



Final Report on

A Webinar Course on Disaster Journalism

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As the need for sensitizing media students on Disaster Journalism and Crisis Communication (especially in the context of Covid-19 pandemics-induced difficulties in Nepal) was realized, the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at **Kantipur City College (KCC)** conducted a webinar course in collaboration with **Talbot Campus, Bournemouth University**, England from 29 April till 1 May 2020. A total of 45 students and former graduates participated in the course, most of them being directly into mainstream journalism.

Pandemic and health-related media products that are comprehensible and useful to people in general are required in larger scale than ever before, but the working journalists in Nepal were seen to only seldom focus on what actually is required. The need for empirical, science-backed background-knowledge of health issues was highly realized.

In this backdrop, the webinar course on Disaster Journalism was conducted as a timely step to sensitize them about the theme and motivate them to produce media products which could be very useful in times of public health crisis.

Objectives

- To familiarize participants with public health issues in times of crisis
- To transmit skills to participants for designing communication strategy including, among others, messaging on communicable diseases, epidemics, pandemics
- To motivate media students to be instrumental in providing reliable health information in times of disasters and crisis

Outcomes

- The conceptual idea of disaster journalism and its significance, especially for disaster-prone nation like Nepal, was informed and realized.
- The need for building better editorial/newsroom/journalistic resilience has been agreed upon by all the participants.

Lessons Learnt

The knowledge and sensitization significance of this program was accepted by participants overall. This section includes only those of logistics:

- The webinar course was recorded, but the recordings could not be shared on other platforms due to some issues with sound. It had however been mostly clear during the webinar.
- Issues with internet connectivity interfered during certain sessions.
- The reading materials were to be distributed beforehand. The links to the materials were hyperlinked in the course outline itself and files supporting the hyperlinks were sent, but there were confusion among participants still.

Methodology

A preliminary discussion with Bournemouth University came with an idea for a web-based course on disaster journalism. Then an outline course was designed targeted at meeting the afore-mentioned objectives and discussed internally among the journalism department at KCC. Upon finalizing this from KCC end, it was shared with Bournemouth University. After receiving additional reading materials from the university, they were incorporated along with some Nepal-related studies in the webinar course.

An online meeting of faculty members of the Department with KCC administration was also conducted to inform and plan logistics for webinar course. The original plan of conducting the course on 24-26 April 2020 was postponed to address the interest of former graduates. A registration form for the interested participants was called via this link: <https://forms.gle/BJMPVnf9dUrVptnp7>. Altogether 40 responses were obtained via the form and others confirmed their availability on other platforms. They were provided ZOOM meeting details via email and the webinar course was conducted on the newly scheduled date.

Upon completion of the course, a final evaluation form was shared (can be seen on this link: <https://forms.gle/FvYEeW7DLxNDKCZTA>). We received only 16 responses of the course evaluation. Further reading materials were also emailed to participants as a Google Drive link.

Course Outline/Program Schedule

	Particulars	Mentor(s)	Method	Expected Result(s)
29 April	What is crisis? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potter, D. & Richhiardi, S. (2009). Disaster and Crisis Coverage. International Center for Journalists. 	Prof. RK Regmee	Lecture	Theoretical Understanding and Evaluation
	Why crisis communication? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potter, D. & Richhiardi, S. (2009). Disaster and Crisis Coverage. International Center for Journalists. 			
29 April	Issues during crisis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sreedharan, C. & Thorsen, E. (2018). Voices from Nepal: Lessons in Post-Disaster Journalism. Poole: Center for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University. Sreedharan, C.; Thorsen, E. & Sharma, N. (2019). Disaster Journalism: Building Resilience in Nepal. Bournemouth University & UNESCO Office in Kathmandu. 	Janardan Bista	Discussion	
	Media as a tool for crisis communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redlener, I. (2016). Covering Recovery: The Challenges of Preparing for Major Disasters. DART Center for Journalism & Trauma. Reporting on Disasters. (2016). Earth Journalism Network. 	Prof. RK Regmee	Lecture	Practical Application
30 April	Dynamics of crisis communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neason, A. (2020). In a pandemic, what is essential journalism? Columbia Journalism Review. 	Yek Raj Pathak	Lecture	Theoretical Understanding
	Case Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gorkha Earthquake Covid-19: Lockdown + Social Distancing 	Abhas DR, Rajiv Timalsina	Discussion	Understanding and Application
1 May	Disaster Journalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sreedharan, C.; Thorsen, E. & Sharma, N. (2019). Disaster Journalism: Building Resilience in Nepal. Bournemouth University & UNESCO Office in Kathmandu. 	Chindu Sreedharan	Lecture/ Discussion	Theoretical Understanding
	Strategies for preparedness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potter, D. & Richhiardi, S. (2009). Disaster and Crisis Coverage. International Center for Journalists. Redlener, I. (2016). Covering Recovery: The Challenges of Preparing for Major Disasters. DART Center for Journalism & Trauma. Reporting on Disasters. (2016). Earth Journalism Network. RTDNA Guidelines 	Prof. RK Regmee	Lecture	Practical Application
	Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potter, D. & Richhiardi, S. (2009). Disaster and Crisis Coverage. International Center for Journalists. Redlener, I. (2016). Covering Recovery: The Challenges of Preparing for Major Disasters. DART Center for Journalism & Trauma. Reporting on Disasters. (2016). Earth Journalism Network. 	Shreeman Sharma, Abhas DR	Discussion	Practical Application

Proceedings

A brief inauguration and introductory program was conducted with short remarks by Prof. Rama Krishna Regmee, Dr. Chindu Sreedharan, Prof. Einar Thorsen, Suman Katwal (Chairman, KCC), Dr. Pralhad Karki (Managing Director, KCC), Raju Kattel (Principal, KCC).

At least two participants themselves journalists were on duty during the webinar. They shared on difficulties that they had to face during their journalistic works/reporting, both at news-desk and at the field.

Prof. Rama Krishna Regmee took a lecture on the idea of crisis, followed by crisis communication. He defined crisis as a difficult time for any country where people, economy, surrounding are affected and differentiated epidemics, pandemics, famine, earthquakes, floods, landslides etc. as natural ones, and civil war, revolutions, uprising etc. as artificial.

Communication during such time is required to make people aware and encourage them to take precautions. He asserts the informational role of media as crucial at this time.

A session by Janardan Bista focused more on discussion with participants that enlisted different issues communicators face during crisis as follows:

- Lack of transportation means for news coverage/reporting
- Spread of false information
- Selling of emotional stories and making money
- Threats of security, safety for the journalists

On the next day Prof. RK Regmee discussed on media as a tool for crisis communication. He states that inefficiency in journalism during crisis can result in problems, and if it is well done, it can be a platform for crisis response, management and recovery. He focused on media role during three phases of crisis, viz. preparedness, during crisis and post crisis or recovery period. He focused on need of a structure for preparedness and highlighted safety as primary essence during crisis.

Yek Raj Pathak discussed on why this Covid-19 pandemic crisis is different than any other crisis, in the perspective of communication. Building on that Abhas D Rajopadhyaya and Rajiv Timalina discussed on journalism during lockdown and social distancing. The discussion clearly pointed that media and journalists were not prepared for this kind of situation.

The final day started with a theoretical introduction on disaster journalism by Dr. Chindu Sreedharan of Bournemouth University. Developing on Dr. Sreedharan and Prof. Einar Thorsen's research works on disaster journalism during 2015 Gorkha earthquake, he linked the idea of disaster journalism with editorial resilience. Five years after the quake, he asked are Nepalese journalists better prepared for disaster reporting.

Prof. Regmee shared on strategies for preparedness and identified fake news, information flood, social media interference, visual communication among others as topics to be discussed during crisis. He pointed that journalists should also focus on health information, health care system and community health system.

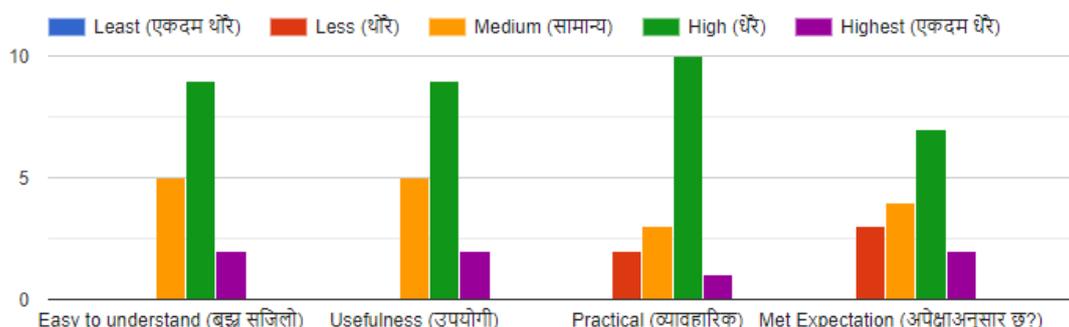
One of the participants and a MA MCJ student is currently serving in Nepal Police. He shared on how general people's perception on police during lockdown is shaped by media as uninformed and care-free.

In the last session, Bigyan Sharma presented on safety of journalists during disaster. His focus was on disaster plan in the newsroom, as a part of resilience. He stressed on the general safety measures of World Health Organization (WHO) and professional safety guidelines by International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) to be followed by journalists. All sessions were followed by brief discussions.

The closing session had brief remarks of acknowledgements and discussion on prospects of future programs building on this knowledge. Prof. Rama Krishna Regmee, Dr. Chindu Sreedharan, Prof. Einar Thorsen, Suman Katwal (Chairman, KCC), Pralhad Karki (Managing Director, KCC), Raju Kattel (Principal, KCC), Rajiv Timalina (MA MCJ Program Coordinator, KCC) and Bigyan Sharma addressed the closing ceremony.

Evaluation

Out of the 16 responses obtained via Google form as an evaluation of the course, almost everyone have rated the course high on parameters of ease of understanding, usefulness, practicability, meeting expectation. The participants marked the course 8 out of 10 in an average, with few scoring 10 out 10 too.



In rating individual sessions, most participants have highly rated Prof. RK Regmee's and Dr. Sreedharan's sessions. Useful feedbacks as lessons to be learnt include the following (name is not disclosed):

- The sessions need to compare [the theory] with local situation. How we practice it at the local level? It would have been useful if we had more discussion about this [local] situation.
- The session was very fruitful for newcomers like us in this sector. However, somewhere I felt few sessions were cut off.
- The contents did not come up more on Corona pandemic specifically, but it has certainly sensitized us. It would have been good to hear from working journalists participating in the program. *(Translated from Nepali language.)*

Media Coverage

Some mostly online media covered this program based on information shared on other platforms and social media, and talks with some of us. The following is a list of the online coverage (both in English and Nepali language portals) of the webinar course program:

- FeedTherapy = www.feedtherapy.com/2020/05/3-day-webinar-on-disaster-journalism.html
- KathmanduExpress = <https://www.kathmanduexpress.com/archives/7572>
- KCC website = <http://kcc.edu.np/3-day-webinar-on-disaster-journalism-concludes/>
- NepaleKhabar = <https://nepalekhabar.com/2020/05/94373>
- NepalNews = <https://www.nepalnews.com/news/nation/23180-2020-05-02-00-51-16>
- Newspolar = <https://newspolar.com/news/detail/145019>
- Hamrakura = <https://hamrakura.com/news-details/78084/2020-05-03>

Sustainability

KCC is committed to insertion of the themes mentioned above, as part of embedding contemporary topics, into formal courses of MA MCJ in various semesters – Specialized Reporting, Public (Affairs) Journalism (in the fourth semester), Project Works (in all semesters), and Scripting for Media (Media Production courses provided by Kantipur City College as non-credit courses). This could ensure sustainability, for years to come, of disaster journalism, crisis communication and preparedness for the same.

Acknowledgements

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