

Nepal's misinformation domain- comparing mainstream journalists and content creators

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Abstract

From the era of dot pen to the era of dot.com, Nepal's media landscape has traversed a long journey both in terms of medium and content. Misinformation is as long as Nepali media's journey. This article aims to pinpoint the increasing trends of Nepal's misinformation domain inundated by both legacy media journalists and content creators. With the evolution of new media, mainly the digital domains with various mighty social media platforms, Nepal has witnessed rapid rise of content creators having hundreds of thousands of followers which is almost the same as that of legacy media, if not more. Unchecked contents devoid of journalistic characters are giving rise to misinformation. The article uses publicly available data, relevant researches on misinformation front of Nepal in order to figure out the scenarios of misinformation. The article talks on initiatives taken by Press Council Nepal to douse the conflagration of misinformation. Finding says that misinformation generated by legacy media journalists is mainly owing to strong gate keeping and team failure. However, content creators' misinformation is mainly caused by their

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crowd-pleasing and emotion-driven sensational statements. The article concludes with recommendations for professional and moral encouragements involving fact checking, media literacy and digital literacy initiatives spearheaded by stakeholders like Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), Press Council Nepal, Department of Information, among others to build a scenario where journalists will be equipped with the trending technology and catchy contents as that of content creators and content creators will be skilled with journalistic code of conduct, gate-keeping and fact-checking.

Keywords: *Mainstream media, social media, misinformation, journalists, content creators*

Introduction

In Nepal, a question deserves a better mention - "which stream is mainstream?" Mass media are not like what they used to be. The vacuum created by the mass media, typically the legacy media, is filled by content creators in various social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, X, YouTube, among others. Therefore, it is crucial to measure the misinformation matrix not only from the legacy media but also from the content creators spread in multiple digital domains. Given Nepal's robust digital domain (Tiwari, 2024), there are over 10 million people having 4G access. Likewise, 43 percent of Nepalis have internet access. About 73 percent of Nepal's population has cell phone access. This data shows Nepal's position as a lucrative land for digital presence. This digital dividend has created fertile digital domain for maneuvers both for legacy media journalists and content creators. Nepal's diaspora is equally involved in this wired world creating misinformation in the process. Full-fledged press freedom guaranteed by the preamble of Nepal's constitution and the incredible access of internet and social media sites have boosted Nepal's misinformation matrix. By comprising mainstream journalists and content creators in terms of misinformation, this paper has acknowledged the rapidly evolving

strength of content creators as well as drawn trends and traits of misinformation practices from both sides with three case studies from both fronts.

Literature review

Misinformation, disinformation and malinformation are three major irritants not only in media world's credibility but also in the weakening of the democratic practice. All of these are 'information' having different prefix like 'mis', 'dis' and 'mal'. According to the Deakin University (2025), misinformation, disinformation and malinformation are not the same. According to the university definition, misinformation is "the false and misleading information that is spread either intentionally or unintentionally." Disinformation is somehow similar to misinformation but "it's spread with the intent to deceive". In the same manner, malinformation means is an authentic information. However, it "is spread with the intention to harm someone's reputation."

Among various theories of the media world, mainly three theories are crucial lens to glance the misinformation matrix. Three theories are - gatekeeping theory, agenda-setting theory and framing theory. Gatekeeping theory works strongly in the traditional media which is almost absent in most of the content creators. Agenda-setting theory equally works for the both fronts - mainstream media journalists and content creators. So does it come true to the case of framing theory.

Digging into the misinformation landscape, Dahal (2025) categorizes three stages of misinformation evolution. They are - mission, making and mediums. Mission includes mainly three benefits - political, economic and social unrest. Making accommodates clickbait topic, promotion of partial truth and using old picture or video in new context. Mediums are also three - social media sites, fake news portals and deepfake technology.

There are few instances of comparisons between misinformation matrix among the mainstream media journalists and content creators. From global to regional to the national level, there are not much visible comparison of the pinpointed misinformation practices by mainstream media journalists and content creators.

Content creators at the forefront of misinformation domain

Various researchers have found that content creators are the major drivers of the misinformation front. Content creators from across the world come to the same page. According to an article at the United Nations University, 41.6 percent depend on the number of likes and views of their content (Chong, 2024). Other indicators of the trustworthiness include personal experience (60%), content shared by the trusted pals (20.6%). Only 17 percent content creators work for the actual evidence and documentation.

Even in some surveys of Nepal's media landscape, content creating platforms have bigger share of Nepal's misinformation. A fresh survey-based research article says 56.51 percent of Nepal's misinformation comes via social media (Acharya & Kunwar, 2025). The research shows that online media accounts for 16.95 percent of misinformation. Online media also involves a lot of content creators. Share of misinformation by politicians stands at 17.69 percent which is just a percent above the online media outlets.

Content creators don't follow the professional journalistic ethics which give ample avenues for the flow of misinformation. Content creators mainly focus on the trending topic, engaging contents and influential angle. However, they don't go through the layered process of gate keeping and fact checking. That's what prompted national and international organizations to have dedicated programs of fact checking mainly targeting content creators. For instance, 21 Nepal's content creators and social media influencers were trained on fact checking issue by Earth Journalism Network from January 7 to 9, 2025 at Dhulikhel of Kabhre district. This training included many

contents generating a lot of misinformation from their respected domains.

Likewise, there are efforts to integrate professional journalists and content creators together at a function to better understand the issue of the hour and the authenticity of the matter. On December 13 of 2024, in collaboration with UNESCO, Youth Innovation Lab organized a mix of 13 professional journalists and 13 content creators. This was widely published inspiring similar endeavors to follow suit. Despite such programs, content creators are again at the forefront of misinformation as there is no limit of content creators as they are produced overnight from their possible viral contents.

Three noted cases of misinformation by the content creators

Content creators of Nepal and of Nepali origin are at the driving seat of Nepal's misinformation front. Some are based in Nepal. Some are outside Nepal. Here are three cases of misinformation by content creators.

Case One: Fake New York Times story of a Nepali park

On 26 May 2025, Sirjana Oli, mostly known as Sirjana Sizzu, posted a video clip on her YouTube Shorts. The video described the Cholung park of Tehrathum district in East Nepal saying that it was featured by the New York Times as the 42nd must visit destination in the entire world. She described the story putting the provincial government logo of Koshi Tourism Year 2082 BS.

In fact, the park was neither featured by the New York Times, nor was categorized as the 42nd best world destination. Interestingly, the park's image was used to depict the home stay network story of Nepal in The Time Magazine of the USA. The Time (2025) features the image of the Cholung Park as the picture of the Nepali Community home stay network which is also a misinformation. Those homes, clicked by Rachel Lees, were not of community home stay.

It was the clip made viral by hundreds of thousands of viewers who love the organic stone park rooted in the Yakthung Limbu cultural contents and ritualistic roots. Even after being proven that she was wrong, she neither updated the information nor confessed the misinformation. As of August 23, 2025 she hasn't corrected the incorrect.

Case Two: Fake history of Nepal's Koirala family

In October, a popular YouTube channel called In-Depth Story posted a story about a murder. It was later removed by the YouTube because Nepali journalist, KP Dhungana, the author of the book called 'Open Secrets' lodged a plagiarism issue with the YouTube. The so-called 'In-Depth Story' was a plagiarized one. This was the worst-case scenario for a channel which calls itself 'In-Depth Story'. This channel has made multiple misinformation which are still online. One of the noted misinformation case is all about the Koirala family of Nepal. A video posted on September 16, 2024 has gained more than 326,000 views in YouTube only. However, the content has numerous misinformation like:

- The video says republican Nepal was made in 2063 BS. But the fact is 2065 BS.
- Video claims Rana-King-Congress had an agreement on 7 Falgun 2007 at New Delhi. This is wrong because on this day all of these parties were back to Kathmandu to proclaim democracy for Nepal. In books by BP Koirala (*Atmabritanta*) and Matrika Koirala (*A Role in a Revolution*) also dismisses the claim of tripartite Delhi agreement.
- Matrika opened Nepal Praja Party, claimed the video. But the fact is that the party was named Rastriya Praja Party.

This misinformation was pinpointed on September 19 (Birat Briefing, 2024). However, neither the content creator corrected the matter not

confessed the misinformation. This is the channel watched mainly by Gen-Zs which might have long-term misinformation impacts on them both for their personal understanding and competitive examinations.

Case Three: Irrelevant mention of legacy media editors

Nepal's noted content creator is a YouTube channel called The Nepali Comment. This channel spreads misinformation at times. The most noted one was on September 18, 2024 when it headlined 'Rabi Lamichhane: Clean Chit or Guilty in Sahakari Case?' This video is mainly on the cooperative scam report that mainly focuses on Rabi Lamichhane, GB Rai and their handling of cooperative cashes deposited by many ordinary folks. The content creator unnecessarily named 'Baahra Bhai' (Baahra means 12 and bhai translates as brothers) and Kailash Shirohiya. Baahra Bhai a derogatory term for Nepal's 12 or so mainstream male editors for making Rabi the guilty in the cooperative fraud scam. Kailash Shirohiya is the owner of Nepal's leading media group Kantipur Media Group who Rabi arrested for so-called citizenship scam. This misinformation was publicly finger-pointed (Birat Briefing, 2024). However, this went as nothing wrong happened. Still, there is no mention of that blunder which has misled hundreds of thousands of viewers. The content creator hasn't corrected the content hampering the personal and professional images of many editors and an owner for no reason.

Legacy media's misinformation

From the age of wood papers to the era of web portals and social media pages, misinformation is a constant phenomenon. According to the UNESCO (2018), "disinformation is an old story, fuelled by new technology" (p.15). This comes true to the legacy media's legacy also. Legacy media outlets have been part of varied misinformation instances, accidental and intentional. Even the commoners feel that misinformation comes from the legacy media outlets.

According to a research by Chetana Kunwar and Ujjwal Prajapati (2025), mainstream includes a huge chunk of trust deficit owing to the misinformation issue. They have found that, 9.8 percent believe the misinformation comes from the radio. From newspapers, the percentage is even bigger- 12.6 percent. From the television, the misinformation volume is felt by 19.1 percent. This speaks volumes about the misinformation mirage in the mainstream or the legacy media outlets. Nepal's legacy media is prone to perpetual flow of misinformation.

Three major cases of misinformation by mainstream media outlets

Legacy media outlets are equally visible in misinformation landscape of Nepal. To have a short spotlight, here are three of the major cases of misinformation in Nepal's legacy media outlets.

Case one: The Wagner saga connecting Nepali youths

When the Russian invasion of Ukraine was at its peak, there was the breaking news of Nepali youths joining the Russian forces by The Diplomat (2023), many Nepali legacy media outlets gave misinformation. For instance, on July 2, 2023, *onlinekhabar.com* headlined – "Will Nepali youths in Wagner integrate into Russian army?"

A daily newspaper *Nagarik Daily*, on July 16, 2023, ran a story – "Nepali youths in Wagner group."

Another news website *Ratopati.com* wrote on July 17, 2023 – "Nepali youths join Wagner group."

Other than these, there were countless such headings mentioning Nepali youths' entry into the Wagner group, now functionally defunct Russian combatants' group comprising former and recently released jailbirds. None of the hundreds of Nepalis have even said about Nepali's entry into the Wagner group. All of the

Nepalis recruited in Russian war were part of Russian state forces, not the Wagner group. However, Nepali mainstream media outlets made false stories based on what foreign press published. It was the story wrongly manufactured from India-based journalists writing for the foreign press.

None of the Nepali mainstream media outlets who wrote on Wagner group's Nepali connection have established well-founded base of the story so far. Nor have they apologized for the misinformation.

Case Two: The man-killing monkeys from Nuwakot

On August 20, 2025, news circulated both in private newspaper Annapurna Post and state broadcaster Nepal Television. The story was of Panchakanya Rural Municipality, Ward Number 2 of Nuwakot where, the news said, a 58-year-old man named Gokarna Nepali was said to have been killed by a group of monkeys. This news raised eyebrows not in news industry but also in conservation world of Nepal. Then came fact checker and ultimately made it clear that the news was full of misinformation. The Tech Pana (2025) proved all the outlets carrying the news as misinformation peddlers. Nepal Television didn't say sorry, nor did the Annapurna Post newspaper. Annapurna Post just removed a monkey driving the bus. It hasn't said sorry for the proven misinformation by its reporter Devchandra Bhatta. Other news portals have just altered the headlines. No apologies at all.

Case Three: China's 'encroachment' of Nepal's seven district borders

On July 24, 2020, Nepal's leading newspaper *Kantipur Daily* ran a story claiming the border encroachment of Nepal's seven northern districts by the northern neighbor China. The news written by Kantipur's veteran journalist Balaram Baniya had quoted Ministry of Agriculture and wrote 35 hectares of Nepali land was captured by China. The news quoted an unnamed source 'former director

general'. The news was shared thousands of times and was ultimately proven misinformation. Three factors were at play to prove it wrong. First, the Ministry of Agriculture is not an authorized ministry to record the border issue. Plus, none in the ministry owned the news. Second, the unnamed source made it a more absurd story. Third, Nepal government, unlike in case of China, hasn't figured border encroachment by China. Nepal is not afraid to raise its border issue, if the issue is genuine, like it did with both India and China when they agreed to have cross-border trade via Lipulek pass of Nepal's far northwest.

Later on, *Kantipur* (2020) apologized. This issue has been one of the interesting case studies of fact checking course contents in Nepal.

Misinformation in Nepal's issue by media of neighboring nations

Nepal's misinformation domains are somewhat impacted by mainstream media outlets from neighboring nations - India and China. Indian media are hated at times for their insensitive coverage. The most glaring instance was in the aftermath of Nepal's 2015 earthquake when Nepal's social media was trending with the hashtag of 'Go Home Indian Media' (Times of India, 2015). This was picked by various global media outlets like Aljazeera, BBC, among others. On May 4, 2015, BBC headlined - "Why is India media facing a backlash in Nepal?" Aljazeera, on May 6, 2015 titled - "Nepalis slam Indian media for using quake for PR."

Indian media's misinformation drive during the COVID-19 pandemic was pathetic. On April 10, 2020, Indian television channels like TV9 Bharatvarsa and TV24 broadcasted a disinformation saying that a Nepali-Jalim Mukhiya was deliberately spreading coronavirus to bordering India with 200 infected folks from Nepal's side. The disinformation even linked Mukhiya to Pakistan's intelligence front - ISI. This disinformation drive had created fear among borderland citizens of both country and Pakistan was unnecessarily invited in a matter it was not involved of.

Chinese media outlet China Radio International (CRI) Nepali, now rebranded a CGTN Nepali, has instances of giving misinformation on Nepal in Nepali language. From February 25 to March 2, 2020, it ran multiple stories with multiple misinformations concerning US program MCC in Nepal. Two headlines are noteworthy with heavy misinformation. On February 25, 2020, it ran a story titled, "Why 500 million US dollars can't buy Nepal's sovereignty and people's self-respect?" Again, on March 1, 2020, another headline said - "Who is Nepal's true friend? Why USA is pressuring Nepal to ratify MCC?"

In this way, Nepal's neighboring media outlets have tried to defame third countries with misinformation.

Misinformation complaints at Press Council Nepal

Press Council Nepal has been appealing media platforms to make them reliable (Kathmandu Post, 2024). Mainstream media platforms are following this call to a larger extent. However, social media platforms are flooded with misinformation contents. Complaints are rife at Press Council Nepal, the government entity to govern media world in Nepal. According to the data of a year 2081 BS (mid-April 2024 to mid-April 2025), 147 misinformation cases were lodged (Press Council Nepal, 2025). Press Council instructed relevant social media influencers, content creators and users. Of them, 28 were YouTube channels, 29 Facebook pages, and seven web portals. In the press release issued by the Press Council, it is stated that four media outlets were put in blacklist and social media platforms and users are also being monitored in accordance with the latest guidelines of YouTube channels. Press Council in the last Nepali fiscal year, has settled 361 issues. In 2081 BS, 340 complaints were made. Out of them, 158 were of character assassination, 147 were of misinformation, nine were of bargaining and threat, 13 were of copyright contents and 13 were other.

However, the misinformation by foreign press related to Nepal's issues doesn't come under the jurisdiction of the Press Council

Nepal. Still, Press Council has an example of alerting its counterpart in India on the misinformation concerning Nepal.

Conclusion

Nepal's mainstream media journalists and content creators both are actively involved in the misinformation domains. Both sides have some commonalties like apathy to apologize, lack of multi-layer gate-keeping, strong fact-checking and multiple-source verifications. Still, mainstream media have some good characters - willingness to be transparent, open and well-sourced in the information provided. Plus, they mostly practice ethics of journalism. However, content creators are mainly impacted by the crowd sentiment, sensationalism, click bait and the likes aided by AI. Content creators are openly biased of not just the mainstream media editors and owners; they are actively engaged to defame them on personal levels. In order to fill in the gap of the content creators and journalists, stakeholders must drive initiatives to mix extraordinary qualities of both of them. Journalists must be trained to be updated with the content of the time and the trend of the technology like content creators this will make their storytelling more effective and more engaging. For content creators, they must be equipped with the journalistic code of conduct, gate keeping and the like. As the number of content creators is growing in geometrical scope and scale, it is almost impossible to counter their skyrocketing misinformation by limited fact checkers in the legacy or new media outlets. For this, youths in schools and colleges must be trained to have strong ideas of digital literacy, media literacy, editorial seriousness, fact checking of misinformation, disinformation, misinformation as well as hate speech. Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), Press Council Nepal (PCN), Department of Information and proven journalism skills trainer like Center for Media Research (CMR) must join forces to counter misinformation from the civilian and journalistic levels.

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