainstream media themselves who forget their basic foundation, norms, and structural basis. They have just become the propaganda machines of the elite groups. The media owner just watched for the illegal benefits, even though sometimes they sabotage others to gain something or otherwise threaten them to write against their personal and institutional lives. The democratic country of Nepal has also experienced the worst media situation in some years. Most of the mainstream media in Nepal have almost forgotten the voice of the common people. They are becoming far from their audience by leaving people-centered agendas and emphasizing more about the elite's interests and concerns. At times of political struggle or national crisis, all media have a responsibility to give importance to those critical matters. But in the other situation, the media should follow the voice of the voiceless without diverting their attention. The problem with the post-1990 scenario is that it almost diverts from the agendas of common people and engages in serving capitalist and power groups. American professor Noam Chomsky is one of the pioneer academicians who never tired of writing against the filthy and unsolicited activities of mainstream media in a capitalist system. When Nepali political parties and civil society groups were in a political movement to bring social and political change, mainstream media had supported a lot to create a conducive environment for change. But with the end of campaign, media owners thought that political freedom gave them almighty freedom of expression and they could do whatever they wanted. This tendency, ultimately, drives them to create monopolies and increase bargaining power to get illegal and unnecessary benefits. American President Donald Trump's term "fake news media" is an outcome of distrust in mainstream media in America, so even though Trump is criticized for his comment, there are a large number of people in America or around the world who support Trump's comment because of media's straying from their basic principle, value and norms. Digital media need to be a connecting factor rather than fracturing the society (James, 2003). Many cities in Nepal now have 4G Internet service. As discussed above, a large population now uses various social media sites to share their thoughts. In 2019, there were some incidents in Nepal where a large portion of social media users showed their presence by actively criticizing the government, political parties, and administrative mechanisms. Nirmala Pant rape case, Rabi Lamichhane issue, Gyanendra Shahi attack case and Krishna Bahadur Mahara case were the some issues social media users had given immense pressure to associated backers to reprove the criminals and provide justice to victims. Some media scholars in Nepal say that these incidents even decrease the access of mainstream media and increase the scope and length of social media platforms. Social media's interactive practice and immediate reaction are the major aspects of why people are becoming crazy on it. Traditional news reporting methods, delayed dissemination, formality, paid news practices, and focusing on the interests of elites—these are actually the major reasons why mainstream media are losing ground and scope in Nepal and around the world.

1.4. How to Make Online and Social Media Responsible?

There is no doubt that online and social media have gained strong attention around the world. Due to them, the definition and characteristics of journalists, reporters, editors, and photojournalists seem to be redefined and reinterpreted based on changing contexts, the use of modern technologies, and people's perceptions. With the decreasing scope of mainstream media, there is also a strong voice on the requirement of regulation of online and social media to make them more professional, flow truthful information, have healthy competition or interaction on sharing the views, and realize their social responsibility and contribution. The American Congress and the European parliamentary committee had called Facebook CEO

Mark Elliot Zuckerberg and asked multiple questions about users' privacy, misuse of data, and many other issues, assuming that social media are crossing the required professional standard. With the increasing use of social media, the discussions rage on about whether Facebook and other social media platforms are good or bad for human beings and whether it is necessary to hold them responsible for the actions of their users or advertisers (Manson, 2018). Silicon Valley has faced immense questions since last year, and these concerns are more serious than just curiosity. Manson said that people have changed about Silicon Valley and its reputation has declined dramatically. The reason behind it is that most social media sites are the products of Silicon Valley, and now these sites are crossing social boundaries, attacking personal privacy, and ignoring the secrecy of the users. Some experts opined that rather than governmental regulation, users themselves need to be responsible. We have the responsibility to post or share everything in a trustworthy manner and make social media trustworthy. In America, some attacks on the US government's laissez faire approach to regulation are due to Internet platforms being able to use business strategies that were not in use at the time of initiation (MacNamee, 2018). In the present situation, Facebook, TikTok, X, Google, and YouTube are very influential social media platforms. It is said that they have more power than groups to bring people into the street and make them dynamic. The concern here is that they have started to misuse personal data and use it for business purposes. Vibrant use of social media in the 2016 American presidential election had alerted to all concerned parties to the increasing role of social media platforms. The biggest challenge now is to stop hatred, negativity, blaming, and rumors using the social sites. Because of increasing misuse of online and social media in one hand and a similarly growing trend of using it, communication experts and related stakeholders have started discussions on necessary regulation of online and social media. In Nepal, the government has proposed the media-related bill in the parliament, aiming to make all types of media responsible and follow the social norms and values. Social media should play a neutral role; to make them instrumentally responsible necessary legal mechanisms need to be issued. Social media's misuse of information is more harmful because it is disseminated to millions of people within a second (Leetaru, 2018). Person-to-person communication has minimal effect and a slow flow in comparison to social media. As a liberal democratic country, Nepal has seen huge quantitative development in the media sector. Analysts say that Nepali democracy has not assured positive outcome to the common people. Why democracy? To learn Nepal would be an appropriate destination for researchers and academia. Weak institutions, irresponsible political parties, and dire corruption have made Nepali democracy like a "white elephant" to the people. Getting flexible democratic rule, social media got fertile ground to grow their presence. Like Western democratic countries, Nepali society is enjoying total freedom in using social media. Similarly, negativity, blaming, hate messages, and unhealthy criticism are becoming the normal issues for social media users. Security experts warned that if they were delayed in regulating online and social media, they would destroy the peace, harmony, and friendliness in the society and create complete chaos. Acknowledging this reality, since 2018, the American congress and European Parliament have started serious discussions, calling some senior officials of social media like Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc. No doubt that since the last decade, social media has contributed to linking the global community more closely. Social media has played a vital role in the movement of mobilization of the society. Love, hatred, strikes, alignment, and attachment are in all ways now social media are in the front to flow that matter. Powerful social media companies are now at the top of the list of richest companies in the world. But the worrying issue is that great leaps forward in connecting people can cause harm to individuals and society at large (Gyimah, Sam, 2019). Social media companies are focusing more on just getting more profits and doing all work to expand their spheres and benefits. Without bringing them under the necessary regulation and systematic procedure, the society and nation will face severe consequences in the future; that cost will be huge and destructive, and only chaos will remain in the society. Countries like Nepal, where the number of social media users is increasing day by day, must take the institutional initiative to make social and online media responsible and positive for society. On one hand, the government should create an environment for the positive development of social and online media, and similarly, on the other hand, the state legislature should issue related laws and regulations to handle, manage, and regulate social and online media. It is better to take

initiative at both the international and national levels. Internationally, related international institutions could make a consensus among states to formulate international norms and limitations to conduct social media companies. Secondly, state parties should work domestically on that matter. Studies show that most of the research on the use of social media depicts the dangerously growing problem of mental health and depression. Fatally, those aged 14 to 30 are on the top list of using social media; they are wasting their productive time of life on nonsense use of social media. An in-depth study by the Royal Society for Public Health tells us that social media can be more addictive than alcohol or cigarettes. "Systems designed to bring people together are leaving many young people feeling isolated, alone, and alienated," writes Sam Gyimah. It should not be delayed to bring social and online media companies within a responsible legal boundary, which could compel them to do it for positive consequences rather than negative ones. Owners of tech giants also must contribute to society. When communicating with owner tech giants, government institutions need to take the initiative to adopt a balanced policy, which obliges tech giants to be benign and similarly to create an environment under which tech giants grow nicely and contribute to the social and economic development of the country. It will be a win-win solution to increasing anxiety about the misuse of social and online media and also the tension of tech giants on possible government hurdles on their business due to pressure from civil society spheres particularly.

2. EFFORTS IN NEPAL FOR REGULATION

While mainstream media in Nepal are losing trust and a base from a large section of the audience, in fact, social and online media have gained huge ground to flourish. At the same course, social media users have misused the platforms, and some incidents of crime have happened. Acknowledging this situation, the Nepal government last February tabled a new law at the parliament, which is aimed at regulating social and online media and also mainstream media. This bill is also supposed to restrict civil servants from sharing their views criticizing the government. According to the provision of the proposed bill, the government has prescribed a fine of up to Rs 1.5 million and/or five years of imprisonment for individuals who post online content that goes against the provisions of law (Lama, 2019). "The bill has a provision that states that no one should be defrauded, discouraged, discriminated against, or discredited through social networking sites," Lama writes. Critics said that this is an attempt by the Nepal Communist Party (NCP)-led government to prevent negative comments and criticism of the government and NCP. But a government official says that it is a national issue, and regulation of social and online media has become inevitable for peace, stability, and harmony in the society. In the age of information technology, it is very hard to control the increasing weight of social and online media. Even in the many autocratic regimes, use of social media is high, though they have put strict regulations in place. Communist China has largest number of social media users and also multiple sites to share opinions. According to the Chinese government, due to the practical provision and management, social sites are fulfilling their social responsibilities and also obeying social norms and values. But in many countries in the world, social and online media have become the source of chaos. That's why respective governments are seriously taking measures to make media's work responsible, accountable, and acceptable. Due to the unraveling crime scene around the world using social media, many governments took initiatives to regulate. The government came to a decision to regulate the social media sites (Nepali Sansar, 2019). For some years, there have been dozens of cases of lynching in India using social media. For these cases, on the one hand, civil society groups blame the government for not doing anything to stop violence and chaos, and at the same time, when the government tries to regulate social media and online activity, they make loud voices against the government, accusing the state of curtailing freedom of expression. The civil society needs to stop this double standard position. Further, they need to begin discussion on how to make social and online media systematic, friendly, and responsible in an era of information technology. Without institutional discipline, delivery, and responsibility, democracy could not be healthy and secure. Nepali people are enjoying complete liberal rights, but a problem occurred due to the weak democratic institutions; the system is not working properly, which means irresponsibility is everywhere. In this context, social and online media have gained propitious ground to grow. The same political leaders who insisted their cadre attack opposition parties using social media felt humiliated and

nonsensical when attacked by others. Now social media is becoming a ground for spreading hatred, blame-games, and negativity. Though some parties in Nepal are not satisfied with some provisions of the proposed bill, they also agree on the issue of strict regulation to make social and online media responsible. When the mainstream media forgot their basic principle and went far from their fundamental duty, then they lost their real ground and sufficed to elite groups only. On the other side, mainstream media has left investigative journalism, which is a way to retain value and weight in mainstream media. Chomsky said that there is nothing at mainstream media; they are reporting just elites' interests and activities. In the scenario of a large gap between mainstream media and common people, social media has successfully filled the gap. For the first time since modern journalism began in the world, audiences have become strong and are using their own sharing platforms. The suggestion of media experts in Nepal is that the government should address the issue of misuse of social media and online platforms but be careful not to curtail freedom of expression of the people, which is the most important pillar of liberal democracy.

3. CONCLUSION

Studies show that, particularly since the last decade, public interest and trust in mainstream media around the world are declining. The debate that has started now is that the decline of mainstream media is not only bad for the professionalism of the media sector; it is actually a big loss of democracy and liberal order. For some years, social and online media have been increasing their scope, strength, and access on a large scale. The public are attracted to them due to immediacy and direct participation in sharing and imparting information, views, and experiences. Professor Noam Chomsky has long been critical of the role of mainstream media; according to him, it serves the interests of elite groups and forgets the agendas of common people. Mainstream media should be the voice of voiceless people. Accuracy, balance, and credibility should be their basic principles while reporting and disseminating the information, news, and views. But with the drastic advancement of the capitalist economy and the increasing strength of large multinational companies, they have used media owners and later parties to serve power elites to take parochial benefits. The 2016 Report of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, entitled Trust, Media, and Democracy Initiative, clearly mentioned that US citizens have a large amount of distrust in mainstream media, and the rate is increasing. Respondents opined that mainstream media became the puppet of the power elites. On the other side, for some years social and online media have been getting significant presence, support, and active participation in the public sphere. Reasons are that individuals can directly participate in the use of social media, it is fast to flow, and comparatively, it has more influence and impact on others. Social media has given a massive platform for individuals, businesses, entrepreneurs, professionals, and organizations that seek more attachment and inclination to each other. In today's more competitive time, while people don't have enough time for media, social media have actually become good tools for them to utilize short time and share the stories. Rather than mainstream media, social and online media are easily accessible, and all kinds of users could enjoy them based on their interest areas and concerns. For the business community too, social media is the best platform to reach clients effectively and with easy influence. In the context of Nepal, particularly in the last five years, social and online media have been taking a strong presence with numerous users. Like in other countries, mainstream media did not change them based on changing context in society and around the world; second, they have left to represent the voice of common people; and third, they have not prepared to deal with the aggressive posture of social and online media. That's why, in Nepal, social media has many users, and the pace is increasing in a fast way.

Due to less formality, no regulated framework, and lack of self-responsibility, misuse of social and online media has increased exponentially. If you want to destroy others' dignity, you can easily do that using social and online media platforms. Misuse of social and online media has given rise to threats to the peace, order, and harmony of the society. So at the request of civil society groups, the initiative of the Nepal government to pass the bill aiming to make social and online media socially responsible and accountable and to promote healthy competition is a positive effort, and we think it could be exemplary to other countries too. And also there should not be any provision to curtail freedom of speech and fundamental civil

rights of individuals, which are guaranteed by the constitution. Relevant legal provisions to regulate social and online media are inevitable, and also civil society groups need to be aware of whether the government itself is responsible or not in the case of the protection of fundamental rights of citizens.

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