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Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Master thesis

2022   **Akriti Manandhar**

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Online Harassment Among Male and Female Journalists in Nepal and Its Impact on Their Work

Master thesis

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Abstract

Online harassment of journalists is a growing concern worldwide as more journalists report burnouts, fatigue and desire to quit journalism. This research was based on in-depth interviews of five male and five female Nepali journalists. It aimed at investigating the forms of online harassment journalists face in Nepal, the impacts it has on them and the strategies they employ to deal with it. It was of research interest to examine differences in harassment experiences of male and female journalists. Results showed the common forms of harassment journalists face are cyberstalking, sexual harassment, gendered harassment, manipulation and intimidation. Due to this, journalists decreased social media usage and self-censored themselves on it. It led to fears of physical harm, judgement and being discredited. Most interviewed journalists ignored it considering it a part of their job. Complaining about harassment bore no positive results. Women from the sample faced comparatively more sexual and gendered harassment, with harassment being more personal and of higher intensity. This had adverse impacts on some female interviewees leading them to quit social media and the profession altogether, which further increases gender gap in the heavily male-dominated industry. Younger and less experienced journalists had stronger emotional reactions to online harassment.

Abstrakt

Online obtěžování novinářů je celosvětově rostoucím problémem, neboť stále více novinářů hlásí syndrom vyhoření, únavu a touhu skončit s žurnalistikou. Tento výzkum byl založen na hloubkových rozhovorech s pěti nepálskými novináři a pěti nepálskými novinářkami. Jeho cílem bylo zjistit, jakým formám online obtěžování novináři v Nepálu čelí, jaké má na ně dopady a

jaké strategie používají, aby se s ním vypořádali. Výzkumným záměrem bylo prozkoumat rozdíly ve zkušenostech s obtěžováním u novinářů a novinářek. Výsledky ukázaly, že běžnými formami obtěžování, kterým novináři čelí, jsou kyberstalking, sexuální obtěžování, genderové obtěžování, manipulace a zastrašování. Z tohoto důvodu novináři snížili používání sociálních médií a autocenzurovali se na nich. Vedlo to k obavám z fyzické újmy, odsuzování a diskreditace. Většina zpovídaných novinářů to ignorovala s tím, že to považuje za součást své práce. Stěžování si na obtěžování nepřineslo žádné pozitivní výsledky. Ženy ze vzorku čelily poměrně většímu sexuálnímu a genderovému obtěžování, přičemž obtěžování bylo osobnější a mělo vyšší intenzitu. To mělo na některé respondentky nepříznivý dopad a vedlo je to k tomu, že opustily sociální média a profesi vůbec, což dále prohlubuje rozdíly mezi muži a ženami v tomto odvětví, v němž dominují muži. Mladší a méně zkušení novináři měli silnější emocionální reakce na online obtěžování.

Keywords

Klíčová slova

Range of thesis: 99,738 characters

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that she compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.

2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.

3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

In Prague on 2nd of August 2022   Akriti Manandhar

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for supporting me throughout my academic journey. The Erasmus Mundus scholarship that I won to pursue this program enabled me to be fully focused on my academic learning. I am grateful for my peers in my master's program for widening my world view a bit more, and I am fortunate I got to share this writing journey with them. I am thankful to my thesis supervisor for her guidance in the writing process. I am grateful to my interviewees for sharing their stories. It helped me write this piece of work, about an issue I deeply care about. I am a journalist myself and I hope this work will shed some light on online harassment of journalists in my country.

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism FSV UK
Research proposal for Erasmus Mundus Journalism Diploma Thesis

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Start of studies for EMJ (in Aarhus): September 2020	
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Study program/form of study: Erasmus Mundus Journalism	

Thesis title in English:

Online harassment among male and female journalists in Nepal and its impact on their work

Expected date of submission (semester, academic year – example: *SS 2021/2022*)
(Thesis must be submitted according to the Academic Calendar.)

SS 2021/2022

Main research question (max. 250 characters):

What are the forms of online harassment that male and female journalists face in their professional work in Nepal?

Sub-questions:
How does online harassment faced by male and female journalists differ and impact them?
What strategies do they employ to handle online harassment?

Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters):

Worldwide, there have been limited studies on online harassment of journalists. According to research, male journalists are given more desirable assignments, are promoted more, and get better working conditions than female journalists (Lasorsa, 2012). Social media reflects these hierarchies present in traditional media (Lasorsa, 2012). Almost all journalists face some sort of online harassment (Lewis et al, 2020). Among them, women and those who are more personally visible on the news are disproportionately affected by online harassment (Lewis et al, 2020). Online misogyny is becoming the norm even in countries considered relatively safe for journalists (Adams, 2018). Social media is an important tool for building profile for journalists (Molyneux et al., 2019) but due to online harassment, research has shown that female journalists limit usage of social media (Chen et al, 2020).

With a developing country like Nepal, the studies are even more limited with online harassment being considered a "first world problem" (Koirala, 2020, p. 48). Research shows that female journalists bear the brunt of online harassment in the patriarchal country working in this 'masculine' domain (Koirala, 2020). There has been limited research done in Nepal regarding online harassment of female journalists.

However, the literature on the differences in the forms of harassment faced by journalists of different genders, and how it impacts their work is entirely missing.

Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters):

The research draws on feminist theories, media, and technology to examine online harassment cases. Various studies (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019; Bartlett, Norrie, Patel, Rumpel, & Wibberley, 2014) show the effects of online harassment is stronger for women than men. Judith Butler (2014), a feminist theorist, emphasizes that while men and women are equally vulnerable to harassment, "certain kinds of gender-defining attributes like vulnerability and invulnerability... are distributed unequally" (p. 111) and "certain populations are effectively targeted as injurable (with impunity)" (p. 111). As Nepali society is patriarchal, the effects of online harassment might be stronger. Women journalists also particularly experience gender-based harassment, such as sexist and sexual harassment (Kristin & Tayeebwa, 2020). Koirala (2020) argues that "gender-based harassment is intended to reinforce the patriarchy, where women are expected to be a submissive victim" (p. 49).

Addressed by second-wave feminists, there is similarity between social problems (like sexual harassment and domestic violence) and gendered cyberhate (Jane, 2016). This type of harassment is based on gender hierarchy and "old" misogynistic discourse that contend women's inferiority to men (Jane, 2016). This also reflects on cultural understanding of gender (Jane, 2016). For example: speaking in public does not traditionally fall under the role of women and as journalists, when women are speaking in the public, they don't conform to the traditional gender roles (Megarry, 2014). These female voices are then targeted for harassment (Megarry, 2014).

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):

Qualitative primary data will be collected and analyzed to explore the research questions. Semi-structured in-depth interviews will be conducted with 10 to 15 Nepali journalists with at least two years of work experience in the media industry. At least two years of experience is considered as a criterion for selection as they would have had time to explore and navigate through social media dynamics as a journalist, had some audience interactions and possibly used social media for their work.

Audio interviews, which are expected to be 20 to 40 minutes long, will be conducted and recorded over Zoom platform with permission of the interviewees. Information regarding meaning of harassment and forms of harassment will be provided to ensure they understand certain terms. Interviewer will target to conduct and transcribe the interviews in English language but if any interviewee is not fluent in English, then interview will be done in Nepali language and then translated and transcribed in English language for analysis.

For this research, only journalists who have faced some sort of online harassment at least once while working in the media industry will be considered as the questions are related to how they combat the issue and how it affects their work. Snowball sampling to be used, as journalists would know others in the field who have experienced this harassment and would be able to connect me with other potential interviewees.

Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

An interview guide will be followed to get answers to the same questions from all interviewees, but follow-up questions will be molded as suitable during the interview. Starting questions will be open and broad to understand interviewees' general understanding of the issues and to figure out if the interviewee had faced any form of online harassment at least once. Online harassment and its impact on social media usage will not be measured in absolute terms but on journalists' own assessments (Example: Faced online harassment-sometimes, often or never). The time period considered for experiencing online harassment by the journalists will be focused mainly during their work as a journalist. Names of interviewees will be changed to protect privacy as this is a sensitive subject. The numbers at the end of the pseudonym will represent interviewee's age.

An interview guide will be followed to get answers to the same questions from all interviewees. Transcribed interviews will be analyzed for emerging themes and categories. This research will follow inductive coding approach. Transcripts will be imported to HyperResearch for coding and to help with analysis.

The research methodology will take inspiration from Samiksha Koirala's research "Female Journalists' Experience of Online Harassment: A Case Study of Nepal" (2020) because of similar research interest and context, as this research was also conducted in Nepal.

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):

Abstract- Summary of the research showing what the research is about and most important findings

Keywords- Words that would help potential readers to understand what the research is about

Introduction- General background on the topic with some data on online harassment of journalists and their use of social media around the world and specifically in Nepal. Research questions will be included clearly in this section.

Theoretical background and literature review- Mention of recent research on the topic in Nepal and globally. The theory that the research draws on will be written about. Explanation on why this research is important and relevant.

Method and data collection- Detailed explanation of methodology and methods used for data gathering and explanation of how analysis of data was done

Analysis and discussion- Demographic profile of journalists, analysis of what was found through the interviews about online harassment in Nepal's media industry with some relevant quotes from interviewees, discussion section will focus on findings with my own views and what can be done for further research

Conclusion- What the research hoped to find, core findings of research, limitations

References- Reference list of all materials used in this research

Appendix- Questionnaire used for semi-structured interviews of journalists

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Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):

Adams, C. (2018). "They Go for Gender First": The nature and effect of sexist abuse of female technology journalists. *Journalism Practice, 12*(7), 850-869.
https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1350115

Bartlett, J., Norrie, R., Patel, S., Rumpel, R., & Wibberley, S. (2014). Misogyny on Twitter. *Demos*, 1-18. http://demos.co.uk/files/MISOGYNY_ON_TWITTER.pdf

Butler, J. (2014). Bodily vulnerability, coalitions, and street politics. *Critical Studies, 37*, 99-119. https://www-proquest-com.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk:12048/scholarly-journals/bodily-vulnerability-coalitions-street-politics/docview/1750223576/se-2?accountid=14468

Chen, G., Pain, P., Chen, V., Mekelburg, M., Springer, N. & Troger, F. (2020). 'You really have to have a thick skin': A cross-cultural perspective on how online harassment influences female journalists. *Journalism, 21*(7), 887-895. https://doi.org/21. 146488491876850.10.1177/1464884918768500

Jane, E. A. (2016). Online misogyny and feminist digilantism. *Continuum, 30*(3), 284-297. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1166560

Koirala, S. (2020). Female journalists' experience of online harassment: A case study of Nepal. *Media and Communication. 8*, 47-56. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i1.2541

Kristin, S. O., & Tayeebwa, W. (2020). Introduction: rethinking safety of journalists. *Media and Communication, 8*(1), 1-4. http://dx.doi.org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk:2048/10.17645/mac.v8i1.2873

Lasorsa, D. (2012). Transparency and other journalistic norms on Twitter. *Journalism Studies, 13*(3), 402-417. https://doi.org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk:12048/10.1080/1461670X.2012.657909

Lewis, S. C., Zamith, R., & Coddington, M. (2020). Online harassment and its implications for the journalist–audience relationship. *Digital Journalism, 8*(8), 1047-1067. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1811743

Megarry, J. (2014). Online incivility or sexual harassment? Conceptualising women's experiences in the digital age. *Women's studies international forum, 47*, (pp. 46-55). Oxford. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.07.012

Molyneux, L., Lewis, S., & Holton, A. (2019). Media work, identity, and the motivations that shape branding practices among journalists: An explanatory framework. *New Media & Society, 21*(4), 836-855. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818809392

Nadim, M., & Fladmoe, A. (2019). Silencing women? Gender and online harassment. *Social Science Computer Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439319865518

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):
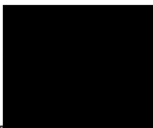
Date / Signature of the student:

13 November, 2021

THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.

doc. PhDr. Alice Němcová Tejkalová, , Ph.D.

Digitálně podepsal doc. PhDr. Alice Němcová Tejkalová, , Ph.D.
Datum: 2021.11.15 10:27:12 +01'00'

....

Surname and name of the supervisor | Date / Signature of the supervisor

Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, **by November 15, 2021**, addressed to the Program Coordinator. Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Mgr. Sandra Štefaniková. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.

Contents

1. Introduction

Online harassment has become a common feature related to work for journalists around the world. Due to online harassment, journalists report experiencing anxiety, fatigue and disconnection from their work and social media (Holton et al., 2021). At a time when more journalists report burnout and a desire to leave their profession, addressing online harassment for journalists is a growing concern (Holton et al., 2021).

The harassment that journalists used to face offline has been replicated online (Koirala, 2020). Journalists were protected to some extent by filtering systems prior to the advent of social media (Drysdale, 2006). The comments received by media today are far greater in number than the letters to the editor that the newspapers used to receive (Drysdale, 2006). In addition to that, there was another layer of protection for journalists as these letters first reached a newsdesk secretary, who removed any letters that were offensive and unclear. Furthermore, the editor would select letters based on brevity, coherence, interest to readers and the writer's authority (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002).

There is challenge of equal representation of men and women in newsrooms around the world. Some obstacles to achieving a gender friendly news media environment are fewer number of female journalists in newsrooms, lack of female journalists in leadership positions and lack of opportunities to develop journalism career for women (Aryal, 2019). Social media is considered important for journalists' work (Molyneux et al., 2019). When female journalists face online harassment, they limit its usage (Chen et al., 2020). Thus, this can negatively impact their professional work.

In Nepal too, journalism is heavily male dominated, with only nineteen percent of journalists identifying as females according to the Federation of Nepali Journalists (2022).

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Among them, only six percent are in influential positions such as news editors in the Nepali media industry. Almost forty-seven percent of female journalists report on 'soft social issues' according to the statistics gathered by Federation of Nepali Journalists (2022). Aryal (2019, p. 22) writes that, "The trend towards analyzing barriers for women journalists are basically linked with pay inequity, the struggle to balance work and family, glass ceiling in the news media".

A study by Sancharika Samuha (2016) identified that the major setback for role and progress of women in the industry is them quitting the profession midway. The same report also cited editorial teams or editors in media houses as saying that women in Nepali journalism field lacked competence or efficiency to progress in this field (2016). However, a report by International Federation of Journalists (p. 27) in 2015 on "Media and Gender in Nepal", reported that "the working environment within media organizations does not seem congenial enough to enable them to grow and progress easily". The report also found that female journalists are not taken seriously in newsrooms and they are subjected to harassment and discrimination not just outside the newsrooms but inside it as well (2015). Despite online harassment being a problem in Nepal, Koirala (2020) reported that this problem is seen as a 'first world problem'. The industry is also considered masculine.

In a report by Freedom Forum (2019) looking at bylines by female and male journalists between April to June 2019, it was found that only thirteen percent and seventeen percent of bylines appeared of women in print and online news media respectively.

Gender policies in news organizations are also missing in Nepal. The Sancharika Samuha study (2016) found that only 14.7 percent of news organizations claimed that they had a separate gender policy compared to 61.9 percent of media that reported not having any gender policy. 23.5 percent of media houses did not say anything. However, even those media organizations

that claimed to have gender policies in place did not provide any documentation to support their claim (2016).

Nepal is also a patriarchal country, where traditional gender roles can be observed. Thus, when a female journalist challenges societal norms, writes on hard or controversial issues, she faces harassment. At the peak of MeToo movement in Nepal recently, senior journalists like Binu Subedi, Suman Thapa Magar and Subina Shrestha came forward to uncover the difficulties that female journalists bear, revealing the harassment and sexism they face working in the industry (Khadgi, 2022).

There has been limited research done in Nepal regarding impact of online harassment on female journalists' use of social media. There are also newspaper articles on harassment of journalists in Nepal. However, the literature on differences in forms of harassment that male and female journalists face, how it impacts them and what strategies they employ to handle the harassment is missing. Previously, I wrote a seminar work on this topic. This thesis further broadens my unpublished paper (Manandhar, 2021). The interviews and results from my past unpublished study has not been used for this research. Rather, results of this work are entirely based on new interviews conducted for this study.

This research will focus on this subject and the following research questions:

Main research question:

What are the forms of online harassment that male and female journalists face in their professional work in Nepal?

Sub-questions:

i)   How does online harassment faced by male and female journalists differ and impact them?

ii)   What strategies do they employ to handle online harassment?

First literature review and theoretical framework is presented, followed by the methods section. Then results according to the research questions are discussed. The paper ends with discussion and conclusion section, where a summary of the paper is provided and research questions are answered in regards to the literature section. Suggestions for future research and limitations are also discussed.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Feminist theories to examine online harassment cases

This thesis paper draws on feminist theories, media, and technology to examine online harassment cases. Studies (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019; Bartlett, Norrie, Patel, Rumpel, & Wibberley, 2014) reveal the online harassment effects are stronger for women compared to men. Judith Butler (2014), a feminist theorist, emphasizes that while men and women are equally at risk of harassment, "certain kinds of gender-defining attributes like vulnerability and invulnerability… are distributed unequally" (p. 111) and "certain populations are effectively targeted as injurable (with impunity)" (p. 111).

Addressed by second-wave feminists, there is a link between gendered cyberhate and societal problems, for example, sexual harassment and domestic violence (Jane, 2016). This form of harassment is based on "old" misogynistic discourse and hierarchy of gender that contend women's inferiority to men (Jane, 2016). This also reflects on cultural understanding of gender (Jane, 2016). Take for example, traditionally, speaking in public does not fall under women's role. As journalists, when women speak in public and are vocal, they do not adhere to the traditional gender roles. These female voices become harassment targets (Megarry, 2014). Earlier work shows that men fear losing control when women push the boundaries for gender

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equality in any field (Beard, 2015; Spender, 1980). It is a "male response to women claiming a space" (Adam, 2005, p. 51).

Women react more strongly to online harassment when it is targeted at group-based characteristics, as "women are simply more easily discouraged from expressing their opinions than men" (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019, p. 256). When online harassment is targeted toward "who they are" which refers to group characteristics than "what they think" relating to attitudes and arguments, it has a stronger silencing effect on women (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019). Research has shown that women tend to hold back from sharing their stance online more than men to prevent being mocked and harassed, hurting, and offending others, getting bullied and being perceived as a bully on social media, and being monitored on social media (Steen-Johnsen & Enjolras, 2016). Nadim and Fladmoe (2019) in their article "Silencing Women? Gender and Online Harassment" write that even having the awareness of what kind of online harassment other women face can scare a woman from expressing her opinions online, regardless of whether she has faced online harassment herself. Witnessing other women facing online harassment can have a silencing effect on women as they perceive themselves as being a part of a vulnerable group, at least in some contexts (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019).

2.2 Harassment in the context of South Asia

Nepal is a country situated in South Asia. Harassment in South Asia is different from what is reported in other geographical or cultural contexts (Sambasivan et al., 2019). Power relations and local norms are important to consider in the South Asian context (Sambasivan et al., 2019). Vahida Nainar (2013) in her article "Patriarchy in South Asia – Structures and Relations" states that systems, relations, or structures are influenced, if not based on patriarchy in South Asia. Vahida Nainar has been working internationally on women's rights issues for the

past 20 years with feminist organizations and served as an Adjunct Professor of Law at the International Women's Human Rights Clinic, CUNY School of Law. She writes that patriarchy is "a system of dominance that continues to operate in its crudest form" (Nainar, 2013, p. 1). She adds that "patriarchy is maintained and perpetuated through relations and modes of production, state regulated and monitored laws and policies, control of sexuality and monopoly in religion and culture" (Nainar, 2013, p. 1).

2.2.1 Women's position in South Asian society

Nainar (2013) in her article elaborates that there are many ways how this system of dominance works in South Asian society. Generally, women are mostly kept in a prescribed space of the private (at home) and are expected to take care of children and elderly. Women's participation in the economy is negatively affected by restricted mobility, sole responsibility of child rearing, cultural diktat of segregation and frequent childbearing. In urban areas, economic factors like higher cost of living and men solely being unable to financially provide for the family has relaxed restrictions for women. Even in these cases, most women engage in informal and poorly paid jobs such as sweat-shops, domestic labor, and piecework from homes (Nainar, 2013). Women's main life goals are childbearing and rearing within the patriarchal paradigm, so education for girls is considered unnecessary. This further creates dependence on men. Property is also generally passed on the male lineage from fathers to sons. Women in South Asia leave their parental homes when they get married, so they are not given a property share. Giving property to married daughters would mean a non-lineage claim by their husbands which would potentially weaken the patriarch's hold on the property. Even in the case that a woman works and contributes financially to her family, she does not escape the impact of male dominance completely (Nainar, 2013).

Conservatives in all South Asian countries "espouse rigid and fundamentalist understanding or interpretation of religion and culture that promote male domination and women's subordination as a virtue" (Nainar, 2013, p. 3). Nainar (2013) writes that women's characters in South Asia are also judged as good or bad considering how demure or obedient the woman is and considering her modesty in appearance. A female rape victim's character is thus often called into question in court. If she is a "good" woman, only then is she considered to deserve protection of law (Nainar, 2013).

Gabriele Dietrich (2004) writes that honor is one of the most important ideals in South Asia. In general, prestige and honor are measured by the respect bestowed on the family by others. A family can lose or gain honor through money and power. But there are also families that do not have both, so other aspects are also critical. Honor can be gained or lost through proper and improper conduct, mostly by female members of the family. If their behavior is undesirable, women of the family can bring shame and dishonor to the family forever. Women's behavior by families are thus tightly controlled (Dietrich, 2004).

2.2.2   Crime of morality and honor

A 2021 report by Equality Now and Dignity Alliance International states that definition of sexual assault is problematic in South Asia. It is framed as a crime of morality or honor, instead of focusing on coercion. Because such high value is placed on morality, the pressure is then on a woman to uphold these "moral" values. In case of sexual assault, it encourages jurisprudence focusing on "immorality" of victims (Equality Now & Dignity Alliance International, 2021).

This creates an environment where women's lives and bodies are tightly controlled. A sexual assault victim faces victim blaming and is looked down upon. It creates a hierarchy of

more or less "worthy" survivors. In India, which is a neighboring country of Nepal, survivor's past sexual history is prohibited to be introduced in court. However, in Nepal, there is nothing in the law prohibiting this. Thus, survivor's past sexual history is questioned, presented, and talked about in court by defense lawyers. The victim's "character" is questioned based on this history and judges often fail to intervene to stop this (Equality Now & Dignity Alliance International, 2021).

The report (2021) found that sexual violence is underreported in South Asia because of implementation problems within the criminal judicial system and barriers to access justice for survivors. Problems include long delays in police investigation, extra-legal settlements, corruption in justice system officials, lack of support services for survivors, low conviction rates and intersectional discrimination against the most marginalized (Equality Now & Dignity Alliance International, 2021).

Due to all these things, there is high level of stigma attached with rape which leads to nonreporting and withdrawal of cases. In addition to these problems, there is also pressure to withdraw the case, death threats and social ostracization faced by the victims (Equality Now & Dignity Alliance International, 2021).

Additionally, in South Asia, even seemingly minor things such as leaking someone's names or lifting their profile photo can have significant consequences. In the article, ""They Don't Leave Us Alone Anywhere We Go": Gender and Digital Abuse in South Asia", female participants cite reputation harm, emotional harm, domestic violence, and romantic coercion as consequences of online abuse (Sambasivan et al., 2019). Authors note that women are stigmatized for receiving online harassment. To protect themselves, they limit usage of online platforms (Sambasivan et al., 2019).

Violence against women is used as a tool to perpetuate and reinforce patriarchy in South Asia and is an obstacle to the rights and interests of women (Nainar, 2013). These attitudes seep into online space as well. The lack of online space, lack of online presence and trying to get women out of online space further perpetuates familiar patriarchal norms (Sambasivan et al., 2019).

2.3 Online harassment of journalists worldwide

Worldwide, studies conducted on online harassment of journalists are limited. Research shows that almost all journalists face some sort of online harassment (Lewis et al., 2020). In the article "Fair game? Journalists' experiences of online abuse", Amy Binns lays out that journalism industry has a culture of being dismissive of both criticism from the public and journalists complaining of criticism (2017). Journalists are expected to "take the heat" or "get out of the newsroom". The industry prides itself on toughness. Online harassment is commonly considered a part of the job (Binns, 2017). There is not a specific approach that social media or any government has put in place to protect journalists against online harassment (Granger, 2020).

People in positions of authority, such as a headmaster, a boss, or a politician are considered as a fair game for criticism and ridicule (Binns, 2017). As journalists often produce stories for the public and they have admin privileges, the public also puts them in this category thus making them more vulnerable to online harassment (Binns, 2017).

In some cases, online harassment turns to offline problems. Binns (2017) presents an example of a journalist who was targeted because of his story about a singer. The singer's fans considered the piece insulting and started a concentrated campaign including emails to the journalist's employer and death threats. His sensitive information such PayPal and bank accounts were jeopardized around the same time. The intruders also made email accounts in his name that

associated with child pornography (2017). This example shows that online harassment can translate to offline abuse and there are instances where the abuse has been far greater.

When abusers can hide behind their screens, it is easier for them to dehumanize their targets (Bartlett, 2015). Research also explains that internet norms encourage hate (Herring et al., 2002; Citron, 2014). With the advent of internet, especially social media, the problem of harassment is exacerbated. This is due to various factors such as speed and ease of communication, ability to post anonymously, inadequate regulation and law enforcement (Adams, 2017).

An important tool for a journalist's career is social media. It can help build profile for journalists (Molyneux et al., 2019) but due to online harassment, studies show that journalists limit usage of social media (Chen et al., 2020). Klaß and Wellbrock (2019) suggest that while previously, journalists were unnoticed behind media brands, with digitization they can build human brands which has potential to benefit them and the media houses economically. Journalists also use social media to share their stories and connect with leads and audiences (Koirala, 2020). Feminist voices can find a place in mainstream media through digital platforms according to feminist scholars (Baer, 2016; Carter Olson, 2016).

Unfortunately, experiences with online harassment can incite fear in journalists leading to them practicing caution in expressing their views (Boeckmann & Liew, 2002; Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017). This is limiting press freedom. It also may hinder open democratic debate where all-groups interests are represented, threatening ideals of equality (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019).

This disproportionately affects female journalists according to research. In the article, "Silencing Women? Gender and Online Harassment", Nadim and Fladmoe (2019) found that women tend to become more cautious than men in publicly expressing their opinions, when

faced with online harassment. When they express their opinions publicly and strongly, this is considered as "disobeying" gender roles. Jessica Megarry (2014) studied how these women are targeted and one respondent in her study claims "They go gender first".

Writer Laurie Penny said, "A woman's opinion is the short skirt of the internet" at the 2015 Online News Association keynote panel on online harassment (Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018). Unfortunately, online sexism is getting normal even in countries considered relatively safer for journalists, such as the United States and United Kingdom (Adams, 2017).

2.3.1 Journalism as a male-dominated field

News media is still largely owned and controlled by men (Byerly, 2013). There is gender disparity in the media industry. According to research, male journalists are given more desirable assignments, are promoted more, and get better working conditions than female journalists (Lasorsa, 2012). Female journalists also face other challenges such as problems with carrying out basic groundwork for their reporting.

Adams (2017) presents an example of a female journalist who said she cannot meet sources because these sources think that it is a date. This is an actual physical barrier for her to do her job and can lead to poorer choice of sources, lower job satisfaction, lower quality of journalistic product and diminished networking (Adams, 2017).

Social media reflects these hierarchies present in traditional media (Lasorsa, 2012). Online harassment disproportionately affects women and those who are more personally seen in media (Lewis et al., 2020). Bartlett et al. (2014) analyzed two million tweets and found that the only category of public figures where females faced more online abuse than males were journalists. It further reports that female TV news presenters and journalists face three times as much online harassment than their male counterparts.

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Gendered harassment is a form of harassment that comprises of misogynist or sexist comments (Chen et al., 2020). These comments attack, derogate, marginalize, threaten, or stereotype a person based on sexuality or gender attributes (Chen et al., 2020).

A recent 2021 report by UNESCO found that three out of four female journalists face online harassment, threats and abuse while they are doing their jobs. The harassment ranges from trolling, stigmatization, violence, physical assault, sexist hate speech, rape, to murder (Posetti et al., 2021). The study also found that female journalists face more harassment than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the harassment is not focused on their work content but on their physical appearance, cultural background, ethnicity and is highly sexualized. This leads to self-censorship on the part of the female journalists. This distorts the media landscape. It creates further gender imbalance in the media industry and perpetuates inequality in society (Posetti et al., 2021).

Study by Chen et al. (2020) shows journalists have developed strategies to deal with online harassment, like limiting what they share online, using tools to restrict the public from posting offensive words on their posts and changing what they report on. The study claims female journalists have to use these tactics more often, which limits how they interact with their audience and their work (Chen et al., 2020). If someone is abused, it can lead to their exclusion from public domain (Spender, 1980). This affects women's public sphere participation, which is worrisome considering journalism is already male dominated (Vitak et al., 2017).

2.4 Masculinity and harassment of men

According to gender stereotypes, men are more assertive, competitive, dominant, and masterful than women. Women, on the other hand, are more communal, meaning they are more friendly, unselfish, emotionally expressive and concerned with others according to gender

stereotypes (Newport, 2001). These stereotypes are evident across cultures though with some variations and have persisted through time (Best & Thomas, 2004). When particular attributes are valued by members of a society, these attributes serve as gender ideals and the society's individuals may strive to achieve them (Witt & Wood, 2010).

When these gender stereotypes are internalized and influence behavior, they become gender identities (Wood & Eagly, 2009). When most people internalize at least a few aspects of the gender stereotypes related to their biological sex present in their culture, then gender identities arise. However, not everyone may conform to their assigned gender stereotypes. Some women may demonstrate masculine traits, while some men may demonstrate feminine traits. If gender identity is used by people to regulate their behavior, then, they feel good when they conform to the standard and feel bad when not meeting them (Witt & Wood, 2010). Research by Witt & Wood (2010) utilized existing cross-sectional survey data from 3,174 young adults in the United States. The study found that those who behaved consistently in accordance with gender standards felt significantly better about themselves than those who did not. This research augments previous experimental simulation done by Wood et al. (1997) where women and men were randomly assigned to experience social exchanges, that were either vicariously communal or dominant. The simulation found that those people who demonstrated strong personal standards for gender felt better about themselves when their behavior aligned with gender stereotypes.

Gender transgressions in men are tolerated less than in women (Zucker et al., 1997). Men are also worried about being gender deviant (McCreary, 1994). Masculinity, across cultures, is a highly regarded trait that is regulated, demonstrated and learned actively among men (Gilmore, 1990; Kimmel, 1996). It is related to stability, rationality, and competence (Williams

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& Bennett, 1975; Williams & Best, 1982). It has been found that men tend to reject feminine traits in themselves (Glick et al., 2007). They do this to avoid being labeled as homosexuals, called "pussies" (Berdahl et al., 1996) and to sustain their social standings (McCreary, 1994). They are harassed and ostracized for not being "man enough" (Berdahl, 2007). This type of harassment is called gender-role harassment. The research by Funk & Werhun (2011, p. 13) found that "gender-role harassment significantly threatened participant's sense of manhood, compromised cognitive ability, and weakened attentional self-control compared to the no harassment control condition".

A 1996 study "The Sexual Harassment of Men?: Exploring the Concept with Theory and Data" found that men expected not to be stressed and bothered if they ever faced sexual harassment in the workplace (Berdahl et al.). One even said that it would make the job more fun for him. All but one out of 72 male participants said that they would feel in control of the situation and would try to deal with it personally than getting authority involved. None indicated that they would be threatened by sexual harassment in the workplace. One participant said that he would not be threatened the way a woman would because of the male and female roles in the society. Men also did not expect to experience high levels of anxiety or discomfort when faced with potentially harassing behaviors from women (Berdahl et al., 1996).

Thus, facing unwanted sexual attention may challenge gender roles and threaten the sense of masculinity for a man (Berdahl et al., 1996). Even journalists are told to "take it like a man" while facing harassment and journalism is seen as a masculine profession (Koirala, 2020). Due to this, men may hesitate to report the online harassment they face.

2.5 The context of Nepal

Nepal's news media landscape has been growing over the years however the sector is still marred with gender disparity. Journalism in Nepal is a male-dominated field, with more than eighty percent of the journalists identifying as male (Koirala, 2020). Though the number of female journalists is increasing, less than five percent women were in influential positions in 2015 (Sancharika Samuha, 2015). More female presence is needed in the industry for more diverse media content and media pluralism in Nepal (Freedom Forum, 2019).

Nepal's journalism industry also has other problems. Annual report 2019 of Freedom Forum showed that people with high political powers in Nepal make derogatory remarks about journalists which shrinks civic space and keeps journalists under the government control. Journalists are directed on how to report the news, mocked over their language and grammar, defamed over news, accused of being 'guided' and controlled by 'bourgeoisie'. They have negligible payments, low skills, education, and knowledge, which results in low professionalism in the field (Freedom Forum, 2019). There is also caste discrimination in the industry (Onta, 2001).

The media landscape is largely concentrated in cities, especially Kathmandu which is the country's capital. This poses another challenge for media advocacy, sustainability of the media and journalists' capacities to report news from the country. There were 111 press freedom violations recorded in 2019 by Freedom Forum, which is more than in previous years. Journalists are also suppressed, misused, and lured of monetary benefits. Journalists working in online media are more often the targets of threats and harassment in recent years (Freedom Forum, 2019). Koirala's (2020) research corroborates this, adding that perhaps journalists in online

media stay more active online due to the nature of their work, leading their audience to identify them easily compared to journalists working in print or radio.

Access to broadband internet has been increasing in Nepal and majority of journalists have access to it. Internet comes with its own sets of advantages and disadvantages. It helps journalists in their reporting, but also makes journalists more vulnerable to harassment (Koirala, 2020). It was reported that 91.55 percent of population in Nepal has access to broadband internet (MyRepública, 2022).

Female journalists used to face harassment offline. This harassment has also been replicated online (Koirala, 2020). Subedi (2021) writes that in past it was only people around female journalists such as relatives, acquaintances and neighbors who could give them a cold vibe mixed with a warning for challenging social norms and standing for equality and change. It was mostly verbal abuse. Now, with online harassment, abusers do not have to come face-to-face with the female journalists, so the abuse is more cruel and vulgar. She writes that dozens of female journalists have faced threats for writing on issues of patriarchy, religious dogmas, and inequality (Subedi, 2021).

Online harassment effects might be stronger as Nepali society is patriarchal. According to Kristin & Tayeebwa (2020), women journalists also experience gender-based harassment particularly, like sexist and sexual harassment. Koirala (2020, p. 49) in her article "Female Journalists' Experience of Online Harassment: A Case Study of Nepal" argues that "gender-based harassment is intended to reinforce the patriarchy, where women are expected to be a submissive victim". Character assassination is also used as a weapon to silence female journalists in Nepal. Subedi (2021) cites an example of a female journalist Shilpa Karna who was forced to open two separate Facebook and Twitter accounts and handle them differently. She had to do it

because the abuse she received online was visible to her family members as well, so the abuse affected them too. Therefore, her solution was to live two separate lives, appearing meek and quiet in one social media account and the exact opposite in another social media account which presents her as a journalist. Karna says that journalists must appear decent and fair but for a female, breaching that image is costlier. Karna says that if she had been a man, the abuse on social media would have been less troublesome (Subedi, 2021).

Subedi's (2021) article also touches on how women feel undermined in the Nepali media industry. They are body shamed. Their character is questioned when they are successful hinting that people in powerful positions must have given them special favors (Subedi, 2021). Their success is also linked to their outer beauty or links instead of their talent, hard work and passion according to Rita Pariyar, a media professional and activist (Subedi, 2021). A female journalist's family, husband and character are talked about more than their professional strengths and weaknesses. Pariyar adds that when she writes about justice for marginalized communities, women and differently abled in Nepal, she receives accusations that she is trying to disrupt the 'social harmony' with her 'provocative' messaging (Subedi, 2021).

In Nepal, online harassment is still seen as a 'first world problem' (Koirala, 2020, p. 48). Working in this 'masculine domain' though, female journalists continue to bear the brunt of online harassment in Nepal (Koirala, 2020). Freedom Forum reported no concrete commitment or action by the government regarding the safety of female journalists (2019).

There has also been limited research done on the online harassment of journalists in Nepal. However, the literature on the differences in the forms of harassment faced by journalists of different genders, and how it impacts their work is missing for Nepal.

Increasing number of journalists face digital violence in Nepal, reports International Press Institute (Subedi, 2021). A study by Koirala (2020) found that female journalists working with online television and news portals tend to face more harassment than those working in newspaper and radio journalism in Nepal. Also, younger female journalists and journalists in junior positions than their counterparts are more likely to face online harassment. Most harassment cases go unreported due to ineffective legislation and shaming culture in Nepal (Koirala, 2020). Thus, there is no accurate data on the scale of violence but based on female journalists' stories, the situation is worrisome (Subedi, 2021).

Women journalists mostly tolerate the online harassment and bear the brunt of gendered harassment by being 'strong like a man' (Koirala, 2020). Five female journalists out of forty-one in Koirala's study (2020), said that online harassment is a reason that they may quit journalism, which is alarming for the journalism industry. These issues point the gap in study as well as the importance of it as more research on online harassment and its impacts on journalists' work is required, especially in patriarchal and developing countries like Nepal.

3. Methods

To answer the research questions, qualitative primary data was collected and analyzed. Semi-structured in-depth interviews was conducted with five male and five female Nepali journalists with at least two years of work experience in the Nepali media industry. Journalists who worked in the Nepali media industry for at least two years would have possibly had time to use social media for their work, have audience interactions, navigate social media dynamics, and explore social media as a journalist. Such experiences of fresh journalists just entering the industry would be comparatively limited. Thus, at least two years of work experience has been used as a criterion for selection of interviewees. It was acceptable for this research to interview

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journalists who had never faced online harassment as well, however, all participants revealed they had faced some sort of online harassment during the time they worked in the media industry.

Audio interviews, which were 20 to 60 minutes long, were conducted and recorded over Zoom or WhatsApp with permission of the interviewees. Journalists were asked if they wished to get some information on meaning and forms of harassment before starting the interviews. As the interviewer is from Nepal and is fluent in both Nepali and English languages, the Nepali journalists were given the option to do the interview in either English or Nepali language. They could also choose to switch between the two languages. All interviews were transcribed in English language for analysis.

Semi-structured interviews granted the researcher more flexibility with asking clarifying follow-up questions. It also helped with getting more examples to understand interviewees' experiences properly. Semi-structured interviews are "a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions" (Adams, 2015, p. 493). An interview guide, which is attached as Appendix, was used to get answers to the same questions from all interviewees. The follow-up questions were molded as suitable according to the answers and experiences of the interviewees. The starting questions were broad and open, to allow the researcher to understand interviewees' general understanding of the issues. Experiences of online harassment, whether faced in personal or professional capacity, of journalists were considered from when they started working in the media industry.

Qualitative in-depth interviews, a traditional method of data collection, maximizes data quality and minimizes non-response (Lavrakas, 2008). It is often employed to seek information in highly sensitive projects, such as this where interviewees share their personal harassment

experiences (Lavrakas, 2008). If the survey method had been used, this research might have more respondents. However, this research has benefitted from the interview method as the research answers in-depth questions.

Snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was used to recruit participants for the research. The researchers usually start by using their social links to invite potential participants, also known as seed participants. They are chosen based on research criteria. The agreeable participants are then requested to recommend other potential participants who may be suited based on research criteria who may potentially be agreeable participants, who then recommend other potential participants and so on. This creates an increasing chain of respondents. The recruitment stops once a desired sampling size has been achieved or a saturation point is reached (Parker et al., 2019).

This network-based convenience sampling is frequently employed by qualitative researchers in the social sciences who are especially doing interviews (Parker et al., 2019). It is used to access population who may prefer anonymity, require a degree of trust, feel stigmatized, vulnerable, and particularly sensitive (Parker et al., 2019). This was true for this research as the subject is taboo in Nepal. These were the reasons this sampling method was employed.

In this research, researcher first attempted to establish contact with potential participants who fit the research criteria using social media platforms Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and WhatsApp. They were provided brief information about the research along with information about the length of the interview. They were also informed that the interviews would be anonymous. The researcher's connections in the journalism industry in Nepal may have facilitated access to participants in this research. Once the seed participants were recruited, they were asked if they would like to recommend someone at the end of their interview. If they

agreed, they could either name someone who the researcher could contact or provide direct contact information of potential interviewees after acquiring permission from them. All participants named between one to three journalists who they thought would be able to provide good insights into the topic. These journalists were contacted by the interviewer using social media platforms among other journalists. Four interviewees provided direct contact information of potential interviewees. However, only three of these direct referrals worked. As this is a sensitive topic, the researcher did not reveal to the referees if their referrals worked. Participants were not given any kind of incentives for their participation or referrals.

Names of interviewees have been changed and more details about them have not been provided to protect privacy. Instead, pseudonyms are created for each participant combining a fictitious name and their gender, in that order. 'M' represents male participants and 'F' represents female participants. Participants were asked what gender they identified with at the beginning of the research. All of them either said male or female. Their age and years of experience are presented in a range to further anonymize the interviewees. Interviewees have been divided into age groups of 20-29, 30-39 and 40-49. The range used for their work experience is divided into groups of 0-5, 6-10, 11-16, 16-20 and 21-25 years.

Transcribed interviews were analyzed for emerging themes and topics. The research followed inductive coding approach. In this approach, raw data is read and interpreted by the researcher to look for emerging topics, models, or themes (Chandra & Shang, 2019). "Through first-order coding, a researcher closely reviews the data, makes notes, combines the data into broader themes and theoretical dimensions. Inductive coding requires the marking of passages and sentences of a text with a code" (Chandra & Shang, 2019, p. 91).

The interview transcripts were imported to ATLAS.ti, a computer program used for qualitative research, for coding and analysis. Based on research questions and sections in the literature review, the researcher tried to identify from the transcripts the forms of online harassment, differences in the harassment faced by male and female journalists, strategies they employed for coping, effects of the harassment on journalists' work and professional progress.

The research methodology takes inspiration from Samiksha Koirala's research "Female Journalists' Experience of Online Harassment: A Case Study of Nepal" (2020) because of similar research interest and context. Koirala's (2020) research was also conducted in Nepal. While Koirala's research examines the experiences of female journalists in Nepal (2020), this research also looks at the experiences of male journalists to see what differences exist in their experiences and what different patterns emerge. A survey was done in Koirala's (2020) research in the beginning and then purposive sampling was used to select interviewees for in-depth interviews. This research takes inspiration from some of the questions that were included in Koirala's (2020) research, such as if the interviewees had faced any sort of online harassment, on which online platforms they faced the harassment and how the harassment affected their professional lives. The research also used interview questions from my unpublished seminar paper (Manandhar, 2021), such as, if the interviewees thought online harassment was influenced by gender, if social media was important for a Nepali journalist to progress in their career and if social media made online harassment easier.

4. Results

In this section, first, the demographics of interviewees are specified. The use of social media by journalists and its importance for journalists are discussed. Then, research questions are discussed with examples according to the interviews of journalists.

4.1 Demographic of journalists

The five female journalists interviewed for this research were between the ages of twenty-five to thirty-five years old. Each of them had between three to twelve years of work experience in the Nepali journalism field.

The ages of men varied from twenty-three to forty-five years old. Each of them had between three to twenty-two years of journalism work experience in Nepal.

The journalists were all reporters at some point in their careers. They report on hard and soft issues such as politics, health, policies, and culture. Half of the interviewees with comparatively more experience were working as senior journalists or editors-in-chief. Some were also involved with copywriting, multimedia production, and social media management.

Pseudonym	Years of media experience	Age (in years)	Gender
LoriF	0-5	20-29	Female
SursaF	6-10	20-29	Female
ShreyaF	6-10	20-29	Female
KritiF	11-15	30-39	Female
GitaF	11-15	30-39	Female
SuyogM	0-5	20-29	Male
AmarM	0-5	20-29	Male

ManasM	11-15	30-39	Male
RayM	16-20	30-39	Male
BryM	21-25	40-49	Male

4.2 Social media usage and its importance to journalists

All interviewed journalists use social media to gather information and remain updated on public opinions. They use social media to share their work more than personal opinions and updates. They mentioned that social media was very important for a journalist to gather information, promote their work, find leads, network with other journalists, build their public image and grow their audience. They acknowledged that along with these positives, there were also negatives to using social media, one of which is it makes online harassment easier. They said that it is easier to harass someone under anonymity on social media. Journalists are now more accessible than they were a decade ago due to their personal online presence through social media platforms. People close to power centers are more active now on social media platforms. Thus, there is also space for more coordinated attacks from groups or institutions toward journalists in an attempt to discredit them on social media.

Since digital media is rapidly growing in Nepal, journalists also feel that social media presence is important for work. GitaF (personal communication, May 24, 2022) shared that if it was not for her job, she would stay completely away from social media.

Senior journalists stated that a decade ago, harassment faced by journalists was more offline than online. A senior male journalist (RayM, personal communication, May 23, 2022) shared that about fifteen years back, his newsroom and his editor were attacked by supporters of

a political party. He said that at that time, people would write letters to the editor, attack

journalists in person, or come to the office to talk about the issue if they had any complaints.

Another senior female journalist (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022) said that a

decade ago, the harassment was still mostly limited to the comments section of the news

organization's online website. She added that people did not search for the author online to target

their harassment towards the journalist.

4.3 Forms of online harassment

All journalists interviewed had faced some form of online harassment in their careers.

When asked if they think online harassment is influenced by gender in Nepal, interviewees said

that female journalists definitely face more online harassment than male journalists. They

revealed that compared to men, women faced harassment on a more personal level, where their

character is usually brought into question. All female journalists in my sample had faced sexual

harassment compared to one male journalist who had faced it. Harassers even attempted to or got

the journalists' families involved in a few cases. Female journalists were especially concerned

about their family's safety in regard to the harassment they were facing.

Journalists seemed concerned about their digital safety and privacy, not just for their own

protection but also for their family members and their sources. A senior female journalist had her

online social media account hacked and pornographic content was shared through her hacked

account.

SuyogM (personal communication, February 19, 2022) who has been a victim of online

sexual harassment said that there are not enough resources or support provided to a male

journalist compared to a female journalist when it comes to harassment. He said he has witnessed

that there is only focus on harassment of female journalists when "males are equally victimized.

Male journalists are just not open about their issues" (SuyogM, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

4.3.1 Cyberstalking

All interviewees have been victims of cyberstalking at some point in their careers. Cyberstalking is the use of technology to repeatedly harass, monitor, communicate with, and threaten victims on technological platforms (Wilson et al., 2022). Journalists had also been intimidated by institutions and people they had written about.

A senior female journalist (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022) shared that she anticipates harassment on social media whenever she publishes anything controversial. In one instance, when she published an article on misconduct by a prominent figure, the person repeatedly messaged her. He pestered her that she had done a wrong thing and questioned how dare she write about the issue. Since she shares mutual friends with the person and is in similar social circles, she is still nervous about being introduced to him somewhere. For her safety, she shared she would make phone calls from her office and use a virtual private network because she lived alone. She added remembering that fearful time, "I used to imagine the worst that could happen to me because these were really powerful people," (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022).

Journalists who write reviews said when they publish critical reviews, artists sometimes reach out to them. The interactions with their interviewees or the artists after review publications are not always positive. They question why they wrote a bad review and if they are attempting to defame them. They accuse journalists of not supporting Nepali art. Journalists' credibility is brought into question. SursaF (personal communication, June 21, 2022) shared that she felt pressured and it made her question if she did something wrong to someone, when in fact, she

was just doing her job. She responds professionally to them, trying to convince them it was nothing personal. However, when she had to interview them again, she felt insecure. Some raised their voice at her and intimidated her.

AmarM (personal communication, April 6, 2022) said that he has received threats from artists. Online users have tried to discredit him by alleging he is corrupted and intellectually challenged. He shared that when he critiqued a movie related to religion, "people said I took money from a terrorist organization, that I drink their urine, and am being funded by a western country's embassy" (AmarM, personal communication, April 6, 2022).

Senior male editors said that there is a coordinated attempt at discrediting the work of journalists when they publish against the strong political parties of Nepal. One of them (ManasM, personal communication, May 20, 2022) said that there is power and force behind political parties, so it is very difficult to handle such coordinated attempts at discrediting journalists' work.

4.3.2 Sexual harassment and gender roles

When a person is perceived to be a bit feminine as in the case of SuyogM (personal communication, February 19, 2022), they can be more prone to getting bullied. He shared that because he was perceived to be a bit feminine by his colleagues, he was bullied. Not only did his colleagues question his sexuality and commented on his online social media posts asking him why he is the way he is, but he received sexually suggestive messages from his news bureau chief too (SuyogM, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

> I was in my early twenties. She was fifteen years older than me and unmarried. We used to talk about relationships, and she would say things like, "Why don't you marry me?", "Let's hook up" and "Let's date". If a female staff was asked by her male coordinator to

hook up with him, that would be a huge issue. That happened within the newsroom to me, and nobody cared. It was treated as normal. I did not take any serious action because I feared losing my job. That job meant a lot to me. She told me to inform her if I felt bad due to this. I told her I felt uncomfortable, and that it was wrong that she was doing this to me. Though I was open to her about it, she did not stop harassing me (SuyogM, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

This shows that the sexual harassment of a man was not taken seriously. He suspects that his supervisor told other media professionals that he was feminine, which he believes has hampered his reputation (SuyogM, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

The other male journalists interviewed did not mention that they faced any form of sexual harassment. AmarM (personal communication, April 6, 2022) said that men may get personal attacks, but they do not face sexual harassment.

ShreyaF (personal communication, February 19, 2022) also thinks that men cannot be sexually harassed. Talking on the subject, she laughed pondering, "Who can really harass them? Maybe they would harass the woman who tries to do that to them" (personal communication, February 19, 2022).

This narrative that men do not face sexual harassment in the media industry is problematic. It may lead to more men being uncomfortable to speak up. At the end of the interview, SuyogM (personal communication, February 19, 2022) shared that he feared meeting the researcher at an event. This was because of how he may be perceived now that he shared his sexual harassment story. He added, "People are quick to judge so I am scared to share" (SuyogM, personal communication, February 19, 2022). This shows the level that men hesitate to share such stories publicly, that may not be in line with traditional masculine stereotypes.

ShreyaF (personal communication, February 19, 2022) shared she has encountered men who feel entitled to her attention. She shared that a senior male journalist at her workplace used to constantly initiate conversations with her. He messaged her "Hi" and "Hello", seemingly without any reason. She thinks that he had romantic interest in her. She replied saying "Hi" but did not attempt to take these conversations any further. However, one time, he got angry and sent long messages telling her that she thinks too much of herself and that she is too proud. He even talked negatively about her family. She told him respectfully that she considered him her brother, was respectful towards him and was shocked to receive these messages out of nowhere. He blocked her on Facebook after this incident. She had just joined the media organization. Talking about how she dealt with it, she said:

> I could have left the office, but I handled it. I told my friends. I should have told senior male journalists or the editor, but I could not. I saw him in the office too. He would stare at me and go. If he was in the same floor as me, maybe my concentration would have been affected. But as I was in another floor, I did not feel disturbed (ShreyaF, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

What is interesting in her commentary is that she specifically says she should have shared this with senior male journalists. This shows that for action to be taken or for her to get some justice, she felt that male journalists were in a position to support her. In this case, her harasser used intimidation after he harassed her via messages. She seems to have hurt his male ego by not messaging him enthusiastically and the way he expected her to.

ShreyaF (personal communication, February 19, 2022) also shared another incidence of sexual harassment. A male journalist whose work she admired, started contacting her regularly through social media. He suggested that they meet physically at a coffee shop to which she

agreed. After the meeting, he messaged her more and they had informal conversations. She was also interested in what he had to share. One time, he called her on her phone and requested to meet her. They took a public bus together. In the bus, she felt his hand on her shoulder. He proceeded to put his arms around her. She felt uncomfortable with this invasion of her personal space and his behavior. At first, she reasoned to herself that he may have done this because the bus was a bit crowded, but she started growing angry with time. So, she got off the bus before she reached her destination. He tried to contact her later, but she ignored him. She said he did not give any clarification regarding his behavior. She said that she felt very bad about this whole episode (ShreyaF, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

Some female interviewees had received online rape threats from male journalists and their audience.

GitaF (personal communication, May 24, 2022) shared that when she challenged societal norms by publishing an image of her with a social message on a placard, online trolls distorted the image by changing the writings on the placard. They said that she should be raped and killed. She expressed that this made her feel very alone at that point, as a group of people was coming at her with such a level of harassment.

For her, her first experience of online harassment was traumatizing. A little over a decade ago, she migrated to Kathmandu to work as a journalist after lying to her father that she had found a job. When she arrived, she saw that somebody had hacked her Facebook account and shared pornographic images through it. She had unfortunately forgotten to log out of her account when she left her previous workplace which was not in Kathmandu. She was shaken. With the help of a friend, she first removed those photos. She headed to the press council and police

station to demand justice. But she received no support (GitaF, personal communication, May 24, 2022).

LoriF (personal communication, May 10, 2022) shared that a male journalist had sent her disturbing messages when she was a minor. He had messaged her saying he wanted to rape her in the middle of the road and insert a rod in her vagina. There are screenshots of the messages and he admitted to sending them himself under the influence of alcohol. Recently, she went to the police to report the incident and was informed that the statute of limitations to report such a crime is two years and it had passed. She said she did not even know what her rights were when she was a minor.

4.3.3 Gendered harassment

According to the interviews, mostly female journalists face gendered harassment. No matter what they write, they seem to face some form of harassment.

Journalists said that if the same piece is published by a male and female journalist, the harassment that a female faces is personal and of higher intensity.

Speaking on the issue, ManasM (personal communication, May 20, 2022) said:

It seems to me women will get harassed no matter what they write. There have been instances where women have written just their personal experiences of what they went through, and they still got harassed. A lot of men comment denying that it ever happened to them. Even if it happened, they say that it never happened in the way that women are writing about it. Or they simply say that the woman does not know what she is saying, and she is wrong (ManasM, personal communication, May 20, 2022).

KritiF (personal communication, May 23, 2022) shared similar views by giving an example:

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A female political journalist I know receives a lot of hate and bullying for writing the same kind of story that her male counterparts write. She shared horrific stories about how people in public offices tell her that she needs to be raped. If the same political news she wrote is written by a male reporter, he may not receive that kind of harassment. They will say he is affiliated with XYZ Party; thus, he is writing these critical stories about our political party. It ends there. It does not get personal. But for female writers, it goes beyond just the story. It becomes about them and about their characters (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022).

ManasM (personal communication, May 20, 2022) is a senior political reporter. He said that "Content collection, content processing, and content dissemination are gendered" (ManasM, personal communication, May 20, 2022). He suspected that if he and a female colleague publish the same political piece, the harassment level towards the two might be different. He said that the harassment a female would receive might be on a personal level.

In contrast to what a female political reporter faces, when he writes a critical piece on a political party, that party's supporters harass him by saying that he took bribes to publish the article and is corrupt. They blackmail him threatening they will reveal his "wrongdoings". For ManasM, this harassment is easier to tackle. He said that it doesn't contribute to his mental stress as actions can be taken, such as getting the cyber bureau involved. He is rather worried when the political party criticizes his writing because it comes from an institution (ManasM, personal communication, May 20, 2022).

Journalists also doubt women about writing on hard issues such as politics or policies. ShreyaF (personal communication, February 19, 2022) said:

My supervisor said that women cannot write about policies, and they should only write about soft issues. In fact, many people have said this to me. Someone also said that I am not capable enough to write on hard issues (ShreyaF, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

A male journalist (RayM, personal communication, May 23, 2022) with over fifteen years of experience confirms that this is the case:

There is a kind of boys' club in the media industry. Male reporters do not tend to take women as seriously when it comes to reporting on serious issues. There is the harassment that women get from anonymous sources, but then there is the other kind of belittlement, the kind of dismissal that you get from your own colleagues and other people you are going out to report with. They do not take you seriously because you are a woman and so they think "What must she know? How much political reporting must she have done to report properly?" (RayM, personal communication, May 23, 2022)

4.3.4 Beauty and character, not content

According to the interviewees, there is a lot of casual sexism in the journalism industry. A female journalist (ShreyaF, personal communication, February 19, 2022) shared that she has frequently heard her male colleagues judging a female journalist's character by the way she dresses, her family, and the amount of alcohol she consumes. She added that if a female journalist gets ahead in her career, she has seen male journalists question who helped her get ahead and how she progressed, implying they did not believe her journalistic abilities were due some credit (ShreyaF, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

Four male interviewees said that they have witnessed female journalists get comments focusing on their beauty or characteristics on social media posts related to their journalistic work. There is a tendency to not focus on their content and work.

All five female journalists said that instead of focusing on their journalistic experience or the content they produced, the online harassers are quick to judge their character instead. A male journalist (ManasM, personal communication, May 20, 2022) who has worked in the industry for over two decades said that this drives away the discussion that a female journalist wants to put out on social media.

AmarM (personal communication, April 6, 2022) said:

Our society is very patriarchal, and when a woman comes forward and shares her opinion, the patriarchal structure cannot stand that shift in power. To keep such strong opinionated women within the status quo, many people who are influenced by the patriarchal way of thinking resort to such violence. So, if a woman writes about a sexist law, then she gets comments saying she wants to disrupt societal norms and is characterless. Women get personal attacks and sexually harassing comments (AmarM, personal communication, April 6, 2022).

4.3.5 Concerns about one's safety

In the cases of women, harassers even reached out to the journalists' family members. A senior journalist (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022) shared that when she published an article exposing an activist's wrongdoings, she became a victim of a barrage of comments directed toward her. People called her a pawn being used by powerful people to bring down an activist. Suddenly, her agency and credibility were questioned and her extensive journalism experience was overlooked. She received a call from another activist who screamed at

her for publishing the article. Her mother received calls from people who questioned why her daughter was writing such things. They told her that her daughter is being manipulated by senior male journalists (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022).

Another female journalist shared that if she publishes something controversial, harassers stalk her and search for her friends and family online, some of whose profiles are not even public. Once, she published a controversial article on a social issue and she received many derogatory comments. Some suggested that she should be fed excreta, beaten, and thrown out of the country. The harassers tracked her father's online profile. They bullied her by comparing her opinions to his (LoriF, personal communication, May 10, 2022).

One of the male journalists also revealed that he was worried about his sources' safety. He worries that there are growing reports of journalists losing access to their social media accounts and their emails. He said the biggest danger if his profile gets hacked is that the names of his sources and his chats with them may get public. Some of them wish to speak anonymously with him but their privacy could be jeopardized (BryM, personal communication, May 7, 2022).

4.4 Impact of the harassment

Online harassment has many negative impacts on journalists. The biggest impact it has is that it silences the journalists and negatively influences the way journalists use social media. It impacts their work, the way journalists share their work and their personal life, the openness with which they interact with their audience, and their mental health. In cases where colleagues were involved in online harassment, it impacted journalists' mental health and their work quality directly.

4.4.1 Silencing effect

Almost all interviewed journalists said that online harassment had impacted their way of using social media. They limited its use, mostly only sharing their work, and were cautious about what they wrote online. When sharing any controversial opinions, they calculated if they have time to respond should they face a barrage of negative comments.

Three female journalists had turned their public online profiles into private ones after they faced online harassment. A senior female journalist (SursaF, personal communication, June 21, 2022) shared that she had kept her Instagram profile public because she wanted her audience to have the option to reach out to her openly should they have some leads on stories. She also wanted to discuss her story ideas with her audience. But as she started getting unwanted attention and messages from males who were vying for her attention, she felt a bit insecure and decided to turn her Instagram profile private instead. This has impacted how she performs her work, and limited the network and leads she would have had if she had not faced the harassment.

She further added that a recent online harassment incident had made her scared of writing on issues of feminism and social issues. She was dragged into a conversation and tagged by an online page for not speaking about a sexual harassment incident that had happened in her newsroom. She was not a part of the newsroom when the incident happened. She was concerned that people might start viewing her as someone who does not support female survivors of sexual harassment, especially when she writes on such issues herself. She also said she did not know how to defend herself at that point, as she did not know who is "listening to the page" (SursaF, personal communication, June 21, 2022)

KritiF (personal communication, May 23, 2022) shared that because she writes on sensitive issues, over the years she has become cautious of what she shares online and how the

audience perceives her. In addition to that, she is wary that the harassment she faces could reach her family members so she has started posting less about her family on social media. Rather she views social media as an extension of her journalistic work, sharing mostly her publications.

When female journalists sought justice in cases of online sexual harassment, they faced victim-blaming. People questioned their character, why they were talking to those men, why they were on the social media platform and why they could not solve the issue privately.

LoriF (personal communication, May 10, 2022), who has called a few men out on social media regarding their inappropriate behavior, said she understands why women do not call out their predators. Three of the people she called out are journalists. Unfortunately, online users directed their hatred toward her, calling her an attention seeker. They accused her of seeking publicity and asked her why she could not solve the issue privately. She had first tried to solve the issue privately, however, those attempts bore no positive results. The experience she had to go through after calling people out has taken a big toll on her mental health and she is currently staying away from social media. Thus, she understands why women do not speak up about their harassment experiences publicly. "First, she would lose her job and second, no one truly supports her. She then has to continue living in the society and make a living in the industry" (LoriF, personal communication, May 10, 2022).

ShreyaF (personal communication, February 19, 2022) agreed that women cannot speak freely about their woes. She said that if a woman is harassed by her male colleague, she may share it with their friends but there is no support in the work environment to report the harassment freely. She added that the woman may also fear losing her honor and her job if she shares her harassment story in the workplace.

SursaF (personal communication, June 21, 2022) shared that if a woman writes about a controversial issue, meaningful and constructive criticism is not there in the comments. She has seen questions like "Why are you writing this?", "Why are you even a journalist?" or "Why don't you just sit at home?" (SursaF, personal communication, June 21, 2022). ManasM (personal communication, May 20, 2022) agreed and added that due to this, unfortunately, he has witnessed a high level of fear in female journalists, worrying that society would be merciless towards them if they wrote on a controversial topic.

4.4.2 Fear of physical harm and judgment

All interviewed female journalists expressed their fear of online harassment translating into physical violence.

Honor is placed on women in South Asia (Dietrich, 2004). In Nepal too, honor is an important ideal and the family's honor is placed on the characters of women in the family. So, the harassers most commonly attempt character assassination of female journalists while harassing them. When a Facebook account of GitaF (personal communication, May 24, 2022) was hacked by her colleague to share pornographic content a decade ago, she was nervous and embarrassed wondering what her friends and neighbors would think of her.

LoriF (personal communication, May 10, 2022) shared that though she is not scared to walk freely on the streets, she is finding it difficult to date using online dating applications. Men recognize her as someone who has published challenging societal norms and question what she is doing on dating platforms.

Journalists also shared that if the harassment came from someone they respected or their senior colleagues, they could not block them. They feared being negatively judged by their

superiors for this action. They did not want to be questioned by them, so they rather chose to interact less with them on social media, than block or restrict them.

4.4.3 Fear of being discredited

Almost all interviewees shared fears of being discredited. Harassers also seemed to attack their credibility mostly, whenever they did not agree with what the journalists published.

ManasM (personal communication, May 20, 2022), who has over a decade of journalism experience, said that in his position, he does not feel emotional distress due to the trolls. He rather worries that if the harassment on social media escalates, people may start perceiving him as someone corrupt and his articles would be viewed as biased.

BryM (personal communication, May 7, 2022) also said that especially when journalists write about a powerful political figure, there is a coordinated attempt between different social media accounts to discredit their work.

KritiF (personal communication, May 23, 2022) gives an example of how she faced this type of harassment. She shared embassies in Nepal send gifts to senior journalists during big festivals. She had never received such gifts but when she did, she posted on her social media joking that she had also become a "senior journalist" now. Her post "blew up" and the public started talking about how journalists are accepting such "bribes". Her colleagues also criticized her for posting this. She said that it negatively affected her as people were calling her "corrupt" and an agent of that country. When she wrote a political piece, the online audience judged her as being biased (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022).

> People make those links to suit their biases I guess, and then it becomes less about the
> story and more about me, based on people's judgment of what I have posted in the past

about something. So, I'm just trying to see how people forcibly link those dots. (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022)

4.4.4 Mental health damage

It is interesting to note that interviewed male journalists with under five years of work experience said that the online harassment caused them mental stress. In contrast, the other male journalists, each with over twelve of journalism experience, said that online harassment did not cause them any mental and emotional stress.

AmarM (personal communication, April 6, 2022), who has under five years of work experience, said that it affects him negatively when his audience starts "getting personal". He understands that his audience may not like everything he writes but he does not understand why they have to get personal about it.

ManasM (personal communication, May 20, 2022), a senior journalist, shared that there was once a coordinated online attempt at discrediting his work. People called him corrupt, biased, and someone working for foreign interests. This did not bother him. He said:

I am the editor and I have faced this before. But if it was faced by an entry-level journalist, they would be discouraged. I have already faced so much harassment that I do not even view these instances as harassment anymore. Let people criticize, I will publish what I want to (ManasM, personal communication, May 20, 2022).

All female interviewees shared that their mental health has been negatively affected by the online harassment they faced. LoriF (personal communication, May 10, 2022) shared that after sharing her sexual harassment stories on social media publicly, she started getting nightmares due to the harassment she faced online. Her mental health is in shambles. She now overthinks what she writes in her articles and her social media posts. When she reaches out to

potential leads for her articles, they negatively view her as someone who has been calling out people on social media (LoriF, personal communication, May 10, 2022).

4.5 Strategies to deal with harassment

The most common strategy that journalists employ to deal with online harassment seems to be to ignore it. Some male journalists were cautious of sharing their personal opinions freely on social media. Women had a bigger tendency to decrease their social media usage after facing online harassment or due to the fear of being harassed online. All women interviewed had used at least one of the tactics to limit their social media usage, such as turning their public online profile into private, blocking or unfollowing certain people, deactivating their profile, sharing fewer personal posts on social media, and changing their profile photo so that people would not recognize them. Most of them have completely stayed away from social media at some point in their careers due to sexual harassment. They were also advised by people to ignore messages so that the majority of the messages go into their spam folder and to not look at them.

4.5.1 Ignoring online harassment

All interviewed journalists said that they had tried to ignore online harassment that they faced during their career. They have used this strategy to protect their mental health. They restrict offensive messages to the "spam" folder or restrict certain people from their social media accounts. Male journalists said they consider it better to ignore the harsh comments and did not see any point in responding to the harassers. KritiF (personal communication, May 23, 2022) said that even though she could not see those messages and comments, she still knew they were out there. Some of her friends would even send her screenshots of the negative things people were saying about her.

ManasM (personal communication, May 20, 2022) said that this tactic of ignoring or not checking negative comments about yourself is often bad for journalists. He said journalism is about being able to see all sides. He added it is beneficial to know what people are saying about you so you are prepared to protect yourself if needed.

SuyogM (personal communication, February 19, 2022) revealed that his restricted list and block list are longer than his friend list on social media. He has blocked people who harass him and he is not in touch with them. He has also created another social media account just so he has an account to freely interact with people he feels comfortable with.

ShreyaF (personal communication, February 19, 2022) revealed that three senior male journalists had repeatedly messaged her showing their romantic interest despite her turning them down. She could not unfriend them because they are in high positions and she was afraid of what they might say about her.

4.5.2 Support from newsroom and authorities

Having a strong support network especially from their own newsroom seems to help journalists deal with online harassment. Having a strong support network helps them to put out work that is controversial. A senior journalist (KritiF, personal communication, May 23, 2022) said that when she put out articles that rubbed powerful people the wrong way, the support of her editor and her newsroom team was vital. Her editor even assured her that if someone took legal action against her due to one of her stories, they would support her. She said because there are also good people on the internet, she does not feel the need to defend herself publicly.

Another senior male journalist (RayM, personal communication, May 23, 2022) agreed with her point that the unwavering support from his colleagues and friends has hugely contributed to him not being bothered by online harassment at all.

This has not been the case for younger and less experienced journalists. LoriF (personal communication, May 10, 2022) shared that her supervisor disregarded her when she informed him of a past sexual misconduct of a fellow male journalist working in their organization. He questioned why she is reporting past sexual misconduct issues. She said that she had been living with it, and could not bear that so she resigned from her position. SuyogM (personal communication, February 19, 2022) shared that when he faced online sexual harassment by his supervisor in the newsroom, other colleagues did not care about the issue. The harassment did not stop even after he requested his supervisor to stop the abuse.

ManasM (personal communication, May 20, 2022) said that social media needs to be regulated properly. The line between one's freedom of expression and infringement of someone else's freedom of expression needs to be drawn. Code of values, regulations, ethics and guidelines should be set for social media according to him.

Two female journalists who faced online sexual harassment had sought support from authorities. However, their efforts bore no positive results.

GitaF (personal communication, May 24, 2022), shared that when she faced online sexual harassment a decade ago, she went to report the incident to the police. Four policemen gathered to look at the pornographic content posted on her social media by a former colleague who had gained access to her social media. Looking at this evidence of harassment she presented, they laughed looking at the images and told her this was normal. They asked her why she was even on the social media platform and to solve this issue, she should discontinue its use. She even visited the press council regarding this incident. However, all her efforts were in vain. Speaking of the incident, she said:

I lost my faith in the press council and women's associations since then. Nobody helped me perhaps because I belong to a lower caste family, from a village, just starting out as a journalist, with no support in the industry and a woman. I still cannot imagine how I spent those six months just trying to solve the issue. I changed my phone numbers. I deactivated my Facebook profile for my safety (GitaF, personal communication, May 24, 2022).

LoriF (personal communication, May 10, 2022) was contacted by a women's association when she publicly shared her sexual harassment story on social media. When she followed up with them to move things forward, they stopped responding. She pondered if the association only reached out at that point because it was a "hot topic" and if they were looking to state in their annual report that they reached out.

4.5.3 Quitting the job

Out of ten interviewed journalists, two female journalists resigned from their workplace due to the harassment they faced and went as far as to stay away from publishing altogether for certain period of time. Most female journalists who were interviewed, stopped using social media altogether for certain periods of time because of the mental stress caused by harassment.

A senior female journalist (GitaF, personal communication, May 24, 2022) moved towards another profession due to the trauma she had faced due to online harassment, when she first started. She quit journalism for a year. She said she liked the rush she got seeing her byline so she started writing again as a ghost writer after a year. She also joined a magazine which had a very small distribution. She chose to write for the particular magazine to limit her own audience. From her experience, it is better for her to leave a toxic environment. Regarding her current attitude towards leaving jobs, she said:

If someone in the media organization tries to limit how I write or the topics I choose to write on, I resign. If I do not like the work environment, I immediately quit. Just four months ago, I left a job because I found out the organization was affiliated to a political party and did not want me to be critical of the government. A magazine I used to write for some time back hinted that I was writing like an activist and I should change my ways, so I quit that job too (GitaF, personal communication, May 24, 2022).

4.5.4 Normalization of harassment

Some journalists at the start of the interview said that they had never faced online harassment. However, during the course of the interview, they gave many examples of online harassment they had faced. They were themselves surprised they had so many instances to share but did not recognize these instances as harassment when it was happening to them. Even when they gave examples of harassment, they started by saying they were unsure if this is harassment.

KritiF (personal communication, May 23, 2022), a senior female journalist, shared that she has taken digital safety training course. Thus, she is more aware when she gets harassed and how to deal with it. She shared that most people are not even aware that they are being harassed.

A female journalist said that because she works in online news sector, it is "normal to face harassment and you just have to do your job" (ShreyaF, personal communication, February 19, 2022). She added that female journalists may also ignore their male colleagues inappropriately touching them, because "they feel so used to it" (ShreyaF, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

SursaF (personal communication, February 19, 2022) shared that she has received derogatory and negative comments but she did not perceive them as harassment. She revealed that due to these comments, she does not feel secure as a journalist. She added when she

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publishes on sensitive topics, she is scared about how people are talking about it. However, she concluded "Maybe it cannot be called harassment" (SursaF, personal communication, February 19, 2022).

GitaF (personal communication, May 24, 2022), another senior female journalist, shared that she did not realize that she was being harassed by her senior male colleague when he used to call her very late at night to query what her next day looked like. She thought it was work calling and did not properly understand his intentions. However, she now informs her colleagues not to message her on social media outside work hours.

She added that in her experience, a majority of people do not understand the meaning of consent and harassment.

In a village, a young girl may not know she is being harassed when someone pinches her cheeks, pulls her, hugs her intimately without her consent and touches her inappropriately. She excuses the behavior reasoning it is her brother or teacher. She may not think too much of it. Many do not know they are harassing someone online. I have even received messages from my online connections asking for forgiveness for their past actions, informing me how they did not realize they had demonstrated harassing behavior. (GitaF, personal communication, May 24, 2022)

4.5.5 Responding to harassers directly

LoriF (personal communication, May 10, 2022) has called out many of her perpetrators on social media. She said that it is not about strength and courage to call out but when she got triggered, she shared her harassment stories on social media publicly. But she shared that "you have to call out at the cost of your job and your sanity. You need to call out at the cost of

everything good that is happening to you. Things don't remain good once you start calling out" (LoriF, personal communication, May 10, 2022).

According to GitaF (personal communication, May 24, 2022), many of her online connections are not self-aware.

> As soon as I go online, some men would just video call. If I do not respond, they would ask "What do you think of yourself?" Even if I do not respond, they keep messaging me without any reason. I wrote on Facebook four years ago that if you call or text me without any reason repeatedly then that is also online harassment. I requested my connections to think if they are committing this form of harassment. People just stopped talking to me. They said that I was rude and some were worried I may call them out publicly. (GitaF, personal communication, May 24, 2022)

SursaF (personal communication, June 21, 2022) shared that she has had direct confrontation with her interviewees who harass her. If she writes a negative piece about them, they reprimand her and make her feel intimidated when she goes to interview them again. She responds professionally informing them that it is nothing personal.

A senior journalist (ManasM, personal communication, May 20, 2022) shared that when his company became a victim of organized harassment, he conceded to their demand. Harassers claimed his company's logo represented a religious symbol. They accused the company of taking bribes from followers of that religion. They expressed suspicions that the company was writing with foreign interests rather than national interest. The company responded by changing their logo and updating it on their social media. Only after that, the harassment over the logo stopped. He says that the reason they changed the logo was so that the company is not perceived as being biased by their audience. He wanted to avert the risk of being termed as corrupt. He thought that

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important topics they publish would be overlooked by their audience if the logo stayed the same (ManasM, personal communication, May 20, 2022).

4.6 Other factors affecting online harassment than gender

Journalists mentioned a few factors that are important to consider while analyzing online harassment cases. Along with gender, these factors also have an impact on online harassment in Nepal according to the journalists.

Language is a factor that was mentioned. Nepali is the official language of Nepal and some interviewees who publish in English language said that because they write in English, they already have a limited readership. Thus, they are subjected to lower scrutiny and receive less frequent backlash compared to those who publish in Nepali language.

Type of covered topics by the journalist also seems to have an impact on online harassment. Journalists were of the opinion that those who write on soft issues and articles that are not controversial faced less online harassment. KritiF (personal communication, May 23, 2022) pondered that because she was not writing hard hitting pieces a decade ago, she did not face online harassment early in her career. RayM (personal communication, May 23, 2022) also said that when he started his career around 2005, he was not writing anything controversial so he did not face online harassment related to his work. This reason could have also contributed to male journalists distrusting female journalists to fearlessly write on hard issues.

4.6.1 Level of work experience

Work experience level seems to play a role in the level and type of harassment, how the harassment is perceived and how it is dealt with, especially for male journalists. The two men who had spent under five years in the industry had a stronger reaction to online harassment and said they were mentally stressed about it. Whereas the other three men who have worked for

more than a decade in the journalism industry said they have developed a thick skin towards the harassment. They had also secured powerful positions in the industry. They said that because they were working at an editorial level where their bylines were not appearing so frequently, they were getting lesser attacks.

Also, ManasM (personal communication, May 20, 2022) said that as he is "matured", he knew what to expect and did not face emotional distress when faced with online harassment. Rather, he worries regarding what impact it could have on his career, meaning if politicians in high level positions would agree to be interviewed by him, if he published a critical piece on them. He does not worry what the politician's followers are saying about him on social media (personal communication, May 20, 2022).

Unfortunately for women, even longer experience did not seem to have made an impact. The women said that when they faced harassment in the beginning of their career, they did not either know how to react properly to the harassment, report it or did not gain proper support to deal with it. With experience, they learnt how to deal with the harassment better. However, for them, the mental strain of facing online harassment does not seem to have reduced with experience.

4.6.2 Social status and reporting location

Social status and location of a journalist were reported as influencing online harassment that a journalist is subjected to and how they decide to deal with it. Journalists shared that those from the capital and outside of capital face different types of harassment and the harassment is on a different level. Journalists from outside of Kathmandu may also not have proper resources or security to deal with harassment. If a journalist with higher social status, for example, from a higher caste or someone with a good support system, faces harassment, then they have tools to

properly deal with it. They may not be negatively affected in the same way as journalists from a lower social status.

A senior male journalist said this when asked why he was not bothered by online harassment at all (RayM, personal communication, May 23, 2022):

As a man, it is much easier to ignore online harassment, right? Especially as a man from Kathmandu belonging to a high caste family, a man who has access to all kinds of support systems, who has friends and colleagues who will help you and support you should you need it, it really helps. Just having access to that kind of support system really helps. I am sure that is not the case with everyone. It is not as easy for people who are not from Kathmandu or reporting in the rural areas, who do not have access to these kinds of support systems or networks. For them dealing with online harassment is probably much harder. (RayM, personal communication, May 23, 2022)

He further added that he has been based in Kathmandu, but he has traveled a lot while reporting before. He said, "It does tend to get a little scarier and much more difficult when you are outside of Kathmandu" (RayM, personal communication, May 23, 2022).

AmarM (personal communication, April 6, 2022) also said that female journalists and journalists from marginalized communities especially face online harassment. He said "Marginalization can happen based on gender, language and ethnicity" (AmarM, personal communication, April 6, 2022).

Some female journalists clearly stated that people from outside of Kathmandu faced more online harassment. KritiF (personal communication, May 23, 2022) took extra measures while reporting from outside of Kathmandu, changing her profile photo to display a plant instead of her own photo. She said she did that because, "People outside of Kathmandu are not as open-

minded. These are intricate communities that can create problems for you if they perceive you as someone who is writing against societal norms".

Discussion and Conclusion

This research hoped to examine online harassment experiences of male and female journalists in Nepal. The research set out to find the forms of online harassment male and female journalists face in their work, its impacts on them, and strategies the journalists employed to handle it. It was also of research interest to find if there are any differences in online harassment that male and female journalists face in Nepal. Though there has been research done on online harassment experiences of journalists in Nepal, research comparing online harassment experiences of male and female journalists in Nepal is completely missing. The research hoped to fill this gap in study.

For this qualitative research, snowball sampling was used to recruit five male and five female journalists. The journalists had at least two years of work experience in Nepali media industry. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with them online, to gather primary data. Their names were changed to protect privacy as this is a sensitive topic. The transcribed interviews were coded using inductive coding approach. This was used for analysis and to answer these research questions.

Main research question:

What are the forms of online harassment that male and female journalists face in their professional work in Nepal?

Sub-questions:

i) How does online harassment faced by male and female journalists differ and impact them?

ii) What strategies do they employ to handle online harassment?

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The most common forms of harassment that journalists in Nepal mentioned facing are cyberstalking, sexual harassment, gendered harassment, hacking and gaslighting. Compared to male journalists, female journalists had faced more gendered and sexual harassment. Some female journalists in this research revealed they had received rape threats at certain point in their careers. All of them had faced sexual and gendered harassment. Only one out of five interviewed male journalists revealed facing sexual harassment.

Uggen and Blackstone (2004, p. 64) in their article "Sexual harassment as a gendered expression of power" state that "Adult women remain the most frequent targets of classic sexual harassment markers, such as unwanted touching and invasion of personal space". Feminist theories suggest harassment is a type of social control. Harassment reinforces women's inferior status in society, including in sectors of education, social relationships, and employment (Benson & Thomson, 1982). Thus, it contributes to maintaining a patriarchal and sexist society by supporting female subordination and male dominance (Fineran, 2002; Meyer, 2008). In this research, female journalists cited multiple examples of invasion of their privacy and physical space and sexual harassment by male colleagues.

Interviewed journalists said that generally female journalists face more online harassment than men. There were also differences in what the harassers mostly focused on for male and female journalists. For female journalists, harassers frequently questioned their writing capabilities and credibility. Character assassination was used against them in an attempt to silence them. Koirala (2020) also found in her research that a weapon frequently used to silence female journalists in Nepal was character assassination. According to Nadim and Fladmoe (2019), women are also targeted for "who they are" rather than "what they think" which has a silencing effect on the entire gender. For male journalists, harassers mostly seemed to focus on

the content of their articles and accuse them of being corrupt. Koirala (2020) states that there is a public and private divide and in a patriarchal society like Nepal, there are still reservations regarding women taking up the public space. Thus, there is an attempt to silence them online.

Journalists should be writing without fear or favor; however, online harassment can instill a fear in journalists to write openly. Adams (2017) wrote that speed of communication, ability to post anonymously, direct online reach to the journalists, inadequate regulation and law enforcement have contributed to exacerbate the problem of online harassment for journalists. This was also expressed by journalists in this research who presented examples of how people used to visit newsrooms in case of grievances, and now, public just searches for the journalists' social media page to write all kinds of unfiltered negative comments, most times not even bothering to hide behind anonymity.

For male journalists, online harassment impacted use of social media but did not have much impact on their work. They were more careful of what they posted on social media same as female journalists. However, none reported leaving their jobs, writing for a smaller audience, or doubting their topic selection as a result of the online harassment they faced. Whereas at least one of these were true for all interviewed female journalists. Literature showed that effects of online harassment is stronger for women than men (Bartlett, Norrie, Patel, Rumpel, & Wibberley, 2014; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019). Judith Butler (2014, p. 111) wrote that "certain populations are effectively targeted as injurable (with impunity)".

Most journalists said that online users harass journalists to silence them. Journalists also mentioned mental health damage and fears of physical harm, judgement, being discredited as other main impacts of online harassment for them.

The topic of sexual harassment for male journalists also requires more attention. A male journalist revealed facing sexual harassment by his work supervisor. He was embarrassed about this incident. He believed that because he was considered feminine at his workplace and due to his mental health state, he was bullied at his workplace and his supervisor made sexual comments at him. He feared that people outside his workplace would also think of him as feminine if his colleagues shared this with them. Research by Zucker et al. (1997) found that there is less tolerance for men not conforming to their gender standards than for women. Research by Glick et al. (2007) found that men tended to reject their feminine traits to avoid being bullied. This is gender role harassment.

Online harassment that female journalists face from fellow journalists and their audience has hindered their professional progress. They have felt isolated and alone. Two have reported the sexual harassment they faced to authorities without receiving any justice. Rather they have been questioned why they are bringing this up and been called 'rude' and 'attention-seekers'. Nainar (2013) in her article "Patriarchy in South Asia" wrote that a woman's character is judged by how demure she is, and character of a female sexual harassment survivor is often brought into question even in court. Only a "good" woman is considered worthy of protection of law (Nainar, 2013).

The results revealed that when female journalists decide to report, they have to put their honor, job and physical security at stake. Thus, female journalists tend to not share their sexual harassment stories openly. Regarding honor in South Asia, Dietrich (2004) wrote that it is one of the most important ideals in the subcontinent. Women's conduct can make the family lose or gain honor. Their undesirable behavior can bring shame and dishonor to the family forever (2004). Since their behavior is so tightly controlled and a female victim's character is questioned,

this can hinder female journalists to report any sexual misconduct they face. Equality Now and Dignity Alliance International report (2021) also says that the pressure is on the woman to uphold "moral" values.

Learning about how fellow female journalists do not receive justice or are bullied for sharing their stories discourages female journalists from sharing their own experiences. Nadim and Fladmoe (2019) in their article also wrote that witnessing other women face online harassment can have a silencing effect on the entire gender, as they perceive themselves as being a part of the vulnerable group. Also, they found even the awareness that other women were bullied when they expressed their opinions online can make another woman scared to express her opinions online (2019). In this research too, female journalists shared that they would tell their friends if something happened but would not share such stories publicly.

Female journalists have shared experiences of sexual and gendered harassment from fellow male journalists whose work they may have admired. This harassment they face within the industry limits the professional connections they could make. Adams (2017) also wrote that there are physical barriers for women to do their job and progress in their profession due to this diminished networking. This could negatively impact their professional learning and progress. Female journalists have shared that they have to be very careful about who they can trust. In Adam's (2017) article, a female journalist shared that she could not meet sources as they thought it is a date. In this study, most female journalists had turned their public online profiles into private ones after they faced online harassment.

When the female journalists then limit their social media usage, leave the journalism industry or stop using social media, it affects their professional growth. This further increases gender gap in Nepali media industry, which is already heavily male dominated. Female

journalists revealed that they had taken drastic steps such as discontinuing use of social media, leaving jobs, writing for a smaller audience and not posting anything personal on social media. Reports have shown that in Nepal, online harassment is seen as a 'first world problem' and the government has not taken any concrete action for safety of female journalists (Koirala, 2020).

Social media is an important tool for a journalist's career (Molyneux et al., 2019). Literature review showed that journalists can build human brands which can bring economically benefit the media houses (Klaß and Wellbrock, 2019). Additionally, they can share stories and connect with their leads and audiences directly using social media (Koirala, 2020). Interviewees in the research shared that this is true for them too. In addition to that, they mentioned that social media helps them remain updated on current news.

Journalists revealed that it is very common for them to face online harassment however, not enough resources are available for them to combat it. Especially for younger and less experienced journalists, their mental health seemed to be impacted more negatively by experiences of online harassment compared to older and more experienced journalists. They also did not have a good support system and understood how they could properly handle online harassment. They may also be subjected to more online harassment as their byline appears in the newspaper whereas an editor's byline may not appear. This finding that junior-level journalists are more likely to face online harassment than their counterparts is in line with the finding in Koirala's (2020) research.

Journalists also seem to be unaware about the definition of harassment and recognize harassment to take proper steps to combat it. They may even fail to recognize that they are being harassed. Though they feel negatively affected by it, they consider that it is a part of their job, leading to normalization of harassment. Previous research has also shown that journalists

consider online harassment a part of their job, as the industry is dismissive of journalists complaining about harassment and criticism from the public (Binns, 2017). Journalism industry prides itself on this toughness (Binns, 2017).

Senior journalists stressed the need for more training and awareness regarding the forms and cases of online harassment. They also mentioned that policies on online harassment is needed in the media organizations so that internal harassment can be properly reported leading to negative consequences for harassers. They emphasized the need for journalists to learn about digital safety. Some female interviewees mentioned that because they knew about digital safety, this helped them to be prepared regarding tackling online harassment. It made them feel safer too.

This research is not without limitations. As this research used snowball sampling which relies on small number of seed participants to further recruit other participants, this research process faces the risk of being distorted from the beginning. The research does not claim to be representative and generalizable for all Nepali journalists because the research only had ten participants, eight of whom work from the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu. As evident from the interviews of participants, the harassment faced by journalists based out of the capital may be different and harsher.

As the sample size is small, the researcher hopes the results are treated with caution. For a more representative sample, a larger sample size would be required with a random selection of the interviewees. The researcher only focused on the experiences of ten interviewees to answer the research questions. Also, the female journalists were on an average combined younger and less experienced than the male journalists in this research. This age and work experience gap could influence their experience with social media and their online harassment experience.

Future research could include a larger sample size, taking into consideration journalists' age, work level experience, reporting location, gender (including members from LGBTQIA+ community) and social status. These factors were mentioned by journalists themselves as influencing online harassment experience, impacts of the online harassment and strategies to handle online harassment.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for semi-structured interview

Information regarding age, gender; Providing information on the aim of the research to interviewee

How long have you worked in the media industry and in which capacity?

Which social media platforms are you actively present in?

How often do you use social media and for what purpose?

Do you think social media is important for a Nepali journalist to progress in their career? How?

In your experience, how commonly do Nepali media professionals face online harassment?

Are you aware of online harassment cases in your professional environment (even if you have not experienced it yourself)?

Do you think social media makes online harassment easier? How?

Do you think that online harassment is influenced by gender in Nepal? Can you please elaborate?

Have you faced any online harassment while working as a journalist (even if the online harassment is not related to your work)?

If **yes to the above question**, then I asked questions below:

Can you please give some instances of when you faced online harassment?

How did you respond to the harassment?

Due to online harassment, have you limited the use of social media in any way?

Has online harassment affected your work or your way of using social media?

Why do you think you have faced this online harassment?

If **no to the question**, then I asked these questions:

Can you think of any instances in your life when you were uncomfortable with someone's comment or behavior towards you on social media?

Why do you think you have not faced online harassment?