

## **Rethinking Public Welfare Advertisement in Nepal:**

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From Media Welfare to Public Welfare

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## **ACRONYMS**

ABC	Audit Bureau of Circulation
ACORAB	Association of Community Radio Broadcasters
BAN	Broadcasting Association of Nepal
HLMRC	High Level Media Recommendation Commission
LPICS	Long-Term Policy of Information and Communication Sector
MDF	Media Development Fund
PCN	Press Council Nepal

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Nepali government has been distributing welfare advertisements to the media since 1959. The main aim behind this practice was to provide economic support or media sustenance in the absence of alternative sources of revenue for media houses at that time. But the economic scenario of Nepali media has changed largely in comparison to the 1950s and the 1960s. Yet, a huge amount of public funds is still being spent in the name of welfare advertisement.

By analyzing policy documents related to welfare advertisements, and by comparing it to the nature of public welfare advertising in other countries, this paper shows that it is the media that is benefiting the most from the distribution of the advertisements as opposed to the public. It argues that instead of media sustenance, public welfare should be the main purpose of the distribution of welfare advertising. To ensure public welfare, it suggests ways to reform the current practice of distributing public welfare advertising and highlights the importance of public awareness messages reaching the right audience.

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## Introduction

The Nepali government spends a considerable amount of public funds each year in the name of public welfare advertising. According to the Red Book of 2014-2015, it earmarked NRs 16, 16, 25,000 to distribute to the Nepali media in return for carrying welfare advertising across multiple mediums. While public welfare advertising is common in other countries such as the US and the UK, the existing practice in Nepal largely differs from international norms. Elsewhere, public welfare advertising is used to disseminate messages that raise awareness around issues such as health, sanitation, natural disasters, and is ultimately aimed at benefiting the public. But, the history of welfare advertising in Nepal and its current nature indicates that the main objective of the advertising has been to offer funds to the media as opposed to contributing to the general wellbeing of the citizenry. This paper argues that public welfare should be the main objective of welfare advertising and suggests ways to change the existing nature of public service advertising in Nepal to ensure that it serves the public instead of the media.

This paper analyses how the policy on welfare advertising has changed over time by reviewing policy documents related to distribution of the advertisement, and their subsequent implementation. It focuses on the state institutions that are responsible for implementing the policies, the recipients that are benefiting from the policy, and the process of the distribution. By reflecting on the social, political and economic contexts of policy making, it shows how the nature of distribution of welfare advertising is serving the interests of the Nepali state and the media while ignoring public welfare. By presenting evidence of poor policy outputs and examining inter-linkages among different actors like the state, the media, and the audience, against a backdrop of changing socio-political contexts, the paper argues that public welfare is not the main interest of both the Nepali state and the Nepali media in the course of distributing and disseminating these advertisements.

## Public Welfare Advertising and Its Distribution

The Department of Information has been distributing public welfare advertising to Nepali media since 1959, but the phrase governmental welfare advertising or “Lok Kalyankari Bigyapan” was not yet in use until 2003, when the Long-Term Policy of Information and Communication Sector (LPICS) referred to such advertising as public welfare advertisements. Within the policy, the section on ‘Long-Term Policy on Advertisement’, defines welfare advertisement as “any advertisements published not for business motive but from a social welfare viewpoint by focusing on agriculture, health, education, public interest, and information and good wishes and condolences”.<sup>1</sup> This definition itself is broad as it covers advertisements disseminated on behalf of both the private and public sectors and it must be noted that messages of congratulations and condolence do not fall within the understood realm of public welfare advertising.

Public welfare advertising is a global phenomenon though its name and practice may differ in different places. In the US and the UK they are referred to as Public Service Announcement or Advertising (PSA), and media channels often carry these advertising messages free of cost but there are also instances when they are compensated for it. The idea of PSA became popular in the US during the Second World War. From 1943-1945, the name of the Advertising Council formed two years before the war was changed to War Advertising Council in order to contribute to the war efforts. The council executed campaigns to promote

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<sup>1</sup> HMG 2003

war bonds, and to encourage men and women to join the army.<sup>2</sup> Even after the war the council continued to prepare many public service advertisings (PSA) which the council claims “changed a nation”. Some of its PSA campaigns included the 'Smokey Bear' campaign related to wildfire prevention (1944), the 'Vince and Lorry' campaign that promoted the use of seat belts (1986), and the 'I am an American' campaign that was designed to invoke the feeling of pride and solidarity in being an American after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.<sup>3</sup>

But in the context of Nepal, the conception of public welfare advertising was based on a flawed premise. It began as a way to support the print media in an environment where advertisements from the private sector did not amount to much and newspapers were struggling to sustain themselves. The 1958 Press Commission report suggested government advertising as a possible solution for media sustenance against the harsh economic conditions. The report even expressed surprise at the existence of print journalism considering the lack of favourable conditions such as government support, economic investment, and other basic facilities.<sup>4</sup> The report termed the 1950s as a time of economic crisis for the Nepali media and urged the government to provide welfare advertising as a way to tackle the economic crisis. Probably as a direct result of the report, the government published one of its early welfare advertising messages in the Nepali magazine *Sharada* in March 1959.<sup>5</sup> The advertisement was issued by the Department of Publicity and Broadcasting and detailed the achievements of district and village-level development programs such as the construction of 911 schools and 376 libraries as well as immunization programs that treated over 50,000 people with small pox vaccines.

However, in 1978, the government decided to change the nature of its support to the media. The Nepali state stopped providing money to the newspapers in return for public service advertising and instead offered the newspapers concessions on the cost of newsprint sold by the National Trading Limited.<sup>6</sup> Documents show that in 1978, four categories of newspapers namely, dailies, weeklies, twice-a-weeklies and fortnightlies received concessions ranging from Rs. 450 to Rs. 1200 per month.<sup>7</sup>

Up until 1990, the year which also marked the end of the Panchayat system, newspapers continued to receive subsidised newsprints from the government. The concessions on newsprint had increased up to Rs. 1500 to Rs. 3000 a month. In February-March 1999, Press Council Nepal (PCN) came up with a criterion and a process to classify newspapers whereby the newspapers were graded out of a marking scale of 100 based on the pre-determined criterion. Some of the determining factors that shaped the criterion and qualified the newspapers to receive the subsidies were continuity, circulation, distribution area, language, content, the use of photo, quality of design, and professionalism.<sup>8</sup>

In 2001, one of the factors due to which the subsidy model was stopped and welfare advertisements were resumed is due to the open market policy that was introduced in 1990. Media houses were able to procure newsprint from the private sector and from outside of Nepal at a much lower cost compared to the subsidised newsprint offered by the Nepal Trade

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<sup>2</sup> Ziger 2003

<sup>3</sup> The Advertising Council, Inc. 2004

<sup>4</sup> Chapagain et al., 2004

<sup>5</sup> Devkota 1967, Dhungel 2012

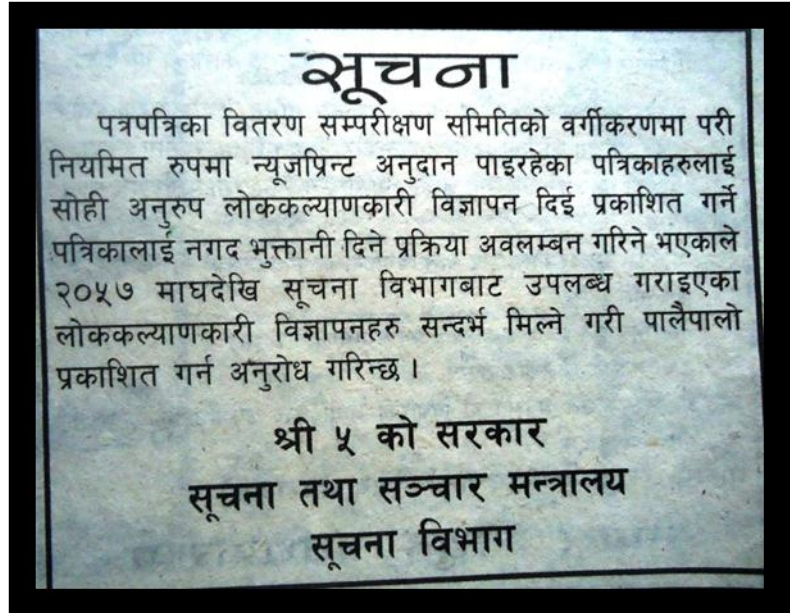
<sup>6</sup> Department of Information 2012

<sup>7</sup> Department of Information 2012

<sup>8</sup> PCN 1998

Limited. This led to the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) asserting pressure on the government to change the mode of support they were offering and the government relented to the pressure and began to distribute welfare advertising once again.

A team of journalists led by Taranath Dahal, the then General Secretary of Federation of Nepalese Journalists met with Mahesh Acharya, the Finance Minister at the time and demanded that welfare advertisements be distributed in exchange for money.<sup>9</sup> There was also an increase in the amount of money the media would receive in return for carrying the advertisements. As a result, *Khabar Kagaj*, a newspaper edited by Bal Mukunda Dev Pandey published a notice issued by the Ministry of Information and Communication on 25 June 2001, announcing that the newspapers that had been receiving subsidised newsprint would henceforth receive monetary compensation of similar value in return for welfare advertising. Besides the lobbying efforts, another reason cited for stopping the subsidies on newsprint was allegations that some newspapers had been selling the subsidised newsprint in the market.<sup>10</sup>



Source: *Khabar Kagaj*, January 25, 2001

According to Taranath Dahal, the model whereby the state paid the newspapers for carrying welfare advertising was better than offering subsidies or just financial support, in order to counter any influence or control the state might try to exert on the media landscape. Moreover, welfare advertising would serve the purpose of disseminating social messages for the welfare of the society.

However, the Long-Term Policy of Information and Communication Sector 2003 defined the practice as a way of “promoting public welfare advertisement dissemination to make a conducive environment for the competitive development of professional journalism”.<sup>11</sup> This definition did not take into account the role of welfare advertising in serving the public but instead focused on its role of supporting the media industry. This clearly shows that the main aim of the distribution of such advertisement was the development of Nepali media or media sustenance.

When dissemination of welfare advertising was first introduced in Nepal, the only medium that benefited from it was print, but with time other mediums such as radio and television also demanded a share of the advertising revenue. For example, three associations related to FM radio stations, the Broadcasting Association of Nepal (BAN), the Kathmandu Valley

<sup>9</sup> Name not mentioned 2000

<sup>10</sup> Acharya 2008a

<sup>11</sup> HMG 2003



Radio Broadcasters Forum, and the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB), had made demands in April 2009 for receiving public welfare advertising and the revenues that came with it. One of the arguments the demand letter made was that radio was also involved in disseminating news and views that ensured citizen's rights to information, and therefore, the state had to distribute welfare advertisements to radio as well.

The demand letter submitted to the government had defined welfare advertisement as the investment to assure right to information and press freedom. The letter read, "We are not clear how the Press Council of Nepal has defined welfare advertisements. We believe all activities of the Democratic Republic Government of Nepal should be for public welfare. We clearly have a view that the government should not reduce the investment to enable citizen's right to freedom of expression and right to information."<sup>12</sup> This shows that these associations linked the advertisements with people's right to information and they thought that the government had to provide them with these advertisements to protect these very rights. This link further complicated the understanding of the purpose of welfare advertising. Its purpose was now interpreted as a means to support the media so they could do their jobs thus diluting the real purpose of welfare advertising which is about disseminating messages of awareness to the public, a practice that can be distinguished from the publication of news.

The media saw welfare advertising intrinsically linked to its financial status and its ability to keep itself running. Moreover, even the state's definition of the role of welfare advertising had been centred on supporting the media as opposed to using advertising as a means to generate awareness for the public. For example, the guideline prepared to distribute the advertisement to electronic media mentions that one of the aims of such advertising is to help develop the media sector in Nepal. It also mentions that the development is desirable in order to disseminate information and news to the public. The guideline states, "The government has made a policy to distribute welfare advertisement in order to assure sustainable development of media that disseminates information and news to the public."<sup>13</sup>

While the function of welfare advertising seemed to contradict the actual understood purpose, even the nature of criterion put in place to classify different media was undoubtedly questionable. To date, the PCN has revised and replaced the original criterion of 1999 in 2003, 2008, 2010, and 2013, and to a certain extent the time of revisions can be linked with larger political changes in the country, compelling one to think about the nature of influence the state might want to exert using the financial support it was providing to media in the name of welfare advertising.<sup>14</sup> For example, the new criterion that was introduced in 2003 was at the time when former King Gyanendra was trying to consolidate his power and the Maoist insurgency was at its peak. The government decided to resume the provision of placing public welfare advertising and the core message disseminated to the public using this provision was to tackle 'terrorism'. These advertisements were designed to remind Nepali citizens about their duties in the society by creating an idea of a model citizen against the backdrop of an ongoing civil war.

The knowledge of audience demographics prior to placing an advertisement in select mediums is also questionable in the context of Nepal. Seeking information regarding multiple media channels prior to placing a public advertisement is a common international practice. The responsible state institution gathers information regarding audience demographics to ensure that the message is received by the right audience. But, in the context of Nepal, the

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<sup>12</sup> Samachar 2009

<sup>13</sup> Nepal Government 2010

<sup>14</sup> PCN 2003, PCN 2008, PCN 2010, PCN 2013

present criterion does not ensure that the right audience gets the right message. The current classification methods are more analytical of the media as opposed to the audience it reaches. For example, using the quality of the content or use of photography as ways to classify a newspaper, as opposed to gaining an insight of what age group reads that particular newspaper serve two completely different purposes. If the government had a message that was pertinent to the youth population of Nepal, it would benefit more from knowing the latter before placing the advertisement. This certainly demands rethinking in the way public welfare advertising is understood and used in Nepal. If the existing practice is not challenged and changed, misuse of public funds would continue in the name of public welfare advertising. In order to change the system, it is essential to understand the flaws that define it.

## Misguided Objective

The main objective of the distribution of this advertisement declared in policy documents has consistently been the sustenance of media. These documents do mention that people's right to information will be fulfilled by this distribution but practices show that the Nepali state is using this as a way to financially support the media.

Often, the main source of revenues for mainstream media is advertising, and advertisers choose appropriate media for their messages and services. During the 1970s, advertisements from private sector in Nepal were minimal and the state intervened to help the media through welfare advertisements and other forms of support. However, the advertising industry boomed in the 1990s, and the broadsheet dailies that started soon after, were in a position to take advantage of the burgeoning private sector. Advertising revenues from the private sector began to contribute greatly to the earnings of the media sector, helping it to sustain itself without the support of the state. But, the state continued its support towards the media in the form of subsidies and advertising by citing media plurality as one of the reasons. For example, Laxmi Bilash Koirala, the Director of Department of Information said during an interview that the department had to distribute welfare advertisements to ensure the diversity of the Nepali media sector.<sup>15</sup>

Nobody can deny the fact that the media sector in Nepal needs financial support to ensure diversity in voices, mediums, languages, and to improve the overall quality of the output from the sector. For this very reason, the Media Development Fund (MDF) was formed in October 1995 to mainly support newspapers published outside of the Kathmandu Valley through the seed money collected from the Danish Government and the Nepali Government. The fund was initiated to modernise and professionalise newspapers outside of the Kathmandu Valley by providing loans at a reasonable interest rate while establishing offset presses and supplying computers.<sup>16</sup> While the intention of the Media Development Fund was good, the process to access these funds was arduous and more importantly, media houses would probably be reluctant to take out a loan to consolidate themselves when they could be the recipients of direct advertising revenue in return of giving up some space for governmental advertising. If the government were serious about ensuring plurality and diversity in media, it would enable the Media Development Fund to offer grants to small and diverse media outlets in a transparent and unbiased manner by using the revenue it would make from the interests on loans offered to bigger media houses that might want to use the money for expansion or training purposes. But, the Media Development Fund is yet to

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<sup>15</sup> Laxmi Bilas Koirala, interview by Harsha Man Maharjan, the Department of Information, 11 January 2015

<sup>16</sup> Nepal Government 2009

innovate itself so that it can fill the void that would exist if the state were to radically change the way it views welfare advertising.

## The Relationship between the State and the Media

The role of media in a democracy is defined by its ability to be fiercely independent and unbiased but the dependence of the media sector on the state for funding under the guise of public welfare advertising compromises its ability to execute this role. Time and again, the Nepali state has used welfare advertising as a weapon to control or 'discipline' any recalcitrant elements within the media landscape. For example, in June 1960, according to Grishma Bahadur Devkota, the B.P. Koirala government stopped distributing advertisements to some newspapers that were critical of the government's policies.<sup>17</sup>

While it may be assumed that Devkota was biased towards B.P. Koirala or the Nepali Congress Party, since he was affiliated to the Communist Party even Madan Mani Dixit has mentioned in his memoir that Prime Minister Koirala provided him Rs. 600 every month, provided Dixit aligned himself to some of Koirala's ideologies.<sup>18</sup>

If we were to look at the way welfare advertising is used in countries such as the United States where the Advertising Council determines the nature of media any public service advertising demands, the practice in Nepal seems to be arbitrary following no structured method to maximize the impact of any public welfare message. It is imperative for the ministry, the PCN and the Department of Information to rethink the objective of public welfare advertising so that it works hard for the welfare of the public as opposed to the welfare of the media sector. There are multiple factors that contribute to the existing inefficiencies in the practice of public welfare advertising in Nepal and it would be essential to shed light on each of these factors in order to come up with a new approach to welfare advertising.

## The Mode of Classification

The Nepali state and the PCN have come up with various ways of classifying media to determine which media entity should receive revenue via public welfare advertising and to what degree. All modes of classification ignore the most important point which is the compatibility of the media with the specific message. If we were to assume that the main objective of public welfare advertising was to reach out to sections of the population with state endorsed messages that would contribute to their wellbeing, the main criteria for selection would be which media can reach out in the most effective way to the section of population that would benefit the most from that particular message. For example, if the message was related to creating awareness regarding traffic regulations, the most relevant audience would be people residing in urban centres of the country. This would mean that the most suitable place to run these advertisements would be media entities that have the largest reach in the desired geographic locations.

While the modes of classification designed by the PCN have evolved over time to give precedence to circulation and have accommodated local and regional newspapers over more subjective factors such as content or professionalism, there is still a long way to go. In 1999, the Press Council announced a criterion of 12 categories. Among these categories, circulation and press observation had the highest weight of 20 points out of the total of 100. Five other

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<sup>17</sup> Devkota 1967

<sup>18</sup> Dixit 2009

categories namely news and content, language, article, printing, and professionalism carried a weight of 10 points each and the remaining six categories like continuity, seniority, pages, distribution area, use of photos, and design each carried a weight of 5 points.<sup>19</sup> This criterion was revised in 2003, 2008, 2010, and 2013 and while there were no major changes through these revisions, in 2010 newspapers were classified further in terms of local, regional and national reach.<sup>20</sup> The change in 2010 gave priority to the circulation of newspapers. Whereas the directive related to the distribution of advertisements to electronic media was guided by the classification of FM radio stations. In the case of television, a proper criterion still does not exist.

Despite several revisions and amendments to the policy on distributing public welfare advertising, it has failed to acknowledge the fact that circulation or coverage is only a component of advertising. A large circulation does not necessarily guarantee reach to a targeted audience. In other words, access to a larger audience does mean that the right people get the right message.

Moreover, the present information on circulation or coverage is generally collected through forms sent to newspapers that voluntarily provide information on their own audience. This has resulted in reports of inflated audience figures presented by the media houses.<sup>21</sup> And there is no sophisticated method in place to gain a deeper understanding of the demographics of the audience, which means that any advertising carried in different media channels is just about presence as opposed to delivery of the message to a relevant audience. While there is a practice of assessing printing presses to check circulation figures, it is still not a sure way of getting accurate information.<sup>22</sup> This makes the existing way of procuring information on circulation of newspapers problematic. In the case of electronic media, there is no mechanism in place that conducts audience surveys, which means that the Department of Information have been distributing these advertisements without any clear idea of reach or audience demographics.

In the past, few people have tried to convince the government to relieve the PCN from its responsibility of classifying newspapers. Other media experts have also requested the government to opt for an Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) formed of the non-governmental sector.<sup>23</sup> Often media advertising agencies, the media and advertisers form the ABC in other countries and generally it is “an organization which acts independently to verify distribution/circulation sales numbers of print and other forms of online or digital media, and then disseminates this information to pertinent advertising markets.”<sup>24</sup>

In an interaction programme organised by Martin Chautari in 2007, Rajendra Dahal, the then chair of PCN shared that he had tried to convince the government that classifications should be excluded from the functions of the PCN as it took up almost all of the organization's budget and time and was often a cause for controversy. Dahal argued for releasing the PCN from its involvement in the ABC, which is responsible for classifying media channels on the basis of their circulation. PCN has come under regular attacks from publishers who are unhappy with the categories their media fell under and the subsequent loss in potential

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<sup>19</sup> PCN 1998

<sup>20</sup> PCN 2010

<sup>21</sup> Dhital 2010

<sup>22</sup> Shrestha 2010

<sup>23</sup> Dhungel 2013, Acharya 2008b

<sup>24</sup> Burlacu 2010

revenues from welfare advertising due to the classification. Moreover, during Dahal's tenure in the council, a 'Newspaper Classification and Criterion Suggestion Sub-committee' coordinated by Mahendra Bista was formed and it had provided short and long term suggestions regarding classifications. These suggestions were ways in which the recommendations of the High Level Media Recommendation Commission (HLMRC) could be implemented. The commission itself was formed on 13 June 2006, under the chair of Senior Advocate and member of the National Assembly, Radheshyam Adhikari. Before the committee of Bista was formed, the HLMRC suggested transforming the ABC by changing it into an independent authority that would include members representing the advertisers, publishers, consumers, media experts, journalists, the PCN and the government to avoid the PCN from any potential conflict of interest.<sup>25</sup> The commission's recommendations for the PCN in the short term were to implement the existing criterion strictly, and to conduct market surveys to vet the circulation data provided by the various media entities. It also suggested that the PCN to make the circulation figures of media public through its website. The government acted upon the short term suggestions to a certain degree but the long term suggestions related to creating an independent body for classifying circulation are yet to be addressed.

In addition to reforming the ABC, further research of various media outlets prior to placing welfare advertising should be a consideration for determining the most appropriate media for the concerned message. Media research helps to understand the audience profile of a medium and provides information on all three components of media: the medium, the message and the audience. Better knowledge of these components provides for better understanding of the relevant media suitable for disseminating specific messages. Audience surveys are one way of understanding media consumption. According to Binod Bhattarai, a media expert, expending huge amounts of public funds in the name of public welfare advertisement without understanding media consumption from an audience's perspective is a waste. He believes that the Nepali state must know whether the public is receiving the information disseminated through public welfare advertising. He further states, "It is also the state's duty to make these messages accessible to people who are living in places where there is limited access to different types of media."<sup>26</sup>

Audience research can be conducted through surveys and focus group discussions. To make welfare advertising more effective, the focus should be on "measuring audiences, identifying their socio-demographic distribution, and tracking issues such as attention flow and channel loyalty."<sup>27</sup> Data generated from such research methods should be the basis upon which the Nepali state picks an appropriate media outlet that best suits the message at hand.

## **The Quality and Effectiveness of Public Welfare Advertising**

A misguided aim and an inadequate evaluation process have affected the output of the policy on public welfare advertising. As the Nepali government has yet to acknowledge the true purpose of welfare advertising, it seems to have neglected the quality of the advertising as well, making it less effective and appealing to the audience it wishes to target. The disregard for the effectiveness of welfare advertising can be used to question whether or not the money being spent on it is being put to good use. If welfare advertising is being used just as a way to

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<sup>25</sup> Adhikari 2006

<sup>26</sup> Binod Bhattarai, interview by Harsha Man Maharjan, Kathmandu, November 5, 2014

<sup>27</sup> Kitzinger 2004

financially support the media, then the intent of public welfare is being compromised while large sums of money from the public funds is being wasted in the name of public good.

The huge investment in welfare advertising is difficult to justify when there is no clear understanding of the audience it is trying to reach. Furthermore, the poor quality of the advertisements should compel us to question whether the large sums of public funds spent on welfare advertising are being used for the right purpose.

The advertisements are targeted to appeal to all and to no one in particular. But, it is a fact that the audience is not a homogeneous group as these public service advertisements seem to depict. Instead, the audience can be segmented according to various indicators such as levels of education, geography, sex, language, etc. If the advertiser, which is the Nepali state in this context, is mindful of the heterogeneous nature of audience, the decisions regarding the nature of the advertising and the medium selected for it could be tailored according to the different demographics of the target audience. For example, the advert below in Box No. 1 is a message for the people who live in the plains of Nepal, warning them of an imminent cold wave.

#### BOX 1

तराईमा शीतलहर प्रकोपको रूपमा बढ्दै गएको छ, शीतलहरबाट बच्न समयमा नै सावधान होऔं ।

नेपाल सरकार  
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय  
सूचना विभाग

#### BOX 2

सारा नेपाली मिलेर अन्याय, अत्याचारको विरुद्धमा लड्नु पर्छ र यस्तो अन्याय, अत्याचारबाट मुक्त हुनुपर्छ । यही नै समयको माग हो ।

नेपाल सरकार  
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय  
सूचना विभाग

The language used in this advert is Nepali whereas the dominant languages used in this particular region are Maithili, Bhojpuri and Tharu. If the state were concerned about the effectiveness of this message it would have instructed the Department of Information to place the advert in the local languages used by the people of the region. Laxmi Bilas Koirala, the Director of Department of Information shared that it is not mandatory to use Nepali language in these advertisements.<sup>28</sup> In the criterion prepared to distribute public welfare advertising in Nepal, it is not mandatory to use one language only, yet in practice even local newspapers carry advertisements in Nepali as opposed to the language they publish in. In the case of electronic media, the directive related to distribution of these advertisements does mention that advertisements could be translated to local languages but according to Prateek Tamang, a radio journalist, the process is difficult as it requires further investment from media houses and these houses are not interested in bearing any additional costs which leads Tamang to hold the Ministry of Information and Communication responsible for the job of translating the adverts into local languages.<sup>29</sup>

Using local languages would not only help in better reception of the advertisement, it would also give the message that the Nepali state embraces plurality and multiculturalism. In a

<sup>28</sup> Laxmi Bilas Koirala, interview by Harsha Man Maharjan, Kathmandu, January 11, 2015

<sup>29</sup> Prateek Tamang, interview by Harsha Man Maharjan, Kathmandu, December 5, 2014

multicultural society, the use of one language for disseminating welfare advertising is a sheer display of neglect of other communities that do not speak it as their first language.

The website of the DoI hosts eleven pages of advertisement templates that media can pick and choose from and are classified under various categories such as women's right, environmental issues, journalistic activities, copyright, foreign employment, drug abuse, right to information, etc. But if we look into the advertisements, as displayed in Box No. 2, we find that they are slogans rather than advertisements.

One can argue that a message is a message whether it is presented in forms of slogan, news release or advertisements but for the message to be engaging, it needs to go beyond just the use of data or slogans. To attract the audience, presentation of advertisement should be an important consideration. As Clyde Bedell said, "Ads that just announce or 'bulletinize' are called ads wrongfully. They are, rather an expensive form of publicity."<sup>30</sup> In the context of Indian advertising, Arun Chaudhari claims that the age of text and prose-led public service advertising is over. He thinks that these sorts of advertisements were suitable for 1950s and 1960s when people's lives were slow-paced but in the current scenario, people respond to visual forms of advertising that are engaging and fun.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the style of public welfare advertising in Nepal is still reminiscent of the 1960s. Some advertisements that have been prepared for radio stations and TV channels lack imagination. Their presentation is hackneyed. For example, an advertisement that was broadcast on radio was about promoting



amity between different communities. The advertisement, however, was simply a narration of its print version published in newspapers. This is a missed opportunity whereby radio time has been wasted on a message that has not been crafted for the medium itself.

In the example of a TV advert used to raise awareness against superstitious practice of witch doctors, one can see that it has not been made with much care. As evident from the screenshot above, it contains scenes where children who are watching the actors are caught laughing on screen turning a serious public awareness message into a parody.

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<sup>30</sup> Bedell 1952

<sup>31</sup> Chaudhuri 2014

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The arguments that have been presented in this paper clearly outline the systematic flaws crippling the intent and purpose of public welfare advertising in Nepal. The various policy measures related to welfare advertising have used public welfare advertising as a front for financially supporting the various media institutions. The disregard for the true purpose of welfare advertising and the benefits it can offer to the general public has meant that large amounts of the public funds have been misused. The failure to monitor and measure the effectiveness of the disseminated public messages has meant that there is no way of knowing whether the public has benefited at all from the state's expenditure. The lack of accountability has meant that the various state institutions have been wasting money on adverts that are of poor quality and fail to appeal to the target audience. Instead, public welfare advertising in Nepal has been serving the interests of the state and more importantly the media houses. Merely sending messages through media does not ensure that the right audience receives them. Welfare advertising can only be effective and beneficial to the public if the content of the advertisements is prepared using the knowledge of media's reach and matching it to the consumption habits of the audiences.

The Nepali state must rethink the way public welfare advertising is being prepared and distributed. Present practices show that the Nepali state is distributing these advertisements without any evidence of serving public interest. This calls for the need of evidence-based policy reform that will reshape the nature of welfare advertising in Nepal. It is high time that the Nepali state takes bold decisions related to the objectives of welfare advertising and the following recommendations should be considered while redefining the purpose and the effectiveness of public welfare advertising in Nepal.

- **The Role of the State**

The related ministry has to principally agree that media welfare should not be the main objective of public service advertising and should come up with a clear policy that defines the role of such advertising and how it should be implemented in the short and long term. It should form a taskforce made up of civil servants, media houses, media experts, and journalists to come up with suggestions for a new policy that would define the true purpose of welfare advertising and would put in place a clear structure that ensures the effective dissemination of advertising to the right media channel based on the nature of the message. A separate policy should be considered for supporting media in Nepal so that public welfare advertising is completely detached and independent from the financial needs of the media. This will ensure that the use of welfare advertising is solely for serving the welfare of the public. Moreover, the Nepali state has to also think about the way this advertisement could be distributed in the federal setup.

- **An Independent Audit Bureau of Committee Should be Formed**

It was the Press Council Act 1992, which made the provision of the ABC comprising of six members: the Press Registrar as the chair, a representative of the Ministry of Information and Communication, a representative of the Press Council as the secretary, three members each from the Auditors Association, the Advertising Association, and the Association of Businessmen or Industrial Association. As there is a direct conflict of interest due to the presence of the PCN in the ABC Committee, the government should facilitate the formation of an ABC that is independent of the Press Council to avoid any possible biases during the distribution of advertising. The new ABC must contain members of the media and



advertising agencies. This bureau needs to be responsible for conducting independent audience surveys of the media outlets and should be able to provide the information to state institutions when they are considering the appropriate media for an advertising campaign. The information should be used as the basis for any decision regarding appropriate media for the advertising message at hand to ensure that the right audience receives the right message. The data generated from these surveys and research would definitely make the industry transparent and this data would help both the state institutions and the media houses. Moreover, the present criterion related to the distribution of advertisements gives priority mainly to circulation of newspapers and the directives for the electronic media rely on their coverage. But in-depth information of the audience is important to ensure that the placed advertisements are effective in their reach and impact.

- **Open Selection of Advertising Agencies**

The Nepali state should conduct a regular process of reviewing and selecting an advertising agency that can work on the advertising campaigns on behalf of the state. The use of a professional advertising agency will improve the quality of the advertising campaigns and make it much more appealing to the general public. The advertising agency can work alongside the Ministry of Information and Communication and the Department of Information on creating advertising campaigns that are not only appealing but also consider the most appropriate style and language depending on the target audience.

- **Regular Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Advertising**

Since public service advertisements are prepared with public funds, the Nepali state needs to evaluate the effectiveness of public welfare advertising on a regular basis. This kind of evaluation would help the state to get information regarding the views of the audience and the quality of the advertisement, leaving them better informed for future campaigns.

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