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Impact of Mass Media on Socio-Economic and Political Discourse in Nigeria: Implications for Legislative Decision-Making

By

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Abstract

The media in Nigeria plays a crucial role in shaping societal norms, influencing public opinion, and fostering community awareness. This study investigates the impact of mass media on socio-economic and political discourse in Nigeria, particularly its implications for legislative decision-making. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the research draws on semi-structured interviews and content analysis to examine how media coverage shapes public opinion and influences socio-economic dynamics. The thematic analysis focuses on legislative proceedings and related issues, with insights gathered from ten key informants, including journalists and members of the public in Ilorin, Kwara State. The study's findings highlight the media's dual role as both an informer and a shaper of public discourse, demonstrating how media frames influence public perception and policy debates on issues such as insecurity, food production, youth participation in politics, healthcare crises, and electoral reforms. Despite these challenges, media convergence is seen as a beneficial development that has revolutionized the media landscape. The study recommends upgrading facilities and equipment, continuous training for media staff, and motivating employees to meet the demands of media convergence and enhance their performance. Implementing these recommendations can strengthen the role of the media as a fundamental pillar of democracy, enhance public understanding of critical issues, and promote a more informed and engaged citizenry.

Keywords

Public Opinion, Legislative Decision-Making, Socio-Economic Dynamics, Media Frames, Audience Engagement.

1. Introduction

The media plays an integral role in shaping societal norms, influencing public opinion, and fostering community awareness. In Nigeria, as in many other

countries, the media is deeply intertwined with the social and personal lives of the people, therefore media is often referred to as the fourth pillar of democracy due to its critical role in informing the public, holding power to account, and fostering an informed citizenry. Nielsen and Ganter (2022) argue that societies rely heavily on mass media to stay informed in an information-driven world. This reliance underscores the media's responsibility in driving changes and shaping public opinion. The role of the media in raising deep public awareness is pivotal, as it continuously informs a society that is increasingly aware of its rights and privileges (Reisach, 2021).

The roles of the news media in the policy process have been thoroughly studied. A key dimension, and our focus here, is their roles in political agenda-setting (Langer & Gruber, 2021). While communication studies often examine how the media influence public issue priorities, political agenda setting looks at how policymakers prioritize issues for action given the flow of information into the system (Jones & Baumgartner, 2012). Media political agenda setting specifically refers to the impact of news media coverage on political priorities. Similarly, it is important to explore how the media contribute to establishing the political agenda and potentially force a policy response (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2016). This question is often studied alongside the counterhypothesis that the media largely follow political elites and thus have a weak independent influence.

The political theme maintains a leading role in modern mass communication. Boeva-Omelechko et al. (2019) state, "One of the most persuasive discourses is mass media discourse, and especially political one" (p. 2). Political discourse is increasingly focused on mass effect, using subtle or near-manipulative technologies to influence public perception. Development media theory, rooted in the agenda-setting theory proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media doesn't tell us what to think, but rather what to think about. The attention given to an issue by the media influences the perceived importance of that issue among the audience. This theory suggests that while the media may not entirely alter individual perspectives, it significantly shapes what is considered important. This influential power positions the media as a crucial tool in the development policies of governments at all levels.

The impact of media power on national politics since Nigeria's democratization in 1999 is a subject of much debate. Adesoji (2010) argues that Nigerian politics is heavily shaped by media power through public opinion, press agitation, and media agendas. Consequently, the press, seen as powerful, is often owned, recruited, and/or engaged by politicians and political parties to influence public opinion and win elections. Kukah (2012) notes that the proliferation of new media outlets, particularly in Lagos and Abuja since 1999, indicates that media agenda-setting remains vital in contemporary Nigerian politics.

However, the influence of the media on Nigerian politics is increasingly questioned amid worsening political corruption, state inefficiency, and radical insurgency. News production is often molded by political and commercial pressures, which complicates and sometimes compromises the media's ability to fulfill its constitutional role (Jatula, 2017). This central idea is based on the media's supposed ability to influence public opinion and democracy. The press is believed to raise the importance of certain issues in the public sphere and among policymakers. While the media may not directly dictate public opinion, it highlights issues for public consideration and, through salience, repetition, emphasis, and analysis, increases public awareness of these issues (Graber, 2003). Although the public determines which issues are relevant, media analysis enhances the prominence of these issues in the public domain.

The media in Nigeria extends beyond mere information dissemination. It serves as a fundamental pillar of democracy, a bridge between traditional and modern societies, and a critical educational tool. The media's ability to foster a sense of community, drive societal change, and inform the public underscores its indispensable role in modern society. As Nielsen and Ganter (2022) and other scholars highlight, the media's influence is profound and multifaceted, shaping not only public opinion but also the very fabric of society.

Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to investigate the impact of mass media on socio-economic and political discourse in Nigeria and its implications for legislative decision-making. Specifically, the study aims to: Identify the dominant media frames used to present socio-economic and political issues in Nigerian media (e.g., security frame, economic frame, etc.), and know how journalists and members of the public perceive the impact of media on public understanding of socio-economic and political issues.

2. Conceptual Reviews

2.1 The Role of Media in Nigeria's Socio-Economic Development

Development is a transformative process aimed at enhancing human life and the environment. It involves creating opportunities for individuals to realize their potential (Nwanyanwu, 2021). The media plays a crucial role in this process through "development communication," providing a platform for information dissemination and public engagement. The media has been described in various ways, such as the fourth estate, agenda setter, watchdog, force multiplier, and gatekeeper, all highlighting its societal influence. Conversely, it is sometimes criticized for sensationalism, propaganda, and bias, which can hinder national development. This dual perception raises questions about the media's true impact on national development and the challenges it faces.

The media's real influence on national development depends on the media organizations themselves, the societies in which they operate, and their audiences. According to Section 22 of the 1999 constitution, the media's role is to ensure government accountability at all levels, reinforcing its status as "The Fourth Estate of the Realm," complementing the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. In developing countries like Nigeria, where poverty and illiteracy are prevalent, the media's role is even more critical. Rosa (2022) notes that journalism in India educates, informs, and rehabilitates minds, a role similarly essential in Nigeria. The media's ability to provide information to illiterate populations helps bridge knowledge gaps and fosters a more informed public (Nairutia, 2023).

However, the Nigerian media has shown inconsistency in addressing issues like corruption and social vices. While it often publishes allegations to fight corruption, it also frequently supports the interests of those in power (Nwanyanwu, 2021). Adeola (2022) emphasizes that media significantly fosters a sense of community in Africa, especially in Nigeria. This communal sense is crucial for broadening public perspectives and enhancing social cohesion. Sabo and Kente (2024) stress that communication is vital for survival and societal organization, with the media serving as a key conduit for this process.

The mass media uniquely bridges traditional and modern societies, acting as a vehicle for social change. Nielsen and Ganter (2022) discuss how the media shapes public opinion and elevates aspirations, thereby supporting societal transformation. The media's role as both an information source and a supporter of social change highlights its transformative power. The media's educational role is also critical, raising public awareness of contemporary issues that can alter social direction (Tabassum, 2022). One of the media's primary functions is education. It helps inculcate new cultural patterns within communities, shaping cultural mindsets and behaviours over time. This educational role is vital in developing nations where traditional educational resources may be limited. By informing the public about current issues and fostering dialogue, the media drives societal progress and adaptation to new cultural norms (Tabassum, 2022).

To sum up, the media in Nigeria goes beyond mere information dissemination. It serves as a fundamental pillar of democracy, a bridge between traditional and modern societies, and a critical educational tool. The media's ability to foster a sense of community, drive societal change, and inform the public underscores its indispensable role in modern society. As Nielsen and Ganter (2022) and other scholars highlight, the media's influence is profound and multifaceted, shaping not only public opinion but also the very fabric of society.

2.2 Media, Democracy and Political Discourse in Nigeria

The concept of political discourse as integral to democracy has long been recognized, dating back to Thomas Jefferson and the founders of the American

Republic. Jefferson believed that influence in society should be derived from participation in open and free discourse rather than predetermined social hierarchies (Helo, 2023). Political discourse, which involves the exchange of reasoned views on resolving societal problems, plays a critical role in democratic decision-making processes (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). In the Nigerian context, the media has emerged as a crucial player in shaping this discourse, especially as the nation grapples with its diverse political, ethnic, and social landscapes. However, the influence of the media on political discourse in Nigeria is complicated by issues of bias, misinformation, and political interference.

In democratic societies, the media functions as the "fourth estate," responsible for disseminating information, acting as a watchdog, and facilitating public debate (Norris, 2000). The Nigerian media has historically played a vital role in this regard, particularly during the colonial and military eras, where it was a key player in the fight for independence and resistance against military dictatorship (Oso, 2011). This legacy underscores the media's potential as an engine for democratic development. However, since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, the role of the media has been challenged by political and economic pressures that have, at times, compromised its independence and objectivity. These pressures reveal the delicate balance the Nigerian media must maintain as a democratic institution while operating in a politically charged environment.

Nigeria's media landscape is highly polarized along regional, ethnic, and political lines, reflecting the country's complex socio-political fabric (Fetzer & Weizman, 2006). This polarization manifests in biased reporting, where media outlets often function as mouthpieces for political elites, skewing public discourse. Media bias during elections is a particularly concerning issue. During Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections, various media outlets aligned themselves with specific political parties, influencing public opinion and voter behaviour (Hassell, Holbein & Miles, 2020). This highlights the need for journalistic ethics and impartial reporting to ensure a balanced political discourse. Without objectivity, the media risks eroding public trust and failing in its democratic responsibilities.

The advent of digital and social media has significantly altered the dynamics of political discourse in Nigeria. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp offer citizens, especially the youth, an avenue for political engagement that is more interactive and decentralized than traditional media (Ogunnoiki, 2018). Social media's role in mobilizing political action was evident during the 2020 #EndSARS protests, where online platforms enabled mass mobilization against police brutality (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018). However, digital media also comes with its own set of challenges, including the proliferation of misinformation. According to Barbera (2018), the spread of fake news on social media can exacerbate political tensions and even incite violence, as was observed during election periods. This

underscores the need for regulatory frameworks that can curb misinformation without stifling freedom of speech.

A major challenge confronting the Nigerian media is political interference. Many media outlets are owned or influenced by politicians or their affiliates, which compromises their independence and ability to serve as objective purveyors of information (Gainaka, Alsagoff & Ghazali, 2020). This situation is further exacerbated by economic pressures, such as poor funding, which limit the media's capacity to perform its democratic functions effectively. While political interference undermines journalistic integrity, economic constraints limit the scope and quality of investigative journalism, which is crucial for holding political leaders accountable.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for the Nigerian media to foster a more inclusive and robust political discourse. The increasing penetration of digital platforms offers a more diverse and participatory media space, allowing citizens from various backgrounds to engage in political discussions. Moreover, with proper regulation and ethical practices, digital media can enhance accountability by providing a platform for real-time citizen journalism and fact-checking. To strengthen democracy in Nigeria, media institutions must focus on maintaining their independence, promoting ethical standards, and leveraging the potential of digital technologies to widen participation in political discourse.

The relationship between media, democracy, and political discourse in Nigeria is both complex and multifaceted. While the media has historically played a crucial role in promoting democratic ideals, its effectiveness is often compromised by political interference, economic pressures, and the challenges posed by digital media. The rise of social media presents new opportunities for broader political engagement, but it also raises concerns about misinformation and political bias. Moving forward, the Nigerian media must strive to uphold its democratic responsibilities by fostering an independent, balanced, and inclusive platform for political discourse, ensuring that it contributes positively to the country's democratic development.

2.3. Theoretical Review

The Agenda-Setting Theory proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), operates on several core assumptions. The first major assumption of Agenda-Setting Theory is that the media does not dictate what people should think but rather what they should think about (Cowart, 2020). The theory posits that the media plays a key role in focusing public attention on specific issues, making them appear more important through repeated exposure. Essentially, the media's level of coverage and emphasis on certain topics or events directly influences the salience of those issues in the public mind. While the media may not drastically change the opinions

or attitudes of individuals, it significantly influences the issues that audiences perceive as most pressing or newsworthy.

Secondly, according to Perloff (2022), Agenda-Setting Theory assumes that the media acts as a gatekeeper in the flow of information. Media outlets have the power to determine which issues are worthy of coverage and which ones are sidelined. This gatekeeping function can shape political discourse, public opinion, and even policy by elevating certain topics to national prominence. In this way, the media is viewed as a critical tool for governments and institutions, particularly in development contexts, where media campaigns can direct public attention toward policy goals such as health, education, or economic reform.

A third assumption of the theory is that the media's power is indirect but pervasive. It does not force ideas or opinions upon the public but instead subtly guides the public's awareness of specific issues through repeated coverage and strategic framing. This subtle shaping of the public agenda, in turn, influences how society perceives the importance of these issues and, ultimately, how policymakers react to them.

Despite these foundational assumptions, the Agenda-Setting face several criticisms. One major critique is the oversimplification of the media's role in shaping public opinion. While the theory posits that the media sets the public agenda, it does not account for the complexity of media consumption in the digital age, where audiences have a wider array of information sources (Tang, 2021). The advent of social media, online news platforms, and user-generated content means that individuals are exposed to a diverse and often fragmented media landscape, reducing the traditional media's monopolistic role in agenda-setting.

Another criticism lies in the theory's assumption of media neutrality. Critics argue that media organizations are often influenced by political, economic, and ideological biases, which shape their coverage and agenda-setting priorities. In Nigeria, for instance, media ownership is frequently tied to political elites, compromising the media's role as an impartial arbiter of public discourse (Adesoji, 2010). Media outlets may serve as tools for political propaganda, promoting the interests of their owners or affiliates rather than providing balanced and objective coverage. This situation complicates the media's role in truly setting a public agenda based on societal needs, rather than political or commercial interests.

Furthermore, the theory is criticized for its lack of attention to audience agency. Agenda-Setting Theory tends to portray audiences as passive receivers of media messages, easily influenced by what the media emphasizes. However, individuals actively interpret and filter media content based on their pre-existing beliefs, experiences, and socio-political contexts. In Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and regional identities are highly pronounced, audience reactions to media messages

can be diverse and resistant to a uniform agenda. This makes the assumption of a cohesive public agenda unrealistic in such a fragmented media environment (Jatula, 2017).

Despite these limitations, Agenda-Setting Theory remains highly relevant for conceptualising media's role in Nigeria, especially in the context of its democratisation process. Since 1999, when Nigeria transitioned to civilian rule, the media has played a crucial role in shaping political discourse and influencing public opinion, particularly during elections (Oyewole & Omotola (2022). According to Kukah (2012), the proliferation of new media outlets, especially in urban centres like Lagos and Abuja, reflects the enduring importance of media agenda-setting in Nigerian politics. Media coverage of political campaigns, policy debates, and national issues still guides public focus, helping citizens prioritize concerns like corruption, security, and economic reforms.

Moreover, the media's ability to set the public agenda is particularly relevant in a developing nation like Nigeria, where access to information is often limited, and the media serves as a primary source of news for many. Through repeated emphasis on certain issues, such as health crises or governance challenges, the media can push these topics into the public consciousness, prompting both civic action and governmental response. While political and economic pressures may compromise media independence, the theory nonetheless captures the essential function of media in guiding public debate and prioritizing national issues in the development process.

While development media theory faces valid criticisms regarding media neutrality, audience passivity, and the evolving media landscape, it remains a useful framework for understanding the media's role in Nigerian political discourse. The theory's central premise—that media influences what the public thinks about—holds particular relevance in Nigeria, where media outlets continue to shape political agendas and influence voter perceptions. Despite the limitations posed by political interference and technological advancements, the theory helps conceptualize the media's ongoing significance in fostering democratic participation and guiding public attention toward critical national issues.

3. Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodology, utilising semi-structured interviews and content analysis to examine how media coverage shapes public opinion and influences socio-economic dynamics in Nigeria. The thematic analysis focused on legislative proceedings and related issues with 10 key informants, including journalists and members of the public purposefully selected in Ilorin, Kwara State Nigeria.

The content analysis aspect identified the dominant media frames used to present socio-economic and political issues in Nigerian media (e.g., security frame, economic frame, etc.), and how journalists and members of the public perceive the impact of media on public understanding of socio-economic and political issues. Specifically, the content of news articles, social media posts, and television programs on socio-economic and political issues in Nigeria were identified as media frames.

A maximum variation sampling approach was utilized to deliberately select informants representing diverse viewpoints, experiences, and contexts related to mass media on socio-economic and political discourse. This approach ensures an inclusive range of perspectives, thereby enriching the study's depth and comprehensiveness regarding the implications for Legislative Decision-Making.

Data collection was conducted through content analysis of social media posts and interviews with journalists and members of the public. These approaches provided comprehensive insights into the dynamics of media-legislature interactions. In designing the research, the study followed the approach outlined by Donkoh and Mensah (2023), which emphasises methodological triangulation and not analysis triangulation. This involves using multiple research methods to study the same phenomenon, such as socio-economic and political issues. Each type of triangulation offers unique benefits and is strategically used to address specific research questions. The primary purpose of data triangulation is to increase confidence in the findings, as it allows researchers to build a strong case for their conclusions. The mixed-method approach and triangulation have proven effective in social sciences research (Creswell, 2012). Similarly, Morgan (2007) posits that combining methods enriches the strengths of findings within a single research study. This study, therefore, integrates various qualitative methods to ensure robust and credible results.

4. Findings

4.1 Content Analysis of Media Frames on Socio-Economic and Political Issues in Nigeria

The findings of this research revealed the significant influence of mass media on socio-economic and political discourse in Nigeria, highlighting its role in shaping public opinion, setting political agendas, and framing legislative debates. The analysis elucidated the complex interplay between media coverage, public perception, and legislative decision-making processes. Specifically, the findings contained the dominant media frames used to present socio-economic and political issues in Nigerian media.

4.1.1 Insecurity and Food Production

The article titled *Insecurity hampers food production in Northern Nigeria, Farmers Lament* published by the Daily Trust Newspaper on 05/17/2024, presents the economic impact of insecurity in northern Nigeria, particularly focusing on food shortages

and rising prices due to farmers abandoning their lands. By highlighting the negative economic consequences, the article frames insecurity as the primary obstacle to economic development in the region. This security frame emphasizes the urgent need for improved security measures to stabilize the agricultural sector and ensure food security.

Another content from social media post titles *Our farmers are the backbone of our nation! Yet, insecurity is forcing them to abandon their lands*. The post harsh tags displayed, #SecuringOurNorth, #ProtectOurFarmers on Facebook dated 05/17/2024. This post uses the humanitarian frame, emphasizing the plight of farmers and their importance to the nation's wellbeing. It appeals to public sympathy and support for farmers, stressing the need for protection and security to safeguard the agricultural sector.

4.1.2 Youth Participation in Politics

The content of this news report titled *National Assembly Debates Proposed Bill on Youth Participation in Politics* on Channels Television website dated 05/16/2024, centers on the legislative debate about a bill to increase youth participation in politics, featuring arguments from both ruling and opposition lawmakers. This elite discourse frame focuses on the political debate within the legislative sphere, potentially excluding the voices of young Nigerians themselves. It highlights the institutional processes and power dynamics involved in political reforms.

Similarly, a social media post titled *We are the future! Will the National Assembly hear our voices*? Exhibited hash tags, #Youths4Change #PassTheBill" on Twitter – Nigerian Youth Movement and dated 05/17/2024. This post uses the empowerment frame, emphasizing the demand for increased youth participation and pressing the National Assembly to pass the bill. It highlights the aspirations and activism of young Nigerians, aiming to mobilize public support and influence legislative outcomes.

4.1.3 Doctors' Strike and Healthcare Crisis

Another media frame was titled *Public Hospitals Overwhelmed as Doctors' Strike Continues* and published on Arise News Online Platform on 05/14/2024. The news provides in-depth coverage of the doctors' strike, focusing on the strain it places on public hospitals and the impact on patient care. Using the accountability frame, the story holds both the government and striking doctors responsible for the healthcare crisis, calling for resolution and improved healthcare funding and management. Raising the salient point concerning the health crisis, a social media post titled *Nigerians deserve quality healthcare*! With hashtags #EndTheStrike #FundOurHospitals" were published on Instagram by Health Sector Watch on 05/17/2024. This post employs the public service frame, underlining the importance of a functional healthcare system for all Nigerians. It urges both sides

of the strike to find a solution, emphasizing the need for better healthcare funding and services.

4.1.4 Rising Food Prices and Farmer Insecurity

The article titled *Rising Food Prices: Farmers Cry Foul, Blaming Insecurity* published in the Daily Champion Newspaper and dated 05/18/2024, focuses on the plight of farmers dealing with insecurity in northern Nigeria, highlighting how it leads to food shortages and increased prices. This security frame points to insecurity as a major hindrance to food security, stressing the need for effective measures to protect farmers and ensure stable food production. Corroborating this perspective, a Twitter social media post with the title, *Empty shelves & rising prices! Our farmers are under attack – not just from insecurity, but from a broken system that fails to protect them* displayed hashtags #SecureOurFood #SupportNigerianFarmers". This post combines the security and accountability frames, highlighting not only the impact of insecurity but also systemic failures in protecting farmers. It calls for comprehensive solutions to safeguard the agricultural sector and ensure food security.

4.1.5 Youth Unemployment Crisis

Another area of media frame bothered on youth unemployment and was published on Arise News – Online Platform, on 05/19/2024 and titled *Youth Unemployment Crisis: A Ticking Time Bomb? Experts Weigh In".* The piece offers a balanced analysis of Nigeria's youth unemployment crisis, featuring insights from economists, business leaders, and youth activists. Using the economic frame, it explores the causes and potential solutions to the problem, prompting policy discussions aimed at reducing youth unemployment and fostering economic growth. Correspondingly, another social media post by Arise News which hosts a live Q&A with industry leaders discussed solutions to the youth unemployment crisis with hashtags #NYCoC #EmpoweringYouth". This post uses the empowerment frame, encouraging young entrepreneurs to engage with experts and seek solutions to unemployment. It aims to foster dialogue and provide practical guidance, highlighting the role of youth in driving economic change.

4.1.6 Electoral Bill and Democracy

Identifying the specific challenges that are associated with electoral bills and democracy was a Radio Lagos Morning Show posted online and dated 05/20/2024. The radio show titled, *Public Debate - Amending the Electoral Bill: Will it Strengthen Democracy?* hosts a live debate on the proposed amendments to the electoral bill, featuring politicians and civil society representatives. This political frame facilitates public discourse on electoral reforms, providing a platform for diverse opinions and encouraging citizen engagement in democratic processes.

Buttressing this media frame on the electoral bill was the Facebook social media post by Radio Lagos Voters Forum titled, *Confused about the electoral bill amendments.* The show used hashtags #ElectionTransparency #YourVoteMatters". This post uses the watchdog frame, promoting informed citizen participation in the electoral process. It encourages listeners to engage in expert discussions and make informed decisions, emphasizing transparency and accountability in electoral reforms.

4.2 Semi- Structured interviews on Media Influence and Public Understanding

This analysis explores how journalists and members of the public perceive the impact of media on public understanding of socio-economic and political issues. The findings are categorized into themes and sub-themes. The right to privacy and confidentiality was disclosed to all interviewees before the interview along with the informed consent. Therefore, every participant was assured that none of them would be identified by name at any time, before, during or in the analysis of this study. Because of this, each of the informant was identified in the analysis by code name which was formed from their initial letters and numbers such as J indicating Journalists and P signifying members of the public respectively.



Figure 1. Emergent themes on journalists' perspectives on media impact on political discourse in Nigeria

4.2.1 Media Responsibility and Accuracy

Journalists (J1, J5) emphasise the media's responsibility for factual reporting and holding power accountable. Sensationalism and political bias are seen as threats to accurate public understanding (J1). "I believe investigative journalism can expose wrongdoing and raise awareness about critical issues. However, the media landscape is saturated with sensationalized content, which can distort public understanding and lead to cynicism."

Journalists (J2) acknowledge the power of media framing in shaping public opinion on political issues. They recognize the challenge of overcoming audience confirmation bias, where people gravitate towards information that confirms their existing beliefs (J2). "We strive to present balanced coverage, but political agendas and audience preferences often influence how stories are framed. The challenge is to provide context and avoid simplifying complex issues."

4.2.2 Media Platforms and Public Perception

Social media editors (J3) highlight the potential of social media for information dissemination, but also the dangers of echo chambers and misinformation. "Social media allows for instant information sharing, but it also creates echo chambers and amplifies misinformation. We try to curate content from diverse sources, but users need media literacy skills to navigate the online information overload."

Economic reporters (J4) acknowledge the challenge of translating complex economic issues into understandable formats for the public. Therefore, warns against oversimplification, which can lead to misunderstandings (J4). "Translating complex economic issues into digestible news stories is crucial. However, oversimplification can lead to misunderstandings and misinformed public discourse."

6.2 Theme 2: Public Perception of Trustworthiness and Influence

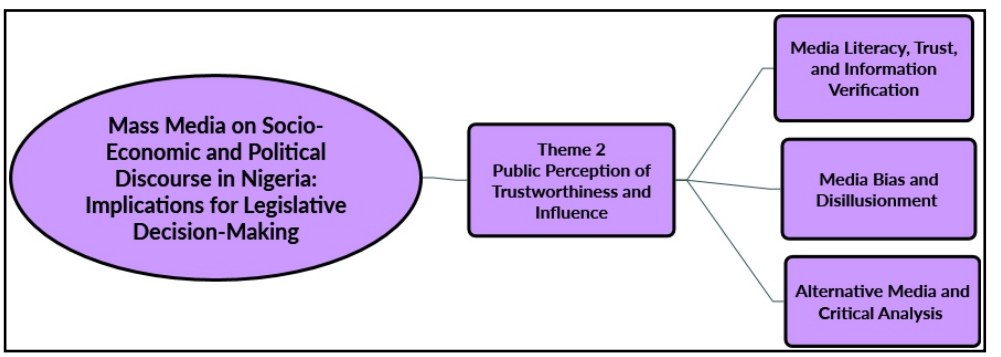


Figure 2. Emergent themes on public perception of trustworthiness and influence on political discourse in Nigeria

4.2.3 Media Literacy, Trust, and Information Verification

University students (P1) demonstrate media literacy skills by checking information from multiple sources and following reputable journalists (P1). "Social media is my go-to source for news updates, but I'm aware that not everything I see is true. I try to check multiple sources and follow reputable journalists on Twitter." Market traders (P2) trust local media sources that reflect their community and cultural context (P2). "I mostly trust the local radio station for news. They know what matters to people here and speak in a way we understand."

Busy individuals (P3) rely on traditional media like television for news due to perceived trustworthiness and convenience (P3). "I don't have much time for news, but I watch the evening news on TV. It feels more reliable than social media."

4.2.4 Media Bias and Disillusionment

Some individuals (P4) express frustration with perceived media bias, leading to a lack of trust in news sources (P4). "News these days seems so biased. It's hard to know who to believe anymore. I miss the days when newspapers were the main source of news. They felt more in-depth and reliable." People in rural areas (P5) may feel disconnected from mainstream media that doesn't address their specific concerns (P5). "I rarely watch the news. It's mostly about things happening in the city, not here in the village. I rely on information from neighbors and local community leaders."

Individuals with specific interests (P6, P9) actively seek out media relevant to their profession (P6) "I follow business news online to stay informed about market trends and government policies that might affect my business."

4.2.5 Alternative Media and Critical Analysis

Some individuals prefer alternative media sources like documentaries (P7) for a more critical and in-depth analysis of current events (P7, P8, and P10). "I get most of my news through documentaries and independent films. They often provide deeper insights than mainstream media." Social media highlights the complex relationship between media, journalists, and the public. While journalists strive to deliver accurate information and combat bias, the public grapples with information overload, confirmation bias, and the trustworthiness of different media sources.

These findings highlight a complex media landscape where journalists grapple with accuracy, bias, and accessibility while the public navigate a range of information sources with varying degrees of trust and media literacy. Efforts to improve media literacy and promote responsible journalism are crucial for fostering a more informed and engaged public.

5. Conclusion

This research has revealed the significant influence of mass media on socio-economic and political discourse in Nigeria, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping public opinion, setting political agendas, and framing legislative debates. The study's findings elucidate the complex interplay between media coverage, public perception, and legislative decision-making processes, demonstrating how media frames dominate the presentation of key issues such as insecurity, food production, youth participation in politics, healthcare crises, and electoral reforms.

The media's framing of socio-economic and political issues in Nigeria underscores its dual role as both an informer and a shaper of public discourse. The analysis of various media frames—from the humanitarian and security frames in discussions about farmers and food production to the empowerment frame in youth political participation—demonstrates the nuanced ways in which media influences public perception and policy debates.

However, the study also highlights challenges within the media landscape, including the tension between sensationalism and responsible reporting, the impact of political and commercial pressures on news production, and the public's varied levels of media literacy and trust. Journalists acknowledge the difficulty in balancing factual reporting with audience preferences and political agendas, while members of the public express concerns about media bias, misinformation, and the accessibility of reliable information. The following recommendations are made:

i. Enhance Media Literacy Programs: Implement nationwide media literacy campaigns to educate the public on how to critically evaluate media content, identify biases, and verify information from multiple sources. This will empower citizens to make informed decisions and reduce the impact of misinformation.
ii. Diversify Media Ownership: Promote policies that encourage diverse ownership of media outlets to prevent the concentration of media power in the hands of a few political or commercial interests. This will help ensure a plurality of voices and perspectives in the media landscape.
iii. Strengthen Legal and Regulatory Frameworks: Enhance legal protections for journalists to operate without fear of retribution, and enforce regulations that prevent undue political and commercial influence on news production. This will help maintain the integrity and independence of the media. Facilitate Public Engagement: Create platforms for public dialogue and engagement on key socio-economic and political issues. Encourage media outlets to feature diverse voices, including those of marginalized communities, to ensure inclusive and representative coverage.
iv. Encourage Collaboration between Media and Civil Society: Foster partnerships between media organizations and civil society groups to address common issues such as corruption, healthcare, and electoral

reforms. Collaborative efforts can amplify advocacy and drive policy change.

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