

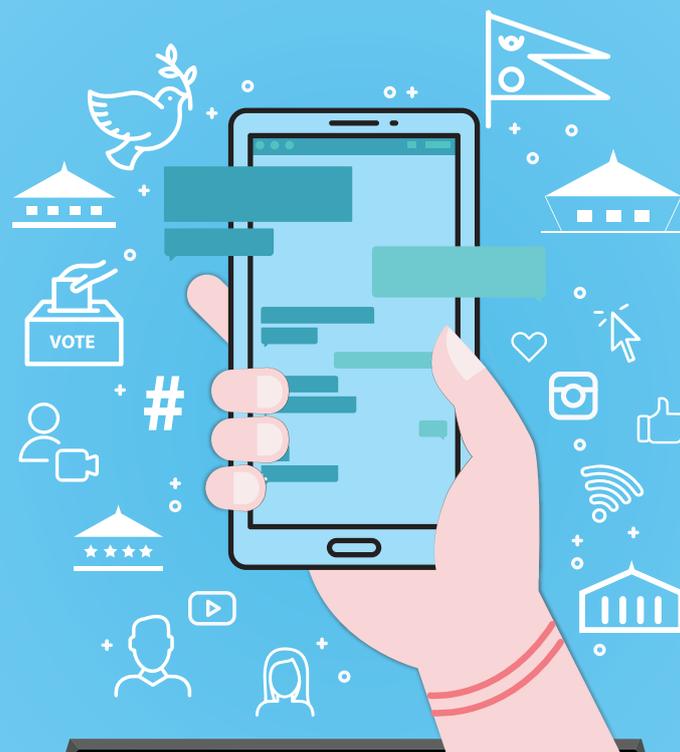
WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

2019

3 MAY

MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY AND PEACE
Journalism and Elections in the
Age of the Internet

Consolidated Report



#WORLDPRESSFREEDOMDAY
#PRESSFREEDOM

EVENT ORGANISED BY



Government of Nepal



Election Commission,
Nepal



Federation of
Nepali Journalists



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1 Introduction

This year, Nepal marked World Press Freedom Day with the theme, “Media for Democracy and Peace: Journalism and Elections in the Age of the Internet.” Nepal’s Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MoCIT), the Election Commission Nepal (ECN) and the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), together with the European Union (EU), UNESCO Nepal and UNDP, organized a one-day national conference to celebrate this occasion.

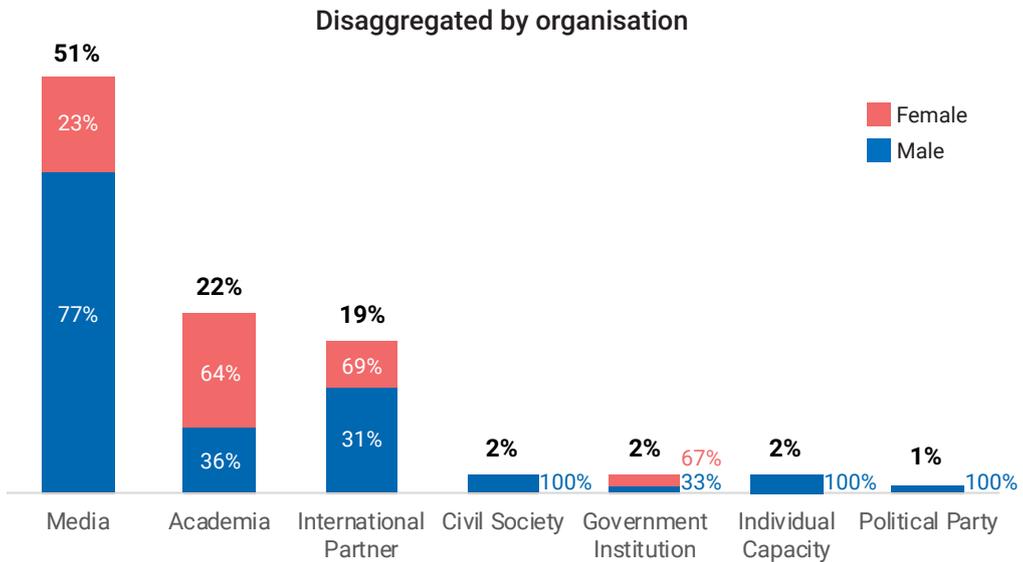
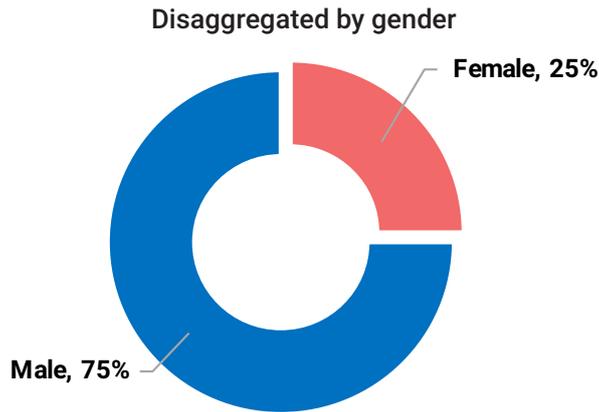
Dignitaries who spoke at the event included: Gokul Prasad Baskota, Minister of Communication, Information and Technology; Dinesh Kumar Thapaliya, Chief Election Commissioner; Valerie Julliand, UN Resident Coordinator; Veronica Cody, Ambassador of the EU Delegation to Nepal; Richard Morris, British Ambassador to Nepal; Govinda Acharya, FNJ President; Kishor Shrestha, Acting Chairman of the Press Council of Nepal; and Harihar Birahi, former FNJ Chairperson. All of the speakers highlighted the important role that a free press plays in contributing to democracy and peace.

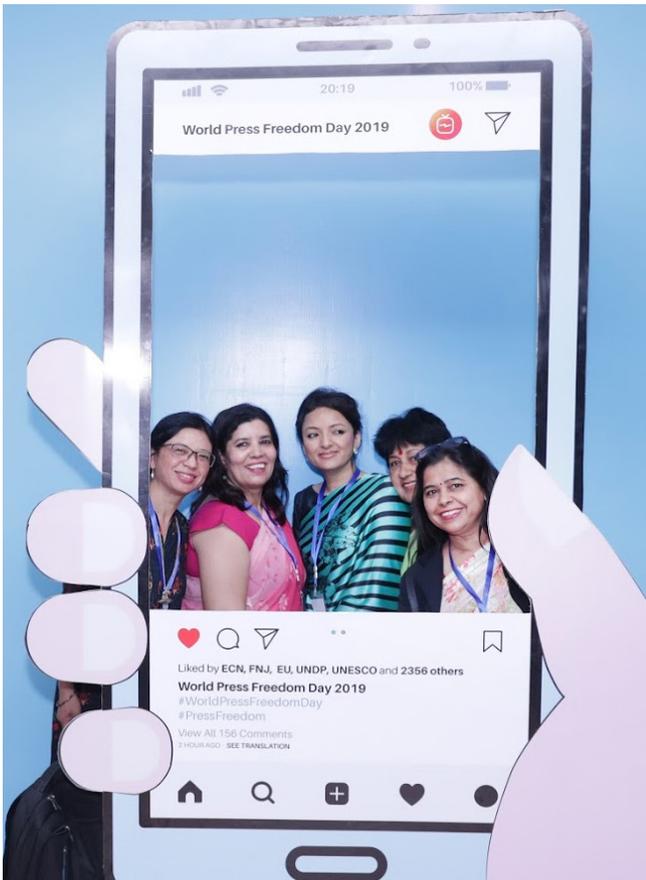
The conference was organized into six thematic panel discussions, which included: deliberations on new opportunities and challenges for the integrity of Nepal’s elections in the digital age; media and its role in supporting peace and democracy; voter education through mass media; social media policies and practices; digital media portrayals of gender and social inclusion; and media policies conducive to peace and democracy.

The one-day event was attended by nearly 300 participants from various media houses, ECN and academia. In addition, there were national and international development partners present to reinforce their support for and commitment to World Press Freedom Day and media dedicated to democracy and peace.

Participant's Demography

There were a total of 289 participants, among whom 25% were female. There was high participation among media representatives (51%) followed by those in academia (22%) and international partners (19%). Gender disaggregated data from different organizations are presented below.





2 Sessions

2.1 Inauguration



The President of FNJ, Govinda Acharya, welcomed guests to mark this important day, reminding those in attendance that FNJ and UNESCO have commemorated this day since 1995. This year, however, World Press Freedom Day is being recognized in partnership with MoCIT, ECN, EU and UNDP. In his address, Mr. Acharya remarked that democracy is not possible without a free press and that FNJ has been supporting every movement for democracy. Furthermore, he stated that FNJ played an important role during the time of the elections to make them free, fair and impartial. In line with this, he informed attendees that there is a need to enhance the quality of discussions around this issue. Noting that a free press includes being responsible for the welfare of the Nepali people and national prosperity, Mr. Acharya remarked that the discussions carried on throughout the day will be extremely valuable.

His address was followed by the launch of the Annual Press Freedom Report, published by FNJ. According to the report, there have been 60 instances of press freedom violations since 4 May 2018, the majority of which were attacks, threats, misconduct and arrests. He elaborated that more than 77 journalists and five media houses faced criminal cases and harassments for alleged violations of the Electronic Transaction Act. Mr. Acharya called for an increased effort to ensure the safety of journalists and freedom of press. During the function, three senior journalists – former President of FNJ, Dharmendra Jha, pioneer of radio in Nepal, Gopal Guragain, and former Chairperson of Working Women Journalists, Sangita Lama, were honoured with the **Press Freedom Fighter Award**.



Sangita Lama

Dharmendra Jha

Gopal Guragain



Former FNJ chairperson, Harihar Birahi, also addressed the event. Mr. Birahi stated that the day's theme suits the present situation in Nepal, expressing concern over the Annual Press Freedom Report's findings of 60 cases of press violations since 4 May 2018. This was even more concerning because it happened in a full-fledged democracy like Nepal. He emphasized that the spirit of democracy needs to be embodied in the Constitution and that all of Nepal's acts should reflect this. Mr. Birahi then informed the audience that journalism needs to embrace development and democracy so that a sustainable peace prevails, emphasizing that journalists need to be committed to the people rather than being ideologically affiliated.



important for news operations to abide by a code of conduct.

The Acting Chairman of the Press Council of Nepal, Kishor Shrestha, noted that there are 7000 registered newspapers, but only 924 are published on a regular basis. Likewise, there are currently approximately 1670 online newspapers, 800 radio stations and 125 registered television stations. He stressed that journalism in Nepal has achieved much in such a short time, but he also noted that it is important for these platforms to deliver factual and consistent information and upgrade the quality of their reporting. To do so, he emphasized that it is



Internet holds the power to disseminate information at great speed, it also carries the risk of spreading false information, fear, threats and violence. She concluded by emphasizing that journalism needs to be truthful, reliable and transparent in order to enhance press freedom.

UN Resident Coordinator Valerie Julliard remarked that a transparent and reliable press ensures better governance. She asserted that if the press is not free, people are not free; and she reminded the audience that a free press is essential for justice, peace, sustainable development and the enjoyment of human rights. Without independent journalism, she said, societies lose their integrity. Ms. Julliard stated the need to enhance transparency, identifying the Internet as a key resource for sharing information. She pointed out that while the



The British Ambassador to Nepal, Richard Morris, stressed that the concept of a free press is relevant around the globe, as free media helps to hold the powerful to account. He asserted that a free press helps to ensure accountability and improves the public services delivered to ordinary people.



analyzing and exposing disinformation; ensuring coordinated response to disinformation; mobilizing the private sector to counter disinformation; and improving societal resilience.

The EU Ambassador to Nepal, Veronica Cody, informed the audience that in this age of growing digitalization, threats that seek to disrupt electoral and democratic processes are increasingly being felt in different parts of the world. The threats come mainly from disinformation campaigns taking place during and before elections. In order to address this, the EU launched an Action Plan against disinformation in December of 2018. Ambassador Cody set out the four pillars of the EU Action Plan against disinformation, which include: detecting,



awareness.

In his address, the Honourable Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Kumar Thapaliya emphasized that free, fair, accountable and professional media contribute to credible elections. He discussed plans to restructure the ECN at the provincial and local levels, which will help to delineate responsibilities, enable voter registration and update voter lists through the use of software. In addition, he stressed that to capitalize on the opportunities that the Internet brings, ECN will update its data centre and disseminate information through a user-friendly website. The ECN will also adopt a geographic information system (GIS) to map polling stations for future elections and will utilize traditional media and social media to promote electoral



The Honourable Minister of MoCIT, Gokul Prasad Baskota, also highlighted the connection between democracy and the press and stated that the country needs to think about ways to make the media accountable and reliable to make the best use of it. He acknowledged the sacrifices the journalists have made in past democratic movements, commenting that their actions serve as a reminder to the government of the importance of press freedom in establishing peace and stability. The Honourable Minister also declared that 2019 will be the year to safeguard the dignity and security of journalists, stressing the continued need for responsible and professional journalism.

In summary, all of the inaugural addresses stressed that the ongoing discussions would pave the way for a robust, free and responsible press in Nepal – a press that will contribute to free and fair elections, democracy and peace.

2.2 New Opportunities and Challenges for the Integrity of Nepal's elections in the Digital Age

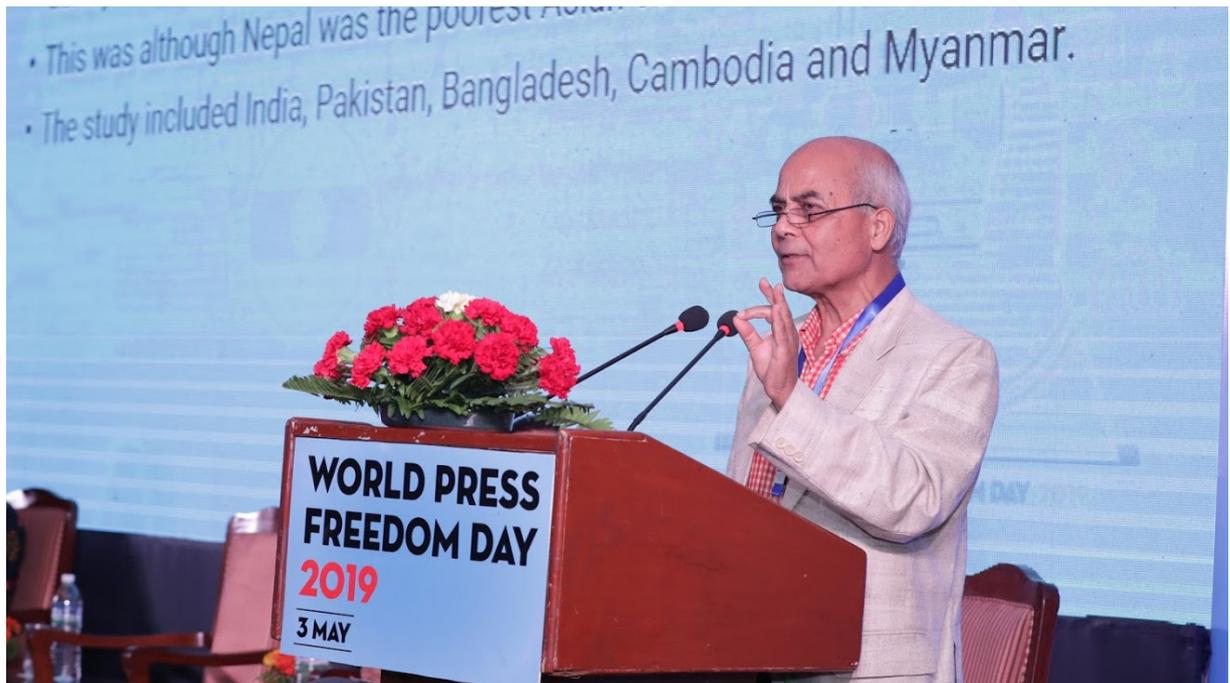
The session on new opportunities and challenges for the integrity of Nepal's elections in the digital age was led by former Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel. His presentation emphasized the importance of understanding how election processes are being reshaped in the digital age. The modern digital environment provides new opportunities as well as new challenges – especially in the context of the upcoming 2022 elections, for which preparations will now need to start.

Among the opportunities, Mr. Pokharel stressed that the Internet provides access for many Nepalese people who would otherwise have little access to infrastructure. He highlighted that social media provides a space for discussion, which can contribute to electoral integrity, but warned that social media may also be disliked by regimes in authoritarian countries. Mr. Pokharel stated that information and communications technology has been immensely helpful in the following ways: engaging citizens in the democratic processes; empowering and educating voters; increasing accessibility for election campaigns in a cost-effective manner; improving election management through voter registration, voter identification, logistics and election-related information management; and results management. It has also played a key role in different parts of the world in empowering people to establish their political rights. He further expressed that the large number of Internet users in Nepal add to the opportunity to contribute to electoral integrity.

In terms of challenges, he explained how the dynamics of the Internet can lead to polarization, and that there are low barriers to spreading disinformation, hate speech and even incitements of violence. This will be even more challenging when artificial intelligence becomes more prominent. Artificial intelligence has added new challenges with “deep fakes,” the rise of professions and industries that promote artificial intelligence and increased state sponsorship of “cyber troops.” Mr. Pokharel cited research from the University of Oxford that highlights the rise in junk news and fake social media accounts during election periods. He also stated that disinformation campaigns through encrypted media like WhatsApp have also become a serious concern.

Mr. Pokharel asked how Election Management Bodies can ensure a level playing field and preserve the integrity of elections in such an environment. He cited multiple examples from around the globe. For example, China censors online speech, bans platforms like Google and Facebook from operating in the country; the United States adopts a libertarian view of speech and generally deregulatory posture toward the internet; South Africa has launched an online reporting platform in April 2019 for citizens to report cases of alleged digital disinformation; and the EU adopted an action plan which dedicates resources to implement a four pillar strategy to tackle disinformation, which may also have relevance for Nepal.

After outlining the specifics of the situation in Nepal, he asked panellists to consider how the nation can make use of technology to preserve the integrity of Nepal's elections. The presentation from Mr. Pokharel was followed by a panel discussion. The panellists were: Dr. Suresh Acharya, FNJ's former Chairperson; Ms. Subhekshya Bindu, Press Council Nepal Member; Mr. Subhash Ghimire, Editor-in-Chief of Republica; and Ms. Girija Sharma, Joint Secretary of the Election Commission of Nepal.



Dr. Acharya commented that he felt that the journalists in Nepal were very supportive of the way the 2017 elections were conducted at a time when it seemed that elections were unlikely in the country. He emphasized that periodic elections are a vital element of democracy and that media is also at the vanguard of democracy. Dr. Acharya claimed that in the age of the Internet, the media do not have the final say in forming people’s opinions, as people put media to the test. He expressed the need to differentiate between free media and media associated with political parties, noting that an impartial media holds the potential to contribute positively to democracy.



Ms. Subhekshya Bindu remarked that the Code of Conduct for journalists shared by the Press Council is all-encompassing and that it should be the guiding document, the “guru mantra.” She stated that impartial and sincere journalism holds the potential to contribute to fair elections. As an example, Ms. Bindu said that the Press Council monitored various media outlets during the 2017 elections. According to the monitoring report, the online media documented several violations of the Code of Conduct. This makes it a challenge to envision how these media outlets can become more responsible and contribute to the delivery of factual news. Ms. Bindu emphasized that ensuring a more responsible online media will have a positive impact during the electoral cycle and beyond.



Mr. Subhash Ghimire, Editor-in-Chief of Republica, noted that fake news remains a global challenge which seeks to undermine the integrity of elections. On one hand, he remarked, digital media enable fake news and incitement; on the other hand, they also hold opportunities to reach more voters. For example, Mr. Ghimire stated that Bibeksheel and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) were the two political parties that had invested a lot of resources in social media to campaign during the local elections of 2017, and the former benefitted the most from that investment. However he asserted that despite social media, traditional media like radio and television remain more impactful in voter outreach.



Ms. Girija Sharma, Joint Secretary of ECN, informed the panel of the many ways in which the ECN has been using digital technologies to its advantage. She stated that the ECN has invested in a biometric-based voter registration system in order to prevent multiple voting. The organization has also implemented political finance software and invested in electoral risk management tools which is a software to mitigate any potential risks that may arise during elections. Ms. Sharma also emphasized that digital tools can be leveraged to enable or enhance voter education. She elaborated that in the federal context of Nepal, the Election Commission needs to be present in the provinces and that digitalization can help ensure better coordination.

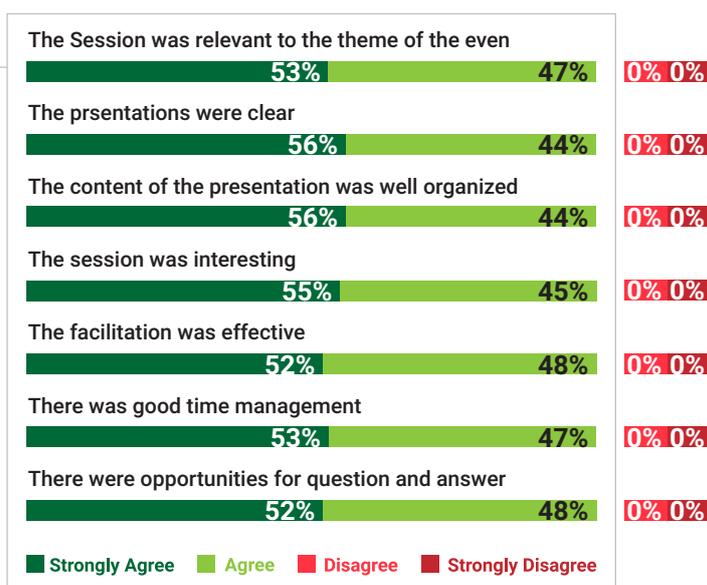
The audience raised issues of fake news, the need for monitoring social media sites during elections and for making electoral processes more inclusive. Audience members stated that elections should be looked at from an electoral cycle perspective: pre-elections, during elections and post-elections. They also asserted that the voter motive should be examined during the time of elections. These examinations will help to tackle the issue of deep fakes and fake news in order to better regulate online media. The floor questioned how relevant and necessary such advanced technologies will be in the context of Nepal. Additionally, some among the audience opined that a media bill regulating fake news in social media platforms can contribute to better reporting. Audience participants also asked that the ECN adopt public hearings to increase accountability during elections and expressed their views on the need to identify ways to address media literacy and media credibility. Some participants were worried about the way Electronic Transaction Act is affecting the media. Journalists also expressed their concern regarding the provision of a new media bill presented in the parliament.

This session brought to light the challenges of ensuring the integrity of elections in Nepal and used examples from around the world to explore opportunities for holding credible elections. Research found that 63% of Nepalis have Internet access (NTA-2018) and around 2.5 million people join this group annually. Likewise, about 95% of Internet users in Nepal are on Facebook. Based on a global study (After Access-2018) 72% of people in the 15-65 age group in Nepal use a mobile phone, 46% of people in this group know about the Internet, 77% of mobile phone users utilize social media applications and 58% of social media users trust the news they read in social media. These facts were taken as both an opportunity and a challenge in meeting electoral integrity.

There was a general consensus that various stakeholders need to collaborate and coordinate in the pursuit of sound elections. The session served as a starting point for the discussion of this pressing issue, with more attention given to exploring opportunities than dwelling on hindrances.

Session Evaluation

The organizers of the conference organized an evaluation conducted through individual participant questionnaires after each session and after the event as a whole. For the first session, remarkably, 100 per cent of evaluations were positive. All participants agreed that the session was relevant to the theme of the event. Attendees found that the presentations were clear, the content was well organized, the session was interesting, the facilitation was effective, there was good time management, and there were opportunities for questions and answers.



Self Evaluation

Likewise, all of the participants agreed that the particular topic was relevant for their professional work; that the session was effective in enhancing their professional knowledge and skills; and that they were likely to apply the knowledge they gained from the session; and that the session met their expectation.



Recommendations:

- Media should act independently and fairly and maintain oversight to support the process of election to maintain electoral integrity.
- The Election Commission should enhance its engagement with the media not only during elections but during the entire electoral cycle.
- Media must provide impartial information, which will help contribute to independent and fair elections.
- There is a need for better collaboration and coordination between various stakeholders in the pursuit of credible elections.
- This event should serve as the starting point for the discussions around electoral integrity in the digital age.

2.3 Media and its Role in Supporting Peace and Democracy

The session on media and its role in supporting peace and democracy was led by Mr. Binod Bhattarai, Media Expert. This session emphasized that the media have typically been in favour of democracy and peace, and sought to understand how the role of the media contributes to both. The panellists highlighted the role of Nepali media in past democratic movements and elections and raised concern about the upcoming media laws and policies at federal and provincial levels. The facilitator discussed how easy it was for various media personnel and ordinary citizens to access information from the government, especially since there are information officers in government offices.

The panellists included: Ms. Amrita Anmol, Journalist; Mr. Gopal Jha, former President of the Broadcasting Association of Nepal; Mr. Surya Prasad Gautam, Under Secretary of the Election Commission of Nepal; and Mr. Krishna Jwala Devkota, Naya Patrika Dainik.





Mr. Binod Bhattarai, introducing the session, said that independent journalism could only flourish under a regulatory environment that allows free expression, and a government that accepts critical journalism. Only such journalism can support the development of democracy.



Ms. Amrita Anmol opined that as a local Rupandehi-based reporter, it is easy to get the sort of information that the government wants publicized. She elaborated that the access to information for investigative journalism is not always so readily available. In addition to not being able to access all kinds of content for news, she said that even journalists may sometimes be ideologically driven to pursue and push for party-related news rather than impartial news. This was a reminder of the challenges that exist for professional journalists in Nepal. On the issue of fake news, Ms. Anmol remarked that although many claim that journalism is simply rushed information, journalists should aim not to disseminate inaccurate information. She pointed out the fact that a lack of data and records also gives people room to manipulate news in their own interests. The issue of controlled news, for example, comes through when journalists and reporters at the local level are given a press release and have a spokesperson deliver the kind of content that is already deemed fit for distribution. She emphasized that this gives very little room for journalists at the districts to dig out factual information and write balanced news.



Mr. Gopal Jha commented that access to information is different in different provinces. For example, he identified Province 3 as the place where information is hardest to get. Pointing out that Province 3 houses both the central government and a provincial government, he stated that many journalists exercise self-censorship in communicating information because of the civil and criminal codes that exist in the country. On the other hand, Mr. Jha expressed that the government is more willing to provide information that it wants to promote via the radio in other provinces. Mr. Jha also remarked that journalists need to remind themselves to stand above politics and ensure that political parties do not influence journalism. The best way to ensure this, he said, is to follow the Code of Conduct.



Mr. Surya Prasad Gautam addressed how accessible information is at the ECN. He stated that the ECN is open for journalists and anyone else who wants to obtain information. He pointed out that the ECN operates a media centre that has as its primary goal the dissemination of information. He also informed the audience that the ECN shares all of the information that is allowed to by law. Mr. Gautam also spoke on how the ECN views the media as a bridge between the government and the people. He stated that the government and the media need to work together, and there needs to be a shift against the traditional view that pits the two institutions against each other. He opined that if the media abide by ethical standards and verify information, it will prevent of the spread of rumours and disinformation. He also suggested that the FNJ play a coordinating role to ensure that factual information is verified and presented in a coherent manner by all media agencies.

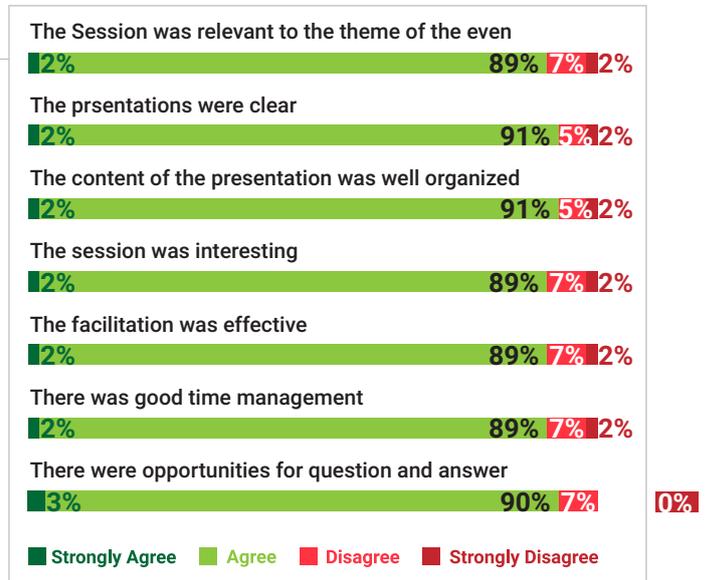


Mr. Krishna Jwala Devkota spoke on the challenges that independent journalists face in a field that is often dominated by party-driven reporting. The central question that was posed to him was: Can one get impartial information? To this, Mr. Devkota responded that certain political party representatives have become celebrity figures, and therefore even journalists seem keen on reporting issues that are related to these familiar faces. However, he feels that, despite this, it is possible to be an independent journalist in Nepal and obtain impartial information for impartial news.

The session also included an open floor discussion where participants raised issues pertaining to media's access to democracy. The views from the floor supported the belief that the ECN has a well-established website and a mobile app where it is easy to access information. However, those in attendance also expressed reservations about other government agencies where the latest content is not always available on the official website or official social media channels. As a recommendation, it was proposed that all government bodies at all tiers have designated information officers who ensure easy access to information.

Session Evaluation

For this session, almost all participants (91%) agreed that the session was relevant to the theme of the event. Those who felt it was irrelevant stated in the comments that content was not focused on the theme as the topics. Only a few individuals (7%) reported that presentations were not clear to them and that the contents were not well organized.



Self Evaluation

Most of the participants (94%) agreed that the particular topic was relevant to their professional work. Likewise, respondents found that the session was effective in enhancing their professional knowledge and skills, and they were likely to apply the knowledge they gained. The vast majority of respondents also found that the session met their expectations.



Recommendations:

- There should be an enabling legal and policy environment for media to work freely.
- Media should honour its professionalism and should be unbiased in their reporting. It should abide by the Code of Conduct.
- Election commission shall facilitate media in collecting and disseminating news during the electoral process.
- Government bodies at all tiers need to have information officers to facilitate easy access to information.

2.4 Voter Education through Mass Media (Increasing People's Access to Information)

Mr. Neelkantha Uprety, former Chief Election Commissioner, led the session on voter education through mass media and increasing people's access to information. The session commenced with a presentation followed by reflections from the panellists and then moved on to a question and answer session. It asked how the media can play a role in facilitating credible and effective elections. The presentation echoed the sentiment that digital media is a tool and the benefits it brings need to be capitalized upon. The presentation also singled out the media as an important tool in spreading accurate information. Mr. Uprety emphasized the need to use the digital media technologies as well as traditional media to our advantage to reach voters and citizens through radio, television, Internet and print media to enhance voter education.

A panel discussion followed Mr. Uprety's presentation. The panellists were: Mr. Chandra Neupane, BAN; Mr. Rem Bahadur Bishwakarma, FNJ Secretary; Mr. Dharmendra Jha, former President of the FNJ; Mr. Shankar Prasad Kharel, Joint Secretary of the Election Commission of Nepal; and Mr. Subhash Khatiwada, ACORAB.



Mr. Chandra Neupane said that although a majority of the Nepali people use Facebook, not everyone believes that it is a reliable source of information. Therefore, it is important to ensure that credible information is passed through social media platforms. He further emphasized that this information also needs to be targeted and made available to all groups and communities.



Mr. Rem Bahadur Bishwakarma noted that only people with financial means are in a position to vie for election. He stressed that there is a pressing need to increase awareness and bring marginalized and otherwise excluded people into the election process. In order to do so, he highlighted the importance of designing inclusive Information, Education and Communication materials. This, he emphasized, will contribute to informed votes. Mr. Bishwakarma expressed that the media can play a particularly important role, helping to carry this invaluable information to citizens in remote parts of the country.



Mr. Dharmendra Jha noted that voter education needs to go beyond voting and include the entire electoral process. To reach this goal, he suggested that the ECN design content for civic and voter education. He stressed the importance of collaboration and suggested that the ECN work with various media to distribute free educational materials through their communication platforms. Furthermore, Mr. Jha stressed that the content needs to be audience-focused, simple and innovative and emphasized the need to cultivate an environment of educated political choice.



Mr. Shankar Prasad Kharel commented that accurate information helps to ensure impartial elections. Speaking on behalf of the ECN, he highlighted the organization's efforts to collaborate with the media and disseminate reliable news. He stressed that these types of conversations mark the beginning of progress.

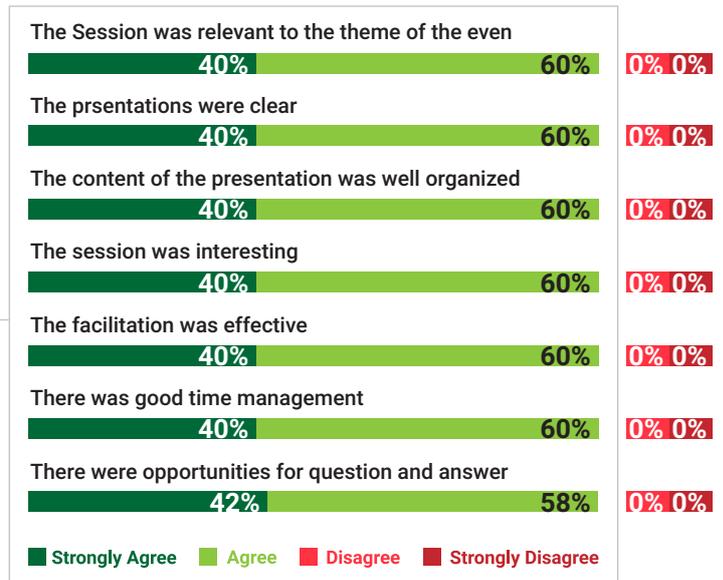


Mr. Subhash Khatiwada expressed the need to use local media to reach people and stated that community radio stations might be particularly helpful. He urged the audience to consider the important role that community radio plays in reaching people in remote parts of Nepal in the spread informative voter education. He highlighted that radio and television audiences increase significantly during the time of elections.

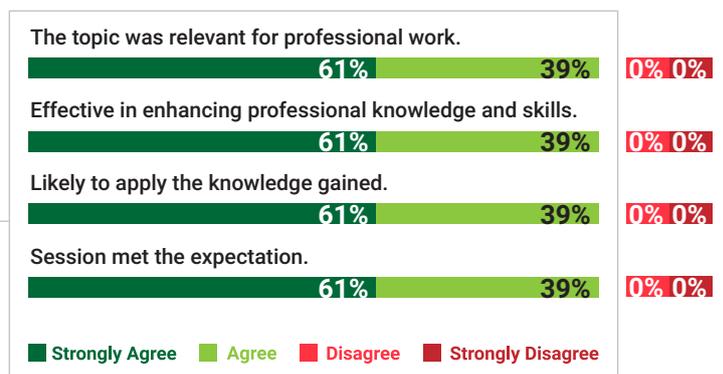
The panel then gathered suggestions from the audience on how to best use mass media for voter education. The suggestions shed light on the need to use local language to design content for voter education. Audience members also expressed the need to have designated staff for civic and voter education instead of relying on secondary school social studies teachers. Attendees also stressed the importance of ensuring that voter and civic education be made available before elections for people living with disabilities and that have easy access to the election results.

The session raised important issues about the need to design inclusive Information, Education and Communication materials for marginalized and differently abled communities. It also emphasized the importance of collaboration between the ECN and the media to increase that voter education and the creation of a full-time staff dedicated to providing voter and civic education.

Session Evaluation



Self Evaluation



Recommendations:

- Mass media should be used to impart voter education.
- Voter education should be a continuous process and should not only be prioritized during the elections.
- Inclusive content for voter education needs to be designed: it needs to take into account the various marginalized groups as well as people living with disabilities to ensure they too have easy access to the materials.
- ECN needs to work with various media to distribute free educational materials through their communication platforms.
- ECN should also explore the possibility of having a full-time staff for civic and voter education, instead of relying on secondary school social studies teachers who are unable to devote adequate time for this important task.

2.5 Social Media Policies and Practices

Mr. Ujjwal Acharya, social media researcher, led the session on social media policies and practices, which sought to examine the relationship between social media and journalism. The session discussed the practice of using social media, disinformation through social media, and the experience from the last elections.

The panellists for this session included: Mr. Prakash Thapa, FNJ Secretary; Dr. Rajeev Subba, Deputy Inspector General, Nepal Police; Mr. Mohan Mainali, South Asia Fact Check; Mr. Deshbandhu Adhikari, Under Secretary of the Election Commission of Nepal; and Ms. Amrita Lamsal, Rights Activist.





Mr. Prakash Thapa said that FNJ is developing a social media guideline for its members. He noted that although it is important for journalists to use social media, they should use it carefully as the audience may perceive it as news even if it is on the journalists' personal social media account. He also stated that social media has facilitated access to – and enhanced the exchange of – information. Even so, he also remarked that there are also challenges associated with social media. To further explore the issue, he asked Dr. Rajeev Subba of the Nepal Police to offer his insight.



Dr. Subba commented that he is amazed by the way that social media has such a strong grasp on societies in countries like Nepal, where societal and family support are both so strong. He acknowledged that the Nepali people are active on social media and speculated that this may be because it is easier for them to say things online than it is in real life. According to Nepal Police findings, social media negatively affects women and girls the most. They also found that fake news and disinformation spread very quickly.



Mr. Mohan Mainali agreed that disinformation spreads quickly but also observed that people seem to trust this kind of disinformation. He recalled that there was a time when people used to think that whatever was published in newspapers was 100% accurate, and now that same belief seems to have shifted to social media. He implored the audience to use their best judgement and think of ways to mitigate the negativity that can spread through social media. Mr. Mainali also recommended that ECN ensure that all of the content that is uploaded on its website is archived so that it can be easily accessible to people at all times.



Mr. Deshbandhu Adhikari highlighted the important role that media plays in spreading election-related information. He recalled that, during the 2017 elections, the ECN had a mandate to complete the conduct of the elections within 120 days, but the organization was able to complete the task ahead of time because of the support from the media. The ECN used platforms like YouTube and Facebook along with mobile applications to reach out to voters. He felt that this outreach approach enabled many voters to cast valid votes despite a very complicated ballot. Lastly, he reminded the audience that the proper use of social media depends upon individual users acting responsibly.



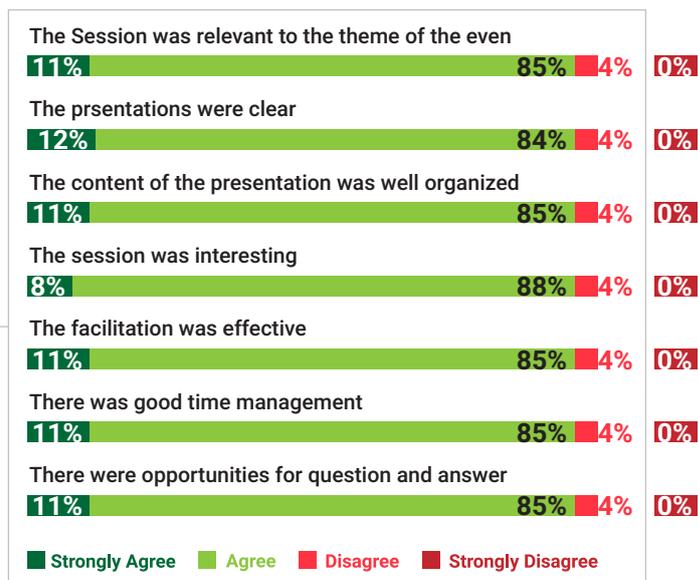
Ms. Amrita Lamsal was also very positive about the potential of digital technology. Citing the Arab Spring, she informed the audience that these tools have made it easier to hold people in power accountable. Noting how she was able to utilize social media to raise funds for a village in Dhading and technology, Ms. Lamsal sees many beneficial uses of social media. She expressed her belief that social media provides a voice for the voiceless and remarked that a simple tweet or post can generate responses that many in-depth reports can't. She also acknowledged the darker side of social media shared that she has been a victim of trolling herself. Despite this, she reiterated that individuals must focus on the best use of technology.



Mr. Ujjwal Acharya pointed out that, although social media may be a tool to spread disinformation and fake news, it can also be used as a tool to fight those very same things. He reminded the audience that social media is a tool that can hold people accountable. DIG Dr. Subba echoed this sentiment, stating that social media has created the space for the public to directly speak to governments without any hierarchy.

The questions and answers from the floor focused on how to take advantage of the benefits of social media and provided a consideration of the negative consequences that social media hold. The panellists responded by saying that fact-checking should be an important component of social media activity. In addition, they remarked that women and girls are particularly vulnerable to the harms of social media. The panellists concluded that social media is like a double-edged sword, with both opportunities and dangers, and that there was a definite need to conduct fact checks and maintain records of all information publicly to enhance transparency.

Session Evaluation



Self Evaluation



Recommendations:

- Journalists should be very careful about disinformation in social media and should not publish or broadcast news without proper verification.
- ECN should upload and archive its content so people can easily access it.
- Social media is a tool that can both spread as well as fight disinformation.
- FNJ should finalize the social media guidelines for journalists and share it with other media houses as a reference.
- ECN should issue a social media code of conduct for the general public and political parties during the elections.
- The Nepal Police should remain vigilant and act to ensure that trolling and hate speech is discouraged, especially on females and activists.
- The state must protect and promote social media as a public accountability tool, and act upon any complaints received through social media.

2.6 Digital Media – Portrayal of Gender and Social Inclusion

Former Election Commissioner, Ms. Ila Sharma, facilitated the session on the portrayal of gender and social inclusion in digital media. The panel discussed how women and disadvantaged groups are often marginalized in digital media. It focused on gender and social inclusion in media, including news content and newsroom, and its impact on democratic practices and the election process. The discussion focused on media can be inclusive within itself to ensure that news is representative and can take into the voices of the marginalized and women, especially women voters and candidates.

The panelists for this session were: Mr. Ameet Dhakal, Editor and Journalist at Setopati; Mr. Danda Gurung, President of the Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Journalists (FONIJ); Ms. Girija Sharma, Joint Secretary of the Election Commission of Nepal; and Ms. Nitu Pandit, Sancharika Samuha.



The session commenced with a presentation from Ms. Ila Sharma followed by a panel discussion and question and answers from the audience. In her presentation, Ms. Sharma noted that, following the 2017 elections, the representation of women and marginalized groups is higher than ever. She also informed those present that the ECN took special measures for inclusion, such as: provisions for voters with children of up to five years of age; separate queues for senior citizens and the physically disabled; the maintenance of sex-disaggregated data; and a curriculum on voter education for the visually impaired and those with hearing disabilities.

Beyond the activities of the ECN, Ms. Sharma observed that women still struggle with access to the digital space, noting that digital media provides opportunities but also challenges for gender equality and social inclusion. Social media, she remarked, is a reflection of society, and existing forms of exclusion and marginalization are replicated on social media. Her presentation stressed the belief that hate speech and disruption of communal harmony can harm marginalized groups because they are often more vulnerable. Moreover, she remarked that, despite its benefits, social media also allows for the expression of extreme or regressive opinions.



Mr. Ameet Dhakal commented that ethnic stereotypes exist in Nepali society and said that people need to be considerate of that fact. He emphasized the importance of raising awareness of the different values, perspectives and beliefs that diverse groups have and reflecting those values through news media. During the session, he observed that newsrooms are a microcosm of society and emphasized the need to make newsrooms more inclusive.



Mr. Danda Gurung also addressed the issue of inclusion in media. He highlighted the need for inclusive content along with representation in the newsroom. If marginalized individuals are included, he argued, it will inspire them to take ownership, get involved, and pay closer attention to the news.



Ms. Girija Sharma spoke on the specific challenges that women face as candidates in elections. She opined that false information on the Internet impacts women candidates and women voters alike, pointing out that the same news outlets often portray men and women differently. She stated that it is not uncommon for news outlets to be more critical of women candidates as well as women voters than they are of their male counterparts. Therefore, she concluded, there is a need to level the playing field.

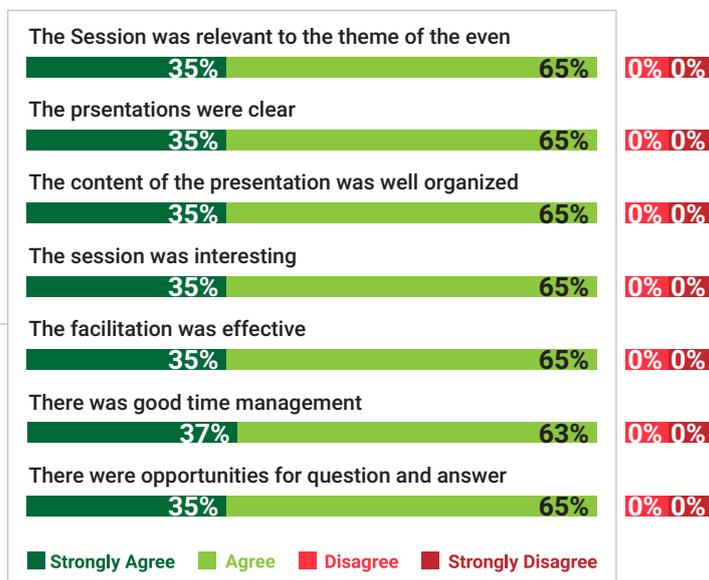


Ms. Nitu Pandit discussed how social media affects women and girls. She stated that an advantage of social media is that it is extremely fast, but also acknowledged that this speed can also work against a person by undermining their reputation and character. Ms. Pandit recounted the personal experiences of women in politics who had shied away from using social media for this reason. She concluded that social media can be detrimental to anyone who does not know how to use it properly, recounting that social media has become a challenge for women candidates during elections. Furthermore, she noted, with the advancement of artificial intelligence, people are able to create fake news that looks very convincing. This adds to the challenge of fully utilizing social media.

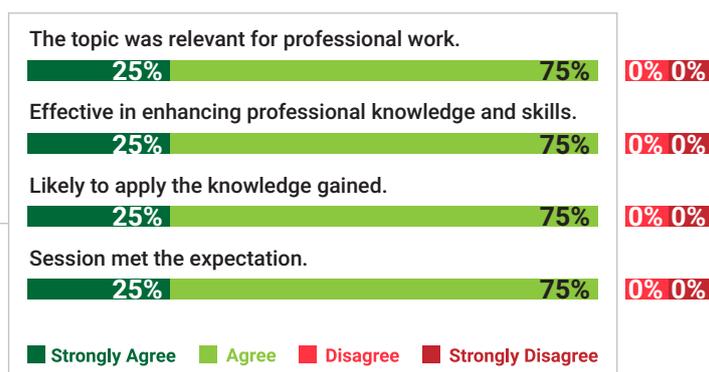
There was a consensus in the session that women and marginalized communities need to be represented and placed into managerial positions and that breaking away from tired stereotypes will help this to occur. The panellists also agreed that representation should be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The panel unanimously believed that women and marginalized people are disproportionately affected by disinformation and that they must develop methods of combatting it. Ms. Sharma pointed out that local elections presented an opportunity for women to run for office but that not many women came forward. She noted that improving political finance regulation would help to address this issue.

This session raised important issues regarding elections and the challenges faced by women candidates and their access to digital technology. Inclusion in the newsroom was also considered a necessary step to generate inclusive content. Likewise, social media was seen as an important tool in giving a voice to marginalized groups.

Session Evaluation



Self Evaluation



Recommendations:

- Newsrooms must be inclusive to represent an accurate picture of the country.
- Women participation in journalism is still low and FNJ needs to work on this through capacity building of women journalists. Moreover, women must be encouraged to cover topics other than those that are stereotypically seen as covered by female journalists.
- Women and the marginalized need to be portrayed in a more empowering light through the digital media. This can help empower women and marginalized voters as well as candidates.

2.7 Media Policies conducive to Peace and Democracy

Ms. Babita Basnet, Media Expert, led the session on media policies conducive to peace and democracy. She examined the role that media can play to support peace and democracy, reminding the audience that the media has been a reliable supporter of elections, democracy and peace. The panellists for this session included: Mr. Rishiram Tiwari, Joint Secretary of MoCIT; Mr. Govinda Acharya, President, FNJ; Dr. Mahendra Bista, former President of the FNJ; Mr. Taranath Dahal, former Chair of the FNJ; and Mr. Chandra Prasad Siwakoti, Under Secretary of the Election Commission of Nepal.



Mr. Rishiram Tiwari examined the current status of media policies and laws, stating that the Information and Technology Act and Advertisement Act have already been presented in the parliament, whereas the Mass Communication Act and the Media Council Act are in the process of being tabled in the parliament. Mr. Tiwari emphasized that the legislation that has been drafted is in line with and support the vision of the Constitution, which seeks to ensure fundamental freedoms for all.



Mr. Govinda Acharya then spoke about press freedom and the movement for quality journalism. He asked why the journalists still face violations despite the existence of policy. Mr. Acharya expressed that the media is struggling with the same issues that it always has, despite the onset of democracy in the country. He acknowledged that citizens and government officials alike must change their attitudes regarding the media and called for better coordination between the media and the government, especially when drafting laws that affect the former to ensure that laws do not violate the freedom of the press. He called for the need of an Umbrella Act for the media and also asked for the Working Journalists Act to respect the rights of the press.



Dr. Mahendra Bista emphasized that freedom of the press should be guaranteed during the law-making process, especially when media-related legislation is being considered. He also emphasized that new media needs to be addressed through policy, and that policy should set the standard for all media actions. Dr. Bista said that the Media Policy 2015 was drafted in consultation of all the stakeholders, including the FNJ.



Mr. Taranath Dahal also spoke about press freedom and the violation of those freedoms. He remarked that stakeholders should be consulted in the creation of government policies and that the data reported by various media outlets should be consistent. He urged for the creation of a rigorous monitoring system to ensure transparency. Mr. Dahal expressed that to him, the Civil and Criminal Codes, the Information Technology Act, the Advertisement Act, the Privacy Act and acts seemed like they are directed toward controlling the media.

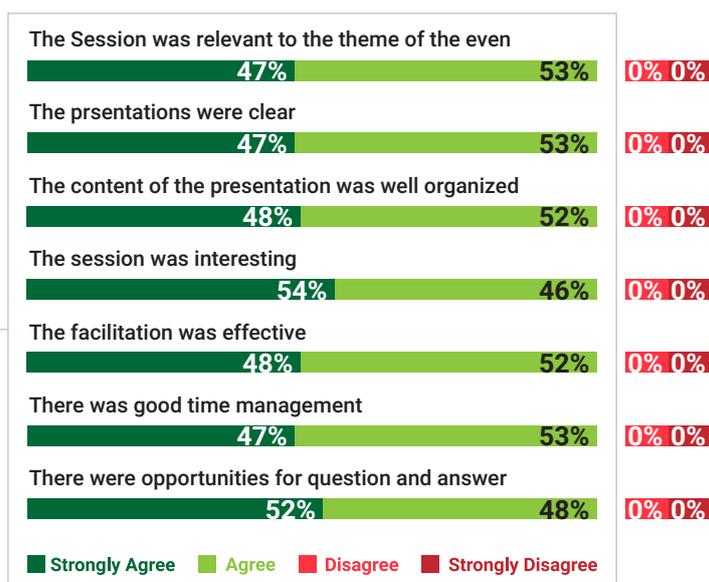


Mr. Chandra Prasad Siwakoti shared his insights related to elections and voting, highlighting the Nation's motto: "Development and Prosperity." Accordingly, he requested that this same ideal be applied to everyone. He also highlighted the role that media plays in making elections successful and expressed appreciation for the media's promotion of voter education. Likewise, Mr. Siwakoti explained the average citizen's roles and responsibilities in the election process. He also stressed the importance of a free press for the effective monitoring of elections.

The panellists discussed the implementation of laws and policies at the provincial and federal levels and emphasized the necessity of both ensuring press freedom and strengthening the implementation of the Action Plan for the Safety of Journalism.

The session highlighted the ways in which the media plays a vital role in keeping the peace and promoting democracy in the age of digitalization. The discussion concentrated on government policies, their implementation and the ways in which media can and do contribute. The panellists expressed their views on international instruments and practices. There was a robust discussion about how to best ensure a free press collaboratively. This session also reinforced the widespread support for the Action Plan for the Safety of Journalism that addresses issues of impunity during times of elections. The panel of experts proactively participated in the discussion and provided valuable and constructive insights.

Session Evaluation



Self Evaluation



Recommendations:

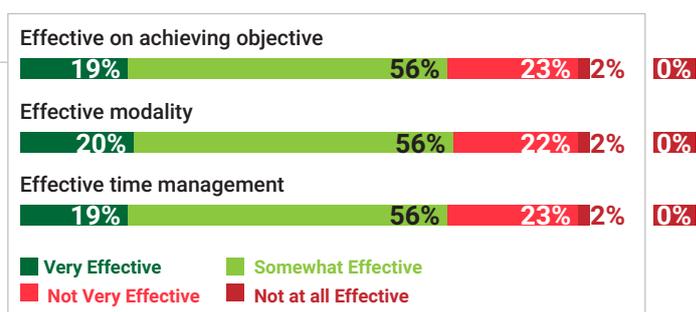
- All the media laws that will be brought up by the federal, provincial or local governments must honour the Constitution of Nepal.
- The laws and policies should be based on the international standard of press freedom in democratic countries.
- Media laws should be focused on making media self-regulatory rather than controlling them. Press Freedom must be protected.
- UN Plan of Action in context of Nepal should be implemented.

3 Concluding Session

There was a general consensus on the need to adapt to digital technologies, more so in light of the upcoming 2022 elections in Nepal. The event served as a catalyst for discussions about the impact of technology in the digital age and how it influences elections, the electoral cycle and, ultimately, peace and democracy. In addition to stimulating discussions, the event also included a creative corner with mock polling sessions, a photo station, video clips about media for democracy and peace as well as Mithila art about inclusive elections.

Overall evaluation

In the evaluation of the event as a whole, a total of 76% participants reported that the event was effective in achieving its intended objective. Time management was the biggest concern among those who found that the event was not effective. In terms of modality, those who did not find the programme effective commented that there should not have been two sessions on different topics running in parallel as this made it difficult for participants to decide which one to attend.



The participants were asked to provide their suggestions on follow-up activities after the event. Their input was consolidated into six categories. A small number felt that the event could have covered issues in a more detailed manner. Half of the participants suggested organizing similar events in the future, while 14% emphasized the need to have similar exchanges at the local and province levels.

Recommendations:

- Increase ECN capacity to use social media for outreach, but not neglect “traditional” media.
- Analyze the potential threat to credibility of next elections.
- Adapt code of conduct and legislation accordingly, without curtailing fundamental freedoms.
- Increase ECN capacity to detect and respond to disinformation and other threats, both within ECN and through partnerships.
- Regularly review the situation in order to be prepared for emerging challenges.

4 Annex

4.1 Final Agenda

Inauguration: 9.00 AM - 10.30 AM

Chair:	Mr. Govinda Acharya, President FNJ
Chief Guest:	Hon. Gokul Prasad Baskota, Minister, MoCIT
Guest of Honor:	Hon. Dinesh Kumar Thapaliya, Chief Election Commissioner
Guests:	Ms. Valerie Julliard, UN Resident Coordinator H.E. Veronica Cody, Ambassador, Delegation of EU to Nepal H.E. Richard Morrison, British Ambassador to Nepal Mr. Harihar Birahi, Former Chairperson, FNJ
Moderator:	Mr. Ramesh Bista, General Secretary, FNJ

- Launching of the South Asia Press Freedom Report
- Launching of Annual Press Freedom Report - Nepal

Tea Break: 10.30 AM - 11.00 AM

Parallel Sessions

Session 1: 11.00 AM - 12.15 PM

New opportunities and challenges for the integrity of Nepal's elections in the digital age.

Senior Lead Facilitator: Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel, Former Chief Election Commissioner

Panelists:

Ms. Dev Kumari Guragain, Secretary, Election Commission, Nepal
Dr. Suresh Acharya, FNJ's Former Chairperson
Ms. Subhekshya Bindu, Press Council Member
Mr. Subhash Ghimire, Republica, Editor-in-Chief

Topics

- How to balance media literacy and media credibility?
- What are the roles of various stakeholders in maintaining the integrity of elections?
- How can we coordinate and collaborate to ensure electoral integrity?
- What immediate steps can we take to maintain the integrity of elections in the digital age?

Session 2: 11.00 AM - 12.15 PM

Media and its role in supporting peace and democracy

Senior Lead Facilitator: Mr. Binod Bhattarai, Media Expert

Panelists:

Mr. Surya Prasad Gautam, Under Secretary, Election Commission, Nepal
Mr. Gopal Jha, Former President, Broadcasting Association of Nepal
Mr. Shuvashankar Kandel, Nepal Media Society
Mr. Krishna Jwala Devkota, Naya Patrika Dainik
Ms. Manika Jha, Journalist

Topics

- Reflection on the role of media in the past democratic movements.
- How can media play a role in ensuring the benefits of democracy for the people?
- Creating and enabling environment for media in democracy through policies.
- Role of media management in supporting democratic practices and peace in the society.

Session 3: 12.15 PM - 1.30 PM

Voter education through mass media (Increasing people's access to information)

Senior Lead Facilitator: Mr. Neelkantha Uprety, Former Chief Election Commissioner

Panelists:

Mr. Shanker Prasad Kharel, Joint Secretary, Election Commission, Nepal
Mr. Dharmendra Jha, FNJ Former President
Mr. Subhash Khatiwada, ACORAB
Mr. Chandra Neupane, BAN
Mr. Rem Bahadur Bishwakarma, FNJ Secretary

Topics

- Role of the media in increasing knowledge of elections among the public.
- How can the media and the Election Commission collaborate effectively?
- Media's role in facilitating voter awareness

Session 4: 12.15 PM - 1.30 PM
Social media policies and practices

Senior Lead Facilitator: Mr. Ujjwal Acharya, Social Media Researcher

Panelists:

Mr. Deshbandhu Adhikari, Under Secretary, Election Commission, Nepal
Mr. Mohan Mainali, South Asia Fact Check
Dr. Rajeev Subba, Nepal Police - DIG
Mr. Prakash Thapa, FNJ Secretary
Ms. Amrita Lamsal, Rights Activist

Topics

- The proposed Social Media Law and its content
- How can social media be helpful in the upcoming elections?
- Freedom of expression and social media
- The role of social media in presenting factual information
- Disinformation - media and social media
- Social Media Use Guide (Code) for Journalists
- Trolling and its effect - do women suffer more?
- Fact checking, information verification and combating online abuse

Lunch: 1.30 PM - 2.15 PM

Session 5: 2.15 PM - 3.30 PM
Digital Media - portrayal of gender and social inclusion

Senior Lead Facilitator: Ms. Ila Sharma, Former Election Commissioner

Panelists:

Ms. Girija Sharma, Joint Secretary, Election Commission, Nepal
Mr. Ameet Dhakal, Editor/Journalist, Setopati
Ms. Nitu Pandit, Sancharika Samuha
Mr. Danda Gurung, President, FONIJ

Topics

- Portrayal of gender issues by the media – the issue of reservation and quota with special reference to last year's elections
- Specific challenges for women candidates in the Age of the Internet
- The digital divide
- Countering hate speech and polarization
- Does the content of the media cover the voices of the marginalized?
- Inclusion in the newsroom to generate inclusive content

Session 6: 2.15 PM - 3.30 PM
Media policies conducive to peace and democracy

Senior Lead Facilitator: Ms. Babita Basnet, Media Expert

Panelists:

Mr. Chandra Prasad Siwakoti, Under Secretary, Election Commission, Nepal
Mr. Govinda Acharya, President, FNJ Chairperson
Mr. Mahendra Man Gurung/Rishikant Tiwari, Secretary/Joint Secretary MoCIT
Mr. Taranath Dahal, FNJ Former Chair
Dr. Mahendra Bista, FNJ Former President

Topics

- International instruments and practices
- The current media policy and laws in Nepal
- Provincial laws vs. Federal Law
- Ensuring freedom of press in the laws
- How we can work together to ensure free press
- Strengthening the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, in times of elections

Tea Break: 3.30 PM - 4.00 PM

Closing Session: 4.00 PM - 4.30 PM

Hon. Ishwari Prasad Paudel, Election Commissioner
Mr. Bipul Pokhrel, Vice President, FNJ

Moderator: Ms. Laxmi Pun, Secretary, FNJ

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4.2 Evaluation Questions

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Media for Democracy and Peace: Journalism and Elections in the Age of the Internet

May 3, 2019 Friday

Program Venue: Kathmandu

Session Evaluation Form

Name of the Session: New opportunities and challenges for the integrity of Nepal's elections in the digital age.

We appreciate your feedback on the session. The information you provided will be used internally to improve similar programmes in the future.

Name(Optional) _____ Gender: Male Female Others

Organization: Government Institution Media Political Party Academia
 Other Civil Society International Partner Individual Capacity
 Other (Please Specify) _____

Based on your experience of the session, please rate the following:

A. Session

#	Criteria	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The session was relevant to the theme of the event.				
2	The presentations were clear.				
3	The content of the presentation was well organized.				
4	The session was interesting.				
5	The facilitation was effective.				
6	There was good time management.				
7	There were opportunities for question and answer.				

B. Self-Evaluation

#	Criteria	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The topic was relevant for my professional work.				
2	The discussion was effective in enhancing my professional knowledge and skills.				
3	I am likely to apply the knowledge gained.				
4	The session met my expectations.				

C. Other comments and suggestions?

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Media for Democracy and Peace: Journalism and Elections in the Age of the Internet

May 3, 2019 Friday

Program Venue: Kathmandu

Overall Evaluation Form

Based on your experience of the programme, please rate the following

We appreciate your feedback. The information you provided will be used internally to improve similar programmes in the future.

A. Program

Areas	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Not Very effective	Not at all effective
How effective was the program in achieving its overall objective?				
How effective was the modality of the program?				
How effective was the overall time management?				

B. Logistics

Particulars	Very Good	Good	Bad	Very Bad
Halls/Space preparations				
Food				
Side Activities				

C. What follow-up activities should be conducted on the issues discussed?

D. Other comments and suggestions?

4.3 Presentations

New Opportunities and Challenges for the Integrity of Nepal's Elections in the Digital Age

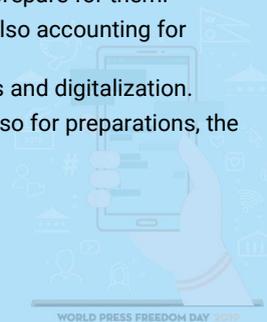
Bhojraj Pokharel

3 May 2019
Kathmandu



The context

- Enhancing the integrity of elections requires us to prepare for them.
- This means improving the internal processes, but also accounting for external challenges.
- One such area is the relationship between elections and digitalization.
- The next general elections are scheduled for 2022, so for preparations, the time is now.



Opportunities

- Many parts of Nepal still struggle with access to basic infrastructure, but **many Nepalese use the Internet**.
- This is an **opportunity** that can be tapped into.
- ICT and social media **contribute to electoral integrity**.
- Social media create **space for discussions**. Social media played a key role in recent popular uprisings.
- However, when such opportunities **threaten** certain regime types, they can be met with **attempts to control** the Internet.



Challenges

- Calls to regulate the Internet also result from concerns about:
 - Disinformation
 - Meddling
 - Hate Speech
 - Incitement
 - Violence
- There are already examples of this from around the world.
- Also, artificial intelligence and remote sensing may add to the challenges, for example, through so-called “deep fakes”.

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Challenge to EMB?

This then invites the question:

How can Election Management Bodies prepare and ensure a level playing field to preserve the integrity of elections?

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Different approaches from around the world



US
Adopts a generally deregulatory posture toward the Internet



European Union
Took measures to detect and respond to disinformation while respecting fundamental rights



China
Censors online speech



South Africa
Launched an online reporting platform



India
Expanded its model code of conduct and political advertising rules to social media and introduced social media ethics



The Kofi Annan Commission on Elections and Democracy in the Digital Age

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The Nepali Context

The 2018 *AfterAccess* study reveals:

- Nepal had higher levels of Internet use than the other Asian countries surveyed.
- This was although Nepal was the poorest Asian countries surveyed.
- The study included India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Myanmar.



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Can Nepal seize the opportunity?

- Nepal's international Press freedom ranking in 2019 is:
106 among **180** countries.

104	Montenegro
105	Brazil
106	Nepal
107	Guinea
108	Kuwait
109	Angola

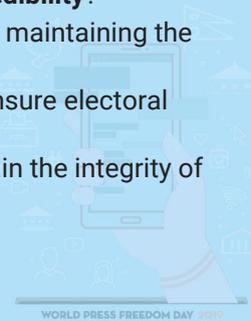
- A new IT Bill has been presented to the Parliament, which encompasses issues of press freedom and transparency.



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Issues for Discussion on Digital Democracy

- How to balance **media literacy** and **media credibility**?
- What are the **roles of various stakeholders** in maintaining the integrity of elections?
- How can we **coordinate and collaborate** to ensure electoral integrity?
- What **immediate steps** can we take to maintain the integrity of elections in the digital age?



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Thank You!



Voter Education Through Mass Media

(Increasing People's Access to Information)

Neel Kantha Uprety
upretyneil@gmail.com

3 May 2019
Kathmandu



Reflections

- Education about voters' concern issues
- The mode and means of communication
- What make her/him to think why should I bother for the work government does in their community?
- Why I need to vote in the elections?
- What I need to do for my eligibility to vote in the election?
- Citizen's interactions and interconnections

Point: You don't like to give your key of your property to a unknown person but why are you hand in a key of your country or community to a person whom you have not voted and who never vouched for you?

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Reflections

- Voters need to access information to know about their role and responsibility!
- The information made available must be understandable to each voter.
- Information (knowledge) could be in different forms and Mediums
- Marginalized, Illiterate, differently abled and remotely isolated with no access to mass media are citizen the voter education programs should prioritize to address
- Information/Social media/avalanche of content/ ISPs/ **made of news (disinformation)** by the different paid actors could create confusion.
- Independent media and journalists are pushed back - falsified information as news replace the true information/news /views

Confidence with no clarity leads to disaster

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Mass Media

- A vast range of media technologies:
- Broadcast media transmit information electronically – Radio, Television, Recorded Music, Movies, , PSA
- Internet – Emails , Websites
- Concerts - Shows and Events
- Print Media – News Paper and Magazine, Photos and Cartons, Poster and Pamphlets, Billboards, Sticker and Information/ Invitation Cards etc.

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More Mediums for Voter Education

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| • TV / Radio | • Product inserts | • Websites |
| • Radio talkback | • Caps, stickers, | • Blogs |
| • Radio drama | • Newspaper articles | • CDs |
| • TV soap opera | • T-shirts | • Films |
| • TV public announcement | • Pamphlets | • Email |
| • Radio public announcement | • Posters | • Books |
| • Candidate-debates | • Lecture notes | • Loud speaker |
| • Cartoons advertisements | • Drama groups | • Audi Tapes |
| | • Puppets | DVD |
| | • Texting | Songs |
| | | Letters... |

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Mass Media in Nepal

Mass Media in Nepal	Number	% of Popn. Covered	% of Geography Covered
Radio /FM/Com. Radio	742	90	57
Television	120	71	51
Internet ISPs	43	55.5	63
Mobile Phone	36.5 Mil.	90	85
Online Media	120	N/A	63
News Papers Dailies	490	N/A.	N/A.
Weeklies and Fortnightlies papers	2705	N/A.	N/A.

Source: <https://nta.gov.np>

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Civic and Voter Education

Civic Education:

- Sociopolitical issues
- Community concerns
- Democratic culture
- Citizens' rights and duties

Voter education:

- Why, Where, When, How to vote

Mediums:

- All possible media :
- Radio/Fm / community radios
- Tv cable TV
- Flipchart - face to face
- Pamphlets in Brail
- Graphic posters for illiterate voters
- Voter education- Mobile Van

Priority target:

- Marginalized,
- Women and
- Remotely located people
- Special program for voters registration to missed outs and students of higher secondary schools of cities

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Social Media

- Facebook/Messenger
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Word Press Blogs
- Live News/journal
- Google Account
- MS Account
- Google Reader
- Instagram
- Viber
- Skype
- WhatsApp
- WeChat
- Online News portals
- Many more to come

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Social Media Features

- **Reach** - Social media technologies provide high scale and are capable of reaching a global audience. Social media are by their very nature more decentralized, less hierarchical, and distinguished by multiple points of production and utility. (Trustworthiness?)
- **Accessibility** - social media tools are generally available to the public at little or no cost.
- **Usability** - social media production does not require specialized skills and training, or requires only modest reinterpretation of existing skills;
- **Immediacy** - social media is capable of virtually prompt responses;

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Social Media has already proven to be:

- A powerful tool to disseminate information and create awareness (across geography)
- Highly effective and impactful in people to people communication
- Capable of reaching target small or large audiences through technology
- A tool for present generation which is technology savvy and demanding . (quality assurance?)

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The most important advanced technology of the last five years is the mobile phone.

For most of the world, mobile phone penetration vastly exceeds internet usage.

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Thank You!



Digital Media - Portrayal of Gender and Social Inclusion

Ila Sharma

3 May 2019
Kathmandu



Background

- Following the 2017 elections, representation of women and marginalized groups is higher than ever
- Nepal now ranks 36th of 193 countries in the IPU Women in national parliaments classification.
- This was achieved through progressive legal provisions initiated by ECN and targeted actions by ECN & other stakeholders.



ECN inclusion activities in 2017

- Voters can carry their child of an age of up to five years.
- Visually impaired or physically disabled voters can take support from a family member or polling officer to cast their vote.
- Female, Dalit, marginalized and financially weak candidates are entitled to a 50% discount on the security deposit for candidate nominations.
- There are separate queues for senior citizens and physically disabled voters.
- Data forms are disaggregated by sex.
- More than 100 polling stations guarantee wheelchair access.
- Voter education materials are produced in 16 different regional languages.
- Social mobilizers are deployed, 19,000 in local level elections and 19,500 in the HoR/SA elections.
- During election time, sign language news are broadcast on the national channel Nepal Television.
- Partnership program with CSOs and NGOs to reach marginalized communities.
- Special provisions in code of conduct.
- Inclusion In Election Observation organization.
- There are separate queues for pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- Special voter education orientations are organized for visually impaired voters and those with hearing disabilities.
- Inclusion in the temporary security force & among women volunteers for voter education.

There is more to do ...

- This doesn't mean that we can consider Gender Equality and Social Inclusion issues resolved in the political arena.
- Representation remains disproportionate and women & marginalized groups faced obstacles even in the 2017 elections.



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Traditional media & citizen's journalism

- Digital media provides opportunities but also challenges for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion



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Digital media, social media and their dynamics

- Social media activity is a reflection of societal mind-sets.
- Gender inequality and social exclusion is REPRODUCED in social media.
- Hate speech, & disruption of communal harmony harms marginalized groups are more exposed.
- They allow for the expression of extreme or regressive opinions, for example on reservation and quotas.
- This will be even more so with the advent of artificial intelligence



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The digital divide

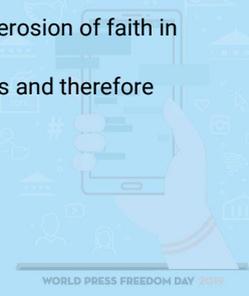
- Access of women to the digital space may also be more restricted.
- Women have less access to smartphones than men and lower levels of education make it more difficult to be active online.



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Specific challenges of digital media

- The Age of speed = Age of (mis)information, spread of falsehood & lies
- Quick reactions, media trial and opinion building
- Dangers of the 'decline of serious investigation' and erosion of faith in institutions
- All of these apply to different aspects of the elections and therefore challenge inclusive participation and representation.
- There may be both opportunities & challenges



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Conclusions

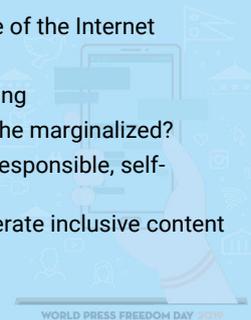
- Collective ethics of the society and the sense of responsibility are not keeping up with the speed and technology
- Each of us must realize that more the rights/freedom, more the responsibility
- This requires a common response involving government regulation as well as actions on the part of the Election Commission and civil society.



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Topics for discussion

- Portrayal of gender issues by the media
- Specific challenges for women candidates in the Age of the Internet
- The digital divide
- Countering hate speech and polarization, cyber bullying
- How can social media be mobilized to give voice to the marginalized?
- How can social media & citizen journalism be more responsible, self-regulate
- Inclusion in the newsroom/citizen journalism to generate inclusive content



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Thank You



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