Framing Nepal on The Global Stage

Navigating Power, Identity, and Possibility in International Film Co-Productions

Student Name: Shreya Pokharel
Student Number: 661936

Supervisor: FKS (Fraser) Robinson

Master Media Studies - Media & Creative Industries
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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This thesis is more than an academic project. As someone who believes in the power of stories from Nepal, this journey was a deeply personal exploration. Writing about Nepali cinema and co-productions felt empowering as it allowed me to look closely at an industry I hope to contribute to, not just in thought, but in action.

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Abstract

This research contributes to the emerging study of international co-productions and their impact on smaller film industries, focusing on the underexplored context of Nepal. Despite a growing interest in global film flows, most academic attention remains fixed on dominant industries such as Hollywood, Bollywood, or select East Asian markets. Nepal's film sector, by contrast, operates at the margins, shaped by limited state support, poor distribution infrastructure, and reliance on foreign partnerships. This study explores how co-productions influence the visibility, agency, and global positioning of Nepal's cinema.

Through qualitative research, including twelve in-depth interviews with Nepali filmmakers, producers, and cultural professionals, the study investigates how filmmakers navigate creative and operational decisions in co-productions. The findings suggest that while co-productions open doors to funding and visibility, they also introduce conditions that shape content and limit narrative autonomy. Filmmakers often adjust their storytelling to meet the expectations of international funders and festival circuits, which tend to prioritize themes such as poverty, trauma, or conflict. These adaptations help secure funding but can narrow the diversity of stories that reach global audiences.

The research also reveals how global platforms like Netflix or Amazon rarely invest in Nepali content due to the country's small market size and limited digital infrastructure. Even when local films appear on these platforms, they often remain invisible - unpromoted, undubbed, and without marketing support. This aligns with existing theories about structural gatekeeping, media asymmetry, and platform-driven visibility.

While Nepal's industry continues to operate through informal networks and personal credibility, this research highlights the pressing need for formal support systems. The absence of co-production treaties, tax incentives, or national film funds forces local filmmakers to rely on patchwork solutions. Yet, despite these constraints, the research captures the resilience and ambition of a generation of Nepali filmmakers committed to reaching global stages on their own terms.

Overall, this thesis provides insights not only into the mechanics of co-productions but also into the lived realities of cultural negotiation in a resource-limited context. It extends theories on global media flows (Thussu, 2007), platform power (Poort, 2021), and informal distribution (Lobato, 2012) to a rarely studied national cinema. It also brings Bhaskar's view about how uncovering deeper structures can inform social transformation into light.

While the study offers rich, grounded insights, limitations include the absence of foreign producer perspectives, a small sample size, and a limited focus on gender dynamics. Future research could explore comparative cases in other emerging markets or delve deeper into sectors like animation and documentary filmmaking in Nepal. This study lays the groundwork for understanding how global collaborations unfold in lesser-known film industries and what is at stake when storytelling travels across borders.

Keywords: International Co-productions, Nepali cinema, Film funding, Gatekeeping, Film Festivals

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Cinema has always been more than just an industry, it is a cultural battleground where stories do more than entertain. They assert identity, wield soft power, and shape perceptions of entire nations. In an era where global media giants control distribution pipelines, command advertising dollars, and set stylistic norms, smaller film industries like Nepal are increasingly faced with existential choices: Should they compete by emulating dominant industries? Should they collaborate through co-productions? Or should they attempt to carve an alternative path, prioritizing local voice and cultural integrity over international appeal? Musa (2022) outlines how global media consolidation, the rise of streaming services, and technological shifts in visibility and access have reshaped conventional film production and distribution practices (pp. 272–285). Within this disruption, co-productions have emerged as both a lifeline and a liability. It offers financial and technical resources, international reach, and cross-cultural collaboration, while simultaneously raising concerns about dependency, narrative dilution, and creative marginalization.

Nepal, with its deep-rooted traditions and a nascent independent film scene, stands at a crossroads. As Panta (2020) notes, Nepali cinema has long struggled to assert itself, held back by weak domestic distribution systems and the dominance of Bollywood, which continues to occupy the majority of screens and market attention across the country .Yet, recent breakthroughs of few of Nepal's films like Shambhala which was selected at the Berlin International Film Festival suggests a growing appetite for stories that are locally grounded and globally resonant. The critical question, however, remains: can international co-productions offer Nepalese filmmakers the resources and reach they need without relegating them to subordinate roles within transnational hierarchies? Parc (2020) explains that to get co-production subsidies, filmmakers often have to change their scripts or filming plans to meet official requirements, which means the final film reflects what funders want rather than the filmmaker's original vision (p. 462)

Over the past few decades, international co-productions have become increasingly prevalent across Europe and Asia, fueled by globalization, deregulation, and the rise of digital streaming platforms (Baltruschat, 2010, p. 183; Hammett-Jamart et al., 2018, p. 226).

Drake (2018) explains that due to the fragmented nature of the European film industry, nation-states have been encouraged to harmonize media support policies to facilitate and expand co-productions across borders (p. 84). However, this normalization of transnational collaboration often masks an uneven playing field where dominant industries benefit from state subsidies, robust infrastructure, and global market access, while smaller nations struggle to keep up (Zemaityte et al., 2024, p. 6).

Nepal finds itself at a critical juncture within this global landscape. While historically influenced by Bollywood in both form and function (Liechty, 2003, p. 88), the Nepalese film industry has recently begun to forge a more independent identity. Yet, despite this creative momentum, systemic issues from weak policy support and limited training to poor distribution channels continue to plague the industry (ILO, 2021, p. 2). With this, international co-productions are often seen as a necessary compromise. Asian film industries have increasingly depended on working together and sharing funding across borders,not only smaller but also bigger ones, as they try to keep up with Hollywood (Khoo, 2021, p. 3).

The success of films such as Shambhala (2024), Nepal's first entry into the Berlin International Film Festival, suggests that co-productions can catapult local stories onto the world stage. However, its limited domestic revenue (Rs1.4 crore) compared to box-office hits like Chhakka Panja 3 (Rs19 crore) reveals a paradox: international prestige does not guarantee national success (The Kathmandu Post, 2018; Bhandari, 2024). Smits (2019) argues that process of cultural gatekeeping in the film industry is framed by institutional norms and market priorities, which reinforces unequal patterns of global film circulation (p. 82-83)

1.1 Research Questions

This thesis seeks to explore the above-mentioned tensions and calls for closer attention. Nepalese filmmakers currently stand between promise and compromise. Co-productions offer visibility, funding, and growth. But they also risk dependency and creative loss. The combination of key factors like unequal global and local structures, shifting regional ties, and the push for local voice form the basis for this discussion. A deep dive into how international co-productions shape the trajectory of Nepali films has not been

conducted yet. Thus, this paper aims to explore the issues for which the following central research question has been devised:

How do international co-productions shape the visibility, agency, and global positioning of Nepal's film industry?

To answer this overarching question, two sub-questions will be addressed:

How does Nepal's position in global media flows affect its visibility, financing, and narrative inclusion in co-productions?

How do structural challenges and institutions shape the creative agency of Nepalese filmmakers?

These questions aim to understand the complex theoretical and empirical debates in media production studies, transnational cultural flows, and the political economy of the creative industries. Media production studies highlight how factors like hidden labor, industry rules, and negotiations between institutions play a key role in shaping what films are made and how they're made(Havens et al., 2009, p. 239). According to Appadurai (1996), global media flows through uneven and complex systems shaped by power, money, and technology, rather than moving freely across the world (p. 35).

Within this transnational framework, scholarly attention has focused on leading players ranging from Hollywood's vertical integration, Bollywood's diasporic influence, and East Asia's state-sponsored soft power strategies (Khoo, 2020, p. 4-5). These industries possess institutional stability, robust funding mechanisms, and international treaty networks that enable them to leverage co-productions as instruments of expansion and influence. In contrast, emerging film industries like Nepal's often lack the infrastructure, legal frameworks, and state support to participate on equal footing. As a result, they are rarely the subject of in-depth academic inquiry, despite offering critical insights into how the peripheries of global cinema adapt, resist, and reconfigure prevailing models of transnational collaboration. Scholars tend to focus the bigger players with visibility, backing, and built-in value. This pattern mirrors the same imbalance playing out on the ground.

This thesis attempts to reorient that gaze. This thesis aims to explore how marginal voices engage with, adapt to, and sometimes push back against dominant modes of co-production. The dive into understanding Nepals' role in the global media offers valuable counterpoints to mainstream narratives of globalization. Furthermore, it highlights the complex negotiations between creative agency and structural dependency that define media work in under-resourced contexts. Understanding how Nepalese filmmakers navigate international co-productions helps bridge the gaps in the lacking literatures. It opens up new pathways for theorizing cultural sovereignty, narrative equity, and the contexts of international collaboration in a world of transnational flows.

1.2 Academic Relevance

The academic importance of this study lies in its focus on the micro-level experiences of a small national cinema operating within the larger structures of transnational film production. Much of the existing literature on Asian cinema has concentrated on dominant industries and their global interactions, particularly with Hollywood and European players but regional inter-Asian collaborations and smaller industries remain understudied (Khoo, 2021, pp. 4–6). Studies by Hammett-Jamart et al. (2018) have highlighted how co-productions in Europe are shaped by national funding bodies and treaty networks, but these frameworks often fail to address how industries without such institutional support participate in, or are excluded from, these collaborations

By analysing Nepal solely, this research aims to provide a necessary oversight. It deepens the field of production studies, which has advocated for a more nuanced understanding of the cultural industries and one that accounts not only for texts and technologies, but also for people, processes, and power relations (Havens et al, 2009, p. 236). This thesis bridges production studies with value chain analysis (Parc, 2020) and gatekeeping theory (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009, p. 1497), offering a hybrid framework that accounts for both the macro-political economy of media systems and the lived experiences of creative workers. It contributes empirically by providing new data from underrepresented contexts and conceptually by expanding the scope of what it means to participate in transnational cinema from a small-market perspective.

Moreover, this study engages with broader theoretical debates around cultural sovereignty, narrative agency, and equity in collaborative production. It challenges the idea that globalization is a purely horizontal and instead emphasizes the vertical, often unequal, structures within which transnational media partnerships operate. In doing so, it extends the conceptual toolkit available to media scholars seeking to understand the intersection of cultural production and global power asymmetries.

1.3 Societal Relevance

The societal stakes of this research are equally significant. Nepal's film industry is more than an artistic pursuit for the local economy. It has potential to be a socio-economic engine capable of generating employment, fostering cultural exchange, and contributing to national soft power. As streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime continue to expand their global footprint, they have disrupted traditional models of media circulation by creating new pathways for cross border distribution and audience engagement. These platforms invest heavily in localization through dubbing, subtitling, and region-specific marketing strategies. This allows national content to travel more easily across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Wayne, 2020, pp. 1–2). At the same time, the rise of co-productions within the Asia-Pacific region has begun to reshape the dynamics of transnational media flows, offering emerging markets more visibility and creative agency in global storytelling (Jin & Su, 2019, pp. 4–6). In this evolving digital and collaborative landscape, smaller film industries like Nepal's may find rare opportunities to position themselves within international circuits. There will be challenges related to infrastructure, funding, and market access though. At a time when global audiences are demanding more culturally diverse and locally rooted content, Nepalese films if positioned strategically have the potential to not only entertain but to reframe international perceptions of South Asian film industries beyond India and China.

However, this opportunity remains unevenly distributed. As Smits (2019) explains, digital distribution platforms like Netflix and Amazon increasingly rely on content aggregators to control access to online markets, making it difficult for independent producers without established sales agents to secure visibility (p. 194). These gatekeeping practices, along with high licensing costs(as observed in the multimillion-dollar bidding at major festivals) deepens the struggles of small-scale producers to finance and distribute their

work, collectively disadvantage emerging film markets such as Nepal (pp. 196–198). Even when Nepalese films are successful on the festival circuit, their domestic reach remains limited due to weak distribution channels and market fragmentation. This research sheds light on these systemic barriers and offers actionable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and cultural institutions on how to build more inclusive, sustainable, and internationally competitive film ecosystems.

Crucially, the study also speaks to the tension between cultural and commerical. In a world where co-productions often demand narrative universality to appeal to broader markets, local filmmakers risk sacrificing cultural nuance for international palatability. This thesis critically examines whether Nepalese storytellers can retain their narrative voice while engaging with global platforms. Parc (2020) explains that structural barriers in the co-production landscape often exclude new and marginal industries and push small creators to a system that is not designed with them in mind(p. 462). This could create pressures that may compromise creative autonomy

By unravelling this tension, the study opens space for balanced imaginaries of cross-border collaboration in creative industries.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Mapping the Margins: Nepal in the Global Media Flow

In a world increasingly wired for instantaneous exchange, the movement of stories across borders could surfacially appear seamless . Streaming platforms, international film festivals, and online distribution promise a horizon where any voice, from any corner, might be heard. However, access to visibility within these systems are full of inequalities. As Thussu (2007) notes, the commercialization and privatization of media have shifted priorities toward markets and advertising, turning audiences into consumers and making visibility dependent on economic value(p.11). Similarly, Curtin (2007) explains that cities like Hong Kong, Bombay, or Cairo become centers of media power not by accident, but because they concentrate resources, talent, and cultural influence(pp. 202-204). Global media visibility is not equally available to all and rather depends on one's proximity to economic capital, cultural relevance, and state support.

For countries like Nepal that are positioned geographically and economically in the fringes of giants (India and China), the global promise could become a constrained opportunity. As Parc (2020) explains, co-production systems tend to benefit well-resourced players, leaving limited space for smaller or unconventional participants (p. 462). Following this, Nepali film industry becomes more frequently a site of reception than of emission.

This section examines Nepal's uneven place in the global media order. Divided into two interrelated inquiries, it first maps Nepal's position within global flows, exploring how structural inequality, limited infrastructure, and algorithmic biases shape conditions of invisibility. The second part examines how Bollywood's cultural dominance has influenced Nepali cinema. As Karki (2023) shows, the success of Bollywood-style films in the 1980s and 1990s led many Nepali filmmakers to follow the same path of prioritizing romance, action, and song-dance sequences over more diverse or artistic storytelling (p. 51).

2.1.1 Nepal's Position in Global Media Flows

Appadurai's (1996) concept of mediascapes proposed that global media do not flow freely but are embedded within structures of power, shaped by uneven access, production

capacities, and ideological filters (p. 35). This insight gives relevant information to understand Nepal's place in the global film ecosystem. Instead of being a hub of original, generative media production, Nepal's position is more reactive where the industry is situated such that it responds to external demands, funding incentives, and international tastes.

To understand this reactive positioning, one must look at the historical roots of Nepalese filmmaking. Karki (2023) outlines how the emergence of the Nepali film industry was intertwined with state institutions and cultural diplomacy. The first Nepali film, *Satya Harishchandra*, was produced in India in 1951, and for years, filmmaking remained a sporadic, institution-led effort rather than a robust industry (p. 3). Even as the number of films increased in the 1980s and 1990s, the infrastructure for sustainable production, distribution, and exhibition remained fragile.

Nepal's cultural production has operated since many years under the aesthetic dominance of Bollywood, where proven commercial formulas have often outweighed alternative storytelling approaches (Karki, 2023, p. 51). The popularity of Hindi-style romantic melodramas encouraged Nepali filmmakers to prioritize familiar themes such as romance, music, and family conflict, sidelining more local or experimental narratives. While such mimicry initially helped Nepali cinema gain traction, it also constrained creative freedom by setting predefined expectations for what successful films should look like (Karki, 2023, pp. 46–47)

Nepali cinema's evolution has been shaped by its historical entanglement with India's film industry and the structural limitations of local production. Further, as Panta (2022) explains, early cinema in Nepal was heavily dependent on Hindi imports and Indian-trained technicians. Local films lacked post-production costs and faced distribution challenges, so they often produced using Indian stylistic conventions. This resulted in Bollywood-inspired narratives and melodramatic tropes that ended up becoming the default template. By the late 1980s and 1990s, as films like Deuta and Chino gained popularity, Bollywood-style storytelling focused on moral binaries and hero-villain melodrama, started dominat the national screen (Panta, 2022, pp. 5–6; Karki, 2023, p. 8). However, a gradual shift has been occurring. Karki (2023) observes the emergence of new wave filmmakers who resist these dominant templates and instead pursue films rooted in local realities, social critique, and artistic experimentation, starting from the 1990s (p. 7).There was a shift to

digital formats after 2000. Independent filmmakers began telling stories rooted in their local contexts, taking inspiration from villages and theatre backgrounds and moving away from Bollywood mimicry. Yet despite this small bubbles of creative resurgence, systemic barriers exist.

Other scholars have expanded on this critique on digital accesibility . Wayne (2020) explains that Lobato views Netflix as a hybrid media system that combines older television logics with algorithmic mechanisms. The curated content shapes the visibility to audiences through recommendation systems rather than offering open access (p. 2) This is evident in Nepal's marginal presence on platforms like Netflix or Amazon Prime, which continue to prioritize globally recognizable content over regionally specific narratives.

Visibility in the global media sphere is not an equal opportunity, but a selective one. Appadurai (1996) argues that globalization has amplified the global circulation of media but also reinforced power asymmetries. These could dictate how how narratives are produced, circulated, and stored for collective imagination (pp. 33–36). Further, Shohat and Stam (1994) argue that peripheral cultures are often made hyper-visible through frameworks that exoticize or stereotype them. This "Eurocentric regime of representation" manages cultural or marginal difference by channeling it through familiar colonial tropes. Shohat and Stam (1994) find that this allows for stereotypes, and not complex or self-defined portrayals (pp. 182–183, 214). .

The global media economy presents a paradox for peripheral filmmakers like that of Nepal. It offers access to international platforms, but often demands compromise. As Thussu (2007) explains, globalization has not created an equal playing field. Instead, "the global media flows are still dominated by a handful of transnational corporations based in the West" (p. 13).

Musa (2020) notes that "American cinema became world cinema," turning Hollywood into a global standard (p. 275). Peripheral industries must conform to these norms to gain recognition. Yoshimoto (2003, as cited in Musa, 2020) describes this process as both "homogenizing film culture all over the world" and multiplying difference at the same time (p. 277). Heterogeneity exists, but is shaped by dominant industry expectations. In such an economy, mimicry becomes a survival strategy.

And yet, there are exceptions. In 2000, Tsering Rhitar Sherpa's *Mukundo: Mask of Desire* became the first Nepali-language film submitted for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, symbolizing a nascent emergence into global cinema (Rana, 2021). Later, *Kalo Pothi: The Black Hen earned* international acclaim, winning the Fedeora Award at Venice's Critics Week and becoming Nepal's submission to the Oscars (Venice Biennale, 2015) (Nabina, 2015). Most recently, *Shambhala* (2024), also directed by Min Bahadur Bham, was selected for the main competition at the Berlin International Film Festival—an unprecedented achievement for Nepali cinema (Mottram, 2024). These milestones signal the growing ambition and recognition of Nepali filmmakers, even as structural inequalities persist.

Nepal's position in global media flows is therefore emblematic of a larger structural imbalance where stories from the margins are permitted visibility only under conditions of strategic alignment.

2.1.2 In the Margins: Overshadowed by Giants

Nepal's position in the regional media landscape is deeply shaped by its historical ties to Bollywood, the Hindi centric film industry of the neighbouring country, India . They influenced how local audiences understood storytelling and production quality. As Panday (n.d.) explains, "Nepalese film producers have responded to this situation by moulding their product in the Bombay model, song for song and action for action" (p. 5). Nepali films were often compared to Indian ones. Their success was measured by whether they were "better or worse than the ones from Bombay" (Panday, n.d., p. 4).

Karki (2023) notes that Hindi cinema was the main reference for how films were made and consumed in Nepal. She writes, "Until the 1990s, Hindi films were the principal reference point for the ways of producing and consuming cinema in Nepal" (p. 52). Bollywood shaped not just the content of Nepali films but also their style and sound. Even when original Nepali films started to appear, they struggled to escape Bollywood's influence.

Liechty (2003) documented in his ethnography of urban youth culture in Kathmandu of how Bollywood has long functioned as the default popular cinema in Nepal (p. 88). This dominance manifests in everything from narrative arcs and musical interludes to the aspirational lifestyles depicted on screen. Bollywood films, widely distributed and aggressively marketed in Nepal, often overshadow domestic productions, which lack comparable budgets or promotional machinery. Panta (2020) echoes this concern, noting that Nepali films often struggle to secure prime screening slots in domestic theaters dominated by Indian imports (p. 9). This unequal competition extends beyond the screen. Indian studios have a robust state support, export subsidies, and a large diaspora audience, whereas Nepali filmmakers operate with minimal institutional backing and a fragmented domestic market.

This influence has shaped not only what Nepali audiences watch but how Nepali filmmakers imagine their craft. As Parc (2020) argues, in many regional co-productions, smaller industries are relegated to the role of cultural subcontractors, providing local flavor without narrative control (p. 462). In Nepal's case, this has meant an over-reliance on Bollywood's style of filmmaking, which can stifle experimentation and narrative diversity.

However, while India looms large, China remains largely absent. Despite China's growing investments in global cinema and regional co-productions, Nepal has not been a significant partner. Zhang (2020) notes that China's cultural diplomacy in Asia has favored nations like Thailand, Malaysia, and South Korea, where formal co-production treaties and media exchange programs have been established (p. 5). Nepal, lacking such agreements and often viewed as geopolitically peripheral, remains outside China's cinematic ambit.

The result is a double marginality for the Nepali film Industry: overshadowed and ignored. And yet, as Appadurai (1996) reminds us, globalization is not a singular force of erasure but a landscape of disjuncture and possibility. While dominant flows shape much of what circulates, smaller nodes, that are generated through resilience, improvisation, and creativity, find ways to rewrite the map (p. 37).

2.2 Balancing Co-Production and Cultural Identity

2.2.1 Economic Inequalities in Co-Production

Hammett-Jamart et al. (2018) explain that international co-productions in Europe began as state-endorsed strategies to resist Hollywood's growing dominance after World War II (p. 14). Countries like France and Italy led these efforts. In 1949, they signed the Franco-Italian Co-Production Treaty. This agreement was more than cultural exchange. It was a political and economic tool. The goal was to safeguard national cinema while extending its reach. These treaties allowed countries to share financial risks and maintain cultural visibility on global screens.

Parc (2020) argues that co-productions, though often framed as collaborative ventures, are shaped by structural inequalities. He observes that "co-production can be a useful tool to enhance the competitiveness of the European film industry," but often follows a "confused picture" where power lies with dominant players (p. 2). This imbalance becomes more visible when state-led and corporation-led models are compared. Corporation-led models aim to maximize business outcomes, while state-led co-productions, often in smaller markets, are used to "enhance the national image" through subsidies, rather than supporting true creative autonomy (p. 1).

Khoo (2013) agrees with this , stating that "the co-production structure remains vertical" with countries like Japan or Korea rarely occupying central roles unless backed by strong domestic markets or cultural brands (p. 8). Even then, the distribution and prestige circuits are "locked into hierarchies that privilege Anglo-American content" (p. 9). In this way, economic power structures determine narrative voice and market visibility.
Dal Yong Jin (2020) supports this view by contrasting the South Korean co-production model. He writes that Korea's approach is deliberate and state-led, ensuring that even in collaborations, "Korean cultural content maintains creative control" (pp. 3-5). This contrasts sharply with most Global South co-productions, where the dominant partner "usually controls the script, post-production, and international marketing"

By contrast, smaller film industries like Nepal's often find themselves on the margin of these arrangements. Nepal lacks a formal co-production treaties, has limited state subsidies, and operates without a centralized film commission to facilitate or attract foreign partners (ILO, 2021, p. 5). As Karki (2023) observes, this absence of institutional

scaffolding places the burden of international collaboration squarely on individual filmmakers, many of whom must navigate grant systems, bureaucratic hurdles, and cultural expectations with limited support (p. 9). Scholars like Curtin (2007) and Musa (2020) argue that the global film economy operates through a logic of asymmetrical interdependence, where certain countries function as nodes of cultural export, while others serve primarily as sources of narrative material or exotic backdrops.

As Khoo (2010) notes, co-productions are often driven less by shared artistic goals and more by economic pragmatism, including access to new markets and diplomatic leverage: “Co-productions are as much about trade and diplomacy as they are about film” (p. 8). For smaller markets like Nepal, which lack substantial public investment or guaranteed domestic returns, this creates a structural imbalance. The logic of engagement is typically shaped by those who provide capital, infrastructure, or distribution, not necessarily by equal creative input.

Zemaityte et al. (2024) emphasize that many co-production treaties appear formally equal on paper but are “informally tilted towards one country,” particularly those with greater institutional access and cultural capital (p. 6) . This imbalance manifests in creative hierarchies of whose names appear first in credits or who gets final editorial control.

However, alternatives are emerging. Musa (2020) observes a growing wave of South–South co-productions, especially between African and Asian filmmakers, which aim to shift away from “Northern-dominated” production structures by centering mutual experiences and horizontal collaboration (p. 44) . Zemaityte et al. (2024) add that true transformation requires moving beyond participation toward parity, designing co-production frameworks that allow smaller nations to not just be included but co-shape narratives and ownership (p. 13).

2.2.2 Cultural Identity and Narrative Sovereignty

At the heart of international co-productions lies tension between the economic logic of visibility and the cultural logic of representation. Shohat and Stam (1994) explain where cultural identity is made visible only through a curated, consumable lens (p. 145). While co-

productions promise global reach, they also risk eroding the autonomy of smaller film industries to tell stories on their own terms. Musa (2020) aptly frames this as a problem of "negotiated authenticity" (p. 37). When regional filmmakers enter global circuits through co-productions, they are often expected to portray "authenticity" but authenticity here is not defined internally.

As Kraidy (2005) argues, global cultural flows do not simply enable storytelling but govern the terms of narration (p. 118). Within co-productions, especially those driven by funding from the Global North, stylistic expectations are embedded within funding criteria, script assessments, and distribution planning. Films that explore hybrid identities, indigenous epistemologies, or politically sensitive topics may find less institutional enthusiasm than those that conform to established global genres like poverty realism, trauma cinema, or picturesque ethnography.

Language further compounds this issue. Krauss (2021) highlights how English, as a global lingua franca, not only dominates scripts and festival submissions but often sets the template for narrative pacing, humor, and dramatic tension (p. 7). Phillipson's (1992) notion of "linguistic imperialism" becomes relevant as films that do not translate well into dominant languages are often deemed "niche" or "difficult," thereby limiting their distribution potential (p. 75). For Nepali cinema, this means that multilingual stories beyond Nepali, like Maithili, Tamang, or Tharu dialects, must often be flattened into English-subtitled scripts, and with these nuances are lost in translation.

Beyond language, visual and thematic norms are also implicated. As Panta (2020) notes, Nepali filmmakers engage in a form of narrative pre-censorship, tailoring their work to align with what they presume will be appreciated by foreign audiences and juries.Other genres, deeply rooted in local contexts, are often sidelined not due to lack of artistic merit but because of their lack of place in dominant frameworks. This narrative outsourcing has consequences not just for industry dynamics, but for cultural memory. When dominant players dictate the cinematic voice of smaller nations, the result is not only distortion but displacement. National identity becomes scripted elsewhere, often by those who can afford to shape what counts as truth, beauty, or relevance.

2.3 Gatekeepers of the Global Screen: Platforms, Festivals, and the Logic of Visibility

2.3.1 Platforms as Economic Gatekeepers

Digital streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ function as algorithmic and economic gatekeepers of global cinema and not just as distributors. These platforms are governed by sophisticated backend infrastructures driven by proprietary algorithms, predictive analytics, and linguistic standardization. As Lobato (2019) asserts, digital visibility is not a neutral or level playing field, it is structured by the business logic of platforms that prioritize profitability, discoverability, and data-driven categorization (p. 52). The favoring of star-driven content, high production values, and English-language metadata systematically disadvantages smaller film industries like Nepal's. Without access to dubbing resources, subtitle teams, or global marketing pipelines, Nepali films often remain buried in platform back-ends (Smits, 2019, pp. 64–67).

This exclusion is not merely about access to platforms but equally about cultural legibility. Thussu (2007) frames this dynamic as a continuation of "subaltern silence," where stories from peripheral nations are rendered invisible unless they conform to dominant narrative and aesthetic tropes (p. 22). Algorithms trained on Western consumption patterns replicate these biases by privileging genres and themes that have historically performed well Smits (2019) points out that streaming platforms often use genre tagging and viewer profiling as tools of predictive monetization, thereby excluding content that is multilingual, non-linear, or grounded in indigenous storytelling forms (p. 103). Films that do not neatly map onto established audience clusters are rarely promoted. Instead of reflecting a true diversity of cinematic voices, platforms amplify a narrow band of market-sanctioned stories, reinforcing a feedback loop where only the already-visible becomes more visible (Curtin, 2007, p. 296).

In this sense, platforms operate as gatekeepers not through explicit censorship but through deeply embedded economic and infrastructural mechanisms. Barzilai-Nahon's (2009) theory of network gatekeeping is important here, it emphasiesi that control in the digital age occurs by structuring the architecture through which visibility is determined and not blocking content outright(p. 1494). This includes everything from algorithmic recommendation systems to content acquisition policies shaped by regional profitability projections. As Zboralska and Davis (2021) note, even when films from smaller nations are

included on platforms, they are often buried behind search barriers, poorly indexed, or omitted from regional catalogs due to licensing inefficiencies (p. 8). For national cinemas like Nepal's, this means that entry into global circulation is conditional, not on narrative merit alone, but on market viability, language conformity, and co-production compatibility. Absent internal state support or lobbying structures, Nepali films become reliant on foreign intermediaries who can translate their work into the language of platform economies.

2.3.2 Festivals as Cultural Gatekeepers

International film festivals such as Cannes, Berlinale, and Venice do not merely showcase cinema; they play a defining role in determining the global narrative landscape. As de Valck (2007) notes, festivals are not neutral platforms but curated events that construct hierarchies of cultural value and aesthetic legitimacy (p. 17). These institutions perform what Bourdieu (1984) would describe as the consecration of symbolic capital, selecting works that reinforce the existing tastes of curators and juries while filtering out those that do not align with established canons. For filmmakers from smaller industries like Nepal, entry into a major festival is not just a career milestone. It often marks the threshold between global invisibility and critical acclaim.

The significance of such inclusion is reflected in the journeys of films like "Kalo Pothi" (2015) and "Shambhala" (2023), which gained traction at Venice and Berlinale respectively. While they are rightly celebrated as milestones in Nepali cinema's international recognition, their visibility is also shaped by a particular global aesthetic. Krauss (2021) terms this process "curated authenticity," where films from the Global South are selected for their capacity to mirror familiar global narratives rather than challenge them (p. 9). These selections frequently center themes such as post-conflict trauma, rural hardship, and spiritual ambiguity, thereby positioning difference as legible within a Western gaze.

In this context, film festivals provide both visibility and act as symbolic gatekeepers that define what kind of cultural difference is acceptable. Elsaesser (2005) identifies the rise of "festival cinema" as a genre in itself which is characterized by slow pacing, non-linear narratives, and humanist struggle often rooted in poverty realism (p. 80). These stylistic expectations shape both the curation and production of films. Zboralska and Davis (2021) explain that filmmakers from underrepresented regions often adapt their narratives to align

with these unspoken criteria, ensuring their work fits the mold of globally palatable cinema (p. 11).

This selection process is further entangled in a web of institutional and geopolitical asymmetries. As Smits (2019) argues, even in independent and non-commercial festival circuits, gatekeeping persists through networks of programmers, curators, and funding bodies who operate primarily from the Global North (p. 108). These actors are not only cultural intermediaries but also brokers of funding and access, whose decisions are shaped by existing geopolitical sensibilities and funding priorities. Smits observes that films with multilingual dialogue, experimental structure, or hyperlocal settings often struggle to break through because they do not align with what distributors or jurors perceive as "universal" or "meaningful" within the dominant frameworks of cinematic storytelling (p. 103).

Moreover, the economics of festival participation add another layer of stratification. As the European Audiovisual Observatory points out, festivals often serve as gatekeeping institutions that shape distribution outcomes and further institutional validation (Zemaityte et al., 2024, p. 9). Travel costs, networking demands, and submission fees become structural barriers for filmmakers from the Global South. Participation becomes not just about artistic merit but about institutional fluency and financial access. As Aronczyk and Espinoza (2022) emphasize, the infrastructure of international recognition is skewed in favor of those who already possess the cultural and economic capital to navigate its channels.

For Nepalese filmmakers, this means that breaking into the global circuit requires more than storytelling skill.

2.4 Co-Productions as Opportunities for Peripheral Cinemas

While the dominant discourse around co-productions often centers on structural imbalances and dependency, a parallel body of scholarship emphasizes their enabling potential. International co-productions, despite their limitations, offer crucial financial, infrastructural, and symbolic resources that smaller film industries may otherwise struggle to access. For countries like Nepal, co-productions can function as strategic entry points into global cinema, expanding both audience reach and funding channels. According to Hjort

(2010), co-productions can serve as vehicles for “small nation cinema” to achieve international recognition by leveraging collaborative platforms for storytelling and distribution. This is particularly significant in contexts where national film policies are weak or non-existent. In such settings, co-productions can act as informal policy substitutes, creating structures that allow filmmakers to access grants, training opportunities, and transnational production infrastructure.

2.4.1 Financial Access and Risk Sharing

One of the most frequently cited advantages of international co-productions is access to diversified funding streams. According to Parc (2020), co-productions enable smaller industries to mitigate financial risks by pooling resources with better-funded partners, allowing them to increase production value without over-relying on domestic markets (p. 460). Zemaityte et al. (2024) similarly argue that treaty-based and non-treaty co-productions open up eligibility to multiple national film funds, tax incentives, and broadcaster investments, particularly in European contexts (p. 6). For Nepal, where formal state funding is limited and most productions are self-financed or grant-dependent, these arrangements could offer a pathway to more sustainable financing models.

In addition to direct financing, co-productions often lead to enhanced access to distribution networks. As Khoo (2020) notes, when one partner holds existing relationships with broadcasters, streaming platforms, or theatrical distributors, the final product benefits from expanded circulation (p. 18). This advantage is particularly relevant in Nepal’s case, where domestic distribution infrastructure is weak and international access is often dependent on festival circulation or NGO-sponsored campaigns. Even limited co-production partnerships can expose Nepali films to new audiences through shared marketing efforts or automatic catalog inclusion via institutional partnerships.

2.4.2 Institutional Learning and Capacity Development

Beyond financing, co-productions are frequently sites of institutional learning. Musa (2020) explains that working with more established partners allows smaller industries to gain insight into production management, international compliance standards, institutional

practices, and creative development processes (p. 285). These engagements act as informal knowledge transfers, providing access to skill sets and workflows that may not exist in smaller, isolated markets. In the case of Nepal, co-productions could contribute to building technical capacity in areas such as sound design, editing, and script consultancy—sectors that are often underdeveloped or fragmented due to resource constraints.

Baltruschat (2010) elaborates on how international partnerships help in cultivating co-production literacy among domestic stakeholders (p 43-49). When local producers learn to navigate multinational grant applications or pitch their stories to foreign script assessors, the result is not just project-level success but an accumulation of institutional capital. For emerging filmmakers in Nepal, this learning can translate into better project viability over time, even for locally funded films. In this sense, the co-production process can indirectly bolster the resilience of the domestic industry by professionalizing practices and fostering transnational competence.

2.4.3 Cultural Hybridity and Narrative Innovation

Co-productions also present opportunities for cultural hybridity and narrative experimentation. While often critiqued for shaping local content into globally palatable formats, scholars like Hjort (2010) argue that co-productions can also foster creative dialogue between traditions, leading to new aesthetic possibilities (p. 26). When executed on equitable terms, such collaborations can support the emergence of hybrid genres that merge narrative conventions from different contexts.

Kraidy (2005) discusses how cultural hybridization through media collaboration can serve as a form of creative resistance, where minor cinemas innovate within the constraints of dominant formats (p. 9). In the Nepali context, filmmakers might use co-productions to embed local mythologies or socio-political concerns within globally familiar genres, such as road films, coming-of-age dramas, or post-conflict narratives. The resulting films can thereby bridge the expectations of foreign audiences while maintaining narrative rootedness.

Moreover, this hybridity enables smaller industries to access transnational recognition without entirely forfeiting local specificity. Curtin (2007) points out that some of the most successful examples of co-produced cinema in Asia have gained critical acclaim

not by mimicking dominant aesthetics but by creatively negotiating between multiple cultural grammars (p. 277). With the increasing visibility of South-South collaborations in Asia and Africa, as noted by Musa (2020), Nepal has a growing opportunity to situate itself as a regional player experimenting with new forms of storytelling through shared cultural proximities.

2.4.4 Rebalancing Global Film Ecologies

A final benefit of co-productions, when equitably structured, lies in their potential to rebalance global cinematic flows. Zboralska and Davis (2021) argue that traditional distribution and acquisition models tend to marginalize smaller nations by over-representing content from a few dominant markets (p. 8). In contrast, well-negotiated co-productions offer a counterweight by enabling smaller nations to not only participate but also influence transnational narratives. As Elsaesser (2005) observes, international film festivals serve as strategic gateways for films from smaller markets, where visibility often hinges on alignment with the expectations and infrastructures of the global festival circuit (pp. 84–85).

For Nepal, co-productions can therefore be more than economic lifelines. They can serve as platforms to strategically reposition its cinema within a global hierarchy that often overlooks it. According to De Valck (2007), festivals act as symbolic marketplaces that not only evaluate artistic quality but also validate industrial legitimacy (p. 40). When Nepali films are co-produced with reputable international partners, they are more likely to pass through these symbolic gatekeeping thresholds and gain access to curatorial visibility.For Nepal, such a shift may involve building regional alliances, establishing co-production agreements within South Asia, or creating policy mechanisms that ensure equitable credit, authorship, and revenue sharing. As Zboralska and Davis (2021) argue, meaningful co-productions are those that enable reciprocal influence, where each partner's narrative, aesthetic, and economic needs are acknowledged and integrated (p. 12).

In this sense, the future of co-productions lies not just in broader participation but in deeper transformation. Equity is not the byproduct of access alone. It must be built into the terms of collaboration, the structures of decision-making, and the ethics of representation.

3. Methods

Co-productions are complex interactions between various players. In the case of international co-productions, they tie economic negotiations with cultural contexts and creative collaboration. Given these layered dynamics, qualitative research is well suited to explore them in depth. As Boeije (2010) notes, qualitative methods are ideal for capturing meaning, interaction, and lived experience in social contexts (p. 85). They allow researchers to engage with complexity instead of reducing it.

This study will use semi-structured interviews to examine how professionals in Nepal's film industry experience co-productions. Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility that can help extract nuanced meanings and perspective. They create space for participants to elaborate on themes they find important (Boeije, 2010, p. 91). An interview guide will be developed with core themes. It will use both closed and open-ended questions, enabling detailed reflection and comparison.

To add to this, thematic analysis will be used to organize the data . This method helps identify patterns while keeping the richness of the content intact (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It allows the researcher to move between description and interpretation across cases.

Additionally, these interviews draw from Bruun's (2016) idea of "exclusive informants". These are individuals with unique insight into media production processes (pp. 133–135). In contexts like Nepal, these voices are vital, and their voices are yet to be critically and academically analyzed. They help uncover backstage dynamics that are not otherwise visible. Elite informants often hold both institutional knowledge and creative power, and access to their insights is essential for constructing a grounded analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This research applies a critical realist lens (Bhaskar, 2020, pp. 113–116). It starts from the belief that reality exists outside our perception but how we access that reality is shaped by discourse, power, and social systems. In the film industry, material constraints like budgets, and institutional priorities shape important creative decisions. At the same time, filmmakers bring their own values, visions, and strategies into this space too. Co-

productions sit at this intersection and become more than mere financial tools. They carry power, politics, and possibility.

This study uses Bhaskar's four-planar model of social being to map this complexity. It treats co-productions as layered phenomena that unfold across four domains: material structures (such as money, labor, and technology), social interaction (like collaboration and negotiation), institutional systems (including policy and gatekeeping), and embodied subjectivity (the filmmaker's intent, identity, and creative agency) (Bhaskar, 2020, p. 116). These layers are not separate but they impact each other.

This model facilitates the study of global imbalances and local ambitions and how they meet . It shows how power operates not only at the top but also in daily decisions and creative negotiations. In Nepal's case, it offers a way to understand how co-productions influence what gets made and the preceding "hows" and "whys" that accompany it.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

This study used purposive sampling to select participants with direct experience in Nepal's co-production ecosystem. It focused on individuals who work in co-production, funding, directing, production design and policy making. These professionals offered grounded insights into how international collaborations unfold in practice.

Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure the sample matched the research goals. It allowed the study to focus on information-rich cases rather than general representation (Etikan, & Alkassim, 2016, p. 3). As Campbell et al. (2020) note, this method increases a study's trustworthiness by aligning participant selection with its central aims (p. 653). It also supports transparency and depth for strong qualitative research.

The first participant was found through Instagram, highlighting how informal digital networks often support research access in emerging industries. Later participants joined through snowball sampling, as initial interviewees referred others. This method helped reach a broader range of voices, especially from within Nepal's film community.

In total, ten participants took part. All of them were experts from their field and had worked or managed with co-productions directly or indirectly. They included animators,

producers, directors, film students, researchers, and policy makers connected to co-production work. Their varied backgrounds helped capture both local practices and transnational dynamics. While the sample size was small, the richness of the interviews and recurring themes provided strong analytical depth.

By targeting professionals closely linked to the topic, the sampling strategy ensured that every interview added meaningfully to the study's core questions (Campbell et al., 2020, pp. 653–655).

3.3 Data Collection Methods

This study employed semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data from professionals involved in co-productions related to Nepal. Participants included Nepali producers, directors, international collaborators, researchers, and government officials engaged in film policy. Semi-structured interviews offered flexibility, allowing participants to share their experiences in depth while ensuring core themes were addressed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80).

An interview guide was developed around three analytical themes: economic logic, gatekeeping, and value chain integration. Questions explored topics such as funding structures, licensing terms, co-production decision-making, distribution practices, and creative control dynamics.

Data collection took place between mid-April and end-May 2025. A total of 10 interviews were conducted. Six interviews were conducted in person in Kathmandu, that included field visits and community referrals. Four interviews were conducted via Google Meet, ensuring wider accessibility and convenience. The film industry's close-knit nature in Nepal enabled efficient snowball sampling and built participant trust.

Interviews were conducted in Nepali and English, depending on participant preference. All interviews were audio recorded with informed consent and later transcribed and translated manually. On average, each interview lasted 65 minutes, ranging from 55 to 110 minutes. Field notes were taken during and after each session to capture contextual details and reflect on emerging insights.

Patterns of repetition began to emerge in later interviews, especially on questions regarding structural imbalances and creative autonomy. This suggested that the dataset was approaching thematic saturation, where reiterating similar ideas and perspectives. This point enhanced analytical depth and validated the sample scope.

The interviewer's position (familiar with the Nepali context but distanced through academic study abroad) encouraged open dialogue and reflexivity. This insider–outsider stance of the interviewer forged deeper trust and more candid insights, reflecting the advantages outlined by Ganga and Scott (2006) in cross-cultural qualitative research.

The combined use of in-person and online formats expanded participant diversity and strengthened the overall dataset.

3.4 Operationalization of Research Themes

This study categorized its central research inquiry into three operational themes: economic logic, gatekeeping, and value chain analysis. These categories helped form a focused exploration of co-productions within Nepal's film industry.

3.4.1 Economic Logic

Co-productions distribute financial risks by pooling investments across countries and stakeholders. They offer financing models, from territorial sales, license-based deals, and hybrid systems, that enhance sustainability and reduce exposure to local market failures (Poort et al., 2019, p. 13). In Nepal's case, this diversification helps navigate limited state funding and infrastructure. However, these arrangements may also reinforce dependencies on external stakeholders and dilute local creative control (Poort et al., 2019, p. 81).

This theme guided interview questions around funding sources, licensing frameworks, budget formation, and the long-term financial viability of cross-border projects. Participants reflected on how international collaborations affect local autonomy and resource control.

3.4.2 Gatekeeping

In the traditional media economy, studio executives, public broadcasters, and commissioning editors acted as gatekeepers, deciding which films secured funding and distribution (Shabir et al., 2015, p. 580). Today, these roles are shared by digital platforms, film funds, and international festivals, which shape both access and visibility.

Gatekeeping theory provided a lens to examine power asymmetries between global institutions and local filmmakers. Questions focused on who gets to decide what stories are told, which narratives receive funding, and how institutional norms influence creative expression. As Smits (2019) notes, international co-productions often operate within normative frameworks set by funding bodies and cultural diplomacy, restricting which identities are made visible (pp. 82–83).

3.4.3 Value Chain Integration

Porter's value chain model helps trace how value is created across stages different stages of development, production, marketing, and distribution (Boediman et al., 2024, p. 124). In fragmented industries like film, value does not lie in the final product alone. It flows through the linked processes.

Digital tools have helped transformed this chain. Technologies like CGI, cloud editing, and remote workflows reduce costs and enable cross-border collaboration (Parc, 2020, p. 395). These tools help low-budget industries like Nepal's match international quality standards without scaling infrastructure.

Distribution has also changed. Streaming platforms now bypass traditional cinema networks, giving filmmakers direct access to global audiences (Parc, 2020, pp. 399–40; Boediman et al., 2024, pp. 128–130). For Nepali filmmakers, this opens new doors but also introduces algorithmic gatekeeping and global competition. These shifts reshape how stories are made, marketed, and seen. They offer flexibility, but also raise new constraints. The chain is leaner, faster, and more global—but not always more equitable.

Interview questions under this theme addressed how local productions adopt digital workflows, access international talent or technology, and position themselves in transnational exhibition circuits. Respondents shared examples of how production pipelines adapt to co-production timelines, shared standards, and cross-border audiences. Themes included the use of digital tools, efficiency in production workflows, and global platform access (e.g., Netflix, MUBI). The aim was to understand whether Nepali co-productions benefit from new digital infrastructures or remain marginalized in distribution.

The interview guide was structured to align with these categories but remained flexible, allowing participants to introduce new topics or offer personal anecdotes. This flexibility was crucial in surfacing unexpected but insightful data.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study applied thematic analysis to make sense of the qualitative data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006, pp. 87–93) six-phase approach. Since most interviews were conducted in a mix of Nepali and English, the process began with full translation of Nepali responses. This stage required careful attention to tone and cultural phrasing to ensure accuracy and preserve participant intent.

After translation, interviews were transcribed using Fathom, a tool that helped speed up the process by providing initial automated transcripts. However, these transcripts were manually reviewed and edited to correct errors, clarify phrasing, and add missing context of translation. Repeated listening and multiple readings of the transcripts helped build deeper familiarity with the content and capture nuances in tone, emphasis, and expression.

Open coding was used to identify early patterns and points of tension across interviews. The researcher grouped codes into broader themes that reflected the research objectives: economic logic, gatekeeping, and value chain integration. Additional themes emerged during analysis, including informal financing practices, authorship dilemmas, and challenges of creative control.

Throughout the process, Atlas.ti was used to organize and visualize the data. Features like color coding, memo writing, and network views allowed for a layered, iterative analysis. As Boeije (2010, p. 94) points out, qualitative analysis involves continuous interaction between data and interpretation—and the use of Atlas.ti supported that flexibility.

The interview guide itself was revised midway through the study as new themes emerged organically from conversations. This adaptive strategy aligned with Bruun's (2016, p. 251) recommendation to let the research context and participant dynamics guide inquiry in close-knit cultural fields like cinema.

By the final interviews, similar themes began recurring with only slight variations. This suggested thematic saturation, increasing the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process. All participants were informed verbally as well as received a detailed consent form outlining the purpose of the study (Appendix C), the voluntary nature of participation, and how their data would be used. Interviews were only recorded after explicit consent was obtained.

To protect participant identity, all names and specific affiliations have been anonymized in the final write-up. Sensitive data, including transcripts and audio recordings, were stored on an encrypted external hard drive and will be deleted upon project completion.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Additionally, space was provided at the end of each interview for participants to add comments, clarify their responses, or ask questions about the study's broader goals.

3.7 Limitations and Reflections

While the qualitative approach provided depth, there were also limitations. Scheduling interviews with high-level professionals proved challenging due to time constraints and

shifting availability. Some interviews had to be rescheduled multiple times or were ultimately cancelled. Additionally, the use of two languages added complexity in transcribing and ensuring that translations retained the tone and meaning of original responses. Another practical limitation emerged from the nature of the interview settings - most of the interviews were conducted in person, in public spaces like cafes and offices. As a result, background noise occasionally affected the clarity of the recordings. The bilingual nature of the interviews, which was conducted in both Nepali and English, posed further challenges. Due to these factors, commonly used online transcription and translation tools such as Google Translate, Otter, or Fathom were not suitable to process the interview audio data fully. As a result, all transcripts had to be manually translated and transcribed which significantly extended the time to process the data.

Another notable limitation to this research was the gender imbalance, with the interviewee group. Majority of interviewees (8) were male, which reflected the gender imbalance within the film industry, particularly in leadership and decision making roles. While the insights were very valuable to the research, the underrepresentation of female voices may have limited the diversity of perspectives, especially in understanding how gender dynamics shape experiences.

4. Results: Findings and Patterns from the Field

This chapter presents the main insights drawn from interviews with 10 experts who are molding Nepal's film industry through their involvement in the industry. The interviewees include filmmakers, directors, producers, animators, and policy makers of Nepal who are actively working on the very topics this thesis explores. Their contributions offer firsthand perspectives on how co-productions are negotiated, financed, and brought to life in practice. These voices are particularly important as they reflect the current state of the industry and the decisions that are shaping its global presence.

The intention with this paper is to piece together how these collaborations actually unfold on the ground. What makes a co-production happen? Who decides what stories get told? What kinds of resources and structures support or limit the possibilities for Nepali cinema to travel globally?

Rather than directly following the sub-questions one by one, this chapter is built around recurring themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes overlap with the questions guiding the thesis but are grounded in lived experiences and repeated patterns.

The first section explores the early stages of co-productions, where Nepali filmmakers often begin by seeking funding and building connections with international partners. As Musa (2020) explains that filmmakers from peripheral markets often depend on informal connections, personal links, and festival visibility to initiate projects (pp. 274- 276). In the absence of national co-production treaties or formal state support, filmmakers must rely on personal networks, past collaborations, and international film festivals to find partners and funding opportunities. These early choices often influence the direction and nature of the project from the very beginning.

The second section analyzes the kinds of stories that gain visibility on the global film circuit. International expectations more so than not drive this selection. Films that portray rural hardship, trauma, or spiritual identity tend to receive more support. Funders and festival curators often favor these familiar themes. Barlet (2011) points out that marginal African filmmakers are well aware that "some stories have more chance of reaching the West: war,

childhood lost, AIDS, misery" (p. 22). Musa (2020) similarly observes that the Global North continues to reward films built around "the exotic, the tragic, and the spectacular" (p. 275). These preferences can unlock funding and exposure. Yet they also pressure Nepali filmmakers to shape their stories for external audiences, forcing a constant negotiation between authenticity and legibility.

The third section examines creative decision-making and collaboration. It focuses on how the terms of funding, institutional requirements, and partner involvement influence various aspects of film development. These influences are evident in script revisions, casting decisions, and stylistic choices. As Khoo (2013) observes, the structure of many co-productions remains hierarchical, with dominant partners typically assuming control over key creative and editorial responsibilities (pp. 8–9). Similarly, Parc (2020) observes that in corporate-driven collaborations, decision-making authority tends to rest with the party contributing the most financial or distributional resources (pp. 1–2). This could result in a production process where creative input is unevenly distributed.

The fourth section addresses how filmmakers navigate the demands and pressures of co-production. Participants described moments of both constraint and satisfaction, reflecting the dual nature of their experiences. As Bruun (2016) reflects, interviews provide access to these layered responses, capturing not only strategic concerns but also emotional investments (pp. 7–8). In line with this, Sorrentino, Sicilia, and Howlett (2022) argue that while co-productions create opportunities for broader circulation, they frequently fall short of ensuring equal influence in decision-making (pp. 6–7). Creative negotiation in such cases are formed by how closely local interests align with the priorities of international stakeholders. These tensions persist throughout the project and influence all phases of production.

Throughout the chapter, each section is written in direct quotations and thematic analysis. This approach highlights not only what is happening but also how it feels to be inside the process of co-producing a Nepali film for international circulation.

4.1 Access is Not Equal: How Visibility is Controlled

This section examines how access to international platforms remains uneven in the global film industry. Nepali filmmakers often work in systems that prioritize their learnt aesthetics and built networks. Curtin (2007) shows that media capitals centralize resources and influence what content gains visibility. These centers set the terms of global participation. Thussu (2007) adds that global media flows continue to favor dominant markets, limiting space for peripheral voices. Whether it is film festivals, streaming platforms, or co-productions, access tends to be shaped by unwritten rules that are difficult to navigate without the right networks, funding, or strategic storytelling choices.

4.1.1 Film Festivals: Who Gets In and Why

Film festivals such as Berlinale, Venice, and Cannes are seen as critical gateways to global recognition. For many Nepali filmmakers, these festivals represent both opportunity and limitation. They offer a platform for visibility and funding, yet they often define the boundaries of what kinds of stories are deemed "worthy" of attention. Many interviewees acknowledged the symbolic and economic power of these festivals but also expressed concern over the selection process, which appears to favor certain predictable narratives, especially those that frame Nepal through the lens of poverty, trauma, or geopolitical tension.

One participant noted that thematic repetition was almost expected:

> *"If your film is about poverty, rural struggle, or children caught in conflict, it has a better chance. That is what they think Nepal is. We want to tell different stories, but those do not get selected." (Interviewee 1)*

As Elsaesser (2005) reflects that festivals operate as gatekeepers, evaluating artistic quality while conferring industrial legitimacy (p. 82) . Bondebjerg (2015) adds that despite their global reach, festival narratives often reproduce familiar tropes that align with geopolitical interests or marketable themes like poverty and trauma . The issue is not simply about inclusion but about the conditions under which inclusion is granted. One director recalls:

> *"My film went to a smaller section at Venice, which helped us find a co-*

producer later. But I know it would never make it to the main slate because it was not dramatic enough. It was a quiet story about a woman returning home. There was no war or poverty in it." (Interviewee 4)

Several interviewees noted that the barriers to festival access begin much earlier, with the submission process itself. As one producer said:

"I do not think we submit enough. Maybe people don't know how. Or they think it's only for certain types of films. There is also this internal feeling that our films are not good enough." (Interviewee 4)

This sentiment was repeated by others, pointing to a mix of infrastructural and psychological barriers. One young filmmaker commented:

"We don't have a system that supports international submissions. No one tells you how to apply, where to go. It's all based on who you know. And often, people say, 'Why bother?' They won't pick us anyway." (Interviewee 2)

These insights align with Smits (2019), who highlights the informal nature of gatekeeping in independent circuits, where access is shaped as much by relationships and institutional familiarity as by artistic merit. Most of the interviewees emphasized the role of intermediaries like their networks, foreign producers, mentors, or friends in bridging this gap.

As one filmmaker explained:

"I attend co-production forums and pitch events, not just to sell a film but to understand what they are looking for. Sometimes that helps you shape the next project in a way that still feels honest but also fits the platform. It's like decoding a language." (Interviewee 2)

Some filmmakers noted that selection in smaller festival sections led to meaningful outcomes. These included access to co-production markets, development residencies, and follow-up funding for future work. Barlet (2000) observes that even without awards, inclusion in secondary sections can open key industry doors and generate new partnerships (p. 122) . One participant shared:

> *"Getting into a side section of a festival changed my life. It didn't win anything, but people saw it. And from that came a residency and then a grant for my next film. It's like a chain reaction, but the first step is the hardest." (Interviewee 4)*

Taken together, the responses suggest that festivals are not just exhibition venues but also engines of industry logic. They reward films that conform to their expectations while rendering others invisible. Parc (2020) notes that access to such platforms reflects broader institutional imbalances, where dominant players control visibility through existing infrastructure and reputation. In the context of Nepal, formal support and strategic guidance are limited. This could result in depending on informal networks and learned navigation rather than equal access for all

4.1.2 Streaming Platforms: Hard to Find, Easy to Miss

Streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Mubi are often positioned as gateways to international exposure. However, access remains limited for most Nepali film makers. Inclusion alone does not ensure visibility. Platform algorithms tend to highlight content in dominant languages and commercially familiar formats. As Lobato (2019) notes, Netflix's distribution systems privilege productions that align with global viewing patterns and market-tested genres (as cited in Wayne, 2020, p. 2). This shapes what is viable and profitable

One filmmaker shared the frustration of this mismatch between access and attention:

> *"Our film made it to two OTT platform – HBO and Prime . But you had to search the exact name for it to show up. It was not promoted; there was no banner or highlight. I don't think a lot of people saw it, I am not even sure if it is still there, or if it was ever promoted" (Interviewee 3)*

Barzilai-Nahon (2009) calls this a form of infrastructural gatekeeping, where films are not explicitly rejected but are simply not made discoverable (p. 499). Smits (2019) agrees that adds to the argument that such systems enforce invisible thresholds, where films must meet certain aesthetic, linguistic, or commercial criteria to be surfaced to viewers.

Infrastructural constraints equally restrict access to digital platforms in Nepal. Internet connectivity and digital payment systems are limited in Nepal and affect both content creators and audiences. Musa (2020) highlights that "Third Cinema artists in Africa and other developing countries have much talent, but have been hampered by limited capital and technology" (p. 273), a condition mirrored in the Nepali context. Khoo (2008) similarly observes that while the digital promise of global reach is luring, a significant access imbalance based on geography and infrastructure remains. Tamara (2016) adds that many Southern filmmakers lack the technical prerequisites needed to circulate their work through dominant digital channels. These accounts suggest that material barriers, and not merely algorithms, allow the extent to which filmmakers from smaller industries can meaningfully engage with global digital platforms.

> *"The number of people watching on Netflix or Amazon in Nepal is very small. Most people share accounts or watch pirated versions. The OTT model doesn't work well here because we don't have that scale or infrastructure." (Interviewee 7)*

Others pointed out that there is an absence of strong local OTT platforms that could serve as a stepping stone to international circulation:

> *"There's no strong local OTT platform yet. There have been many in the*

past but none are really popular or profitable. Even if someone wants to start an OTT here, there isn't enough demand or population that would make it profitable..... So even local films don't have a proper home, for locals or diaspora." (Interviewee 6)

The consequences are double. First, Nepali films have no reliable pipeline to reach international audiences unless mediated through a foreign co-producer or distributor. Second, the domestic audience is not large or digitally enabled enough to support a streaming-first economy. Most Nepali filmmakers remain outside the global digital economy. Without foreign co-producers or distributors, they have few pathways to reach international audiences. The domestic market, on its own, lacks the digital reach or purchasing power to sustain a streaming-first model. As Lobato (2012) argues, access to distribution is not neutral but shaped by structural and economic design.

4.1.3 Forging Foreign Partnership

Many Nepali filmmakers emphasized the pivotal role foreign partners play in helping their projects gain visibility and legitimacy on the international stage. Without formal co-production treaties or state-sponsored frameworks, Nepal's film industry relies heavily on informal, network-driven pathways to access international opportunities. Relationships formed through film festivals, international residencies, and word-of-mouth operate as substitutes for structured matchmaking systems. This aligns with findings by Baltruschat (2010), who explains that in contexts lacking formalized frameworks, informal collaborations become essential routes to co-production and international access (p. 202).

One producer explained,

"There's no structured way to reach out to a European or an American producer. In Nepal, we don't have any government body that facilitates these introductions. You rely on who you know. And sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't." (Interviewee 7)

These informal co-production arrangements often begin during development, especially through international script labs or festival markets. Yet without the structural support that co-production treaties provide, these partnerships often remain fragile (Baltruschat, 2010, p. 192).

Several participants, despite the challenges, acknowledged that foreign partnerships often serve as a gateway to grants, festival placements, and streaming platform acquisitions. A producer shared,

> *"Our film wouldn't have made it into the European fund if we didn't have a Belgian co-producer. They had the experience, and honestly, the face. When a European name is on the application, it's taken more seriously." (Interviewee 9)*

This imbalance of visibility is tied to gatekeeping structures discussed in earlier sections. Barzilai-Nahon's (2009) theory of network gatekeeping highlights how control does not lie only in explicit exclusion but in access to networks and pathways. Without a system to connect with gatekeepers in other countries, Nepalese filmmakers find themselves locked out of opportunity pipelines.

At the same time, some interviewees acknowledged that informal forms of co-production do occur, particularly when international teams shoot in Nepal and work with local line producers or coordinators. These projects are rarely framed as co-productions in legal or financial terms, yet they involve a blending of local and global creative labor.

> *"I have worked as a line producer for three international projects. They bring the money and the camera team, and we manage everything else. It's not called a co-production, but in many ways it is." (Interviewee 2)*

These informal collaborations are often excluded from formal recognition, yet they serve as a crucial space for skill transfer, network building, and exposure to global workflows.

Still, the lack of structured pathways to transform such collaborations into equitable co-productions remains a major barrier.

The reliance on personal networks also leads to uneven outcomes. As one participant admitted:

> *"Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.... I've had two projects where foreign partners who wanted to initially fund my project lost interest halfway. There is no accountability as such. We don't have contracts or institutional support to fall back on." (Interviewee 4)*

Although there is a growing awareness among policymakers in Nepal about the importance of building more structured and equitable international partnerships, concrete support mechanisms are still limited. Informal collaborations often operate outside formal recognition but remain central to how Nepali filmmakers access international workflows, skills, and networks. These partnerships frequently emerge during early development stages but rarely transition into long-term co-productions.

Kraidy (2005, p. 9) observes that cultural hybridization within media collaborations can function as "creative resistance," where minor cinemas negotiate dominant aesthetics while innovating within them. Curtin (2007) notes that several acclaimed Asian co-productions did not succeed by emulating hegemonic styles but by weaving together distinct cultural grammars. These insights suggest that Nepali filmmakers working through informal channels may also engage in similar negotiations between local expression and global legibility.

Filmmakers and line producers usually rely on personal networks, informal agreements, and ad-hoc arrangements in the absence of formal co-production treaties or streamlined government support. International projects continue to come to Nepal to shoot, but these collaborations rarely extend beyond logistical convenience, offering minimal engagement with local creative professionals. As one policy expert acknowledged:

> *"We are aware that many international projects come here and leave with*

> *very little actual collaboration with the Nepali industry. That's why we are working on better incentives, clearer rebate structures, and easier permits. We want to make it attractive not just for them to shoot here, but also to collaborate more meaningfully with local producers and talent." (Interviewee 6)*

This quote highlights the gap between institutional intent and current practice, where the burden of initiating and maintaining international collaborations still falls heavily on individual filmmakers and producers. Baltruschat (2010) points out that without strong national frameworks, international projects often extract value without investing in local capacity. Similarly, Bondebjerg (2016) stresses the role of state support in building resilient industries that can negotiate co-productions on equitable terms. The quote highlights a shift from passive hosting of foreign shoots to a more strategic position, aiming to retain economic and creative value within the local industry.

4.1.4 Summary and discussion

This section highlights how access to global film platforms is shaped by uneven structures of visibility. While international recognition is often framed as merit-based, Nepali filmmakers face systemic barriers that go beyond the quality of their films. Big Film festivals like Berlinale, Venice, and Cannes offer global exposure but tend to favor stories that fit certain aesthetic and expectations. Several interviewees pointed out that narratives around poverty, trauma, or conflict are more likely to get selected for a country like Nepal. This pattern leads filmmakers to self-censor or reshape their projects to align with what they believe selectors want. As Elsaesser (2005) notes, festivals function as industrial gatekeepers, and Bondebjerg (2015) argues that these platforms often recycle familiar tropes tied to geopolitical interests. The issue is not just about thematic fit but also access to submission knowledge and networks. Many respondents described a lack of support systems to guide festival entries, with barriers ranging from confidence gaps to missing mentorship structures. Festivals can open doors like how when some filmmakers described secondary selections that led to funding or residencies, but getting in remains opaque.

Streaming platforms offer another route, but still visibility is uneven. As Barzilai-Nahon (2009) describes, this is infrastructural gatekeeping: films are not rejected outright but

simply remain unseen. Filmmakers who reached OTT platforms shared that their work was poorly promoted or hidden in search results. Smits (2019) adds that platform algorithms favor content with commercial or aesthetic familiarity.

Nepali infrastructure also limits digital engagement. Musa (2020) and Tamara (2016) highlight how material challenges like weak internet, low OTT access, and limited tech investment prevent Southern industries from fully participating in the global digital film economy. This holds true for Nepal, where even local OTT platforms struggle to survive.

In response, filmmakers turn to informal partnerships, festivals, or foreign producers to gain international access. These relationships offer funding and reach but often lack equity. Local producers become subcontractors rather than creative partners. As Baltruschat (2010) and Bondebjerg (2016) point out, stronger national frameworks are needed to ensure such partnerships build lasting capacity.

Overall, the interviews show that access is shaped less by talent and more by gatekeeping structures, uneven infrastructure, and missing institutional support.

4.2 Agency and How It Is Negotiated

In the context of international co-productions, agency refers to the creative and decision-making power that Nepali filmmakers retain, or give up, during various stages of a project. It includes choices over script development, casting, budgeting, editing, and even marketing. As Baltruschat (2010) notes, agency in international co-productions is rarely stable. It is often negotiated through the interplay of financing, institutional frameworks, and cultural hierarchies, with dominant partners exerting more influence over creative and operational decisions

Participants reflected on how agency was often conditional. The level of control a Nepali filmmaker could exercise typically depended on if they were initiating the project, the scale of foreign involvement, and the source of money. Agency shifted across stages in many cases. What was noted was that it became more flexible in the early idea phase and more constrained during editing or distribution.

4.2.1 Creative Control Across Production Stages

The question of creative control emerges consistently across interviews, with many participants describing it as something fluid. Rather than being a fixed attribute, creative agency is shaped by multiple factors across the lifecycle of a film. This includes the development of the script, the negotiation with co-producers, post-production decisions, and festival positioning. Control is often strongest at the initial stages when projects are locally developed. However, this control tends to become more negotiable as projects gain interest from foreign collaborators or funding bodies.

One filmmaker reflected on how this shift unfolds over time:

> *"We start with something very personal, very local. But once we get some interest from outside, we have to start reshaping it. It is not always in a bad way, but it's not entirely ours anymore, the shape is changed and loses the local touch." (Interviewee 1)*

This dynamic aligns with what Bergfelder and Iordanova (2016) describe as the balancing act of transnational film production, where local stories are reframed to align with global curatorial tastes or funding criteria.

In some cases, collaboration is approached strategically from the beginning, with international interests and funding expectations shaping the proposal. As one participant explained:

> *"In our documentary, it was a co-direction with a friend. We had freedom but we knew we had to apply for grants. So we kept refining the proposal with those international calls in mind. It was our story, but it had to sound like something they would fund." (Interviewee 4)*

This practice reflects Curtin's (2003) notion of "media capital," where creative content is adapted to circulate effectively within international funding and festival circuits. The story

is not necessarily compromised, but it is subtly reshaped to meet the expectations of gatekeeping institutions such as grant panels and programmers.

Participants also described how informal collaborations, specially during research or writing phases, play an important role in creative control. These networks often include past collaborators or international allies:

> *"When a project is still in the research or writing stage, I try to involve collaborators early. Some of them are from abroad, some from here. It's a mix. That helps later when you need support for post-production or exposure." (Interviewee 2)*

For others, international partnerships brought unexpected benefits. One participant described how being selected for Berlinale Talents helped them gain a local co-financer and finish their film on a modest budget:

> *"I had applied to the Berlinale Talents short film section. It gave attention to the project. A co-financer who also runs theaters here approached me. He handled all the finances and logistics, and we finished the film with a small budget." (Interviewee 3)*

Yet, challenges remain. Some filmmakers spoke of losing control in post-production, especially when dealing with partners who expected more universally recognizable pacing or editing styles. Others pointed to a lack of local expertise as a constraint:

> *"There are so many stories here, but we need better editors, color graders, and sound people. Sometimes when we collaborate with outsiders, they take over these parts—not because we don't want to do them, but because we can't always find the right people." (Interviewee 1)*

The interviews reflect how creative agency is not one stable attribute but a shifting element changed with context. Parc (2017) emphasizes that in co-productions, control over creative decisions is rarely singular or static. Instead, it is supported by financing, distribution access, and institutional hierarchies: "Who gets to make the final call depends on financing, access to distribution, and institutional positioning" (p. 19). This echoes participant reflections that creative agency is strongest during early development, often under local direction. However, as international partners join the project, the agency becomes more negotiable. Parc further notes that "broadcasters or large corporations… often request editorial influence," altering the direction of a project, especially in post-production (p. 20).

These findings suggest that agency is not lost all at once but is negotiated differently across the production timeline. Writing and development phases often offer more autonomy, whereas funding, editing, and distribution stages are more susceptible to external influence.

4.2.2 Being Present but Not Leading

Through the interviews, it was found that Nepali filmmakers frequently find themselves involved in international co-productions as essential yet secondary collaborators. While they may be listed as co-producers or local partners, their roles often resemble those of subcontractors. They execute critical logistical or technical responsibilities without participating fully in creative decision-making. This dynamic is particularly visible in service productions, where foreign teams shoot in Nepal and rely on local producers, line producers, or fixers to manage the on-ground execution. Parc (2017) notes that in many co-productions, especially state-led or corporation-driven ones, "local players are often mobilized more as facilitators than as genuine creative contributors" (p. 94).

This pattern becomes especially visible in service productions, where foreign crews depend on local producers and fixers for execution but retain control over narrative and creative decisions.

As one line producer stated:

> *"Most of the time, we are brought in to do the legwork. We arrange the shoot, permits, logistics, everything. But the story, the edit, the poster—*

those are handled elsewhere. We are thanked at the end, but we don't sit in the main meetings." (Interviewee 2)

Another filmmaker added to this, and emphasized how the label of "co-production" can be misleading:

"It's called a co-production, but really, we are just offering support. There's no creative input from our side. The title is flattering, but the reality is we're doing commissioned work." (Interviewee 3)

This dynamic reflects what Curtin and Sanson (2016) describe as the asymmetries of global media production, where local crews in smaller markets shoulder the labor of execution while foreign partners retain creative and financial control The dynamic further mirrors what Mayer (2011) calls "below-the-line labor", an essential yet invisible contributions that rarely result in narrative or financial ownership.

Despite these limitations, some participants acknowledged the learning opportunities that such engagements offer. One respondent involved in an international shoot remarked:

"We worked with a European team on a documentary here. I was the local producer. It wasn't our story, but we got to learn how they structured the shoot, managed timelines, even post-production workflows. It helps, even if we are not the main storytellers." (Interviewee 2)

Such sentiments raise important questions about equity and visibility in transnational collaborations. While being part of international projects can build capacity and global networks, repeated subcontracting without authorship rights risks reinforcing systemic inequality. Even well-meaning partnerships may fall short of true creative exchange if local collaborators are only included in the operational backend.

4.2.3 Summary and Discussion

This section examined how Nepali filmmakers navigate creative agency within international co-productions. Agency here means control over creative decisions across scriptwriting, casting, editing, and distribution. But this control is rarely stable. As Baltruschat (2010) notes, agency is negotiated through funding structures, institutional norms, and cultural hierarchies. Across interviews, participants described a shifting balance of control depending on who initiates the project, when international partners join, and where the funding comes from.

Many shared that agency is strongest at the start during script development or early concept design. At this point, projects reflect local vision and context. But as foreign collaborators or funders become involved, stories often get reshaped. Sometimes this is strategic. As one filmmaker said, they adjusted their documentary pitch to match grant expectations. Other times, the pressure is less direct but still felt.

This aligns with Parc's (2017) observation that broadcasters and large funders often shape a project's direction, especially in post-production. Participants mentioned how decisions around pacing, editing, and color grading sometimes shift away from local hands due to both expertise gaps and external influence. Curtin's (2003) concept of "media capital" also helps explain this: stories often need to be tailored to gain entry into gatekeeping platforms like festivals or grant panels. This negotiation is not always negative, but it does affect whose voice is prioritized.

The data also showed that informal collaborations can create space for agency. Early partnerships, mentorships, and mixed teams during writing stages were seen as helpful. One participant explained how early feedback and co-research from a diverse team helped keep the story grounded while still making it viable for international attention.

At the same time, a recurring concern was being present but not leading. Many Nepali filmmakers involved in international shoots described roles more aligned with service production. As Parc (2017) writes, such roles often mobilize locals as facilitators rather than full creative partners.

This concern was not just about credit but about authorship and ownership. Being involved in global productions without decision-making power risks reproducing structural

inequality. Mayer's (2011) concept of "below-the-line labor" is relevant here—valuable work that remains invisible in terms of narrative agency.

Still, several interviewees acknowledged the learning value of these projects. For some, working with international teams provided exposure to new workflows and timelines. But as the codes show, when creative control and authorship are consistently missing, the long-term benefit for local storytelling ecosystems remains uncertain.

Overall, the findings suggest that agency is not a fixed trait but a process. It is constantly negotiated, strengthened or weakened at different points in the production cycle, and is shaped by the asymmetries of access, funding, and institutional recognition

4.3 Money Matters: Challenges in Film Funding

Access to funding remains one of the most significant barriers for filmmakers in Nepal. Without state-supported film funds, co-production treaties, or tax rebates, many directors and producers are left to find creative and often unstable ways to finance their films. While international co-productions can provide much-needed resources, they also bring conditions that may limit creative and operational freedom. This section explores the challenges Nepali filmmakers face when sourcing money, how financial dependency shapes the kinds of stories that get told, and how informal and personal networks often replace institutional support. The reliance on personal contacts and scattered international grants has become the norm, while structural issues like the absence of co-production agreements or government-backed funding mechanisms continue to restrict the industry's growth.

4.3.1 Local Structures

Nearly every interviewee pointed to a lack of institutional support for film in Nepal. Unlike other countries with dedicated film funds or rebate programs, Nepal offers very limited public funding. Several participants mentioned that they had never even considered applying for support from Nepali institutions because they either do not exist or are not functional.

One participant explained:

"There is no dedicated film fund in Nepal....If you're lucky, you might get a

cultural grant, but it's not for production. So everyone's applying outside from IDFA Bertha to Sundance. We've had to learn how to write proposals for a global audience." (Interviewee 4)

Another filmmaker described how this affects their early planning:

"We start thinking of foreign grants right from the development stage. It's not about what story we want to tell, it's what story we can pitch that fits a call. It shapes the film from the start." (Interviewee 7)

Producers echoed these concerns, particularly those working in line production for foreign projects shot in Nepal:

"Even when big films come here to shoot, there's no rebate or tax incentive. We are used like service providers. There's no policy to retain that investment or even help us grow our crew capacity." (Interviewee 3)

The absence of formal co-production treaties was another recurring issue. Several filmmakers noted that without these agreements, projects cannot access certain international funds, or must route their applications through foreign collaborators:

"There is no co-production treaty with any country. So when we want to apply to French or German funds, we need a producer from there. Otherwise, we are not eligible. It keeps us dependent." (Interviewee 8)

As a result, informal relationships often take the place of formal infrastructure. Participants described relying on personal networks, festival meetings, or social media outreach to initiate collaborations:

"Most of us are finding partners to collaborate with on Facebook or through

> *WhatsApp. That's the reality. We don't have an agency or desk that connects us. It's all personal credibility." (Interviewee 4)*

This aligns with Hjort's (2013) broader framing that festivals operate as informal institutional nodes, compensating for the absence of centralized film infrastructure and facilitating collaborations through personal networks rather than state bodies (Hjort, 2013, p. 128). Similarly, Curtin et al. (2016) point out that without national policies, global partnerships often entrench dependency rather than build equal capacity.

These limitations push filmmakers to continually adapt to external funding logic. Over time, this can influence both the kind of projects that are developed and the form they take.

4.3.2 Foreign Grants Come with Conditions

For many Nepali filmmakers, foreign grants are a lifeline. With limited or no institutional support at home, these grants often enable projects to get off the ground. However, they come with their own expectations, frameworks, and thematic preferences. Many interviewees noted that while these opportunities are vital, they also shape the creative direction of a project, sometimes subtly and sometimes decisively.

Filmmakers often find themselves reframing their narratives to align with the logic of the funding body. As one interviewee explained:

> *"We often start with a story that's very local and rooted in our own context, but when we apply for funding, we begin asking, 'Will they understand this? Will this match the themes they like?' We are aware of what gets funded of stories of women, poverty, conflict, and climate. So we start shaping our proposals in that direction. Sometimes, we have to find a way to make our story sound like it fits these boxes." (Interviewee 1)*

A young filmmaker provided a particularly reflective account of this. In discussing his feature-length documentary that took five years to complete, he explained how grant writing often required anticipatory adjustments to the proposal.

> *"With our documentary, we kept refining the narrative to suit the calls we were applying for. Each call had a different focus. Some were about human rights, others about youth or migration. We knew we had to respond to those keywords. The story stayed the same at its heart, but how we described it changed each time. That's just part of the process now." (Interviewee 4)*

This process often extends beyond grant writing. Filmmakers described how the tone, framing, and even pacing of their work may shift to reflect what international juries or funders might expect. As one director put it:

> *"If your film is too subtle or doesn't have dramatic stakes, it's hard to get attention. So just to get attention, we have to try to highlight what's 'relevant' .....like trauma, oppression, struggle even when that's not the main point of our story. It becomes a balancing act between being honest and being fundable." (Interviewee 1)*

These comments align with critiques from industry scholars who argue that international co-production schemes, especially those linked to state subsidies, often act as a form of "collective censorship", pushing filmmakers to tailor scripts, settings, or casting to meet funding criteria rather than artistic intent (Parc, 2020, p. 462). Similarly, Luna and Meers (2017) demonstrate how global film festival circuits and funding infrastructures tend to reward films from peripheral regions that conform to expected narratives—encouraging the portrayal of poverty, conflict, or exoticism, and reinforcing familiar tropes in global cinema.

The influence of funding expectations does not always result in a loss of integrity. Some filmmakers spoke about navigating these pressures creatively. One noted:

> *"I don't think we always compromise. Sometimes we use the themes they want as entry points. We still tell our story, but maybe we highlight certain angles a bit more. It's like speaking in a language they understand, while keeping our own accent." (Interviewee 1)*

Nonetheless, the structure of funding access itself remains an obstacle. Not only must filmmakers adapt to foreign expectations, but they also face the logistical challenges of repeated applications, changing deadlines, and limited feedback. The constant reframing becomes a skill, but also a source of fatigue and frustration.

These insights reveal how funding is not a neutral input. It shapes the narratives that are told, how they are framed, and even who gets to tell them. Access to funding remains a central challenge for filmmakers in Nepal. In the absence of co-production treaties, national film funds, or tax incentives, most directors rely on informal, fragmented sources. Hjort (2010) argues that state-supported frameworks—such as bilateral agreements and subsidies—are crucial for ensuring creative participation in international co-productions (p. 5). While global collaborations offer financial relief, they often come with conditions that limit narrative autonomy. As a result, Nepali filmmakers turn to personal contacts and scattered grant opportunities, navigating a system where institutional support remains minimal.

4.3.3 Regional Collaboration: A Hopeful but Unclear Path

Alongside dependence on Western funding, several Nepali filmmakers see regional partnerships, particularly with countries like India and Bangladesh, as a potentially more equal and contextually aligned model for collaboration. These aspirations stem from shared cultural proximities, linguistic overlaps, and more comparable production ecosystems. Yet despite this promise, such collaborations remain limited by the lack of formal frameworks, funding schemes, and political or infrastructural support.

One participant reflected on this duality:

> *"I think collaboration with India is more organic. The cultures are similar, so the kind of stories we want to tell feel more understood. But there's no*

> *structure for this. It always depends on who you know, if someone invites you, or if a festival connects you. It's not like Europe where you have clear co-production treaties or schemes you can apply to." (Interviewee 7)*

This resonates with Bhatia's (2023) observation that many Indian international co-productions are shaped not by institutional frameworks, but by informal interpersonal networks built on intuition, emotional rapport, and "vibes," often initiated through personal relationships at festivals rather than formal treaties or structured funding ecosystems). In the interviews, participants spoke about shared histories with South Asian countries, particularly India, but also emphasized that national politics, border complexities, and funding asymmetries still limit actual cooperation.

Another filmmaker emphasized the challenges of taking South-South collaboration beyond conversation:

> *"We've had so many talks with Bangladeshi and Indian friends—like, let's do something together. But there is no fund we can apply to together, no co-production agreement between Nepal and these countries. So even if we want to collaborate, we don't know how to formalize it." (Interviewee 4)*

The lack of treaties and regional grants makes these partnerships logistically complex and financially uncertain. One participant described a past project involving an Indian co-producer that fell through due to visa delays and tax complications. Others noted that even when collaboration happens, it is often on the level of technical exchange, such as hiring Indian cinematographers or editors, rather than full creative co-development.

In theory, South-South cooperation offers a powerful alternative to traditional Global North-South models, which are often asymmetrical in power and creative control. Scholars like Higbee and Lim (2010) argue that regionalism in cinema can promote what they term "critical transnationalism," where collaboration is rooted in shared contexts and mutual benefit, rather than financial hierarchy. However, for Nepal and its neighbors, this potential remains largely aspirational due to the absence of supportive infrastructure.

In the absence of treaties or incentives, regional collaboration currently remains largely informal nurtured through personal relationships, festival encounters, or mutual networks. Thus, while regional partnerships are often seen as a more equitable model compared to Western co-productions, their potential will remain limited until governments and regional institutions begin investing in cross-border funding mechanisms, legal frameworks, and shared production infrastructure.

4.3.4 Summary and Discussion

This section shows that Nepali filmmakers face constant challenges with funding. Interviewees repeatedly stressed that money shapes both the structure and direction of filmmaking. Without national film funds, tax rebates, or co-production treaties, filmmakers must look for unstable and informal financing. They often rely on international grants and personal networks to get their projects off the ground. Hjort (2013) explains that festivals and informal connections often fill the gap left by missing infrastructure. These stand-ins offer opportunity, but they bring added work and no certainty

Filmmakers explained how they begin reshaping their stories early in the development stage to meet funding requirements. Instead of asking what stories matter to them, they ask which ideas will align with donor themes like poverty, gender, conflict, or climate. Luna and Meers (2017) describe how global funders tend to reward films from smaller industries when they follow familiar patterns. These pressures don't always come as direct censorship, but filmmakers learn how to adjust their narratives to survive the system.

Several interviewees said that funding affects not just the message of their films but also their structure. Parc (2020) argues that international co-productions can influence creative decisions by rewarding certain formats or tones. In practice, this means that filmmakers often find themselves adjusting scripts, pacing, or casting to meet funder expectations. Many develop the skill to speak in a language that funders understand while still trying to preserve their own voice.

Some participants described how they used these funding categories as entry points. They did not feel they always compromised but instead highlighted parts of their story that would appeal to donors. Still, this repeated need to rewrite, reframe, and reapply created

burnout and frustration. A highly recurring theme in the interviews was the difficulty of accessing funding and the feeling of being excluded.

Interviewees also spoke about the possibility of more regional collaborations with countries like India or Bangladesh. They felt that shared culture and language could make partnerships more equal. However, Bhatia (2023) notes that these partnerships often rely on emotional rapport and informal contacts rather than clear policy. Participants echoed this, saying that they needed personal invitations, festival connections, or private arrangements because no regional co-production funds or treaties exist.

Filmmakers must now act as artists, fundraisers, translators, and strategists. They move through a system that demands flexibility and constant adjustment. Higbee and Lim (2010) argue that meaningful cross-border collaboration should build on shared goals and benefit both sides. But without strong policies or shared funding structures, Nepali filmmakers continue to depend on foreign gatekeepers. They keep reshaping their work to fit a system that is yet to see their stories on their own terms.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Answer to Research Question

This research examined how international co-productions shape Nepal's place in global cinema. The central question explored the visibility of Nepali films and the control local filmmakers have, and how the industry is positioned on the world stage. It asked two core questions: how Nepal's role in global media flows affects what stories get told and funded, and how structural barriers at home shape who gets to tell them.

This research provided answers with insight into how international co-productions have become both an opportunity and a challenge for Nepal's film industry. Co-productions offer visibility on global platforms, access to funding, and technical partnerships that Nepal lacks at home. But these benefits come with trade-offs that shape not just who gets seen, but how stories are told and by whom.

Nepal's position in global media flows limits its visibility. Without formal treaties, state support, or strong local infrastructure, Nepali filmmakers rely on informal networks and foreign collaborators to access global stages. Film festivals and funding bodies gravitate toward stories that match what they already recognize or expect from smaller nations. Narratives that deal with social struggle, political trauma, or spiritual isolation tend to find more space in global circuits. Stories that are outside of these familiar frames, those rooted in everyday joy, urban life, or nuanced emotional complexity, often receive less attention. These patterns indirectly or directly help shape what gets funded and who is seen. As a result, many filmmakers shape their proposals to match these expectations

Financing remains one of the biggest challenges. Without domestic funds or rebates, filmmakers depend on international grants that often come with strict guidelines. This affects the kinds of stories that get told and who gets to lead them. Local filmmakers adjust scripts, casting, and even pacing to meet the tastes of funders and juries. These pressures reduce their creative freedom, especially in later production stages. Yet some also find space to work creatively within these limits, using grants as a tool.

Additionally, OTT platforms offer reach, but not for everyone. Their algorithms push content that promises high views, strong production, and wide appeal. Nepal, with its small audience and weak digital systems, doesn't meet those numbers. Platforms like Netflix or

Amazon rarely invest in promoting Nepali films. Even when these films make it online, they stay hidden without dubbing, marketing, or big partners, they're listed but not really seen.

Structural conditions and weak institutions in Nepal affect creative agency. Filmmakers often act as writers, fundraisers, and negotiators. They must navigate shifting requirements, language barriers, and informal deals without legal or policy support. While co-productions sometimes offer technical growth and international reach, they rarely come with equal decision-making power.

While government support to filmmakers is extended via awards and small fund programs, it is heavily lacking. Nepali filmmakers have carried the weight of going global mostly on their own. They build networks, chase grants, and pitch at festivals, mostly through their own resources. But this model is not sustainable. Film is more than entertainment. It's culture and narrative. Without public support of funds, policies, official treaties, Nepali films will struggle to grow, let alone compete. The global stage is there, but getting on it shouldn't be a solo journey.

Still, there is hope. Regional collaboration with countries like India and Bangladesh feels more culturally aligned and less extractive, even if it lacks formal structure. Some filmmakers also use co-productions to explore new hybrid forms that stay grounded in local experience. These experiments show that even under constraint, Nepali filmmakers find ways to assert voice and vision.

In short, international co-productions shape Nepal's global visibility, but they do not guarantee equal standing. They influence not just how Nepal is seen abroad, but how its filmmakers imagine what is possible. True participation in global cinema will require more than access. It will require structures that support creative agency, protect local voice, and share power across borders.

5.2 Theoretical Implication

This thesis brings Nepal into a conversation where it has long been missing. Academic studies on co-productions have focused mostly on dominant players from Hollywood, major European industries, and a handful of well-supported Asian markets like South Korea or China.

What happens when a film industry tries to go global without national support, formal treaties, or institutional muscle? What does co-production look like when driven by survival rather than strategy? These are questions that existing theory rarely addresses. This study offers a grounded, real-time view from a country that is navigating global film circuits from the periphery. The need to study such contexts is urgent, not only for completeness but for accuracy. Without them, theories risk overstating the agency or stability that many filmmakers simply do not have.

Parc (2020) helps explain why this matters. His work shows how many co-productions, though framed as collaborations, often reflect the demands of funding bodies and national branding—leaving little room for creative autonomy. Thussu (2007) points out that global media flows are rarely neutral. They favor countries and voices that already have reach. For Nepal, this means competing on uneven ground. Poort (2021) sharpens this argument with the concept of "platform power," showing how digital algorithms shape visibility, often pushing smaller players to the margins unless they fit specific molds. And Lobato (2012) reminds us that not all distribution is formal. Much of Nepal's film economy lives in informal, improvised networks—festivals, Facebook connections, cross-border contacts. These are systems, too, even if they don't appear in official reports.

There has been little to no academic work that explores Nepali cinema through this specific lens. Most existing studies on South Asian media focus on India or diaspora contexts. Even local work on Nepali film tends to focus on content, not industry structure. This thesis trie sto bridge the gap. It looks at the mechanics of production, the politics of access, and the economics of visibility. With this, it creates a foundation for further research into small industries operating under global pressure.

Nepal's film industry is still young, but t it is ambitious. If studied seriously, it offers insight into the realities faced by many emerging cinemas across the Global South. For scholars, this means expanding the scope of film theory. For Nepal, it means building knowledge that can inform smarter policies, stronger alliances, and more grounded international strategies. This thesis is one step in that direction.

5.3 Societal Implication

This research offers critical insights into how small film industries like Nepal navigates the complex space of global visibility

It centers the voices of Nepali filmmakers and shows how they work through limited resources, gatekeeping, and aesthetic expectations. These findings can guide local changemakers, including filmmakers, policymakers, and educators, to understand what shapes access, agency, and visibility.It builds knowledge in a field where little research exists. Global scholars and funders can use it to better understand a cinema ecosystem often overlooked. Aspiring filmmakers can see the paths others have taken, the barriers they may face, and the informal strategies that matter. Cultural institutions and governments can use the evidence to push for better support, stronger policy, and public investment in film.

Appadurai (1996) argues that media shapes how societies imagine themselves. In Nepal too, film has the potential to connect regions, document local realities, and build cultural confidence. But without state support, this potential remains limited. Bhaskar's idea of critical realism explains why this matters. Social structures are not always visible, but they shape what people can or cannot do. This research makes those hidden forces clear. It reveals how global systems reward certain stories, limit others, and keep visibility uneven. By naming these patterns, the research helps build awareness and support change.

In this light, this thesis aims to have a practical and social value. It aims to help people inside and outside Nepal understand how creative industries grow under pressure and brings light to what needs to change to support fairer access. It adds a local voice to global conversations and helps shift how we think about inclusion in world cinema. To grow, Nepal's film industry needs recognition, policy, and research. This thesis contributes to that process. It creates knowledge that the sector can use. It is a step toward a more structured, visible, and resilient industry.

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5.4 Limitation and Recommendation

Time placed clear limits on the scope of this research. The study was conducted within a defined period, which required choices about whom to reach and what areas to explore. Although several experienced voices in Nepal's film and co-production landscape were included, a few key figures leading major international projects could not be interviewed. Their insights could have added greater contrast and depth, especially in understanding higher-budget projects and the strategies used to navigate global partnerships.

The study relied on purposive sampling, which allowed for targeted engagement with professionals active in the field. However, this method also meant that some voices remained absent. The overall sample size was small, reflecting depth rather than breadth. A larger and more diverse respondent pool might have captured a wider range of experiences and revealed further variations in how filmmakers navigate international co-productions.

The research also aimed to address the role of gender more directly. However, due to the low representation of women in the Nepali film industry, the study could not include enough female perspectives to fully explore how gender shapes creative agency, funding access, or visibility within co-productions. This remains an important area for future investigation. A focused study on the experiences of women in international collaborations could offer valuable insights into systemic barriers and missed opportunities.

The study focused on professionals based in Nepal to ensure strong local grounding. While this approach brought clarity to national practices, it excluded voices from international producers, funding bodies, and festival programmers. These actors play a crucial role in setting conditions for participation, shaping narratives, and determining who gets seen. Their absence limited the understanding of how decisions are negotiated across borders. Future research should address this gap by incorporating cross-national perspectives and exploring power flows between local creators and global stakeholders.

The subject of co-productions is wide-ranging and layered. Rich insights emerged across interviews, but not every angle could be explored in depth. A follow-up study could focus more narrowly on specific areas such as funding criteria, co-production treaty design, or the aesthetics of proposal writing. Comparative research with a similar emerging film

industry such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, or Mongolia could provide a valuable counterpoint. This would help distinguish which challenges are specific to Nepal and which reflect broader structural conditions within the Global South.

During the research process, several participants pointed to the growing importance of animation and independent documentary work in Nepal. These sectors remain underexplored but show clear signs of momentum. They were not the focus of this thesis, but they so represent thriving emerging creative spaces that often operate outside formal systems. Future research dedicated to Nepal's animation studios or documentary filmmakers could uncover alternative production models and new pathways to global engagement.

This thesis provides a foundation but also reveals the need for broader and more inclusive research. The next steps will require more diverse voices, sharper thematic focus, and deeper engagement with the rapidly evolving segments of Nepal's film industry.

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7. Appendix

Appendix A: Overview of Interviewees

	Job Title	Country of work	Gender
Interviewee 1	Filmmaker, Actor	Nepal	Male
Interviewee 2	Director, Line Producer	Nepal	Female
Interviewee 3	Director, Producer	Nepal	Male
Interviewee 4	Filmmaker	Nepal	Male
Interviewee 5	Director	Nepal	Male
Interviewee 6	Policy Maker	Nepal	Male
Interviewee 7	Filmmaker, Producer	Nepal	Male
Interviewee 8	Filmmaker, Educator	Germany	Male
Interviewee 9	Film Journalist, Film Lecturer	Nepal	Male
Interviewee 10	Researcher	France	Female

Interviewee 1 is a Nepali filmmaker and actor currently based in France. The filmmaker has been based in France since the late 90s. As a filmmaker, he is well known for his socially engaged storytelling. As an actor, he was trained in dramatic arts.

Interviewee 2 is a director, cinematographer, and a line producer based in Nepal. She has been directing and producing films, documentaries, and TV shows for both national and international channels.

Interviewee 3 is a Nepal-based producer and founder of an award-winning film production company. Their films have travelled to various international film festivals

including, Berlinale, Bhusan, Venice and Rotterdam. In addition to producing original films, his company also provides services to international film crews working in Nepal.

Interviewee 4 is a Nepal based filmmaker who works in both fiction and documentary. He is an alumnus of multiple film festivals and has travelled to TIFF, Berninale ... In addition, he is dedicated to support film education and to cultivating new talents.

Interviewee 5 is a director and co-founder involved in several animation and film ventures in Nepal. He works with films, advertisements, music videos, and animation, working with both national and international companies. With his new association, he looks to grow the VFX and Animation industry in Nepal.

Interviewee 6 currently works at Nepal's national film regulatory body, overseeing policy development, industry support programs, and international outreach initiatives. With a long-standing career in the entertainment sector, he previously worked as a director, an actor, and a television host.

Interviewee 7 is a Nepalese filmmaker and producer. He is a pioneer in co-productions and his films have reached international award ceremonies and have travelled various film festivals. He currently produces films and documentaries.

Interviewee 8 is a Nepali filmmaker and visual anthropologist based in Germany. His recent film traveled to a major film festival. In addition to that, he works as an educator in film studies.

Interviewee 9 is a Nepal-based film journalist and educator with experience reporting on national cinema for a major digital news platform. They also teach film studies at a local academic institution and have been closely involved in observing developments in Nepal's contemporary film culture.

Interviewee 10 is a film scholar currently pursuing doctoral research focused on Nepali cinema. Their academic work engages with the structural, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions of the country's film industry.

Appendix B: Consent Form for Primary Research

This is the copy of the consent form that was provided to all the interviewees and signed.

Introduction

Dear …….,

I am Shreya Pokharel, a master's student in media and creative studies at the Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication. I am researching how international co-productions impact the development of Nepal's film industry, focusing on the economic, cultural, and structural implications for local filmmakers. I am conducting this research independently.

I will explain the study below. If you have any questions, please ask me. While reading, you can mark parts of the text that are unclear to you.

If you want to participate in the study, you can indicate this at the end of this form.

What is the research about?

This research explores how international film co-productions influence the development of Nepal's film industry. It investigates both the opportunities and constraints that come with such collaborations—financially, culturally, and structurally. The study focuses on how Nepali filmmakers and producers navigate these dynamics in the broader context of global cinema.

Why are we asking you to participate?

You have been selected to participate in this study due to your role as a professional engaged in Nepal's film or media industry, particularly in areas related to production, distribution, or cultural policymaking. Your expertise and first-hand experiences will be invaluable in helping us understand how co-productions affect Nepalese cinema and the people who shape it.

What can you expect?

This study will take place over approximately 4 months.
If you agree to participate, you will:

- Take part in an interview (approx. 1 hour), either in person or online at your convenience.
- Be asked questions about your experiences with film production and co-productions, as well as your views on funding, distribution, and creative autonomy.
- Have the option to skip any questions or end the interview at any time without needing to give a reason.
- Be recorded (audio or video) for transcription purposes. At the end of the interview, you may review your responses and suggest edits, deletions, or clarifications to ensure accuracy.

You decide whether to participate

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can stop at any time and would not need to provide any explanation.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts. The topics discussed will focus on your professional insights and experiences within the industry.

What do you get for participating? / What are the benefits of participating?

There is no financial compensation. However, your contribution will help illuminate the challenges and possibilities facing the Nepali film industry and may inform future collaborations, policies, or funding frameworks.

What data will I ask you to provide?

You'll be asked to share:

- Personal information: name, age, gender, profession.
- Audio/video recordings of the interview.
- Opinions on co-productions, gatekeeping in distribution, and your experiences in the Nepalese film industry.

- Your email address (used to send you a summary of the research outcomes, if desired).

Who can see your data? / What will happen to my data?

- I will store all your data securely.

- Only persons involved in the research can see (some of) the data.

- Recordings are transcribed. Your name is replaced with a number/made-up name.

- Data such as your name, address, gender, occupation, and recordings will be stored separately from your answers/the transcription.

- We will write an article about the results of the study, which will be published publicly in academic journals and/or books. The results will be accessible to anyone.

- We may use your specific answers in the article. If your answer can be traced to you or we would like to mention your name, we will ask your permission first.

Although we do not include your name in publications or communicate it to other participants or third parties, there is a risk that you could still be indirectly identified.

How long will your personal data be stored?

Your data will be retained for 10 years after completion of the research. We retain the data so that other researchers have the opportunity to verify that the research was conducted correctly. Your name and contact details will be deleted within one year.

Using your data for new research

We will make anonymized data publicly available so that any interested person can use it. We ensure that the data cannot be traced back to you/we do not disclose anything that identifies you.

Part of the data we collect may be useful for educational purposes and future research, including in very different research areas. In the consent form, we ask you to give us permission to use your personal data, excluding name, email address, occupation and recordings for follow-up or other scientific research. The data shared are (potentially) traceable to you.

What happens with the results of the study?

The results will contribute to a Master's thesis and may also be published in academic articles or presentations. If you'd like to receive a summary of the findings, we can send it to your email.

Do you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions about the study or your privacy rights, such as accessing, changing, deleting, or updating your data, please contact me.

Name: [naam]: Shreya Pokharel

Phone number: [phone number]: +31630284477

Email: [email address]: shreya.po.np@gmail.com

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email the Data Protection Officer (fg@eur.nl) or visit www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl. (T: 088 - 1805250)

Do you regret your participation?

During or after the study, you may regret your participation. Please indicate this by contacting me. Deleting your data is no longer possible if the data has been anonymized, making it impossible to trace which data came from you. Anonymizing the data is done within [indicate when it happens] period after the data was collected.

Declaration of Consent

I have read the information letter. I understand what the study is about and what data will be collected from me. I was able to ask questions as well. My questions were adequately answered.

By signing this form, I:

1. consent to participate in this research;

2. consent to the use of my personal data

3. confirm that I am at least 18 years old;

4. confirm that I understand that participating in this research is completely voluntary and that I can stop at any time;

5. confirm that I understand that my data will be anonymized for publication, educational purposes, and further research

Check the boxes below if you consent to this.

Data from the interview

Audio recording

I consent to [the interview] being audio recorded. ☐

Visual recording

I consent to [the interview] being filmed. ☐

My answers in the article

I give permission for my answers to be used in papers, such as an article in a journal or book. My name will not be included. ☐

My answers in the article with my name

I give permission for my name to be used with my answers in an article. ☐

Use for educational purposes and further research

I hereby consent to have my personal data, namely name and position stored and used for educational purposes and for future research, as in other areas of research than this research. ☐

New research

I give permission to be contacted again for new research. ☐

Name of participant:

Participant's signature: **Date:**

You will receive a copy of the complete information and consent form.

Appendix C: Topic Guide

To guide my interview questions, I grouped them thematically based on recurring patterns I observed across topics like policy, funding, creative control, and personal experience. My aim was to reflect both the structural and human dimensions of international co-productions in Nepal. Some themes, like policy frameworks and financial structures, were straightforward, while others—like creative autonomy or gatekeeping—emerged from deeper reflections on power, access, and representation. I also included future outlooks and industry aspirations to capture the hopeful visions many participants shared. This thematic grouping helped structure the complexity of the conversations into a coherent analytical framework.

1. Policy and Institutional Framework

This theme explores the formal structures, government strategies, and regulatory environment surrounding international co-productions in Nepal. Questions under this category examine:

- The long-term vision of the Film Development Board (FDB) for Nepal's film internationalization.
- Existing or absent co-production treaties, policies, and licensing processes.
- The role of the state in supporting co-productions through funding, incentives, or infrastructure.
- Challenges reported by international filmmakers when dealing with Nepali bureaucracy.
- The balance between commercial growth and cultural preservation in policymaking.
- Access and fairness in who gets to participate in co-productions, and how proposals are evaluated.

2. Financial Structures and Economic Logic

This theme deals with the funding landscape and financial decision-making involved in

co-productions. It includes:

- How international grants, soft money, or equity funding are sourced.
- Trade-offs between creative freedom and financial backing.
- The lack of tax incentives or rebates in Nepal and how that affects producer leverage.
- Territorial splits and ownership of intellectual property in co-production contracts.
- Differences in budgeting, break-even points, and distribution strategies between local and international projects.
- The role of streamers and shifts in funding models due to digital distribution.

3. Creative Autonomy and Cultural Representation

Here, the focus is on how storytelling is shaped by global collaboration and whether it supports or suppresses local voices. Questions explore:

- The pressure to "globalize" or exoticize stories to appeal to international festivals or funders.
- The challenge of remaining authentic while fulfilling the expectations of foreign partners.
- How Nepali identity, language, and social issues are represented or altered in co-productions.
- Examples of content compromise, aesthetic changes, or editorial interventions by outside partners.
- The influence of funders or broadcasters on script approval, casting, and final cut decisions.

4. Gatekeeping and Access to Opportunities

- This theme investigates who gets to participate in co-productions and what formal or informal mechanisms control that access. It includes:
- The influence of foreign festivals, sales agents, and funders as gatekeepers.
- Instances where projects were blocked due to political or cultural sensitivity.
- How gatekeeping works inside Nepal—whether through cliques, lack of transparency, or favoritism.

- The emergence of data-driven mandates (e.g., from Netflix or MUBI) influencing what gets produced.
- How producers navigate both local and international gatekeeping dynamics.

5. Infrastructure, Capacity, and Training

Questions in this theme assess the readiness of the Nepali industry to sustain co-productions. Topics include:

- The technical limitations, crew skill gaps, and policy voids that hinder international collaboration.
- Availability (or lack) of mentorship, guild support, and institutional training for emerging producers.
- Comparison of live-action versus animation/VFX sectors in terms of readiness for co-production.
- What capacity-building steps have been most successful—such as equipment upgrades or cross-border training.

6. Distribution, Value Chain, and Industry Positioning

This category maps how films flow through the market and what parts of the production chain Nepali producers control. Questions examine:

- How co-productions affect domestic versus international distribution strategies.
- The role of alternative platforms—festivals, diaspora circuits, or VOD—in bypassing Nepal's weak theatrical market.
- How foreign collaborations have helped (or failed to help) develop local skills.
- The leverage Nepali producers have to demand credit, skills transfer, or co-ownership in joint projects.

7. Personal Experience, Outlook, and Aspirations

These questions allow participants to reflect on their personal journeys and broader visions for Nepal's co-production future:

- What motivated them to explore co-productions and what success looks like beyond awards.

- Lessons from specific projects like Mukundo, Kalo Pothi, Singha Durbar, or Soongava.
- Dreams of ideal collaborations and the supports needed to make them happen.
- Their outlook for Nepal's industry by 2035 and advice to emerging filmmakers.

Appendix D: Coding and Coding Tree

z	Quote	Code
Interview #1	I don't think we always compromise. Sometimes we use the themes they want as entry points. We still tell our story, but maybe we highlight certain angles a bit more. It's like speaking in a language they understand, while keeping our own accent	Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Co-production Impact: Visibility, Economic Logic: Investment
Interview #1	If your film is too subtle or doesn't have dramatic stakes, it's hard to get attention. So just to get attention, we have to try to highlight what's 'relevant' .....like trauma, oppression, struggle even when that's not the main point of our story. It becomes a balancing act between being honest and being fundable	Co-production Impact: Relatability
Interview #1	We often start with a story that's very local and rooted in our own context, but when we apply for funding, we begin asking, 'Will they understand this? Will this match the themes they like?' We are aware of what gets funded of stories of women, poverty, conflict, and climate. So we start shaping our proposals in that direction. Sometimes, we have to find a way to make our story sound like it fits these boxes	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Agency, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning
Interview #1	We start with something very personal, very local. But once we get some interest from outside, we have to start reshaping it. It is not always in a bad way, but it's not entirely ours anymore, the shape is changed and loses the local touch	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Collaboration, Co-production Impact: Skill Development
Interview #1	If your film is about poverty, rural struggle, or children caught in conflict, it has a better chance. That is what they think Nepal is. We want to tell different stories, but those do	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Collaboration, Co-

	not get selected	production Impact: Skill Development
Interview #1	There are so many stories here, but we need better editors, color graders, and sound people. Sometimes when we collaborate with outsiders, they take over these parts—not because we don't want to do them, but because we can't always find the right people.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Collaboration, Co-production Impact: Skill Development
Interview #2	When a project is still in the research or writing stage, I try to involve collaborators early. Some of them are from abroad, some from here. It's a mix. That helps later when you need support for post-production or exposure	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Collaboration, Co-production Impact: Skill Development
Interview #2	We worked with a European team on a documentary here. I was the local producer. It wasn't our story, but we got to learn how they structured the shoot, managed timelines, even post-production workflows. It helps, even if we are not the main storytellers.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Agency, Co-production Impact: Collaboration, Economic Logic: Investment, Economic Logic: Reputation, Co-production Impact: Global Connections, Gatekeeping: Access, Economic Logic: Recognition, Gatekeeping: Influence, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Value Chain: Collaboration
Interview #2	I attend co-production forums and pitch events, not just to sell a film but to understand what they are looking for. Sometimes that helps you shape the next project in a way that still feels honest but also fits the platform. It's like decoding a language	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Motivation, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning
Interview #3	Our film made it to two OTT platform – HBO and Prime . But you had to search the exact name for it to show up. It was not promoted; there was no banner or highlight. I don't think a lot of people saw it, I am not even sure if it is still there, or if it was ever promoted	Co-production Impact: Training, Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Collaboration, Co-production Impact: Quality, Economic

		Logic: Cost Reduction, Co-production Impact: Talent Development, Economic Logic: Investment
Interview #4	In our documentary, it was a co-direction with a friend. We had freedom but we knew we had to apply for grants. So we kept refining the proposal with those international calls in mind. It was our story, but it had to sound like something they would fund.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Validation, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning
Interview #4	Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.... I've had two projects where foreign partners who wanted to initially fund my project lost interest halfway. There is no accountability as such. We don't have contracts or institutional support to fall back on	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Validation, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning
Interview #4	With our documentary, we kept refining the narrative to suit the calls we were applying for. Each call had a different focus. Some were about human rights, others about youth or migration. We knew we had to respond to those keywords. The story stayed the same at its heart, but how we described it changed each time. That's just part of the process now	Co-production Impact: Agency, Co-production Impact: Funding Influence, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Co-production Impact: Visibility, Economic Logic: Authenticity, Economic Logic: Funding, Economic Logic: Marketability, Gatekeeping: Market Preferences, Gatekeeping: Narrative Inclusion, Gatekeeping: Western Standards, Value Chain: Production Choices
Interview #4	Speaker 1: For me after covid it was beneficial, there were projects that wanted to come to Nepal before but they couldn't. Because i was director, the director from there also gave me a few projects. I have not done these heavy big projects, like Icefall productions they do these big projects for Netflix … , I do small scale arthouse documentaries. Luckily till date, I have been able to use local crews. Due to Covid, some of the projects I was able to take the lead itself because	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Agency, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Economic Logic: Local Crews, Economic Logic: Project Demand, Gatekeeping: Opportunities

	they were not able to come to Nepal, coordinating with them.	
Interview #4	Getting into a side section of a festival changed my life. It didn't win anything, but people saw it. And from that came a residency and then a grant for my next film. It's like a chain reaction, but the first step is the hardest	Gatekeeping: Perception, Co-production Impact: Funding, Co-production Impact: Visibility, Economic Logic: Funding, Economic Logic: Economic Influence, Gatekeeping: Gatekeeping, Gatekeeping: Narrative Inclusion
Interview #4	My film went to a smaller section at Venice, which helped us find a co-producer later. But I know it would never make it to the main slate because it was not dramatic enough. It was a quiet story about a woman returning home. There was no war or poverty in it	Co-production Impact: Talent Development, Co-production Impact: Visibility
Interview #4	do not think we submit enough. Maybe people don't know how. Or they think it's only for certain types of films. There is also this internal feeling that our films are not good enough.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Agency, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Economic Logic: Local Crews, Economic Logic: Project Demand, Gatekeeping: Opportunities
Interview #4	On maximum projects, they bring the department head with them, like cinematographer, sound designers … . Even for projects that i know of like of Min Bahadur Bham, the department heads came along with them and the assistant level positions were locally sourced. To bring everyone it is quite expensive so the department heads come from there and the assistants are sourced locally.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Co-production Impact: Skill Development, Economic Logic: Cost-Effectiveness, Economic Logic: Budget Constraints
Interview #4	Most of us are finding partners to collaborate with on Facebook or through WhatsApp. That's the reality. We don't have an agency or desk that connects us. It's all personal credibility.	Co-production Impact: Agency
Interview #4	Speaker 1: No there is a lot we learn, one of the first things	Co-production Impact:

	we learn is professionalism, that is something that is lacking. When you work with people from outside, everything happens in order and there is some sort of discipline. There has been instances where the local cinematographers has been scolded to learn the new skills and have learned them accordingly. It was for the filmmakers benefit only.	Professionalism, Co-production Impact: Skill Development, Co-production Impact: Global Visibility
Interview #4	There is no dedicated film fund in Nepal....If you're lucky, you might get a cultural grant, but it's not for production. So everyone's applying outside from IDFA Bertha to Sundance. We've had to learn how to write proposals for a global audience	Value Chain: Marketing, Gatekeeping: Awareness, Economic Logic: Budgeting
Interview #4	I've had so many talks with Bangladeshi and Indian friends—like, let's do something together. But there is no fund we can apply to together, no co-production agreement between Nepal and these countries. So even if we want to collaborate, we don't know how to formalize it	Co-production Impact: Visibility
Interview #6	We are aware that many international projects come here and leave with very little actual collaboration with the Nepali industry. That's why we are working on better incentives, clearer rebate structures, and easier permits. We want to make it attractive not just for them to shoot here, but also to collaborate more meaningfully with local producers and talent.	Co-production Impact: Agency, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Co-production Impact: Training, Co-production Impact: Visibility, Economic Logic: Indigenous Development, Economic Logic: Training, Economic Logic: Budget Management
Interview #6	Speaker 1: KIMFF is doing good but I see that NIMFF's size has degraded. And they do it privately but they also have some support from us as well. KIMFF has been getting 5 lakhs almost every year, but the question is till when do keep funding? So even I do programs, but till when will the board support me, not till infinity, till the time I am able to do it i hope. We cannot support all the festivals, there are the existing ones that we do support but suppose if there are 15-20 festivals happening, we cannot help everyone, till when do we support, how much do we support, theres a lot of questions.	Co-production Impact: Global Exposure, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Co-production Impact: Limited Support, Co-production Impact: Visibility, Economic Logic: Financial Influence, Economic Logic: Financial Support, Economic Logic: Funding Constraints, Economic Logic: Resource Allocation,

		Gatekeeping: Narrative Inclusion, Value Chain: Value Chain, Co-production Impact: Sustainability
Interview #7	Speaker 1: NHK put Mukundo in a few Japanese film festivals The movie was shown at Tokyo International FIlm Festival, a major festival, executives of other film festivals also came to the film festival in Tokyo to hunt for good films. And because of Tokyo International Film Festival, I was able to go into other film festivals as well. At that time, I didnt know much about all these processes, NHK used to ask me for permission for the movie to be screened at different festivals.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Gatekeeping: Opportunities, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning
Interview #7	Speaker 0: How did your documentary reach the Japanese Film Festivals? Speaker 1:It all started with Film South Asia, my documentary was chosen and won an award at FSA. There were people from the HongKong FIlm Festival in FSA, they had seen my documentary and sent me an invitation for the Hong Kong Film Festival. After the documentary was screened at Hong Kong Film Festival, there were people from Fukuoka FIlm Festival there, who watched the documentary and invited me to Fukuoka Film Festival in Japan. In Hong Kong Film Festival they did not invite me, they just screened my documentary, in Fukuoka Film Festival they invited me as well and met the NHK executives there.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Networking, Gatekeeping: Opportunities
Interview #7	The number of people watching on Netflix or Amazon in Nepal is very small. Most people share accounts or watch pirated versions. The OTT model doesn’t work well here because we don’t have that scale or infrastructure	Co-production Impact: Emerging Filmmakers, Gatekeeping: Funding Access, Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Agency
Interview #7	Speaker 1: We have shown some documentaries in the Netherlands, I think one was in the IDF, the other one is for an ethnography organization called Beeld Voor Built.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Global Exposure

Interview #8	Speaker 1: We produced The Red Suitcase with our own budget. Ram, one of my old friends who is working with me, sold his car to make this film. We went to the Venice Film Festival, without any government support. We sold the movie to HBO, and through that we were able to recover some money, but thats pretty much it. We have small screenings here and there as well but we were able to recover our budget because it was a small budget, if it was a larger budget of 2-4 crores then it would be difficult. We got 20-22 lakhs from screening at the theatres, and 25-30% goes to the theatre itself, so how can we recoup our budget from Nepal.	Co-production Impact: Limited Support, Co-production Impact: Visibility, Economic Logic: Budget Size, Economic Logic: Cost Recovery, Economic Logic: Financial Challenges
Interview #10	Coming to production, there are mainstream, non-mainstream and documentary films are being produced in Nepal. There are either private investors or local producers like RK pokharel, another source is international funds. International funds exist but it takes so much time to implement, process …, its frustrating, it takes a long time. Min Bahadur Bham's co- production movie took around 10 years to produce.	Co-production Impact: Visibility, Co-production Impact: Global Positioning, Co-production Impact: Funding Challenges

Co-production Impact			
1. Funding & Financial Structures	**2. Visibility & Distribution**	**3. Creative Control & Agency**	**4. Cultural Representation & Storytelling**
Funding Opportunities	Visibility	Creative Control	Cultural Identity
Financial Pressure	Distribution	Creative Agency	Cultural Relevance
Grant Acquisition		Creative Limitations	Cultural Misalignment
			Cultural Exchange
5. Skill & Knowledge Transfer	**6. Networking**	**7. Production Capabilities & Challenges**	

Skill Transfer	Global Positioning	Production Capacity	
Skills Development	International Engagement	Production Opportunities	
Knowledge Transfer	International Collaboration	Production Frequency	
Knowledge Sharing		Production Timeline	

Gatekeeping		
1. Market Reach & Strategy	**2. Production & Creative Processes**	**3. Distribution & Logistics**
Market Access	Production	Distribution Challenges
Market Dynamics	Production Capabilities	Distribution Channels
Market Perception		Distribution Dynamics
Market Positioning		
Market Presence		
4. Infrastructure		
Collaboration		
Co-productions		
Facilitation		
Global Integration		

Economic Logic

1. Funding & Financial Structures	**2. Market & Distribution**	**3. Governance & Policy**
Funding	Market	Policy
Grants	Market Access	Government Support
Budget	Audience Demand	Political Connections
Subsidies	Distribution	Legal Issues
Financial Investment	Viewership	Tax Rebates
		Regulatory Compliance
4. Production & Operations		
Production Costs		
Project Viability		
Post-production		

Value Chain		
1. Access & Barriers	**2. Institutional Bias & Bureaucracy**	**3. Narrative Control**
Access	Bias	Narrative Inclusion
Access Restrictions	Bureaucracy	Narrative Restrictions
Agreements	Credentials	Narrative Direction
Barriers	Selection Criteria	Creative Freedom
Acceptance	Exclusivity	Content Assessment
4. Distribution & Exposure		
Funding		
Producer Influence		
Filmmaker Connections		