

BEYOND THE HEADLINES: INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF MEDIA BIAS ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the multifaceted impact of media bias on public perceptions, focusing on political, ideological, cultural, and economic biases. It emphasizes the influence of political ideology on media bias, exacerbated by economic and political factors. To address this issue, the study advocates for promoting editorial transparency and diverse media ownership. The growing influence of media outlets, especially on social media, raises concerns about echo chambers. Various factors, including deliberate and inadvertent influences from newsmakers and journalists, contribute to biased news creation. The study identifies types of bias such as political bias, sensationalism, confirmation bias, selection bias, and framing bias, urging media consumers to recognize and understand these biases for a balanced understanding. It delves into political bias's manifestations, including partisan rhetoric and cherry-picked reportage. Sensationalism and corporate bias are also explored, with large conglomerates shaping narratives in line with corporate interests. The historical context of bias as a political pawn is discussed, highlighting its presence for over half a century. The study addresses the impact of fake news, emphasizing the need for critical analysis. It underscores media bias's significant influence on public understanding, political choices, and the formation of echo chambers. Case studies and research findings, such as disparities in Iraq War coverage and framing's impact on perceptions, illustrate the consequences of biased reporting. The study incorporates psychological theories like Gerbner's cultivation theory and Ajzen's theory of planned behavior to analyze the influence of media on individuals' perceptions and behaviors. It concludes by emphasizing the crucial role of mass media in shaping public opinion and attitudes toward emerging issues.

Introduction

Disregarding the media's impact on public opinion in the current era of excessive information would be an error. In contemporary culture, individuals mostly get their news and current affairs from several media platforms, exerting a significant impact on their perspective of the world. Media bias, however, has existed for a considerable period and now poses a significant challenge to the credibility of news coverage. This study examines the impact of media bias on public perceptions.

Media bias refers to the structuring of news and information sources in a way that favours certain ideologies or points of view. Political, ideological, cultural, and economic biases are many manifestations of prejudice that may result in a distorted understanding of events. Multiple scholarly research have shown that news coverage often exhibits bias, which has the potential to significantly influence public opinion (Entman, 2012; Jamieson & Cappella, 2018). Media bias has been shown to potentially influence cognitive processes, hence affecting individuals' information intake and comprehension. The cognitive effect of bias may be explained by the selective exposure hypothesis (Zillmann & Bryant, 2015), which posits that individuals are inclined to selectively consume information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs. Hence, media bias might potentially foster the creation of echo chambers and exacerbate societal differences.

An individual's political ideology may influence their predisposition towards bias towards the media. Media biases occur when the media promotes certain political viewpoints via their content development. As to Groeling's (2013) findings, news organisations have a tendency to support political parties that align with their own ideological beliefs. This tendency exacerbates the polarisation of political discourse, since it reinforces party narratives. Both economic and political factors contribute to the formation of media bias. According to Bagdikian (2014), media companies may prioritise financial profit above journalistic principles when they prioritise advertising revenue and corporate influence targeting certain demographic segments. A thorough examination of media ownership structures is necessary to address the economic bias that hampers the media's ability to provide impartial information.

The ramifications of media bias are extensive and pose a significant danger to the very foundations of democracy. Biassed reporting has the potential to undermine public faith in democratic institutions and media. This is concerning since a well-informed populace is crucial for the proper functioning of a democratic society, as stated by Sunstein in 2017. The effect of media bias, which moulds popular opinion, may impact elections, public policy, and the viability of democracies. Hence, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive approach to address the ramifications of media bias. Media literacy initiatives, such as the one endorsed by the News Literacy Project, aim to educate individuals in identifying biassed journalism and assessing news outlets with a critical mindset. To enhance news companies' credibility and minimise bias, it is crucial to promote editorial transparency and encourage a wide range of media ownership.

Prior research has shown the connections between perspectives, opinions, and behaviours. Wiese and Akareem (2020) discovered correlations between user attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of social media advertising in three countries: South Africa, Germany, and Australia. The objective of the study's trials was to ascertain if there exists a link between individuals' perspectives, behaviours, and dispositions towards advertisements on social media. Research has also focused on examining how digital elements influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards social media advertisements. The findings indicate a robust

and favourable correlation between individuals' attitudes towards social media advertisements and their perception of the degree of interaction between these advertisements and their audience. A positive association exists between individuals' perception of the commercials and their perceived credibility (Lee et al., 2022). Thus, the present study contributed to the previous literatures that incorporates the public perception of mass media news is brought about. The current study employs the cultivation theory and the theory of planned behavior (TPB).

Several scholars have conducted research on the impact of media bias on the formation of public opinion. Hamborg, Donnay, and Gipp (2019) contend that influential media outlets have had a substantial influence on public sentiment throughout time, as seen by their impact on electoral procedures and societal perceptions of tobacco use. The influence wielded by media companies has seen a substantial surge in the last several decades. As to Lutz's (2017) findings, by 2017, a few six corporations have a 90% stake in the media industry inside the United States. This inherently allows for the potential of deliberate bias in media coverage (Hamborg et al., 2019). Individuals may remain susceptible to media bias on social media platforms, where a more extensive array of viewpoints is often shown (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). However, social media is still distinguished by increased user participation and, presumably, a broader spectrum of perspectives being shown. Social media users often limit their exposure to news and ideas that align with their own beliefs, whether intentionally or unintentionally, resulting in the formation of a "filter bubble" or "echo chamber" (Sunstein, 2002; Hamborg et al., 2019). However, the level of isolation is not necessarily as severe as it is often assumed. Barberá et al. (2015) discovered a notable disparity in the coverage of political affairs compared to reporting on accidents and catastrophes, whereas no such difference was seen in other domains. Advancements in technology may result in a reduced scope of news that is typically consumed, thereby contributing to the isolation of social media users in terms of the subjects they interact with. Facebook, the largest social network globally, with more than one billion active members (Hamborg et al., 2019), recently introduced Trending Topics, a feature that consolidates news articles. Presently, consumers are restricted to just obtaining current events via Facebook. Conversely, the aforementioned amount of impact is heightened when individuals only receive news from a single distributor. In this instance, a solitary company has authority over the content that is shown to news recipients (Hamborg et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The media sector in Nigeria is marred by a pervasive issue – media bias. As a nation with diverse cultures, ethnicities, and political ideologies, the impact of biased reporting on public perception cannot be overstated. The problem lies in the fact that media outlets, often influenced by political affiliations or economic interests, may present news in a way that skews public opinion and fosters division. The consequences of media bias extend beyond mere misinformation; it erodes the foundation of a well-informed citizenry crucial for a thriving democracy. Inaccurate and slanted reporting can contribute to the exacerbation of existing social tensions, deepen political polarization, and impede national unity. Furthermore, the public's trust in media as a reliable source of information is jeopardized, leading to a potential erosion of the democratic values that underpin Nigerian society. This research aims to examine the multifaceted dimensions of media bias, exploring its roots, manifestations, and the far-reaching implications on public perception. By shedding light on the problem, this study aspires to contribute to the development of strategies for fostering unbiased journalism, promoting media literacy, and ultimately fortifying the democratic fabric of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Understanding Media Bias

Hamborg et al. (2019) argue that investigations of biased news reporting have been conducted in the field of social sciences since the 1950s. Williams (2023) defines media bias as the intentional and consistent exhibition of partiality or favouritism. The prejudice being alluded to is apart from other manifestations of subconscious predisposition seen in news coverage, and it is specifically delineated by the previously described concept. Unintentional bias may arise from two primary sources: firstly, the impact of news values on the process of creating news (Park, 2009); and secondly, the manner in which diverse audiences consume news (Oelke et al., 2012). The news values are shown by the proximity of a significant event to the news organisation and its audience, as well as the tangible effects of a particular subject's extensive knowledge or societal importance (Hamborg et al., 2019).

In order to reduce the influence of media bias on consumers, it is advantageous to have a thorough understanding of the many types of bias and how it is evident throughout the process of producing news (Park, 2009). Figure 1 depicts the process by which news organisations convert events into narratives and how viewers absorb and understand those tales. Each step of the process corresponds to the bias categories defined by Baker, Graham, and Kaminsky in 1994.

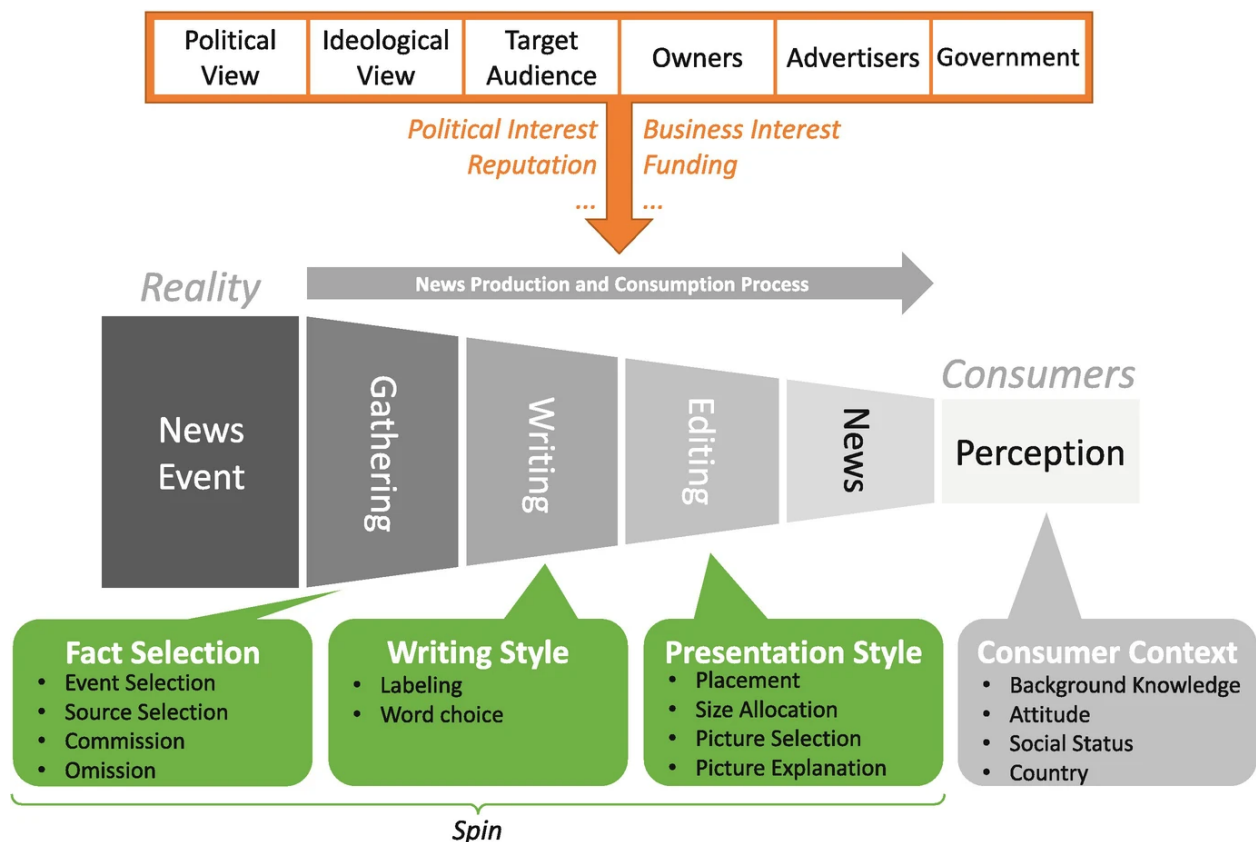


Figure 1: The News Production Process Model.

Source: Hamborg (2023)

The above model illustrates the many manifestations of media bias that arise when an actual event is converted into a news article and then influenced by the perspectives of news consumers, as emphasised by Hamborg (2023). The viewpoint and growth of a news article are shaped by several internal and external forces, as shown in the prominent orange area. Throughout the three stages of news creation, many forms of bias might emerge, as shown by

the green segments positioned at the bottom. In the realm of news consumption, consumer context refers to any external element that impacts the way in which the audience perceives and understands a news piece, alongside the presence of media bias. Based on the first investigation done by Park (2009). Subsequently, we will analyse the ways in which the media might introduce bias into the procedures of acquiring and consuming news.

Various individuals and groups may have an impact on the news generating process, whether their influence is deliberate or not (refer to the orange rectangle in Figure 1 for the elements that contribute to media bias). According to Cohen (2019), newsmakers exhibit a wide range of political and ideological viewpoints. The influence of these ideologies permeates all aspects of a news organisation, shown in the prevalent political bias found inside news businesses and among its reporters. Journalists are allowed to display partiality in their work if they perceive it to be beneficial for their career progression. Both external and internal variables may influence the process of news creation. News items are often altered to suit the particular demographic of the news company (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010). This phenomenon arises when readers see that their news source constantly contradicts their own ideas, prompting them to choose for an other source. For example, Mullainathan and Shapiro (2010) and Mullainathan and Shleifer (2005). Journalists has the capacity to shape news narratives in alignment with the preferences of their owners and sponsors. If any negative incident happens to one of its main sponsors or related firms, they have the option to not acknowledge it. D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010) found that producers may have a predilection towards governments as a result of the information they get from them. Furthermore, the final news report might be impacted by commercial factors, such as the cost comparison between editing pre-written press releases and doing investigative journalism. Ultimately, the fundamental impetus for the bulk of news sources is economic profit, even if they do not overtly recognise it. They may even refute the assertion that their main priority is to maintain objectivity (Paul & Elder, 2004). News programme viewers want commentators to take stances on important issues and differentiate relevant information from trivial material (Boczkowski, 2004).

Hamborg (2023) argues that these traits have subtle but noticeable effects on several areas of the news creation process. Journalists start the information-gathering process for a story by painstakingly assembling relevant material from previous news items. The process of event selection, which is often referred to as narrative selection, begins at this juncture. Evidently, not every incident has significance for the target audience of a new media platform, and narratives with a considerable number of dramatic aspects may provide more financial prosperity. Journalists are responsible for curating materials, such as research, press releases, or other news pieces, to include into their work. The last duty of a journalist is to choose the sources that will be included into their upcoming report and those that will be omitted. Hamborg (2023) characterises this phenomena as "commission or omission," which has a substantial influence on the interpretation of the event.

Journalists should use a diverse range of writing styles in order to proficiently mould the news. The production stages of communication impact the use of designations, whereby a person may be favourably labelled as a "independent politician," while the opposing party may be negatively labelled or not labelled at all. In addition, the selection of words is impacted by factors such as referring to a group as "coalition forces" rather than "invading forces" in an article (Hamborg, 2023). The last phase of the process, editing, is focused on enhancing the presentation of the narrative. The determinants influencing the attention and perception of an event include the selection of visuals, including their dimensions and the incorporation of emotive content. Furthermore, the organisation and ratio of the articles, where a big feature story garners more attention compared to a long analysis on page 3, also

contribute to this phenomenon. In addition, the elucidation of the images, including the provision of context via captions, is a crucial element of this procedure (Hamborg, 2023). Finally, spin bias serves as a prime example of media bias by showcasing the complete partiality of an article. Furthermore, apart from the aforementioned biases, the paper also displays other biases of lesser significance (Christian, 2019).

Types of Media Bias

Media bias comes in various forms, influencing how information is presented and interpreted. Types of bias include political bias, where reporting favors a particular ideology; sensationalism, which prioritizes dramatic or attention-grabbing content; and confirmation bias, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs. Additionally, selection bias occurs when certain stories are emphasized or omitted, while framing bias involves shaping narratives to influence perception. Recognizing and understanding these biases is crucial for media consumers seeking a balanced and nuanced understanding of the news.

A. Political Bias

The prevalence of media bias, particularly in relation to political bias, is a pervasive phenomenon that may significantly influence public sentiment. In order to actively engage in critical analysis of information, media consumers must acquire a comprehensive comprehension of bias. The media may demonstrate political bias via several means, therefore influencing the communication, presentation, and interpretation of news (Jamieson & Cappella, 2018). The presence of political bias in the media is apparent via the use of partisan rhetoric, cherry-picked reportage, and a concentration on some issues while disregarding others. Political bias is often shown via the deliberate and strategic presentation of material that supports a certain political ideology or candidate. Media firms have the ability to emphasise content that aligns with their own perspectives, while disregarding or concealing elements that might potentially undermine their own storyline (Sunstein, 2017). Moreover, the use of political vocabulary, which includes emotionally charged expressions and strategic communication methods, has the ability to slowly shape public sentiment. For instance, the selection of vocabulary used to depict an occurrence or an individual may evoke intense emotions and perspectives. Political prejudices have a significant influence on public mood. Biassed reporting may exacerbate societal polarisation by reinforcing preexisting viewpoints and fostering echo chambers, when individuals are only exposed to information that coincides with their own ideas. This has the capacity to hinder constructive discourse and create a distorted picture of reality (Entman, 2012). Moreover, political bias has the potential to erode public trust in the media by instilling scepticism about the veracity of the information disseminated. The credibility of the media is crucial for the proper functioning of a robust democracy. Therefore, biassed reporting has the capacity to undermine the media's reputation as an unbiased distributor of information.

B. Sensationalism

Sensationalism in media refers to the practice of presenting information in a way that is designed to provoke excitement, shock, or emotional reactions from the audience rather than providing objective and balanced reporting. This type of bias often involves exaggeration, dramatization, or focusing on the most attention-grabbing aspects of a story, sometimes at the expense of accuracy (McManus, 2014). Examples of sensationalism can be found across various media platforms. Headlines that use hyperbolic language to create a sense of urgency or fear, such as "Breaking News: Crisis Unfolding!" or "Shocking Revelations Exposed!" are common in sensationalized reporting. Additionally, news stories that prioritize the emotional impact of an event over its broader context can contribute to sensationalism. For instance,

coverage that emphasizes the personal tragedies of individuals involved in an incident while neglecting the underlying causes or systemic issues (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Sensationalism can significantly impact public perception by shaping how individuals perceive events and issues. When media outlets prioritize sensational stories, they may contribute to the distortion of reality, leading to a skewed understanding of the world. The emphasis on emotional and dramatic content can generate fear, anxiety, or outrage among the audience, influencing public opinion and potentially swaying attitudes on certain issues (Fallows, 2017). Moreover, the constant exposure to sensationalized news can desensitize individuals, making them more prone to seeking out extreme and sensational content. This can contribute to a cycle where media outlets feel compelled to produce increasingly sensational stories to capture and maintain audience attention, further perpetuating biased reporting.

C. Corporate bias

Media bias is a pervasive issue that can significantly influence public perception and understanding of various events. One prominent form of bias is corporate bias, which can manifest in different ways, including through corporate ownership and the shaping of narratives. According to Bagdikian (2014), corporate ownership of media outlets plays a crucial role in determining the perspectives presented to the public. Large media conglomerates, with interests in diverse industries, often control multiple media platforms. This concentration of ownership can lead to a narrowing of viewpoints and an emphasis on narratives that align with the corporate interests. For instance, a media outlet owned by a major corporation in the pharmaceutical industry might downplay negative stories about the industry, potentially affecting the public's awareness of certain issues. Corporate bias goes beyond ownership and permeates the narratives constructed by media outlets. Editors and journalists may be influenced by the overarching corporate agenda, consciously or subconsciously shaping their reporting to favor corporate interests. This can result in the omission of critical information, framing stories in a way that benefits the corporation, or even promoting specific ideologies that align with the corporate ethos. Such shaping of narratives can contribute to a skewed public understanding of events and issues (McChesney, 2019).

Bias as a Political Pawn

The media has consistently shown political bias for over half a century (Schiffer, 2017). As Schiffer (2017) explains, the assertion of liberal bias may be comprehended by considering the historical backdrop of 1964, when Goldwater won the Republican nomination against Rockefeller. The Republican Party was concluding its 36-year tenure without simultaneously possessing the presidency and a majority in Congress. During this period, publications like the National Review started publishing pieces that voiced disapproval towards the New Deal and the subsequent liberal policies. The Republican Party revitalised the conservative movement in response to these allegations. Goldwater published *The Conscience of a Conservative* in 1960. This book might facilitate the attainment of the conservative movement's goals. This booklet enhanced his campaign by offering Republicans an alternative to the New Deal's progressive ideals. Nevertheless, the Republican Party had an unfavourable view of him, the media overlooked his presence, and his credibility was undermined by his unorthodox stance on conservatism. As the mainstream media ignored this growing conservative movement, accusations of liberal bias in the media began to arise (Schiffer, 2017).

When evaluating an accusation of prejudice, it is essential to take into account the many forms of bias. Schiffer (2017) classifies bias into four separate categories: gatekeeping, coverage, tone, and quality. When two problems of comparable significance are merged into a single accusation, the media tends to exhibit partiality towards one side at the expense of the other. In the middle of fervent political discourse, this prejudice is quite widespread. Biassed coverage is the term used to describe when a news institution is seen to have taken a stance in support of one side of a conflict. The term used to describe the presence of flaws in news reports that seem to favour one side over the other is quality bias (Schiffer, 2017). The phrase "tone bias" is used to characterise coverage that shows a preference for one side over the other.

According to the 2011 data from the Pew Research Centre, 52% of Americans maintain the notion that news coverage demonstrates bias. Upon analysing party identity, it was shown that prejudice was prevalent among Republicans (62%), conservatives (61%), and independents (52%). In contrast, the Democrats secured 47% of the vote, and the Liberals garnered 46%. Research conducted by Hassell, Holbein, and Miles (2020) has shown that academic evaluations of prejudice in news have found no substantial political bias in the coverage of contemporary events. The majority of Americans maintain the conviction of media bias, notwithstanding the absence of corroborating proof.

In 2019, Weeks et al. established a correlation between the perception of media bias and the probability of individuals following politicians on social media. Engaging with political figures on social media may incite hostility towards other parties and cultivate enthusiasm for one's preferred candidate or leader. Furthermore, those who choose to endorse lawmakers are prone to developing emotional engagement in politics, making them more vulnerable to unfavourable media bias. The increasing use of social media by politicians to interact with constituents may be creating the sense of a growing unfavourable media bias (Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2020).

Fake News

There is a growing apprehension over the fairness of news reporting as a result of the widespread circulation of erroneous material by ostensibly reliable news outlets. According to Desai, Mooney, and Oehrli (2020), "fake news" refers to news stories that are entirely untrue, biassed, or intentionally created to generate a false or biassed result. A study conducted in 2016 found that misleading news articles might potentially influence individuals with strong political beliefs in a manner comparable to legitimate campaign commercials (Hunt & Gentzkow, 2017). While it is concerning that some examples of fake news appear online, it is important to remember that these stories do not represent the whole of the issue. Furthermore, voters should carefully consider the importance of the phrase "fake news" and its consequences. A study done by Linden et al. (2010) revealed that a significant majority of American voters linked the phrase "fake news" with two well-known mainstream news networks, namely CNN and Fox News. Why? The "Fake news effect" has the potential to influence people's perspectives and their trust in the media. The concept of "fake news impact" refers to the tendency of political supporters to undermine the credibility of unbiased news outlets by labelling them as "fake news" (Linden et al., 2010). President Trump's Twitter feed often exhibits several occurrences of this phenomenon. In a recent tweet, he claims that, except for one poll conducted by @ABC NEWS, which he believes is false and lacks crucial information such as the sample size, party affiliation, and other pertinent factors, he has received mostly favourable poll results, with some exceeding 50%. Despite facing a 12-point deficit before to the previous election, they managed to secure a triumph with just

one week left. "Their content is abhorrently misleading!" Trump's viewpoint on the year 2020 (Trump, 2020).

Effects of Biased News Consumption

According to Gerber et al. (2019), media bias significantly influences how the public and individuals understand news events, which in turn affects their political choices. Despite the progress made in social media, reputable news agencies continue to be the major source of information about current events (Crossman, 2018). Therefore, when news organisations participate in biased reporting, the probability of readers forming biased notions is increased. Present-day users of social media have a greater tendency to "follow" news items that conform to their previous beliefs, which may lead to the spread of biased reporting (Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2015). Therefore, people who get news via social media are prone to becoming ensnared in a "echo chamber" that strengthens their previous beliefs. A considerable fraction of individuals who consume news have a tendency to quickly glance through a restricted set of news outlets as a result of variables such as being overwhelmed with information, facing language hurdles, or having personal preferences and habits (Newman et al., 2015).

Media bias may potentially affect election results for all voters (Kull et al., 2017; Larcinese et al., 2021). According to Sunstein (2019), media bias exacerbates the division of public opinion, hence hindering the process of achieving agreement on intricate matters. Many researchers contend that media bias undermines the core tenets of our democratic system as a result of its substantial detrimental impacts. Does the public's view, influenced by media outlets, really reflect "authentic" popular opinion? An extensive assessment conducted in 2003 uncovered notable disparities in the manner in which information was presented across American television channels. Concerning the Iraq War, those who consumed Fox News exhibited the most pronounced degree of ignorance. According to Kull et al. (2017), the US administration's efforts to justify the war resulted in over 40% of viewers believing that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) had been found in Iraq.

Media bias impacts people's interpretation of news via three main mechanisms: priming, agenda setting, and framing (Daumman and Parkin, 2015). Priming theory posits that people's prior perspectives on specific concerns addressed in news articles about a certain subject impact their subsequent evaluations of that subject. News providers influence the direction of public discussion by strategically emphasising subjects that attract their audience's interest. According to Entman (2013), the viewpoints presented in news items, known as frames, influence how news consumers evaluate situations. According to Entman (2017), journalists use framing tactics to promote a certain perspective while reporting on a topic.

Hamborg et al. (2019) demonstrated the impact of framing by presenting a case study by Kahneman and Tversky in 1984. Consider a hypothetical situation in which 600 persons are in danger as a result of a viral pandemic. For the first poll, Kahneman and Tversky asked participants to assess their preferences for the following choices:

- A. Total of 200 individuals will be rescued.
- B. The likelihood of 600 persons being saved is 66%. There is a one-third (33%) likelihood that no one will be exempted.

Option A was chosen by 72% of the respondents in the first poll, while Option B was selected by 26%. Following that, an additional poll was carried out to ensure an unbiased depiction of

the same options. However, in this case, the voting alternatives were provided according to the anticipated fatality count rather than the number of lives that would be saved.

- C. The predicted fatality count is expected to reach about 400.
- D. 66% chance that no one will die. In two-thirds (66%) of instances, there will be no deaths. The likelihood of 600 persons dying is 33%.

The situation was characterised by the reversal of individuals' choices. Only 22% of poll respondents picked option C, however option D was selected by a majority of 72%. The survey findings indicate that framing, defined as the method of presenting information, may successfully emphasise both the favourable and unfavourable elements of the issue (Hamborg, 2023). Nevertheless, the consequences of media bias are many, and when people are unaware of the full amount of prejudice, these effects are intensified. The concentration of power within a small number of firms has magnified the potential influence of any one news organisation due to media bias.

Bias and Public Trust

Although it is a fact that several news networks are under the direction of a single individual, not everyone is apprehensive about the dissemination of false information via media platforms. In 2018, to the surprise of the American public, several local news stations broadcasted an almost identical script to their viewers. The intended declaration offered by the local news analysts failed to instill confidence in viewers about the impartiality and equity that need to be maintained in the news transmission, contrary to expectations. The Sinclair Broadcast Group, with its extensive network of over two hundred television stations, has provided them with virtually same script, making it impossible to tell them apart. The widespread distribution of a standardised script among network anchors throughout the country provoked substantial public anger and discussion, prompting inquiries into the trustworthiness of local television stations and the rationale for the exclusive control of a single firm in station ownership (Fortin & Bromwich, 2018). The credibility of media is diminished when corporations exert control over news outlets and use them to further their own agendas. Based on the results of a 2017 poll carried out by the Pew Research Centre (b), which revealed that local news stations were seen as the most reliable source of information, this scenario might have significant repercussions. Based on Pew Research Centre's findings in 2017, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all see local news as equally reliable. The trust differentials between national and local news vary from 2 to 13 percent. The Sinclair Broadcast Group controversy, although not overtly exhibiting ideological bias, generated a sense of disquiet among the public over the potential compromise of their reliable news outlets. This might potentially result in more allegations of disseminating inaccurate information.

According to a 2018 study conducted by the Pew Research Centre, those who had associations with both major political parties were more likely to attribute honesty to both views and factual information. Partisans often support a statement if they perceive it to be based on facts, whereas they categorise a disagreement as a subjective issue. This study confirmed the findings of Fragale and Heath (2004) that individuals have a tendency to trust the validity of their own thoughts, assuming that they must have originated from trustworthy sources due to their veracity. Individuals are more likely to see a news source as reliable if their viewpoints align with its own, since they feel it to be more precise.

In 2018, Gallup and the Knight Foundation established an internet-based research tool to examine the level of public confidence in the media. The internet platform generated news

articles and organised them in several formats that obscured the source, the image, both, or neither in the case of each individual story. The research gathered and used the political affiliations of the participants to examine and contrast the perceived credibility of news sites according to their political orientation, as well as the accessibility of sources and visuals. The research found that using political heuristics had a detrimental effect on trustworthiness, while source attribution resulted in a general decline in trustworthiness. The participants were more inclined to evaluate the authenticity or lack thereof of a source based on its perceived link, rather than the content of the article.

Theoretical Framework

The current study employs the cultivation theory and the theory of planned behavior (TPB).

Cultivation Theory by George Gerbner (1976)

The sociocultural paradigm known as "cultivation" analyses the impact of television on the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values of its audience (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Initially, it was conceptualised as a part of a broader cultural indicators study that investigated the broader impact of media on culture, namely via its representation of storytelling. While subsequent research have explored the effects of cultivation in non-American contexts, the original concept largely centred on the significant influence of American media on the development of American culture (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). The cultural indicators project comprised three distinct elements: an examination of the institutional process, which analysed the creation and dissemination of media messages; a scrutiny of the message system, which assessed the content of the media messages; and an exploration of the cultivation of recipients, which investigated how exposure to media messages influenced their perceptions of reality. Moreover, given the significant influence of television in shaping this theory, the majority of research and analysis has concentrated on examining the effects and consequences of television on viewers' understanding of social reality.

The connection between cultivation, as a sociocultural framework, and its three main constituents—media institutions, message origination, and message consequences on viewers—is readily evident. However, media research has mostly concentrated on cultivation analysis, which is the third component. The main indicator of a cultivation effect is the correlation between the amount of time people dedicate to watching television and their perspectives on the world. The central claim posits that an increase in television use is linked to a heightened convergence between an individual's worldview and the prevailing narratives shown on television. To be more explicit, cultivation theory asserts that television plays a very powerful role in shaping narratives. Thorough examinations of television messaging demonstrate a significant consistency in the underlying belief systems, even if there may seem to be variation in the subjects, kinds of programmes, and persons delivering them. Gerbner asserts that television has the greatest impact in developing both individual and social ideals within American culture. This is due to the impact that the regularity and frequency of television broadcasts may have on these beliefs.

The research used the cultivation theory to underscore the interconnections among the various components. The idea suggests that extended exposure to media content causes individuals to develop a tendency to see social reality in accordance with their portrayal in the media. Therefore, this level of exposure directly impacts the attitudes and behaviours of the audience (Cheng et al., 2016). The concept explicitly examines the influence of regular television viewing on individuals' perception of reality, so showing that mass media has a significant impact on people's worldview. Excessive media material that unduly emphasises positive or negative themes or news might harm the audience, as shown by the cultivation

theory in mass communication (Callanan, 2012). Essentially, individuals' perspectives and attitudes might be adversely affected by their exposure to inaccurate information.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Icek Ajzen (1991)

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) was developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991 with the objective of accurately forecasting and elucidating a wide range of human actions. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TPB) was formulated in 1980 with the purpose of predicting an individual's inclination to engage in a certain activity under given circumstances (Ajzen, 1985). The fundamental concept behind the proposal was to include all conceivable actions that may be autonomously regulated by individuals. The notion of behavioural purpose is quite significant in this approach. Behavioural intentions emerge when individuals evaluate the possible benefits and drawbacks of the expected outcome, together with their assessment of the likelihood of achieving the desired result. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) posits that the efficacy of engaging in an activity is contingent upon the significant interplay between motivation (or behavioural control) and capacity (or purpose). The three primary types include behavioural beliefs, normative views, and control beliefs. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has six components that evaluate the degree of an individual's genuine behavioural control.

The research established a correlation between certain independent factors and the dependent variable of altruistic behaviour by using the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). The practical conceptual framework proposed by Yadav and Pathak (2017) aids in understanding the complexities of human social behaviour. In line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), it is important to possess the intention to do a certain action prior to its implementation. Their purpose is influenced by their level of motivation, the expectations of the group, and the perceived level of ease or difficulty in doing the task (Lee, 2011). Furthermore, the Theory of Planned behaviour posits that individuals are more likely to translate their intentions into actions when they explicitly articulate their purpose to engage in a certain activity, particularly when they possess sufficient autonomy over that behaviour (Slater, 2004).

According to Lee (2022), mass media play a crucial role in distributing information and acquainting the public with emerging subjects and difficulties. The media's depiction of less known topics may influence the public's perception of these issues, leading to increased public attention (Hong & Kim, 2020). Moreover, the media have the capacity to influence public sentiment about significant matters. The medium via which news is delivered has the potential to shape the perspectives and acceptance of certain ideas and attitudes among readers and viewers. According to the TPB (Pfattheicher & Nielsen, 2022), an individual's behaviour is influenced by intentional actions, which are determined by their attitudes (personal desires), subjective norms (the opinions of others), and perceived behavioural control (one's belief in their ability to carry out the desired behaviour). Interacting with news may be likened to acquiring knowledge, both of which ultimately shape individuals' perspectives (Ho et al., 2018). As per the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), an individual's attitude has the ability to predict their future behaviours. The probability of a person engaging in a certain activity is closely correlated with their attitude towards that conduct. Individuals' negative perception of an activity diminishes their inclination to engage in it. The public's level of generosity is influenced by their perception of news disseminated by the media.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pervasive issue of media bias, encompassing political, sensational, and corporate biases, significantly influences public perceptions and political choices. The study

underscores the importance of recognizing and understanding these biases for media consumers seeking a balanced and nuanced understanding of news events. It emphasizes the role of political ideologies, economic factors, and ownership structures in shaping media narratives. The impact of media bias extends to the rise of echo chambers and the cultivation of individual worldviews. The study also draws attention to the role of social media in perpetuating biased reporting and the potential consequences of fake news. To address these challenges, promoting editorial transparency, encouraging diverse media ownership, and fostering critical media literacy are crucial steps. Overall, understanding the complexities of media bias is essential for maintaining a robust democracy and fostering an informed and engaged public.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, here are some key recommendations that were deemed necessary:

1. To address media bias, governments should consider implementing policies that promote editorial transparency and diversity of ownership in the media industry. Establishing independent regulatory bodies to monitor and assess media outlets for bias can help maintain journalistic integrity. Governments can also encourage media literacy programs to educate the public on recognizing different forms of bias. Additionally, funding or supporting initiatives that foster investigative journalism and fact-checking can contribute to a more informed citizenry.
2. Technology companies should invest in algorithms and features that expose users to a diverse range of viewpoints, reducing the risk of echo chambers. Social media platforms can collaborate with fact-checking organizations to identify and label misleading content. Transparent algorithms and content moderation policies can help build user trust. Governments can work with tech companies to develop and enforce regulations that curb the spread of fake news and encourage responsible platform behavior. Additionally, individuals should be encouraged to use digital tools that help identify and filter out biased or inaccurate information.
3. Government should advocate for a diverse range of media ownership to prevent concentration of media power in a few hands. Policies can be implemented to encourage independent and diverse media outlets, fostering a plurality of perspectives.
4. News platforms as well as social media platforms should implement rigorous fact-checking processes to ensure the accuracy of news content. These websites should invest in fact-checking teams or collaborate with independent fact-checking organizations to maintain credibility.
5. News platforms should encourage journalists to present multiple viewpoints on a given issue, avoiding sensationalism and ensuring a balanced representation of diverse opinions. Foster a culture that values journalistic integrity over the pursuit of sensational headlines.

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