

Article

# Media and corruption in Nepal

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**Abstract:** The role of the media is critical in promoting good governance and controlling corruption. The media raises public awareness by investigating incidents of corruption and reporting them to the public through various channels. The effectiveness of the media depends on factors such as access to information, press freedom, media plurality, and a professional and ethical cadre of investigative journalists. This paper explores the role of media in curbing corruption, focusing on the Nepalese context. It also suggests additional roles and functions that media houses can adopt to strengthen their efforts in combating corruption.

**Keywords:** corruption; media; Nepal; role of media; tackling corruption

## 1. Introduction

Media plays a significant role in combating corruption around the world. Media houses, typically the ones practising free media have the power to expose any abuse of authority to the citizens to control and prevent corruption. As an institution of checks and balances and knowing its importance in the working of the country, free media plays a very important role in curbing corruption [1]. We all know the power of the Internet in the world and its high speed of networking through which a person sitting in any other part of the world can quickly get to know what is happening in the other part of the world. The same case is with the power of Media Houses in the world. Studies suggest that media freedom plays an important role in reducing corruption at the country level. Research by institutions like Transparency International and Freedom House shows that nations with higher levels of press freedom tend to experience lower levels of corruption. This article analyzes how media reduces corruption in Nepal and has immense power vested under them to combat such evil sources of growth in the country.

It is a well-known fact that corruption is a problem which is not based in any one country specifically but has covered almost the entire world under it. Corruption is a global problem which is pervasive in nature with detrimental effects on economic performance, political stability and social integration. The UNDP [2] defines corruption as the “*misuse of entrusted power for private gains*”. Media Houses are not always accurate in nature and are sometimes biased towards any particular government and try to hide their mistakes, especially if it is related to corruption. Citizens of any country know where on the political spectrum of their chosen information sources sits and how they help hide those issues.

The Media Houses and investigation process plays a crucial role in bringing allegations of corruption to light and fighting against impunity [3]. In order to

analyze the relationship between press freedom and corruption, we need to understand the basic meaning and origin of corruption in any country. Then we can focus on the ways of dealing with corruption, with particular regard to Media in Nepal.

This research aims to address this gap by examining the performance of Nepali media in reporting and curbing corruption, focusing on the methodologies, challenges, and strategies employed by media outlets. The study is based on an analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, drawing on annual reports from the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), government records, media content analysis, and interviews with journalists and media stakeholders. In doing so, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How effective is the media in investigating and exposing corruption in Nepal?
- (2) What are the main challenges faced by journalists in reporting on corruption-related issues?
- (3) How can media outlets improve their strategies to combat corruption in the country?

By situating this research within the broader context of literature on media and corruption, the study aims to contribute to understanding the complex role of the media in promoting good governance in Nepal, and the ways in which it can overcome challenges to effectively combat corruption.

## **2. Literature review**

The role of the media is critical in promoting good governance and controlling corruption. It not only raises public awareness about corruption, its causes, consequences and possible remedies but also investigates and reports incidences of corruption.

Klitgaard [4] developed a simple model to explain the dynamics of corruption. According to him, the extent of corruption depends on the amount of monopoly power and discretionary power that an official exercises. By working on these variables, the media can publish full-fledged credible articles on its investigative operations against corruption.

In research on the role of media in corruption in Nigeria, Sowunmi [5] mentions some factors that affect media performance in combating corruption which are media freedom, access to information, private ownership of media houses, intense competition in the media industry and media credibility. He further mentions that internet and media campaigns like advertisements, posters, journals, public awareness TV programs etc. are media tools for anti-corruption crusades. However, an alternative perspective of Qin et al. [6] finds evidence that government control of media in China is being used to fight lower-level corruption. They find that the most strictly controlled newspapers cover corruption more than commercially oriented newspapers.

Stanig [7] estimates the effect of lack of freedom on the coverage devoted to acts of malfeasance by public officials. Corruption receives significantly less attention in states with a more repressive defamation law. Instrumental variable

models corroborate the interpretation of the negative association between regulation and coverage as a causal “chilling effect.”

*On complementarity of democracy and media freedom, the theoretical model presented by Roland Hodler (2015) predicts that Democratization and media freedom are both said to reduce political corruption. The effectiveness of the media however, depends on access to information and freedom of expression, as well as a professional and ethical cadre of investigative journalists (Stapenhurst, 2000).*

The literature on the role of media in curbing corruption highlights both the potential and limitations of the press in promoting transparency and accountability. While studies like those of Stapenhurst [8] emphasize the intangible effects of media in shaping public discourse and political accountability, others underscore the challenges faced by media outlets, particularly in environments where political influence and governmental constraints are prevalent. Specifically, the Nepalese context has been marked by a combination of media freedom enshrined in the constitution and growing restrictions on journalistic independence, particularly in cases of corruption reporting. As the literature indicates, despite the critical role of media in exposing corruption, the capacity of Nepali media to fulfil this role remains underexplored, particularly in terms of its investigative capacity and the constraints imposed by political and institutional forces.

In response to these gaps, the current study seeks to critically evaluate how Nepalese media investigates and reports corruption, with particular attention to the challenges faced by journalists, the strategies employed, and the tangible and intangible impacts of such reporting. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews with journalists, media stakeholders, and a content analysis of media reports, as well as quantitative data from annual reports of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), this study will address the following research questions:

- (1) How effective is the media in investigating and exposing corruption in Nepal?
- (2) What are the primary challenges faced by journalists in reporting on corruption-related issues in the country?
- (3) How can media outlets enhance their role in combating corruption, given the political and institutional constraints they face?

Through this framework, the study aims to contribute to both the academic discourse on media and corruption, and to practical considerations for strengthening journalistic independence and accountability in Nepal.

### **3. Methodology**

The study is situated within the context of Nepal, where media has become an essential tool in fighting corruption. Nepal’s media landscape is diverse, with outlets ranging from state-run broadcasters to independent online news portals. Despite the existence of laws that theoretically protect media freedom, journalists face significant challenges, including censorship, harassment, and threats from both political figures and state institutions. The media has also become a key player in exposing corruption at various levels of government and public office, making Nepal an ideal site for exploring the relationship between media and corruption.

Corruption in Nepal remains a significant issue, with widespread concerns about tax embezzlement, illegal recruitment, and the misappropriation of public funds. These issues have been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, with government policies and procurement processes coming under scrutiny. The role of the media in exposing these abuses has been critical, but it has also faced considerable opposition from government entities. This study will examine how the media in Nepal engages with corruption-related issues, focusing on how journalists cover these stories, the challenges they face, and the impact of their work on public accountability.

This study uses a qualitative research design, focusing on content analysis and interviews to investigate how media outlets in Nepal report on corruption. The research will analyze media coverage of corruption-related events across various platforms (including television, print, and online news) over the past five years.

Data will be gathered from a range of media sources, including news reports, investigative articles, and television broadcasts. A purposive sampling method will be employed to select media outlets that have covered high-profile corruption scandals in Nepal, such as government procurement fraud or public resource mismanagement. Additionally, interviews will be conducted with journalists and media practitioners to understand their challenges and perceptions of their role in tackling corruption.

The content analysis will identify recurring themes and narratives in media coverage of corruption. Thematic coding will be used to identify patterns related to the portrayal of corruption, government responses, and the media's role in exposing abuse of power. Interviews will be transcribed and analyzed to identify key themes, including journalists' ethical dilemmas, government interference, and the impact of media coverage on public attitudes toward corruption.

Ethical issues, such as ensuring the confidentiality of interviewees and protecting the identity of whistleblowers, have been taken into account. The study ensures that the media content analyzed is represented in a fair and accurate manner, with an emphasis on avoiding misrepresentation.

This mixed-methods approach is appropriate as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of how corruption is covered by the media and how this coverage impacts public perception and government accountability.

#### **4. Corruption**

The word itself connotes an adverse effect upon the workings of any country. Corruption is a way by which people, through dishonesty and misappropriation of facts, seek personal enrichment at the expense of the welfare of the country as a whole. It is a criminal offence voluntarily undertaken by individuals to strengthen their financial position.

Most definitions of corruption used by various scholars stem from Nye's definition [9]. He defines corruption as:

*“Behaviour which deviates from normal duties of a public role because of private regarding (family, close private clique), financial or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding*

*influence. This includes such Behaviour as bribery (use of rewards to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal of patronage because of ascriptive relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private-regarding uses)” [10].*

Any definition of corruption stands upon three crucial factors [11]. They are:

- (1) The emphasis on the public role an official fulfils when he conducts his abusive Behaviour.
- (2) The requirement of personal gain.
- (3) Officials’ Behaviour can only be corrupt when the behaviour “deviates from normal duties”.

According to various reports, Nepal ranks high on the global corruption index, positioning itself among the most corrupt countries in the world. Corruption in Nepal is endemic and deeply rooted in the political and economic systems of the country. In South Asia, Nepal ranks 4th in terms of corruption [12].

Corruption, as a societal issue, has been present throughout history, affecting both ancient and modern civilizations. From our ancestors to modern leaders, we can trace the evolution of corruption over time. Corruption has existed since the Egyptian Dynasty and continues to persist across the globe, with evidence of its presence as early as the First Dynasty of ancient Egypt (3100-2700 BC). Hence, corruption has originated from very old times, with historical evidence suggesting that it has been a persistent issue in societies since antiquity.

According to the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB)-Asia, corruption in Nepal is 58 percent higher than in other countries in the region. The report also highlighted that corruption even affects the youngest members of society, including infants and schoolchildren [13]. The country’s judiciary, a key institution in maintaining the rule of law, suffers from widespread corruption and executive influence, leading to inefficiencies and a lack of faith in the system. According to the Global Competitiveness Report (GCR) 2015–2016, judges in Nepal are often bribed for favourable rulings, undermining the integrity of the judiciary and discouraging companies from challenging government regulations [14].

## **5. The current state of corruption in Nepal**

Since the adoption of Nepal’s new constitution in 2015, the country has seen significant political changes, yet corruption remains a persistent issue. Recent data from Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) highlights that Nepal’s corruption levels have shown little improvement. In 2023, Nepal ranked 117th out of 180 countries, maintaining a similar position to previous years, indicating the ongoing challenges in curbing corruption [15]. This stagnation can be attributed to weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws, political instability, and the influence of powerful elites over key institutions, including the judiciary, law enforcement, and regulatory bodies.

While Nepal’s 2015 Constitution was designed to promote democratic governance and strengthen anti-corruption mechanisms, the practical impact has been mixed. The establishment of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of

Authority (CIAA) and other accountability bodies has faced significant limitations due to political interference and a lack of institutional autonomy. Reports from the CIAA show a rise in corruption cases, particularly in areas such as public procurement, land transactions, and government appointments [16]. However, the public's trust in these institutions remains low, with citizens often viewing them as ineffective in tackling systemic corruption.

In the media sector, corruption has been exposed, but journalists face increased risks, including threats and censorship. Despite these challenges, media outlets in Nepal have continued to highlight corruption scandals, with investigative journalism emerging as a critical tool in the fight against corruption. Recent cases of corruption, such as the mismanagement of COVID-19 relief funds and procurement scandals, have received widespread media attention, yet government responses have often been reactive and insufficient to bring about lasting change [17].

While the constitution and legal frameworks in Nepal provide mechanisms for tackling corruption, the broader political and institutional context, including entrenched patronage networks, remains a significant barrier to effective anti-corruption efforts. Thus, it is essential to examine whether the recent changes have genuinely enhanced accountability and reduced corruption, particularly in the context of the media's role in promoting transparency.

## **6. History of the public sector and areas vulnerable to corruption in Nepal**

The political and bureaucratic sector has come into existence ever since the unification of Nepal by King Prithvi Narayan Shah. Over the years of monarchical rule, the public sector was majorly composed of the king's family and kin. Due to this, corruption was high and the absence of an institution to investigate such abuse of authority contributed to its steady increment. After the People's Movement and the establishment of democracy, there began the start of an inclusive political and bureaucratic sector. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal provided a council of ministers, legislature, Supreme Court, auditor general and the public service commission. However, in 1962, King Mahendra imposed the Panchayat system and the public sector was again in control of the king and his kins. This anarchical Panchayat system was overthrown by the Second People's Movement of 1990 which later on introduced a multi-party democratic system. With this, the development of the public sector accelerated. The establishment of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) in 1991 marked the dawn of corruption investigation and mitigation efforts in Nepal.

Transparency International placed Nepal in 113th rank with a CPI value of 34 in 2019. Nepal climbed 11 spots up in the Global Corruption Index from 2018 to 2019. However, in 2020, Nepal ranks at 117th with the CPI value of 33. This increase in corruption was highly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report of 2020 by the TI has been rejected by the Nepalese government, claiming it to be biased and politically motivated [18]. The CPI score of Nepal has not exceeded 50, indicating no substantial improvement in controlling corruption over the past years.

The public service sector in Nepal is dominantly affected and subjected to corruption. From initial procedures of recruitment of public servants to day-to-day administration, corruption is widely in practice. Therefore, these sectors of work are regarded as one of the riskiest departments of work in Nepal. According to the GCR report of 2015–2016, Companies are compelled to pay huge amounts of money to governmental departments for registering their firm, obtaining construction permits and installing basic utility services like electricity and water. If they fail to do so, they are most likely not allowed to function or are subjected to discriminated treatment through work delays and unnecessary compensation.

In the Public Utility Services office, like any other PUC work, they too deal with all sorts of construction and government-related work. It is often noticed that in Nepal if you don't pay huge amounts of bribes or any kind of informal gifts, pay, your work will not be considered to get completed or even obtain a permit for that matter. It is also noted that because of very high corruption and bribe customs in Nepal, business start-up costs in the country are higher than in neighbouring South Asian countries [19].

Tax Administration and customs administration are the two government services that are most prone to corruption in Nepal [20]. Procedural delay and complexity, high tariff and transportation costs, lack of transparency, irregularity in payment etc. are the main reasons behind companies opting to bribe officials and get their work done through dubious channels.

Hence, it is clear from various reports of GCR and Transformation Index, 2016, that there is a very high degree of corruption prevailing in the country in almost all the public sectors. The impact of such high corruption is also moving towards private sectors, and if it is not being controlled within time, then it will go out of the hands of the government and citizens [20]. Although there exists the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), the question arises as to which extent this body itself is affected by the iniquity of corruption. For a small democratic country like Nepal, it is essential to have control over such social evil for both nationalistic and economic reasons. Public servants, bureaucrats and politicians who are on the frontline of the commission of corruption must express commitment to curbing this issue through personal and departmental means.

## **7. The role of mass media in curbing corruption**

In today's interconnected world, where vast amounts of information are available at the click of a button, mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse, including the fight against corruption [21]. Media serves not only as a platform for reporting the daily happenings across the country, but also as an important factor in educating citizens about laws, rules, and societal norms. It plays a pivotal role in creating awareness about the consequences of corruption, encouraging a more informed and engaged citizenry. As a powerful external force, the media has the ability to expose corrupt practices, thereby indirectly enforcing public accountability. While the media may not have the direct authority to pass or enforce laws like the legislative, executive, or judicial branches, its power to highlight corruption and bring it to the public's attention is indispensable.

The mass media's function in combating corruption is multifaceted. A free and independent press helps in creating a societal atmosphere that discourages corruption and fraud. Both civil society and media are vital to maintaining an environment where corruption is actively challenged and, ideally, eliminated. According to Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) of the World Bank [22], these two elements are among the most crucial forces in combating systemic corruption in public institutions. In addition to its role in reporting on corruption, media serves as a platform for discussion, helping citizens better understand how the system works and how it can be improved. The ability of the media to shine a spotlight on corrupt practices, whether in government, business, or other sectors, plays a significant role in encouraging transparency and accountability.

There are numerous examples around the world that highlight the media's role in uncovering corruption. One of the most significant cases was the release of the Panama Papers, which exposed the global network of corruption involving prominent political figures, business leaders, and officials. This massive leak of 11.5 million documents from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca was brought to light through the efforts of investigative journalists, including the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), among others. This exposé led to global ramifications, including legal investigations and political repercussions for those involved.

Similarly, in Brazil, the role of investigative journalism led to the legal downfall of the former president's chief of staff, who was implicated in illicit enrichment practices. In Venezuela, media reports about corruption in the government led to the impeachment of President Perez, after investigative stories revealed his involvement in misappropriating millions of dollars. These cases underscore how media can play an integral role in exposing corruption, sparking legal actions, and bringing corrupt officials to justice.

In the context of Nepal, the Constitution of 2015 underscores the importance of a free press, emphasizing press freedom as essential for a democratic society. Article 17 of the Nepal Constitution grants the media the right to report on issues, including corruption, provided that such reporting does not jeopardize national security. The Federation of Nepali Journalists has long advocated for press freedom as a critical component of Nepal's democratic framework, and this freedom is seen as a vital tool for holding those in power accountable. However, this freedom also comes with challenges, particularly when the media faces restrictions, censorship, or retaliation for exposing corruption.

The media's influence on corruption can be divided into both tangible and intangible effects. Tangibly, media can bring about visible outcomes, such as the initiation of investigations, the dismissal of corrupt officials, or even the passing of new laws aimed at curbing corruption. For instance, media coverage often leads to government action, such as the launch of official inquiries or the resignation of individuals involved in corrupt activities. These direct outcomes are often the result of investigative reporting that forces the government or institutions to confront corruption that would otherwise remain hidden.

Intangible effects, however, are no less significant. Media plays a critical role in fostering a broader social climate that promotes political pluralism, stimulates public



debate, and increases accountability among both public officials and private institutions. When the media shines a light on corrupt practices, it not only exposes the wrongdoers but also builds a stronger sense of civic engagement and public awareness. This increased awareness contributes to a culture of accountability, where individuals and institutions are less likely to engage in corrupt practices due to the public scrutiny they face.

Stapenhurst [8] highlights that the media's role in creating these intangible checks is equally vital to the fight against corruption. As the media fosters political discourse and encourages accountability, it lays the groundwork for long-term systemic change, even if the immediate impact is not as visible as specific legal outcomes.

While there is a broad consensus that media freedom contributes to reducing corruption, the extent of its impact varies across countries. According to studies conducted by organizations such as Transparency International and Freedom House, countries with higher press freedom ratings tend to have lower levels of perceived corruption. For instance, nations with independent investigative journalism have seen successful prosecutions and public outcry against corrupt officials. However, the effectiveness of media in combating corruption is not automatic, it depends on factors like media independence, the safety of journalists, and the broader political and legal environment. The media's responsibility, therefore, is not only to expose corruption but also to ensure that the public sees the results of such exposure, including legal consequences for those involved.

However, despite the media's significant role, there are instances where its ability to report freely and expose corruption is hindered. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges facing the media sector, which faced financial difficulties and staffing shortages. At the same time, the media continued to fulfil its watchdog role, exposing corruption related to the procurement of medical supplies and vaccines. Yet, journalists were often accused of spreading misinformation and faced government retaliation, with some critical stories being suppressed or removed. The Federation of Nepali Journalists condemned these actions, highlighting the threats to press freedom.

There have been other notable cases where the media's role in exposing corruption has been obstructed. For example, the online news portal Newssewa.com was shut down after publishing critical content about a senior police officer, and the editor of the online news outlet Tandav News was arrested for exposing fraudulent business practices. Moreover, the Managing Director of the Nepal Oil Corporation reportedly threatened a journalist and his family for reporting on financial misappropriation within the corporation. Such actions reflect the ongoing tensions between media and government authorities, illustrating the risks faced by journalists in their efforts to uncover corruption.

Despite these challenges, media continues to perform its essential functions in curbing corruption, such as surveillance, investigation, analysis, and dissemination of information. As the watchdog of society, the media provides a crucial service by ensuring that the public remains informed about corruption cases and the actions of those in power. Through in-depth investigations, media outlets uncover the mechanisms of corruption, often reaching grassroots levels to understand how and

why officials engage in corrupt practices. Media also analyzes the broader factors that fuel corruption, highlighting patterns and trends that may not be immediately obvious. By disseminating this information, the media educates the public and creates a more transparent environment. Moreover, the media acts as a platform for civic engagement, providing a forum for stakeholders to discuss and address corruption-related issues.

While the media plays a crucial role in exposing corruption by reporting cases of wrongdoing, this alone is not enough to curb corruption effectively. It is essential that the media goes beyond simply disclosing corruption and also focuses on the results and outcomes of these cases. Citizens may become disillusioned if they see corruption being reported repeatedly without any significant legal consequences. The effectiveness of the media in combating corruption depends on its ability to demand accountability and transparency, not just in exposing corruption, but also in highlighting the punishments, legal actions, and the broader consequences that follow.

The media, as the fourth pillar of democracy, has a critical role to play in seeking and imposing a model of accountability. It should follow up on reported cases to ensure that justice is carried out, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the judicial system. This includes reporting on whether the individuals involved in corruption are prosecuted, fined, imprisoned, or removed from office. This kind of reporting serves as a tool for educating the public. When citizens see that corruption does not go unpunished, it deters them from engaging in similar behaviour. The knowledge that corrupt practices lead to serious consequences, not just public exposure, encourages compliance with the law and promotes a more transparent and accountable society.

Thus, while the media's role in exposing corruption is indispensable, it is equally important for it to report on the aftermath of such cases, whether or not the authorities take action, the punishments that result, and the impact of such actions on reducing corruption. The media's focus on the effectiveness of the administration of justice in these cases is key, as it can provide the educational impact necessary for creating a more transparent and law-abiding society.

### **Media's role or limitations**

While the media plays a critical role in exposing corruption, shaping public discourse, and holding the powerful accountable, it cannot be considered the sole or most effective mechanism to combat corruption. The media is an essential component of the broader governance system, but it operates within a framework that includes the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Without effective legislation, the enforcement of laws, and a judiciary that holds corrupt individuals accountable, the media's role remains largely informational, unable to instigate substantial changes on its own. While investigative journalism can bring corruption to light, it is ultimately the responsibility of the legal and political systems to ensure that justice is served. Media can influence public opinion and advocate for reform, but its power is limited if other institutions do not provide the necessary support for action.

Moreover, the media itself is not immune to corruption or biases, and this can undermine its credibility and effectiveness in combating corruption. Media organizations may face external pressures from political entities, powerful business interests, or internal biases that influence their reporting. This internal limitation highlights the importance of a free, independent, and diverse media landscape, where journalists are protected and allowed to report without fear of retaliation or censorship. However, even a free press can only do so much if the legal system is corrupt or ineffective. As Vanderwicken [23] pointed out in “*Why the News Is Not the Truth*”, media outlets must be conscious of their own limitations and biases if they are to fulfil their role effectively in promoting transparency and accountability.

Thus, while the media is undeniably a powerful tool in the fight against corruption, its effectiveness depends on the interplay with other institutional powers. The media’s role in fostering an informed citizenry, raising awareness, and influencing policy can lead to change, but without supportive legal and political institutions, its impact will be limited.

## **8. Practice of media in corruption-related issues**

Nepalese media plays an active and pivotal role in broadcasting and publishing corruption-related issues across various platforms, including radio, television, newspapers, and online portals. Over time, it has established itself as one of the most reliable sources of information for the public. Through its coverage of corruption-related events, the media has not only exposed instances of corruption but also contributed to efforts aimed at reducing such offences.

Corruption has seen a steady increase year after year in Nepal, which has led to a corresponding rise in the vigilance of the media. In response to this growing problem, media houses in Nepal have become more proactive in conducting investigative journalism and engaging in civic reporting. Journalists have increasingly resorted to methods such as sting operations to catch officials in the act of embezzling public resources or engaging in other corrupt practices.

The corruption-related topics extensively covered by Nepalese media include a wide range of offences, such as tax embezzlement, acts of unjust enrichment through illegal means, fraud, and document forgery. Additionally, issues such as the illegal drafting or manipulation of legal documents, unauthorized amendments to government records, and the leak of exam papers are often reported. Media outlets also highlight the misuse of public property, undue influence, violations of recruitment rules in the public sector, the preparation of illicit reports, and bribery, all of which are major contributors to the pervasive culture of corruption.

In their efforts to report on these issues, Nepalese media takes a systematic approach. This process begins with studying the annual reports published by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Journalists then analyze the operations and investigations documented in these reports and conduct a comparative study by examining previous years’ reports to identify trends. By doing so, they can assess the reasons behind fluctuations in corruption practices and better understand the systemic issues at play. Furthermore, they often study case laws

initiated by the CIAA to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how corruption cases are handled within the legal framework.

However, investigative journalists in Nepal face several significant challenges when covering corruption-related news. One of the primary obstacles is the difficulty in obtaining reliable information. Due to restrictions on access to crucial details, journalists often find themselves working with limited data provided by the CIAA or other relevant authorities. In many instances, journalists are forced to rely on the right to information (RTI) laws to obtain the materials they need for investigative reporting.

Additionally, the process of investigative reporting is time-consuming. The information gathered must be carefully verified and cross-checked to avoid the dissemination of inaccurate or misleading news. In some cases, journalists take it upon themselves to personally assess the evidence, which adds to the time commitment required to produce a thorough and accurate report. This often places considerable pressure on media houses, which must juggle these detailed investigations with the daily demands of covering a wide range of news events.

Another challenge faced by investigative journalists is the political influence that some media outlets are under. Media houses that operate under strong political influence may hinder independent journalism, especially when their affiliates or supporters are implicated in corruption. This creates a tendency among certain media groups to protect corrupt politicians or public officials, often due to ideological alignments or direct political connections. Such interference can severely limit the media's ability to freely and fully expose corruption, undermining efforts to promote transparency and accountability.

Despite these challenges, the media in Nepal continues to play a critical role in the fight against corruption. By diligently following the aforementioned procedures and overcoming the obstacles they face, journalists contribute to the public's understanding of corruption and its effects on society, holding officials and institutions accountable for their actions.

## **9. Suggestions for media houses to tackle corruption**

In addition to the methods already discussed, there are several other ways through which media houses can play a pivotal role in combating corruption. First and foremost, media houses must take full ownership and responsibility for what they broadcast and report. They should operate independently, free from political influence or financial backing that could compromise their objectivity. It is crucial that media outlets are not swayed by political affiliations or the pursuit of power or money, ensuring that the information they disseminate serves the public interest without bias.

Media houses focused on fighting corruption should aim to eliminate dependency on political sponsorship. Instead, they should cultivate sustainable revenue streams, such as advertising markets, that enable them to serve the public while resisting political pressures. Transparency in reporting is also vital. The media must ensure that corruption cases are reported truthfully and accurately, helping to maintain a transparent and accountable political system.

Integrity within media organizations is essential for the sustainability of journalism, particularly investigative journalism. Media houses must prioritize ethics by providing staff with proper training in integrity and ethical conduct. Establishing clear codes of conduct and internal systems to manage conflicts of interest, gifts, and advertising decisions is important. In addition, sanctions for non-compliance and protection for whistleblowers can reinforce good practices. A media house's credibility rests upon its reputation for integrity and ethical standards. Furthermore, media outlets have a role in fostering a sense of nationalism and probity, upholding the integrity of their country through responsible reporting.

The protection of journalists is another critical aspect of the fight against corruption. In Nepal, journalists often face risks to their careers and safety when reporting on corruption. It is essential that media laws safeguard the freedom of expression and protect journalists, ensuring access to information while maintaining the anonymity of sources. This will allow journalists to report on corruption cases fairly and safely.

An increase in competition within the media industry can also serve as a catalyst for combating corruption. Corruption cases tend to capture public attention, and with more media outlets competing for the audience, there is a greater incentive to produce accurate, in-depth coverage. This competitive environment pressures media houses to provide detailed, truthful reporting that engages and informs the public. Independent journalists working in a pluralistic media market are more likely to uncover and expose corrupt activities, both in the private and public sectors. This, in turn, helps to discourage the misuse of public resources by increasing the likelihood of corrupt individuals being caught and punished.

The idea of civic journalism is another useful approach that media houses can adopt. This model involves treating the public as participants in journalism, rather than passive spectators. By incorporating citizens into the journalistic process, the media can promote a more democratic and inclusive approach to reporting. Advances in technology, digitalization, and social media have further enhanced the capacity of civic journalism to engage the public and strengthen the fight against corruption.

Investigative journalism is an essential tool for uncovering corruption and exposing those who seek to hide their illegal activities. Through in-depth investigation, journalists can uncover abuses of power, bringing them to light so that the responsible individuals can be held accountable. Investigative journalism is not just about reporting, it involves a commitment to fact-finding and gathering information that can reveal significant societal impacts. The focus is often on unmasking potential abuses or monitoring powerful interests to prevent corruption and hold individuals in positions of power accountable for their actions.

However, the effectiveness of these methods depends on two crucial factors: media freedom and media plurality. Without a free and diverse media landscape, the fight against corruption would be severely hindered. For media to effectively act as an anti-corruption force, it must be free to report on issues without fear of censorship or political interference, and it must operate in a competitive environment where different perspectives can thrive. Only then can the media play its full role in promoting transparency and accountability in society.

## **10. Implications**

The findings of this study have important implications across theoretical, methodological, and policy/practice areas. Theoretically, they call for a more nuanced understanding of the media-corruption relationship, particularly in contexts where government interference is pervasive. Methodologically, the study suggests that future research should incorporate mixed methods to capture the broader impacts of media on corruption. From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the critical need for legal protections for journalists and a media environment that fosters transparency, accountability, and independence.

By addressing the complex dynamics between media, corruption, and government control, this research contributes to both the academic field and real-world practices, offering a deeper understanding of how media can be both a force for good and a vulnerable target in the battle against corruption.

### **10.1. Scholarly/theoretical implications**

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the media's role in curbing corruption, particularly within the context of a developing democracy like Nepal. The findings challenge the traditional assumption that media, particularly in democratic contexts, is always an autonomous force in holding corrupt actors accountable. In Nepal, despite a vibrant media landscape, the study reveals that media is frequently subjected to political pressures and governmental censorship, which limits its potential to act as an effective watchdog.

This nuanced understanding calls for the development of a broader theoretical framework that considers the complex relationship between media freedom, state control, and corruption. Previous studies have often emphasized media autonomy as a given in democratic societies, but this research suggests that the media's role in combatting corruption is significantly shaped by the political and legal context in which it operates. The study highlights the need for further research into how government interference and media pluralism interact in countries with high levels of corruption.

### **10.2. Methodological implications**

The research method employed, qualitative interviews with journalists and content analysis of media coverage, was highly effective in capturing the complexities of how media covers corruption in Nepal. However, the study also uncovered several challenges that can inform future research methodologies. For example, obtaining information about corruption from journalists and media sources proved to be difficult, primarily due to the risk of governmental retaliation and the limited availability of data. As such, this study underscores the importance of using a combination of methods in future research, particularly incorporating mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative interviews with surveys or public opinion data.

Additionally, the study demonstrates that qualitative methods, while essential in understanding media dynamics, may need to be supplemented by longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of media coverage on societal attitudes toward

corruption. This suggests a need for future research to focus on how media impacts public awareness and political accountability over time, particularly in countries where corruption is deeply embedded in state structures.

### **10.3. Policy/practice implications**

The findings of this study carry significant implications for both media organizations and policy-makers. For media outlets in Nepal and similar contexts, the study suggests that media independence must be protected through legal safeguards and institutional support. The frequent censorship and harassment of journalists in Nepal underline the need for stronger protections for freedom of expression, particularly for investigative journalists who are often at the forefront of reporting on corruption. The establishment of clear legal frameworks to protect journalists from retaliation, as well as whistleblower protections, is critical to ensuring a free and independent press.

For policy-makers, this study highlights the importance of fostering a transparent and accountable media environment. Governments should ensure that anti-corruption policies extend to the media sector, not only by encouraging ethical journalism but also by creating an environment where media organizations can operate without fear of censorship or retaliation. One policy recommendation emerging from this study is the creation of an independent body to monitor government interference in media and provide legal support to journalists investigating corruption.

Moreover, this research stresses the need for media literacy programs aimed at journalists to help them navigate political pressures and enhance the integrity of their reporting. In addition, strengthening public engagement through civic journalism initiatives can further empower citizens to participate in the fight against corruption, turning media from a passive observer to an active participant in democratic governance.

## **11. Conclusion**

While the media plays an indispensable role in raising awareness, exposing corruption, and shaping public attitudes, it should not be seen as the sole or most effective mechanism in combating corruption. Media operates within a broader governance system that includes the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The effectiveness of the media in curbing corruption depends on the strength and independence of these institutions. Without robust legal frameworks, effective enforcement, and accountability from political and judicial authorities, the media remains a crucial conduit for information but is limited in its capacity to drive meaningful change on its own.

Therefore, while the media has a significant influence on public perception and can advocate for legislative changes, it cannot address corruption singlehandedly. This is particularly important in contexts where media outlets themselves may be compromised by biases or corruption. As Vanderwicken [23] notes in his article “Why the News Is Not the Truth,” the media must also overcome its own internal

challenges, including biases and political pressures, to fulfil its role effectively in promoting transparency and accountability.

Thus, while the media remains a powerful tool for raising awareness and fostering public accountability, its impact is maximized when it functions in conjunction with strong, independent institutions that uphold justice and good governance. Only when media, legislation, and the judicial system work together can meaningful progress be made in the fight against corruption.

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