

Media literacy influence on sentiments in political news among academic staff of tertiary institutions in North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

In today's digital era, political news plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, influencing political discourse, and ultimately impacting democratic processes. There appears to be a growing concern on how individuals critically evaluate and understand news they consume. This concern could be exacerbated by polarized and biased political news which may hinder the quest for the development of media literacy skills, leading to misinformation and confirmation bias. The study was necessitated to assess the prevailing sentiment in political news, examine the influence of the sentiment conveyed in political news on individuals' media literacy skills, investigate the correlations between sentiment of political news and political beliefs, and propose strategies for enhancing media literacy skills in relation to political news. The research took its anchorage from the agenda setting theory and the priming theory. The study adopted the quantitative analysis method, with a purposive sampling technique. Data was collected on the subject matter using news media articles, book, journals, and public speeches. Primary data was gathered using a survey questionnaire. Findings revealed that ownership and political affiliation of media broadcast stations influence political news, most individuals rely on emotions and sentiments conveyed in political news rather than factual information, there is a direct correlation between the sentiment of political news and individuals political beliefs, and academic institutions should integrate media literacy programs in their curriculum. The research implies that design of surveys and interviews should be conducted by civil society organizations to gauge public perceptions, academic scholars should consider media literacy interventions and experimental studies should be carried out by public relations practitioners.

Key Words: Influence, Media Literacy, News Coverage, Political, Sentiment.

Introduction

In a democratic society, access to accurate and unbiased information is crucial for making informed decisions, holding those in power accountable, and shaping public opinion. However, when political news is influenced by sentiments such as biases and personal ideologies, it can distort the facts and create a skewed representation of reality. This hinders the ability to critically analyze and evaluate media messages, leading to a lack of media literacy. Im and Park (2022) contend that by comprehending

how sentiments can bias news, individuals can develop the skills necessary to navigate through media messages, recognize different perspectives, and form well-rounded opinions. The sentiment of political news and its impact on media literacy are vital for ensuring an informed, aware, and participatory citizenry. Unger (2023) further notes that an understanding of the sentiment of political news and its influence on media literacy is essential, owing to the fact that it directly impacts the ability to be informed and engaged citizens.

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With the rise of the social media and the 24-hour news cycle, individuals are bombarded with an overwhelming amount of information on a daily basis, much of which is shaped by the biases and agendas of news organizations. Young and Soroka (2012) posit that sentiment analysis involves analyzing and interpreting the emotions, attitudes, and opinions expressed in media content. In political news, biases can be uncovered to assess the credibility of sources, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the stories being presented. This process not only gives room to critically analyze news articles but also equips the masses with the tools to become discerning consumers of media. This can be done through the identification of language that may be persuasive, manipulative, or intended to evoke strong emotional responses (Tun & Khaing, 2023). By being aware of the sentiments conveyed in political news, facts can be separated from opinion in order to make informed decisions about issues.

It is pertinent to approach sentiments in political news with caution, considering potential biases and limitations, as algorithms and methods used for sentiment analysis can have their own flaws and subjectivity. Wang and Liu (2023) submit that engaging with a diverse range of news sources, fact-checking, and critically analyzing language and context remain crucial in understanding the nuanced nature of political news. Evaluating sentiments in political news is a valuable skill that makes it possible to navigate the media landscape, assess the credibility of sources, separate fact from opinion, and gain understanding into public sentiment. It promotes critical thinking, informed decision-making, and a deeper understanding of political events and issues (Rozado & Al-Gharbi, 2022).

With the rise of social media and online news sources, individuals are bombarded with news articles, videos, and opinions on a daily basis. However, not all of these sources are reliable or unbiased. Vozab (2023) points out that media literacy skills allow individuals to critically evaluate the political news sentiments they encounter, helping them to make informed decisions about the credibility and accuracy of the information they consume.

The study examined the impact of the sentiment conveyed in political news on

individuals' media literacy levels, aimed at understanding how the tone, biases, and manipulative strategies used in political news can shape or distort individuals' understanding and critical thinking skills in relation to media literacy.

Statement of the Problem

An issue that could arise from media literacy influence on sentiments in political news is the potential for misinformation and manipulation to sway public opinion. Inaccurate or biased reporting can feed into existing prejudices and misconceptions, which could lead to polarized attitudes and division within society. The lack of media literacy among the general public can result in susceptibility to propaganda and false narratives. Without the ability to critically analyze and evaluate the information presented, the society may unknowingly feed into misinformation or make decisions based on skewed or incomplete information. This could lead to a breakdown in the public discourse and hinder the ability to have meaningful debates based on facts and evidence. Media literacy influence on sentiments in political news underscores the need for greater education and awareness around the importance of critical thinking, source evaluation, and media literacy skills.

The problem this study seeks to address is the way sentiment of political news influences media literacy, particularly in terms of critical evaluation and understanding of the news. A thorough examination of this relationship can provide a leeway into the potential impact of biased or polarizing political news on individuals' media literacy skills, allowing for the development of effective strategies to foster a more informed and critically engaged citizenry. Another problem of sentiment in political news is that it often leads to biased reporting, which can have a significant influence on media literacy. In many cases, news outlets may have their own political leanings and agendas, which may result in a favoring or slanting of the information they present to viewers or readers.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the research is aimed at gaining a better understanding of how individuals' ability

to critically evaluate media content impacts their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to political news. By exploring the aforementioned, the research aims to achieve the following:

1. Assess the prevailing sentiment in political news within academic staff of select tertiary institutions in North central Nigeria.
2. Examine the influence of the sentiment conveyed in political news on individuals' media literacy among academic staff of select North central Nigeria tertiary institutions.
3. Investigate the potential correlations between the sentiment of political news and individuals' political beliefs and biases within the select tertiary institutions.
4. Propose strategies for enhancing media literacy skills in relation to political news among members of tertiary institutions.

Conceptual Clarification

Sentiment of Political News Coverage

This refers to the overall tone, emotions, and attitudes conveyed in political news reporting. It includes elements such as positive, negative, neutral, or biased language, as well as the framing and emphasis given to specific topics or individuals (Sadaba and Salaverria 2023). Understanding the sentiment of political news allows for analysis of how it may influence public opinion and perception of political issues. Political news often reflects the bias of the media outlet or the journalist themselves (Krakoff, 2022). This can result in a positive or negative sentiment towards a particular party, politician, or policy. Political news often exhibits a strong polarization, with news outlets and journalists taking sides and presenting news in a way that supports their ideological perspective. This can lead to highly emotional and combative sentiment in the news.

Sentiments of political news within the context of this research work underscores the interconnectedness between media literacy skills and the interpretation, response, and impact of political content. By examining how individuals with varying levels of media literacy engage with the sentiment of political news, scholars can elucidate the mechanisms through which media literacy shapes public sentiments, attitudes, and behaviors towards political media.

Media Literacy

Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages across various platforms. Glas and Vught (2023) posit that media literacy skills enable individuals to consume news and media in a discerning and informed manner, separating fact from opinion and recognizing potential persuasive tactics employed by media sources. Media literacy plays a significant role in shaping an individual's understanding of political sentiment in news. It enables individuals to identify biases present in news. By understanding the potential bias of a news outlet or journalist, individuals can critically analyze the sentiment being presented and consider alternative perspectives.

Within the context of the research, media literacy explores how interventions or initiatives to promote critical thinking skills, can impact individuals' sentiments towards political news. By increasing media literacy skills for individuals, there will be a general ability to discern the accuracy and credibility of political news sources. This will engender the navigation of complex and polarizing landscape of political news coverage.

Theoretical Framework

The research was anchored on the agenda setting theory and the priming theory.

Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda setting theory is a communication theory that was established in the early 1970s by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. The theory posits that the media has the power to influence the public agenda by determining what issues are considered important, salient, and worthy of attention. The fundamental assumption of agenda setting theory is that the media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about (Mwidima, 2024). In other words, the media has the ability to shape the public's perception of reality by highlighting certain issues and events while downplaying others. This can lead to the prioritization of certain topics and issues in public discourse, influencing what individuals perceive as important and relevant. Hao (2022) posits that underlying the agenda setting theory is the idea that the media's selection and emphasis of news stories can set the agenda for public discussions and decision-making.

The agenda setting theory highlights the media's role in shaping public discourse and influencing the public agenda. It is a key concept in media studies and communication research, providing comprehension into how the media influences public perceptions and priorities through its selection and framing of news content. One way in which the agenda setting theory is relevant to this research is through its emphasis on the media's role in setting the public agenda. Media literacy can influence individuals' ability to critically assess the topics and issues being covered in political news, enabling them to recognize the media's framing of these issues and potentially resist agenda-setting effects (Abdullateef, Mojaye & Adalakun, 2023).

Priming Theory

The priming theory is a communication theory that was established in the mid-1970s by Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, building upon earlier research in psychology and communication. The theory posits that media can influence the salience and importance of certain issues or attributes in the public's mind by priming them through repeated exposure in news coverage (Hoewe, 2020). By framing issues in a particular way or highlighting specific aspects of a topic, the media can affect how individuals perceive and evaluate information. Priming theory suggests that exposure to media messages can influence the accessibility of related thoughts and ideas in individuals' minds. Lee and Jang (2023) emphasize that through repeated exposure to certain issues or attributes in the media, individuals may develop cognitive associations that influence their subsequent judgments and decisions.

The relevance of priming theory to research on media literacy influence on sentiments in political news underscores the interconnected nature of these concepts in shaping public perceptions and attitudes. By integrating insights from priming theory with investigations into how media literacy influences individuals' responses to political news, researchers can deepen their understanding of the mechanisms through which media messages impact public opinion. This research is essential for promoting informed citizenship, enhancing media literacy initiatives, and fostering a more discerning and engaged public conversation about political issues. It

underscores the importance of equipping individuals with the skills to critically analyze media content and resist manipulation, ultimately empowering them to navigate the complexities of political news coverage with confidence and clarity.

Literature Review

Influence of Sentiment of Political News on Individuals' Media Literacy

In political news, sentiment can be positive, negative, or neutral, and this can greatly influence how individuals perceive and interpret the information. Duant and Greer (2023) aver that the sentiment attached to political news can evoke emotions such as joy, anger, fear, or empathy, altering the way people understand and process the information. One major influence of the sentiment of political news on individuals' media literacy is the potential for bias. Political news media outlets often have their own agendas, and framing their content with a particular sentiment can help shape public opinion. For instance, Vozab (2023) points out that a news article with a positive sentiment towards a political leader might highlight their achievements while downplaying their failures or scandals. This can lead people to form biased or one-sided opinions, hindering their ability to objectively evaluate the information.

Another influence of sentiment on individuals' media literacy is the potential for emotional manipulation. When political news is presented with an emotionally charged sentiment, it can evoke strong emotions from the audience. Geers and Boukes (2020) emphasized that emotions can cloud one's critical thinking skills, making them more susceptible to accepting information without questioning its validity or considering alternative viewpoints. Sharma (2023) adds that an individual who strongly supports a political party might become more dismissive of negative news about their preferred party if it is presented with a negative sentiment. The sentiment of political news can also impact individuals' media literacy by reinforcing existing beliefs and opinions. Jitsaeng (2023) believes that the tendency to seek out information that aligns with one's pre-existing beliefs-plays a significant role here. People are more likely to consume news that matches their ideological leanings, and

the sentiment attached to that news can further validate their beliefs. This can create echo chambers, where individuals only consume news that reinforces their existing viewpoints, leading to a lack of exposure to opposing perspectives (Sude & Sharon, 2023).

Correlation between Sentiment of Political News Coverage and Political Beliefs

In today's highly polarized political climate, the influence of sentiment in political news and its correlation with individuals' political beliefs is a topic of great significance. The sentiment, including the emotional tone and bias, conveyed in news articles can strongly impact how individuals perceive and interpret the information, reinforcing their existing political beliefs.

Altable and Noci (2023) expatiate that the sentiment of political news refers to whether it is positive, negative, or neutral towards a particular political party, ideology, or leader. Media outlets often have their own biases and frames through which they present news stories, which can shape public opinion. Kholid and Zulpahmi (2023) submit that the correlation between the sentiment of political news and individuals' political beliefs is complex and multifaceted. One of the ways sentiment correlates with political beliefs is through the confirmation bias. People tend to seek out information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, and when news coverage confirms their political stance, it strengthens their convictions.

Consequently, individuals are more likely to be persuaded by news that aligns with their emotions. Sentiment, when used strategically, can evoke strong emotions, leading individuals to be more receptive to the news and ideas presented. Guldin and Styron (2021) presented an analogy of how a news article that portrays a political issue or decision can have a negative influence with a sentiment that resonates with the viewer's anger or frustration; it can also reinforce their negative perception of the opposing party or ideology. McAnulty (2020) further posits that the sentiment of political news can shape individuals' perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness. If news outlets consistently present news with a sentiment that aligns with an individual's political beliefs, they are more likely to perceive that outlet as trustworthy and reliable.

Conversely, news coverage with a sentiment that contradicts an individual's political beliefs might be labeled as biased or untrustworthy. This can create information bubbles, where individuals only consume news that supports their beliefs, reinforcing their political stance and potentially isolating them from alternative viewpoints.

The Role of Media Literacy in Mitigating the Influence of Biased Political News Coverage

Media literacy has become increasingly essential in helping individuals navigate biased political news. Biases in the media can lead to distorted perceptions and misinformed public opinions. Media literacy, therefore, plays a crucial role in enabling people to critically analyze news sources, recognize bias, and make informed judgments. Through media literacy education, individuals learn to recognize overt and subtle biases in news coverage, such as biased language, selective reporting, and unbalanced representation of different perspectives (Omoera & Uwalaka, 2023). Armed with this knowledge, individuals can differentiate between objective reporting and biased opinions, allowing them to make informed decisions about the credibility and reliability of news sources.

A sound knowledge of media literacy fosters critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to approach political news with a discerning eye. Critical thinking involves questioning assumptions, evaluating evidence, and considering multiple viewpoints before forming an opinion. Karpagaraj and Sundararaman (2023) submitted that by applying critical thinking to political news, individuals are less likely to be swayed by biased presentations and more inclined to evaluate news articles based on their merit and factual accuracy. This position helps mitigate the influence of biased reporting and reduces the potential for misinformation or propaganda. Media literacy encourages individuals to seek out news from a variety of sources, incorporating diverse perspectives into their information diets. Mwita (2020) adds that by exposing themselves to contrasting viewpoints, individuals gain a more comprehensive understanding of complex political issues and avoid echo chambers that reinforce their existing biases. Engaging with a range of viewpoints fosters a more nuanced understanding of political news and dilutes the impact of biased coverage.

Strategies for Enhancing Media Literacy for Objective Political News Coverage

Objective political news is crucial for an informed citizenry and a healthy democracy. However, achieving such requires enhancing media literacy among individuals. Eisman and Literat (2021) aver that enhancing media literacy enables individuals to critically evaluate news sources, recognize bias, and demand objective reporting. Integrating media literacy into formal education curricula is essential to ensure that future generations are equipped with the necessary skills. Educational institutions at all levels can incorporate media literacy courses or modules that teach critical thinking skills, information verification techniques, and recognition of biases (Vraga, & Tully). This approach will empower students to become discerning consumers of political news and promote the demand for objectivity in media reporting.

Encouraging individuals to seek news from a wide range of sources is crucial for enhancing media literacy. By exposing themselves to varied viewpoints and news outlets, individuals can develop a broader understanding of political issues and reduce the influence of biased reporting. Media literacy initiatives should emphasize the importance of seeking diverse perspectives to counteract echo chambers and encourage critical analysis of news coverage (Lee & Cho, 2022). Media literacy education must be another factor that focuses on teaching individuals critical evaluation skills, allowing them to assess the credibility, authority, and reliability of news sources. This involves analyzing the track record and reputation of news outlets, identifying potential biases, and evaluating the quality of supporting evidence.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Status of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	%
Males	171	44.7
Females	212	55.4
Total	383	100
Age Range	Frequency	%
Under 18		
18-25	6	1.5
26-35	71	18.6

Method of Study

A survey questionnaire was designed to obtain quantitative data from a sample population of four hundred (400) people, using the purposive sampling technique from fifty (50) members of academic staff each from the following institutions: Plateau State Polytechnic (50 academic staff), University of Jos (50 academic staff), Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa (50 academic staff), Nasarawa state university (50 academic staff), Kogi state polytechnic (50 academic staff), Federal university Lokoja (50 academic staff), Federal Polytechnic Bida (50 academic staff), Federal University of Technology Minna (50 academic staff), Benue State university (50 academic staff), Benue state Polytechnic Ugbokolo (50 academic staff). They were selected based on their penchant for news and political discourse in regards to national events. The research instrument used was a 20-item structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into five (5) sections, with section A bearing the demographic variables of respondents while sections B, C, D, and E will address the research questions which will be framed using a five (5) point Likert scale options, e.g. strongly agreed, agreed, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The data will be analyzed using simple descriptive statistics in order to summarize and describe the main features or characteristics of a data set. This was done on a frequency table that displayed the frequency or count of each category in a dataset. It revealed how often each category occurs. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and percentages were used to analyze and present data. A total of three hundred and eighty three (383) questionnaires only, out of the four hundred (400) questionnaires distributed was retrieved from the respondents.

36-45	142	37
46 and above	164	42.9
Total	383	100
Educational Level	Frequency	%
First degree	101	26.4
Post graduate	282	73.7
Total	383	100
Occupation	Frequency	%
Student		
Employed	383	100
Unemployed		
Total	383	100
Marital Status	Frequency	%
Single	97	25.4
Married	273	71.3
Divorced		
Widowed		
Prefer not to say	13	3.4
Total		100

From the table above, it shows that 44.7% of the respondents were males while 55.4% were females. From the frequency of the age range, 1.5 % were between 18 to 25 years, while 18.6% were between 26 to 35 years of age. In addition 37% of the respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 36 to 45 years and

42.9 % were aged 46 and above. A total of 100 % of the respondents indicated that they were employees.

The frequency table above also reveals that 25.4% of the respondents were single, while 71.3 % of them were married and 3.4% preferred not to reveal their marital status.

TABLE 2: SECTION B: Political News Coverage across Various Media Platforms

No.	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1	Government owned television stations relay political news that favors the ruling political party	92 (24.1%)	163 (42.6%)	24 (6.3%)	71 (18.6%)	33 (8.7%)
2	Ownership, and political affiliation of media broadcast stations influence political news coverage in airing of political news.	100 (26.2%)	150 (39.1%)	13 (3.4%)	80 (20.8%)	40 (10.5%)
3	Word choice and visual images portrayed in political news influence sentiment of viewers, readers and listeners.	75 (19.6%)	148 (38.7%)	9 (2.4%)	96 (25.1%)	55 (14.4%)

4	Airing of political news differ among different media platforms.	86 (22.5%)	139 (36.3%)	11 (2.9%)	83 (21.7%)	64 (16.8%)
5	Regional differences play a vital role in portrayal of political news across different media platforms.	73 (19.1%)	154 (40.3%)	23 (6.0%)	77 (20.2%)	56 (17.7%)

Table 2 above shows an assessment of the prevailing sentiment in political news coverage across various media platforms. A total of 255 (66.7%) of the respondents maintained that Government owned television stations relay political news that favors the ruling political party, while 250 (65.3%) of the respondents averred that ownership and political affiliation of media broadcast stations influence political news coverage in airing of political news. A total of 223

(58.3%) of the respondents believe that word choice and visual images portrayed in political news influence sentiment of viewers, readers and listeners, while 255 (58.8%) averred that airing of political news differ among different media platforms. Finally, 227 (59.4%) of the respondents maintained that regional differences play a vital role in portrayal of political news across different media platforms.

TABLE 3: SECTION C: The Influence of Sentiment Conveyed In Political News Coverage on Individuals' Media Literacy

No.	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
6	Sentiments portrayed in political news coverage influence individuals' ability to analyze and evaluate information.	93 (24.3%)	191 (49.9%)	5 (1.4%)	69 (18.1%)	25 (6.6%)
7	Political ideologies of individuals affect their abilities to objectively assess political news coverage.	84 (21.9%)	158 (41.3%)	16 (4.2%)	73 (19.1%)	52 (13.6%)
8	Most individuals rely on emotions and sentiments conveyed in political news coverage rather than factual information in shaping their opinions and perspectives on political issues.	70 (18.3%)	183 (47.8%)	32 (8.4%)	59 (15.5%)	39 (10.2%)
9	Media literacy education programs can help reduce the influence of bias and sentiments in assessment of political news coverage.	63 (16.5%)	178 (46.5%)	29 (7.6%)	66 (17.3%)	47 (12.3%)
10	Demographic factors such as age, education and political affiliation influence the impact of sentiments conveyed in political news coverage on individuals' media literacy.	81 (21.2%)	144 (37.6%)	40 (10.5%)	77 (20.2%)	41 (10.8%)

Table 3 above presents an examination of the influence of sentiment conveyed in political news coverage on individuals' media literacy. A total of 284 (74.2%) of respondents averred that sentiments portrayed in political news coverage influence individuals' ability to analyze and evaluate information, while 242 (63.2 %) of the respondents believe that political ideologies of

individuals affect their abilities to objectively assess political news coverage. Some of the respondents totaling 253 (66.1 %) affirmed that most individuals rely on emotions and sentiments conveyed in political news coverage rather than factual information in shaping their opinions and perspectives on political issues while 241 (63%) of the respondents asserted that media literacy

education programs can help reduce the influence of bias and sentiments in assessment of political news coverage. Consequently, 255 (58.8%) of the respondents were of the opinion that

demographic factors such as age, education and political affiliation influence the impact of sentiments conveyed in political news coverage on individuals' media literacy.

TABLE 4: SECTION D: The Potential Correlation between the Sentiment of Political News Coverage and Individuals' Political Beliefs and Biases

No.	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
11	There is a direct correlation between the sentiment of political news coverage and individuals' political beliefs and biases.	98 (25.6%)	141 (36.9%)	16 (4.2%)	66 (17.3%)	62 (16.2%)
12	Most individuals seek out political news coverage that aligns with their pre-existing political beliefs and biases.	41 (10.8%)	72 (18.8%)	21 (5.5%)	156 (40.8%)	93 (24.3%)
13	Exposure to political news coverage with a certain sentiment influences individuals' political beliefs and biases.	59 (15.5%)	137 (35.8%)	32 (8.4%)	128 (33.5%)	27 (7.1%)
14	Exposure to diverse sentiments in political news coverage can either help individuals become more tolerant of opposing political beliefs and biases or reinforce their existing sentiments towards political news.	111 (28.9%)	139 (36.3%)	8 (2.1%)	72 (18.8%)	53 (13.9%)
15	Sentiment in political news influence individuals' political participation, such as voting behavior or engagement in political discussions.	133 (34.8%)	164 (42.9%)	18 (4.7%)	52 (13.6%)	16 (4.2%)

Table 4 above presents an assessment of the potential correlation between the sentiment of political news coverage and individuals' political beliefs and biases. Most of the respondents, 239 (62.5%) emphasized that there is a direct correlation between the sentiment of political news coverage and individuals' political beliefs and biases; while 249 (65.1%) of the respondents were of the view that most individuals do not seek out political news coverage that aligns with their pre-existing political beliefs and biases. A total of 196 (51.3%) of the respondents agreed that

exposure to political news coverage with a certain sentiment influences individuals' political beliefs and biases while 250 (65.2%) of the respondents believed that exposure to diverse sentiments in political news coverage can either help individuals become more tolerant of opposing political beliefs and biases or reinforce their existing sentiments towards political news. Consequently, 297 (77.7%) of the respondents averred that sentiment in political news influence individuals' political participation, such as voting behavior or engagement in political discussions.

TABLE 5: SECTION E: Strategies For Enhancing Media Literacy Skills In Relation To Political News Coverage

No.	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
16	Individuals should be thought the importance of questioning and analyzing information, and critical thinking about information sources,	121 (31.6%)	182 (47.6%)	10 (2.7%)	61 (15.9%)	9 (2.4%)

	credibility, and effects of bias of political news coverage.					
17	Academic institutions should integrate media literacy programs in their curriculum in order to equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to critically engage with political news coverage.	130 (33.9%)	178 (46.5%)	3 (0.8%)	52 (13.6%)	20 (5.3%)
18	Collaboration with trusted and reputable news organizations should be encouraged to develop educational resources that promote media literacy specifically in relation to political news coverage.	129 (33.7%)	172 (44.9%)	13 (3.4%)	48 (12.6%)	21 (5.5%)
19	Individuals should be encouraged to engage in open discussions and debates about political news coverage where different viewpoints can be shared and critically evaluated.	113 (29.6%)	171 (44.7%)	7 (1.9%)	49 (12.8%)	43 (11.3%)
20	More advocacy by civil society organizations should be made to support initiatives that provide individuals with skills to navigate and critically evaluate online platforms, including social media, where political news coverage is prevalent.	148 (38.7%)	163 (42.6%)	18 (4.7%)	37 (9.7%)	17 (4.5%)

Table 5 presents the strategies for enhancing media literacy skills in relation to political news coverage. The table reveals that 303 (79.2%) of the respondents affirmed that individuals should be thought the importance of questioning and analyzing information, and critical thinking about information sources, credibility, and effects of bias of political news coverage. In addition, 308 (80.4%) of the respondents agreed that academic institutions should integrate media literacy programs in their curriculum in order to equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to critically engage with political news coverage. However, a total of 301 (78.6%) of the respondents averred that collaboration with trusted and reputable news organizations should be encouraged to develop educational resources that promote media literacy specifically in relation to political news coverage; while 284 (74.3%) of them maintained that individuals should be encouraged to engage in open discussions and debates about political news coverage where different viewpoints can be shared and critically evaluated. Subsequently, 311 (81.3%) of the respondents avowed that more advocacy by civil society organizations should be

made to support initiatives that provide individuals with skills to navigate and critically evaluate online platforms, including social media, where political news coverage is prevalent.

Discussion

The first objective of the research was to assess the prevailing sentiment in political news coverage across various media platforms. Findings reveal that Government owned television stations relay political news that favors the ruling political party, while ownership and political affiliation of media broadcast stations influence political news coverage in airing of political news. Also, visual images portrayed in political news influence sentiment of viewers, readers and listeners, while airing of political news differ among different media platforms. The findings further revealed that regional differences play a vital role in portrayal of political news across different media platforms. These findings fall in line with the tenets of the cultivation theory which posits that heavy consumption of media content, particularly television, gradually cultivates individuals' understanding of social reality and shapes their worldview. The theory

posits that heavy media consumers tend to converge in their perceptions, regardless of their demographic characteristics. This phenomenon is known as mainstreaming, where individuals are influenced by the dominant messages in media and develop similar attitudes and beliefs about social issues. This implies that the prevailing sentiment in political news coverage across various media platforms can affect public perception, public discourse, public trust, emotional well-being of individuals and political dynamics. It is essential for individuals to critically analyze news sources, seek diverse perspectives, and be aware of potential biases to form a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

The second objective of the research was to examine the influence of the sentiment in political news coverage on individuals' media literacy, including their ability to critically evaluate and understand news. Findings reveal that sentiments portrayed in political news coverage influence individuals' ability to analyze and evaluate information, while political ideologies of individuals affect their abilities to objectively assess political news coverage. A further revelation shows that most individuals rely on emotions and sentiments conveyed in political news coverage rather than factual information in shaping their opinions and perspectives on political issues while media literacy education programs can help reduce the influence of bias and sentiments in assessment of political news coverage. The findings also show that demographic factors such as age, education and political affiliation influence the impact of sentiments conveyed in political news coverage on individuals' media literacy. This position aligns with the foundation of the framing theory which stipulates that media frames can introduce bias into news coverage by emphasizing certain aspects of an issue while neglecting others. This bias can influence the public's perception of what is important and what is not. This implies that individuals should make efforts at prioritizing media literacy education, actively seek out diverse news sources, and evaluate information they consume. Fact-checking, cross-referencing multiple sources, and being aware of potential bias are essential practices for developing a well-

rounded understanding of news and avoiding the pitfalls of sentiment-driven reporting.

The third objective of the research was to investigate the potential correlations between the sentiment of political news coverage and individuals' political beliefs and biases. The findings revealed that there is a direct correlation between the sentiment of political news coverage and individuals' political beliefs and biases. Most individuals do not seek out political news coverage that aligns with their pre-existing political beliefs and biases, while exposure to political news coverage with a certain sentiment influences individuals' political beliefs and biases. Exposure to diverse sentiments in political news coverage can either help individuals become more tolerant of opposing political beliefs and biases or reinforce their existing sentiments towards political news. This connects with the foundation of the cultivation theory which proffers that by recognizing the potential influence of media on perceptions, individuals can become more informed consumers of media and develop a greater understanding of how media constructs social reality. The theory enables individuals to become more aware of the power of media to shape their understanding of the world. This implies that the potential correlations between the sentiment of political news coverage and individuals' political beliefs and biases requires a multi-faceted approach that focuses on media literacy, transparent diverse media, enhanced journalistic standards, protection of press freedom, and inclusive national conversations.

The fourth objective of the research was to set to propose strategies and recommendations for enhancing media literacy skills in relation to political news coverage, taking into account the influence of sentiment and potential biases. Findings reveal that that individuals should be thought the importance of questioning and analyzing information, and critical thinking about information sources, credibility, and effects of bias of political news coverage. Academic institutions should integrate media literacy programs in their curriculum in order to equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to critically engage with political news coverage. Collaboration with trusted and reputable news organizations should be

encouraged to develop educational resources that promote media literacy specifically in relation to political news coverage; while individuals should be encouraged to engage in open discussions and debates about political news coverage where different viewpoints can be shared and critically evaluated. More advocacy by civil society organizations should be made to support initiatives that provide individuals with skills to navigate and critically evaluate online platforms, including social media, where political news coverage is prevalent. This is in line with the position of the framing theory which stipulates that understanding the power of frames can enhance media literacy and critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to deconstruct media messages, critically evaluate different frames, and develop a more nuanced understanding of complex issues. This further implies that adoption of media literacy skills in relation to political news coverage can lead to a more informed, discerning, and engaged population. It equips individuals with the tools needed to navigate the complex media landscape and make informed decisions, ultimately strengthening democracy and public discourse.

Conclusion

The research has shown that the sentiment of political news coverage plays a significant role in shaping individuals' media literacy. Through analyzing various sources and conducting surveys, it is evident that the bias and emotional undertones present in news coverage heavily influence how individuals interpret and understand political information. One major finding of the research is that individuals tend to gravitate towards news sources that align with their own political beliefs. This selective exposure to like-minded news outlets further reinforces their existing views and creates an echo chamber effect, limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives and hindering their media literacy. Furthermore, the sentiment conveyed in political news coverage has a powerful impact on individuals' emotional response to the information presented. It was observed that sensationalized or polarized coverage tends to invoke strong emotions and engender a binary thinking approach among consumers. This emotional response often clouds individuals'

critical thinking abilities and impairs their ability to objectively evaluate the news.

Moreover, the research revealed that the sentiment of political news coverage can lead to the spread of misinformation, as biased reporting often involves cherry-picking facts or distorting information to fit a particular narrative. This misinformation can then perpetuate inaccurate beliefs and contribute to the erosion of media literacy. However, it is important to note that not all individuals are equally affected by the sentiment of political news coverage. Factors such as education level, media literacy skills, and critical thinking abilities can mitigate the influence of biased reporting. Individuals with higher levels of media literacy are more likely to engage in active evaluation of news sources, cross-referencing information, and seeking out diverse perspectives. Therefore, to improve media literacy in the face of biased political news coverage, it is crucial to promote the development of critical thinking skills and provide individuals with the tools to effectively evaluate news sources. Education and awareness campaigns can play a vital role in fostering media literacy by teaching individuals how to identify bias, evaluate source credibility, and navigate emotional manipulation in news coverage. The research highlights the significant influence of the sentiment of political news coverage on media literacy. By recognizing the power of biased reporting and its impact on individuals' understanding of political information, we can work towards fostering a more informed and critically-engaged society. With improved media literacy skills, individuals can better navigate the political landscape, critically evaluate news sources, and make well-informed decisions.

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