

Kathmandu-centric Dateline of Nepali Media

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Abstract

It has been almost a decade since the federal system started to be practiced in Nepal, ending the centralized governance system. But there is no reflection of federal structure in media sector. Kathmandu-based main stream media are still operating with centralized mindset. This study has employed theoretical framework of diversity in democratic governance. Qualitative approach has been used to analyse issue after key informant interviews and content analysis of four national dailies consisting government owned and privately operated. The study shows that the front pages of newspapers are widely dominated by the Kathmandu-centric bylines and the media contents are predominantly Kathmandu-centric.

Keywords: *Federal setup, Nepali media, Dateline, Kathmandu centric, Nepali journalism*

Introduction

Media are considered as a mirror of society that reflect and represent the values, beliefs, attitudes and diverse dynamics of the society in which it is created and consumed. This idea implies that media contents is a reflection of the larger social context, acting as a mirror that portrays both the positive and negative aspects of society. As Nepal moved from unitary system with a three-level federal system of government, representing and reflecting diverse society in media have received extensive consideration.

Nepal officially started to practice the federal structure after the promulgation of 'Constitution of Nepal, 2015' which has categorally enlisted the powers/jurisdiction of all tiers of governments. A noteworthy arrangement of the federal practice is that provincial governments have the power to issue license for Radio, FM Radio and Television. While local level governments are authorised to issue FM Radio license. Prior to this, broadcasting sector was taken seriously and private sectors were awarded broadcasting licenses with different tight conditions. Radio Sagarmatha,

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accepting 15 conditions including not to broadcast news broadcasting contents, is the first station to get broadcasting license from private sector in 1997. For the print media, liberal arrangements had already been made after the restoration of democracy in 1990. During the period of federal practice, provincial and local level governments are gradually providing licenses of broadcast media, but the frequency management and other technical aspects are to regulated by union government.

The practice of regional and local area-focused media is gradually expanding, as the number of media outlets is increasing every year. It seems that the density of regional and district focused media is increasing. Density of newspapers, online news portals and FM Radio broadcasting is increasing in the district level. 4825 newspapers are published from all over the country (Press Council, 2079 B.S., p. 137). According to the registration records of the Department of Information and Broadcasting, 7911 newspapers have been registered. Similarly, 3494 online media have been listed at Press Council. At present there are 98 television stations in regular broadcasting in the country, while the number of FM Radio in regular broadcasting is 928 (Economic Survey, 2080 B.S., p. 156). Lal Deusa Rai, the first staff when Journalism course was introduced at the Certificate Level in 1976 at Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus (TU), says: "Numerically, the Nepali media might appear to be promising. But when it comes to content and quality, the development does not indicate they are professionally sound" (as quoted in Kharel, 2010, pp. 265-266). Although the media number seems high, large population of Nepal is still far from print media access.

Major daily newspapers had started to publish regional editions right after the peace accord of 2005 and subsequently after the first Constituent Assembly election in 2008. The first CA meeting had announced the country as republican state, abolishing 240 years long regime of monarchy. Discourse upon federal functioning is going on. 'Although the country witnessed political change at time, and with it, changes in press freedom and the role of media, the research component could never receive the attention it deserved' (Regmee, 2001, p. 28). From the media point of view, this study looks upon front pages of selected 'national' dailies.

Obviously, regional issues are covered up in regional editions. Being a 'national daily', newspaper has to provide fair space and priority to all corner of society. This study tries to draw a general picture of diversity of four national dailies published from capital city, Kathmandu. Circulation of these dailies covers all districts. They have reporters/stringers in all 77 districts. Kantipur Media Group (2023) claims that Kantipur Publications enjoys the largest reach and the widest circulation in

Nepal because it speaks to all cross-sections of society. The oldest newspaper of the country, Gorkhapatra has its regional offices in all provinces (Gorkhapatra Corporation, 2023) and circulates to all local levels.

Research question

Basically, national dailies cover national-state news, encompassing territorial boundaries and public interest. It is the basic responsibility of national media to provide balance space to diverse regions and contents of the state. Media houses usually claim that they try to be balanced to enhance the credibility of the media and the published contents. The main research problem of this study is: what is the status of dateline distribution of selected national dailies in Nepal?

Objective

National dailies have to be fair and balance while providing space and prioritizing issues of a diverse country like Nepal. The main objective of this study is to analyse the distribution of dateline of news contents of national dailies into their front face.

Literature Review

Dateline used in news has a special importance. The dateline indicates the place and time the news was written. The dateline is written in different styles according to the medium. In the print media, the details of the most popular place and the month and day are given. In the broadcasting medium, only the place is mentioned while reciting in the form of 'Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow'.

Datelines may include both a place and a date but generally only give the place where the story was written or dispatched. Although it's called a dateline, then it is really a place line (Hough, 2004). The dateline appears on wire service stories to indicate the place of origin— where an event occurred, or sometimes where the story was written or transmitted. Newspaper practice is to use a dateline when a story originates outside the city in which the newspaper is published or outside the city and its immediate environs. Stories that originate outside the newspaper's own city and suburbs are not local, and a dateline is used to tell the reader where the event took place. 'In newspaper terminology, such stories are trade area or suburban, state, regional, national or foreign stories' (ibid).

According to news agency Associate Press (AP), the dateline informs the reader where the basic information of the news story was obtained. AP (2021) says: "A dateline tells the reader where the basic information was obtained for a story. A

byline tells the reader who wrote the story."

The dateline precedes the first sentence of a news story. It identifies the story's point of origin and sometimes, but not always, the date the story was written or transmitted.

Dateline is both national and international. The New York Times usually includes dates in datelines. Not many other newspapers do. Datelines appear on all stories originated by the AP. Stories originating from other sources— correspondents, supplementary news services, the newspaper's state capital or bureau— are also identified by datelines. When staff members are sent on assignment out of town, the stories they bring or send back to the newspaper carry datelines.

In Nepal, the name of the capital city, market, headquarter (district, municipality or city prone area) is often given on the dateline. Generally, names of obsolete and small places or villages are not written in the dateline.

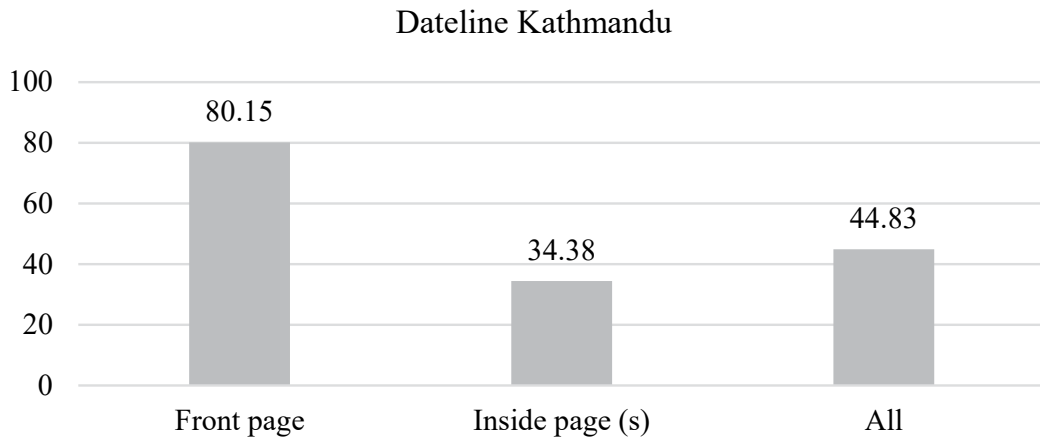
In the dateline, the distance and direction of the place is not mentioned. Sometimes it is necessary to send news from places where there are big incidents and accidents, and because of the incident, the name of the place becomes popular, so in such a situation, the name of that place can be included in the dateline. Sometimes it is necessary to write the name of a small settlement, market, village. In such a case, the name of the district should be given within the brackets. For examples: Tokha (Kathmandu), Khokana (Lalitpur), Kaskikot (Kaski) etc. The second part of the dateline is time. It mentions the period after the place, i.e., the month and day (RSS, 1995). Local stories need no dateline. The stories written for practice in the classroom or as a staff writer for college newspaper will be local stores and need no dateline.

Research on dateline

A study, carried out by P. Kharel in September 2011, a total of 6,534 news items that appeared on the front page and select number of relevant inside page (s) of 11 national dailies over a period of one month, revealed the gloomy picture of dateline which were predominantly Kathmandu-centric. According to this study, 80 per cent of news items being Kathmandu datelined.

Most news from outside the Kathmandu Valley were consigned to the inside-pages, with the result that less than 35 per cent of the news on the inside pages were Kathmandu-datelined. Talking front-page and inside-page news items together, about 45 per cent of the news was found to be Kathmandu-datelined.

Graph 1: Dateline Kathmandu



Source: Kharel, 2012, p. 267

Another study carried out by Pandey (2022) on front page news coverage of Gorkhapatra (21 December 2020- 20 January 2021) displayed that 11 news items (out of which 5 main news) were published about president and 25 news items (out of which 19 main news) were published about prime minister. This study showed that state-owned media had given excessive space and priority although the news subjects were insignificant.

From the literature review, it is clear that state-owned media had given priority to position holders and datelines were center dominated over the time. During the period of federal system, there was no significant changes to state-owned media. It was assumed that different media portrait was there to the privately-owned media.

With the ground of above mentioned science, this study has employed theoretical framework of diversity in democratic governance. It focuses on: how media power (coverage) in society can be unequal due to place, state power, and position.

Methodology of the study

This study employed qualitative approach. It is based on an explanatory approach that identifies the cause-and -effect relationship of reflecting diversity into media coverage. In this study, content analysis and key informant interview was carried out for sequential interpretation.

Four popular and largest selling national dailies - the Gorkhapatra, The Rising Nepal, the Kantipur and The Kathmandu Post - are selected for content analysis representing two biggest publication houses of the country. Gorkhapatra and The Rising Nepal, which are government-owned and published under the Gorkhapatra Corporation, are the oldest Nepali and English language leading dailies of the country respectively. Likewise, Kantipur and The Kathmandu Post are largest selling newspapers which are privately-owned.

This study has included the front-page news items of a month during the period of July 17 - August 16, 2022 (Shrawan 2079 B.S.) of these dailies. Selected period was unique because local levels elections were completed and the nation was preparing for general elections. Diverse policy agenda and national territories were assumed to be represented by these newspapers.

All headlines and datelines were collected and analysed for the selected period. The study was confined only to front pages of selected newspapers. It has not counted the pictures that were published by the dailies.

Discussion

National dailies have overwhelmingly published news items with Kathmandu dateline (Table 1). Further more, newspapers have finger counting items from Kathmandu neighboring districts Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. The Gorkhapatra has only 4 and Bhaktapur 1 news items during the study period. If we count the valley-based datelines to Kathmandu, Gorkhapatra will have nearly 86% of news items from Kathmandu itself.

Table 1: Number of datelines of front page of newspapers

Newspapers	Dateline Kathmandu	Percent	Except Kathmandu	Percent	Total news items
The Gorkhapatra	141	82.94	29	17.05	170
The Rising Nepal	155	83.78	30	16.21	185
The Kantipur	68	71.57	27	28.42	95
The Kathmandu Post	82	82.82	17	17.17	99

Source: Content Analysis, 2022

Table 1 shows that all national dailies are with 'kathmandu-centric' datelines in their

front pages. Two english dailies and the Gorkhapatra are having 82-83 % news items from Kathmandu. The Kantipur has 72 % of news items from Kathmandu dateline. Interesting fact is that these newspapers have published few news contents datelined Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts which are adjoining cities/district to capital city.

National dateline

Except Kathmandu, 22 districts/cities/places were datelined for 29 newsitems to the Gorkhapatra; 27 places were datelined to 30 newsitems to The Rising Nepal; 24 places were datelined for 27 newsitems to the Kantipur, and 12 places were datelined for 17 newsitems to The Kathmandu Post. "The mass media in developing countries are predominantly oriented to an urban elite and still largely ignore the rural regions. The general situation in Nepal, too, is no exception to this rule" (Kharel, 2002).

Gorkhapatra, except Kathmandu, published news items from Lalitpur (4), Bardibas (3), and two news items for each from Dhangadhi and Belaka of Udaypur. Single news story was carried out from Bhaktapur, Rukum Paschim, Rukum Purba, Melauli of Baitadi, Tikapur, Janakpur, Hile of Dhankuta, Pokhara, Banepa, Palpa, Sarlahi, Bara, Hetaunda, Birtamod, Kapilbastu and Biratnagar during the study period. A news story had joint datelined of Kathmandu/ Sindhupalchok.

Excluding Kathmandu, 27 places datelined for 30 news items in The Rising Nepal. Two news stories were published from each of Bardiya, Udaypur and Mahendranagar. Single story was published from each of Ilam, Itahari, Nepalgunj, Hetaunda, Dhangadhi, Janakpur, Damak, Achham, Biratnagar, Musikot, Baitadi, Myagdi, Mugu, Deukhuri, Sindhupalchok, Bajhang, Bhaktapur, Rasuwa, Lumbini, Butwal, Lalitpur and Bharatpur during study period.

While considering the scenario of the Kantipur Daily except Kathmandu, 24 places were credited for 27 news stories. Among them, Gorkha, Jumla and New Delhi were datelined for two stories for each. One news story for each was credited to Parasi, Kanchanpur, Myagdi, Ramechhap, Parbat, Baglung, Arghakhanchi, Makawanpur, Parasi, Dhangadhi, Dailekh, Biratnagar, West Nawalparasi and Dang. Helambu, Janakpur, Dhanusa shared joint dateline to Kathmandu and for separate story to each place. Surkhet/Baglung shared a joint dateline for another news story in the Kantipur.

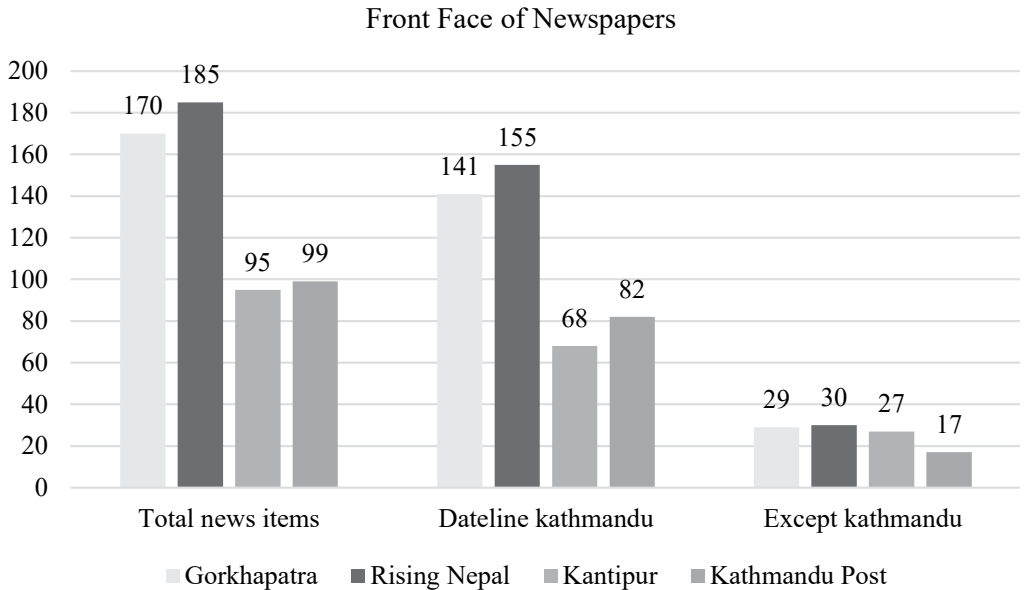
Likewise in The Kathmandu Post, 12 places made 17 news stories excluding

Kathmandu. These places include: Dhangadhi, Lalitpur, Sarlahi, Parasi, Rupandehi and Biratnagar. The Kathmandu Post had published 10 international datelined stories. It had three joint dateline news stories.

International dateline

During the study period, Gorkhapatra had single international dateline of Colombo; The Rising Nepal had two of New Delhi and Colombo; the Kantipur had four places of international dateline which included New Delhi, Taipei, Washington DC and New York. The Kathmandu Post had used more international dateline, six places for 10 news stories. Kantipur Publication had used its staff reporter's dateline from New Delhi bureau. Rest of all news were of different news agencies.

Graph 2: Total news items in front page



Source: Content Analysis 2022

General news contents of newspapers

Various subject matters were being reported by newspapers during the study period. Governance related issues were on top priority for all newspapers (Graph 4). Newspapers had given priority to the issues of politics, election, parliament, social (including culture and crime), economy sector, diplomacy, health and wildlife (Table 2).

Table 2: News Contents of newspapers

General news subject	Gorkhapatra	The Rising Nepal	Kantipur	The Kathmandu Post
Politics	18	25	16	10
Election	16	23	9	15
Parliament	13	15	4	12
Social (culture, crime)	13	19	4	2
Economy, business, and finance	12	18	8	16
Monsoon and disaster	9	10	0	1
Local level	8	4	2	0
Diplomacy	7	14	4	10
Infrastructure	6	4	5	1
Health (mostly Covid19)	4	14	6	4
Wildlife	3	6	0	2
International	2	2	3	10
Others	59	31	34	20
Total	170	185	95	99

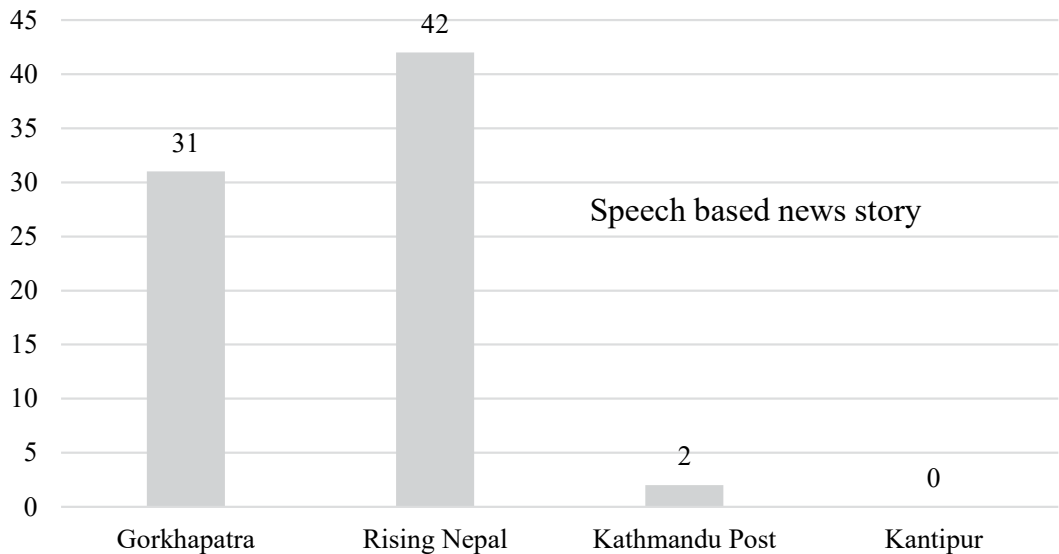
Source: Content Analysis, 2022

Table 2 shows that the coverage items, and issues. Among the Kathmandu centric dateline (as shown in graph 2), majority news contents were of political issues including election and parliament activities. There were few headlines of local level. These headlines were of the garbage problem of Kathmandu. Total non-political contents were of wildlife, social and international beat.

Speech-based news stories

Government-own media, The Gorkhapatra and The Rising Nepal had published speech-based stories significantly (graph 3). These both outlets had used 's/he said type of journalism' predominantly.

Graph 3: Speech-based news stories



Source: Content Analysis, 2022

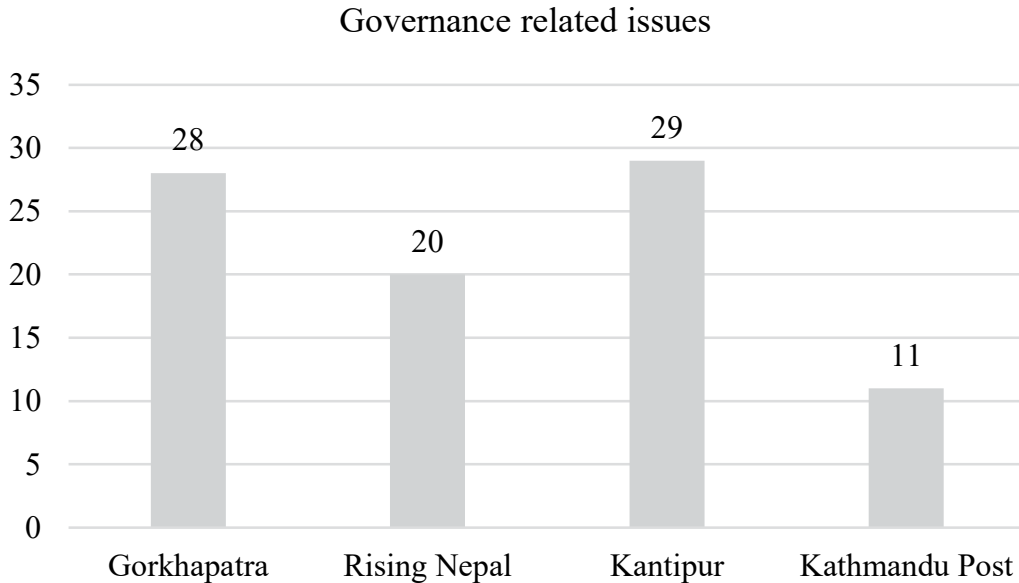
Graph 3 shows that the news story based upon leader's speech. Government position holders (including the Prime Minister, Minister for Communication and Information Technology, Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Foreign Affairs) and their address in different programs were dominating such news items in Gorkhapatra and The Rising Nepal. Likewise, the top brass of ruling parties' and other few influential leaders were also making news items to this category.

Due to these speech-based news items, there was no newness and innovation in reporting. The Prime Minister, who was the main actor for several headlines to government-owned media during study period, was prescribing tips to nation's development, controlling corruption, good governance, preserving tigers, enhancing art and literature among others. 'Such type of reporting did not seem convincing and readers had no attraction reading newspapers' says former secretary of Federation of Nepali Journalists Ramjee Dahal (personal communication July 25, 2023). Privately-own media had avoided such speech-based news items.

Governance related news stories

Majority news contents were of governance related issues which included various shortcomings in politics, bureaucracy, urbanization, education, environment among others.

Graph 4: News items of governance related stories



Source: Content Analysis, 2022

Graph 4 shows the number of news items related to governance out of total number (Graph 2). Into this category of news, issues of bad governance, delay in service delivery, no proper functioning and management of the agencies were published. Overall tone of the news items was negative.

Few headlines of bad governance are presented here during the study period of July-August 2022. Headlines of the Kantipur Daily were: '*Praharima pad badhuwa, manobal Ghatuwa*' [Decreasing morale despite promotion in Nepal Police] (July 24), '*Bato bina 5 crore ko pakki pul*' [5 crore for concrete bridge without road] (August 2), '*Beti ka naam ma cycle bethiti*' [Mismanagement in cycle distribution to girls] (August 4), '*Panch barsama 267 mantri*' [267 ministers within five years] (August 9), and '*Chha barsa ma dui ki mi kalopatra*' [Only 2 KM blacktopped in 6 years] (August 16).

Likewise headlines of the Gorkhapatra were: '*Singhadurbar bhitrari patrachar ko behal*' [Pathetic condition of correspondence (of letters) within Singhadurbar] (July 20), '*Saruwa ma ajhai bhansun*' [Seeking and getting favor in transfer (of civil servants)] (July 21), '*Nijamati seba ma 50,000 pad rikta*' [50,000 vacancies in civil service] (July 28), '*Metiye Yagyamati ra Chankhukhola*' [Total encroachment of Yagyamati and Chankhu river] (July 31), '*Prahari pal ma, 30 pratishat ekai*

ma bhansa, shauchalaya ra byarek chhaina' [Police in tent: no kitchen, toilet and barrack to 30 per cent units] (August 11), and '*Pahila sunya, punaryog ma 80'* [Eighty in retotalling, initially zero] (August 15).

Few headlines of The Rising Nepal were: Previously issued national ID cards may become useless (July 22), Ridesharing services expanding despite lack of legal framework (July 31), Dharahara area reconstruction moving slowly (August 2), and speaker tells mps to be punctual (August 16). Likewise, few headlines of The Kathmandu Post were: Why auditor general's annual reports are more ritual and less effective (July 26), Deuba, Dahal have much to answer in finance minister case, observers say (August 1), Delayed paperwork freezes Rs 60 m of farmers' subsidy (August 7), Police transfers after announcing election date raise concerns (August 8), and Agencies working in health, gender sectors in Nepal fall short on gender equality (August 12). These headlines show the negative trend of governance in Nepal.

Conclusion and recommendations

With the above discussion, national dailies are not providing significant space to the news story of the provincial or local level. Only the issues like, disaster, wildlife and few human-interest stories are picked up from these areas.

The tone and the coverage between government-owned and privately-owned media are distinctly separate. Government-owned media are serving to the influential figures in the power. 'S/he said type of journalism' is widely practiced to these media, whereas private sector media seem more on professional level of reporting.

Centralised mindset of the media needs to be changed and adequate space should be provided to regional or local levels. Positive stories are to be picked up or developed with additional efforts and investment in content production by media houses. Majority contents were about irregularities, and bad governance. Positive or innovative stories are to be reported by minimizing conventional type of journalism.

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