Bias in Newspapers and Readers' Perception of Media Literacy

Sunil Paudel

Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Madan Bhandari Memorial College

Article Info.	Abstract
  Email sunilpaudel.np@gmail.com 	This study explores the trend of publishing news with positive and negative bias and its impact on readers' perception of media literacy. It primarily aims to investigate how biased news affects audience perception. It also seeks to understand how media bias and media literacy influence newspaper readers' ability to critically evaluate and analyze information. Despite the rapid growth of online news media, printed newspapers still serve as an important source of information in Nepali society. National broadsheet Nepali dailies remain primary channels for disseminating newsworthy information, often presenting stories with varying degrees of positive or negative bias. Emphasis on such biases can significantly affect audience perception and interpretation. Several indicators and determining factors—such as framing, sourcing, language use, and tone—play a vital role in shaping readers' perceptions. This study aims to identify the distinction between positive and negative bias in newspaper reporting and how it relates to perceived credibility. Thus, the research essentially seeks to answer how readers' perceptions are shaped by positively and negatively biased news, in conjunction with varying levels of media literacy. To address this question, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, including surveys of respondents' opinions, observations, and content analysis of articles published in major daily newspapers. Newspaper readers in the general public possess different levels of media literacy. These differences influence their ability to understand, evaluate, and analyze the information presented to them, particularly in recognizing bias. This highlights the importance of professional ethics in news reporting and the need to enhance media literacy among readers to promote neutrality, balance, and credibility in journalism and media. *Keywords*: constructive criticism, emotional tendency, media literacy, news bias, positive news, negative news

Introduction

This study attempts to provide a brief reflection on how bias in news reporting in broadsheet dailies affects readers' perception and interpretation of the news. In today's world, people are overwhelmed with information, as it is available everywhere. However, print newspapers are still regarded as one of the most credible sources

of news for Nepali audiences. Therefore, it is important to be able to identify whether news is biased or not.

Some of the most widely circulated daily newspapers play a significant role in shaping public opinion. This research focuses on how news is framed—whether neutrally, positively, or negatively—through editorial choices in gatekeeping, story angles, framing, word selection, tone, and source usage, and how these elements influence reader perception. It is crucial for readers to possess the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate the information disseminated to them.

Audiences who primarily rely on newspapers for information should be capable of detecting bias in news reporting. When readers encounter biased news, it can hinder their ability to think critically about the content they consume. This study uses surveys, content analysis, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions to examine how media literacy influences readers' understanding of bias in news reporting.

Furthermore, this work highlights the importance of journalistic ethics and integrity. It emphasizes the need to enhance media literacy among readers and audiences. As biases in news reporting persist, it is essential to help readers become informed consumers of media who can recognize and critically question such biases. The central aim of this study is to promote neutrality and fairness in news reporting and to raise awareness of the importance of adequate media literacy among the public.

Statement of the Problem

The phrase "media mushrooming" reflects the wide range of choices available to audiences for obtaining news and information. Despite the availability of multiple formats—print, broadcast, and online—people in Nepal still tend to prioritize newspapers, especially daily and weekly editions, as primary sources for the main news of the day and week.

While modern journalism and online media are appreciated for features such as immediacy, multimedia convergence, interactivity, and diverse content, the lack of adequate regulation, gatekeeping, and professionalism in many online platforms has led a considerable portion of the audience to continue trusting newspapers over radio, television, and digital news sources.

Although newspapers are considered more trustworthy by many, it would be unrealistic to claim that all the news they publish is completely fair or free of positive or negative bias. In fact, it is extremely difficult—if not impossible—for newsroom staff and editorial teams to produce news that is entirely neutral. Neutrality is a core principle of journalism, and maintaining balance is essential. However, avoiding both positive and negative news altogether is neither practical nor realistic.

Today, newspapers and other news media are often criticized for exhibiting a negativity bias, contributing to a general sense of pessimism among their audiences and within society.

Research Questions

This research seeks to explore the following key questions:

o Are Nepali national dailies exhibiting a negativity bias? If so, to what extent?

o How do Nepali newspaper readers perceive the news? Do they view national dailies as presenting negative, positive, or neutral news?

o What types of newsworthy content are being prioritized by Nepali national dailies?

o What impact does newspaper content have on influencing readers' sentiments and broader societal attitudes?

Objectives

Although negativity bias is a major topic of discussion in the context of modern media and journalism, there is still a lack of comprehensive study on the subject. This research aims to examine current trends in news selection, angle, priming, framing, gatekeeping, headline writing, and more.

Specifically, this study seeks to determine whether Nepali national dailies are more focused on spreading negativity, promoting positivity, or maintaining neutrality in their reporting. The major objectives of the study include:

o   Assessing whether news in Nepali national dailies is perceived as positive, negative, or neutral.

o   Identifying the news priorities of Nepali national daily newspapers.

o   Examining whether the newspapers show signs of negativity or positivity bias.

o   Offering recommendations to help media outlets maintain neutrality and journalistic balance.

Significance of the Study

This study is rooted in the widely held belief in media studies that "negative news attracts more audience." Based on this assumption, it is hypothesized that mainstream Nepali dailies tend to give more space to negatively biased news over positive news. With the belief that readers are more drawn to negative news, the majority of content in prominent and widely circulated Nepali dailies appears to be negative in tone or framing.

Such a tendency may have adverse effects on the emotional well-being and attitudes of audiences, potentially spreading negativity in society. While some readers may be disengaged or disheartened by this trend, and others may even dislike overly negative content, there may also be newspapers that prioritize more positive news coverage.

This study assumes that if the ratio of positive to negative news is higher, public perception will be more optimistic, potentially fostering a more positive societal environment. Conversely, a predominance of negative news could contribute to a more pessimistic outlook among readers and negative societal consequences.

However, some dailies may not follow a particular preference for either negative or positive news and instead publish content based on availability, striving for neutrality. Since neutrality and balance are foundational principles of journalism, many newspapers may indeed be making genuine efforts to avoid bias. Thus, it is important to test whether these assumptions and expectations about media bias hold true. This research is significant in determining whether commonly held beliefs about media bias in Nepal reflect actual trends in news reporting.

Limitations of the Study

This research has several limitations. Due to constraints in time, resources, and scope, the study has been limited in the following ways:

The research focuses on analyzing the news published on the front pages of seven national daily newspapers over a period of seven days, from December 10 to 16, 2024. It primarily examines and studies the front-page news content of these dailies, all published in Kathmandu. The headlines are the primary focus of observation, evaluation, and analysis. This is based on the assumption that headlines reflect the main idea of a news story; therefore, if a headline presents a positive tone and language, the overall story is considered positive.

To determine bias, the researcher evaluated the headlines, leads, and, where necessary, the full content of news stories. If the headline did

not clearly reflect the central idea of the story, the lead was analyzed. In some cases, the entire news article was read to assess whether it carried a positive, negative, or neutral tone. The categorization of stories was based on the researcher's interpretation and analysis.

To understand readers' perceptions of media bias and media literacy, a Google Form survey was used. A total of 56 respondents completed the form, answering all the questions. The sample was selected randomly and consisted mainly of college teachers and university students—groups presumed to be regular newspaper readers with relatively higher levels of media literacy.

Additionally, ten lecturers from various colleges, all regular newspaper readers, participated in key informant interviews. A focus group discussion was also conducted with five readers who reported reading more than two national broadsheet dailies on a daily basis.

Based on these methods—news content observation, reader perceptions, and input from key informants and focus groups—the study analyzes potential impacts of media bias and offers conclusions drawn from the findings.

Conceptual and Methodological Framework

To facilitate analysis and interpretation, this study follows a conceptual and methodological framework based on certain established theories and research practices. The approach provides a roadmap for conducting the research and analyzing the data.

The study focuses on how newspapers prioritize and select news stories, particularly how tone and language—whether positive, negative, or neutral—are reflected in their presentation. It aims to assess newspapers' preference for either positivity or negativity in their reporting, and how readers perceive such biases in relation to media literacy.

Using the content analysis method, the research examines selected national daily newspapers published in Nepal. Various dependent and independent variables are analyzed, including:

o   News source
o   News category
o   Tone and sentiment of the news
o   Audience perception
o   Societal attitude
o   Geographical context
o   Frequency of positive or negative language

Key concepts such as news content and its presentation in daily newspapers are closely observed. The basics of positive and negative bias are also compared. One of the universally accepted principles of media is agenda-setting—influencing public priorities and contributing to social development through information dissemination.

However, media can also become vehicles for propaganda, defined as "information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view" (Oxford Languages, 2024). Baran and Davis (2010) argue that positive or negative bias in news selection can sometimes be a form of "deliberate promotion of information and ideas to influence the thoughts of the audience."

It is widely believed that the kind of news media deliver—positive or negative—contributes to shaping the public mindset. As McQuail (2005) states, "Society is a construct rather than a fixed reality. Media provide the materials for reality construction." In McQuail's Mass Communication Theory, he emphasizes that the meanings media offer can be negotiated or rejected by audiences. Media selectively reproduce certain meanings since it is not possible to report on all events objectively. All

representations of social reality in the media are, ultimately, interpretations.

In this study, the selection and coverage of positive and negative news in major Nepali dailies are analyzed using surveys, content analysis, and key informant interviews. The perceptions of respondents are studied to understand the extent of perceived bias. Additionally, the researcher applies his own analytical perspective, guided by specific indicators and determinants, to assess bias in the news content. These include:

- o   Context of events, issues, or subject matters
- o   Content as information provided in the news
- o   Tone and language of presentation
- o   Journalistic quality and principles followed
- o   Emotional influence on the audience

Review of Literature

There is a popular saying in journalism: negative news sells more than positive news. When examining the characteristics and role of media in society—especially news media—it is evident that they are expected to serve the public interest. Media are seen as critics, holding the government, political parties, leaders, and power elites accountable by raising questions about wrongdoing and irregularities.

News is a timely presentation of media content that informs audiences about recent events of public significance. According to Kharel (2006), news is the foremost quality of any news media. Various news platforms such as newspapers, radio, television, and internet-based online portals cover a wide range of important events at the local, national, and international levels. National daily newspapers, in particular, are popular and widely read across the country and beyond. They publish both positive and negative news as they report on important

happenings. Some news items, however, may be perceived as neutral—neither clearly positive nor negative.

To interpret the underlying meaning of news, readers need a high level of media literacy. "Media literacy is the ability of a citizen to access, analyze, and produce information for specific outcomes" (The Aspen Institute, 2023). A media-literate audience—whether readers, listeners, or viewers—must be capable of understanding, analyzing, and evaluating various types of media messages.

The Oxford Languages Dictionary defines media literacy as "the ability to critically analyze stories presented in the mass media and to determine their accuracy or credibility" (Oxford Languages, 2024). In essence, media literacy is the skill to distinguish between factual, truthful information and misleading or false content disseminated by the media. People with media literacy can access, interpret, analyze, produce, and share media content using critical thinking.

As noted by The Aspen Institute (2010), media literacy is "the ability of a citizen to access, analyze, and produce information for specific outcomes." Because information is a core function of mass media, media literacy is closely tied to information literacy. UNESCO merges the two in the concept of Media and Information Literacy (MIL), describing it as "a composite set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and practices that allow effective access, analysis, critical evaluation, interpretation, creation, and dissemination of information and media products… on a creative, legal, and ethical basis" (UNESCO, 2024).

However, among Nepali readers, the ability to critically analyze and categorize news content as positive, negative, or neutral is still limited. Given that media are often found to distort facts, adopt unnecessary slants, and overlook

neutrality, the growing need for media literacy is undeniable.

In terms of impact, national dailies publish two primary types of news: positive and negative. Some news may also appear neutral, lacking clear positive or negative bias. While it is not always easy to categorize news, scholars have developed criteria for distinguishing among these types.

Historically, media have adopted a selective approach in news gatekeeping. Most outlets engage in selective exposure, focusing on content that aligns with their editorial stance. Partisan newspapers, in particular, may favor positive coverage of their allies and negative coverage of their opponents. Kharel (2010) explains:

> … [media] adopt the policy of selective exposure, selective retention and selective follow-up. They see and cover only what they wish to project for the interests of the group they serve. They ignore materials that puts their masters in poor light or present opponents in good light. There are others who appear to be resorting to similar methods of exposure, retention and follow-up stories not because of any political prejudice but out of indifference, lethargy and lack of drive and imagination. (pp. 86–87)

Compared to positive stories—about development, progress, and success—negative stories involving accidents, deaths, crime, and disasters tend to receive more media attention due to their emotional impact. Writing for The Guardian, Steven Pinker noted: "The media exaggerates negative news. This distortion has consequences" (Pinker, 2018). According to him, negative content is often sensationalized, causing anxiety and fear among the public.

Negative news, whether factual or distorted, spreads negativity among readers and throughout society. In such contexts, where negative news dominates, people may develop the perception that society as a whole is negative. This effect is stronger where media literacy is lacking. Pinker further states: "Whether or not the world is getting worse, the nature of news will make us think that it is" (Pinker, 2018).

Today, many people believe that negative news outweighs positive news. However, this belief is often based on assumptions rather than systematic research. For example, a study cited by Dadakhonov (2024) analyzed headlines on Google News across 16 country versions over three week-long periods, examining nearly half a million headlines. The results showed that 70.54% of the headlines were actually positive.

This suggests that rather than relying on general impressions, we must turn to research-based findings before concluding that negative news dominates today's media. The stereotype of a global negative news agenda is being questioned.

Basics to Differentiate Positive and Negative News

There are several criteria to distinguish between positive and negative news. Many factors—such as tone, language, framing, and intent—serve as indicators of bias. Identifying these is important because news bias significantly influences public perception. To do so, a certain level of media literacy is essential. Without the ability to evaluate media critically, audiences can be misinformed or misled. Below are key determinants and indicators used to assess bias in media content.

Factors that Determine News Bias

Business and Profiteering Interests of Media

Media outlets may sensationalize content to increase reach and revenue. This includes exaggeration, distortion, or fabrication of facts.

Pressure to attract audiences, advertisers, or funding often leads to biased reporting.

Vested Political and Commercial Interests

Editorial neutrality is compromised when media are influenced by political parties, corporate entities, or governments. These forces may shape content to reflect specific narratives.

Reflection of Ideological Support

The ideological leanings of media owners, editors, or reporters may influence news production. This can lead to slanted reporting that undermines journalistic neutrality.

Professional Standards and Ethics

High journalistic standards reduce the likelihood of bias. Conversely, a lack of professionalism and ethics in reporting contributes to biased or inaccurate content.

Socio-cultural Phenomena

Media content both shapes and is shaped by societal norms and values. In societies with higher media literacy, audiences are better equipped to detect bias. Media in such environments are under greater pressure to maintain objectivity.

Indicators of News Bias

Selection and Placement of Stories

Prioritizing negative news or placing it prominently while relegating positive news to less visible areas can indicate negative bias. Similarly, emphasizing positive stories while ignoring significant negative events indicates positive bias.

Omission of Contradictory Information

Skipping over facts that challenge a certain narrative can create bias. Deliberate omission of negative or positive aspects contributes to skewed reporting.

Source Reliance. Relying on sources known for extreme viewpoints—whether negative or overly positive—can introduce bias. Balanced reporting requires diverse and credible sources.

Language and Tone. Sensational, emotionally charged, or euphemistic language affects audience perception. Overly negative tone suggests negative bias; overly optimistic tone suggests positive bias.

Framing and Angle. How a story is framed can significantly alter its impact. Framing that emphasizes harm, threat, or failure leads to negative bias. Conversely, framing that highlights success or minimizes problems reflects positive bias.

Asking Questions to Find Out the Possible Bias in News Media

'Fair', a New York-based American national progressive media watchdog group since 1986, suggests some questions telling us 'how to detect bias in news media';

o   Who are the sources?
o   Who is telling the story?
o   Where does this journalism's funding come from?
o   What are the unchallenged assumptions and stereotypes?
o   Does this story include loaded language?
o   Does this story present a false balance between sides of an issue?
o   Are the visuals misleading?
o   Does the headline match reality—or the rest of the piece?
o   How prominently are stories placed? (Fair.org, n.d.)

Identifying the main sources of news and their background, the providers of information, their status and credibility, and understanding the intent behind the information can all help detect possible bias in news stories. Looking

for balanced and multiple viewpoints, using neutral and emotionally restrained language, and engaging in thorough fact-checking—through verification and cross-verification—are crucial steps. Recognizing influencing factors such as funding sources and institutional affiliations also aids in identifying bias.

Tallying, testing, checking, and comparatively analyzing the context and relevance of news, and making informed and critical judgments, are essential to detect media bias. Determining whether a news story is positive or negative is challenging, as there are no definitive rules, frameworks, or clear boundaries for such classification. The perception of whether news is positive or negative largely depends on individual interpretation. Thus, a reader's perspective plays a key role in how news is perceived—as positive, negative, or sometimes neutral.

The same news item may be viewed as positive by some readers and negative by others. Likewise, the subject matter—whether events, issues, or topics—also contributes to whether the news is seen as positive or negative. For example, a report about an accident involving death and injury is typically considered negative news. Conversely, news about progress, development, or success is generally regarded as positive. However, if a person's death is reported, that news might be seen as positive by those who disliked or opposed the deceased. Similarly, reports about the success or achievements of individuals or institutions may trigger resentment, jealousy, or hatred in those who strongly dislike them.

Media outlets often present news according to their editorial policies, at times setting agendas or engaging in propaganda. News is shaped by processes such as gatekeeping, judgment, priming, and framing. The way it is presented may generate varying reactions—likes and dislikes—among audiences, leading them to perceive the same story as positive, negative, or neutral.

When analyzing the full content of news, we often find inconsistencies. A story with a positive headline may carry a negative tone in the lead or body, and vice versa. This inconsistency further complicates efforts to clearly categorize news as positive or negative. Some news stories are so ambiguous that readers struggle to determine whether they are positive, negative, or neutral, making it difficult to classify them definitively. Such stories fall into a gray area where the bias is indeterminate.

Positive News

Positive news refers to favorable or uplifting stories that evoke feelings of happiness or satisfaction in the audience. News that brings relief, joy, or a sense of accomplishment is generally perceived as positive. This includes reports on success, improvement, progress, development, achievement, and pleasant experiences. Positive news often follows journalistic principles and maintains proper structure, tone, and formatting. However, it is worth noting that some stories containing negative subject matter can still be well-crafted and adhere to journalistic standards, thereby being considered technically sound despite the content.

Negative News

Negative news refers to stories that contain sad, distressing, or unfavorable information. These stories create a sense of pessimism or emotional discomfort in readers. News about accidents, deaths, crimes, disasters, or failures typically falls into this category. Negative news often has a strong emotional impact and may spread fear, sadness, or frustration among audiences. Some scholars also categorize news as negative if it is poorly constructed—lacking structure, proper format, or adherence to

journalistic ethics. Such imperfections can lead readers to perceive it as low-quality or "bad" news.

Neutral News

While many scholars suggest that news typically falls into either positive or negative categories, others argue that a significant portion of news content cannot be so easily classified. Some stories do not carry an overtly positive or negative tone and are instead neutral. These are pieces that present facts without bias, sensationalism, or emotionally loaded language. Often, while trying to label news as good or bad, readers encounter stories that do not clearly belong to either category. This is where the concept of neutral news becomes relevant—news that informs without evoking strong emotional reactions or favoring any side.

Table 1

Major Differences in Positive, and Negative News

Positive News	Negative News
Audiences usually like and be happy emotionally.	Audiences may like or dislike, be sad or happy according to their context and relevance.
News on subjects like new inventions, the beginning or completion of development projects, social unity and harmony, acts of heroism, environment conservation, etc., are examples.	News about economic crises, natural disasters, socio-political conflict, environmental degradation, crime reports, etc. are examples.
Well-structured, attractive, and quality news is considered good and positive news.	Sometimes lacks quality but attracts an audience of satirical and revenge.
Has a positive influence on the emotional tendency of the audience	Has a negative influence on the emotional tendency of the audience
Audiences usually want and demand to dissemination of positive information	Audience may dislike it by heart but still want to obtain and demand negative information
Get less priority of media and audience in comparison to negative news	Get more priority of media and audience while compared to positive news
Positive tone and pleasing words are used in language and presentation	Negative tones and unpleasant words are used in language and presentation

Setting the Indicators

Being based on various indicators as discussed above, the researcher has set the following key factors as indicators to categorize whether the news is negative, positive, or neutral.

Indicators of Bias

- o   Selection and placement of stories
- o   Language and tone
- o   Frame and angle
- o   Journalistic integrity
- o   Possible influence in the emotional tendency of the audience

Observation Data Presentation

Based on the data drawn from the seven Nepali broadsheet national daily newspaper's first-page news placement of a week from

Tuesday to Monday, 25th of Mangsir to 1st of Poush 2081 (December 10-16, 2024), news bias perceived by the researcher is based on the above indicators is presented as follows:

Table 2

Data of Positive, Negative, and Neutral Perspectives in News Items in Varous Newspapers in Nepal

SN	Newspaper	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
1	Naya Patrika	8	36	4	48
2	Gorkhapatra	17	10	7	34
3	Annapurna Post	9	19	5	33
4	Rajdhani	8	5	5	18
5	Kantipur	6	13	2	21
6	Nagarik	11	22	7	40
7	Nepal Samachar Patra	2	22	4	28
8	All Total News	61	127	34	222

Note. Field Survey, 2024

The data reveal varying degrees of perceived bias in the news coverage of these newspapers, with some being viewed more negatively and others more positively or neutrally, indicating that readers' perceptions of bias differ depending on the newspaper they read. For instance, Naya Patrika exhibits a predominantly critical tone, with 75% of its articles being negative, while positive and neutral articles account for 16.67% and 8.33%, respectively. In contrast, Gorkhapatra offers a more balanced perspective, with half of its articles positive, 29.41% negative, and 20.59% neutral, suggesting a relatively optimistic approach. Annapurna Post leans more toward negative reporting, with 57.58% negative articles compared to 27.27% positive and 15.15% neutral coverage.

Similarly, Rajdhani shows a more diverse approach, with 44.44% positive articles and equal shares of 27.78% for both negative and neutral pieces. Kantipur and Nagarik both display generally critical tones, featuring majorities of negative articles at 61.90% and 55.00%, respectively, with positive coverage around 27% and neutral coverage ranging from 9.52% to 17.50%. Nepal Samachar Patra stands out for having the highest proportion of negative articles (78.57%) and the lowest proportion of positive ones (7.14%), with neutral articles at 14.29%, highlighting a strongly critical reporting style. Overall, the coverage of issues in Nepali national broadsheet dailies is predominantly negative, with 57.21% of articles carrying a negative tone, 27.48% positive, and 15.32% neutral, reflecting a general tendency toward critical reporting, albeit with notable differences across individual newspapers.

Implications

The predominance of negative articles may reflect a focus on highlighting problems and critical frames, which can be important for raising awareness and promoting media literacy among audiences. However, the relatively lower proportion of positive coverage may also indicate a lack of emphasis on achievements and constructive developments. This imbalance in reporting can influence public perception and potentially reinforce negative stereotypes.

Table 3

Perception of Biasness in News Coverage

S.N.	Topic	Responses	Numbers
1	Frequency of Newspaper Reading		
		Daily	32
		Several times a week	12
		Rarely	8
		Once a week	2
		Never	2
3	Perception of News Bias		
		Positive bias	8
		Negative bias	20
		Both positive and negative bias	28
3	Topics Perceived to be More Biased		
		Politics	46
		Economy	4
		Entertainment	4
		Other	2
4	Methods to Identify Bias		
		Analyze viewpoint, language, and source	28
		Check the balance of viewpoints represented	10
		Analyze the language used	8
		Look at the source of information	10
5	Confidence in Recognizing Bias		
		Very confident	20
		Somewhat confident	22
		Not very confident	8
		Not confident at all	2
		I don't know	4
6	Impact of News Coverage on Public Opinion		
		Significantly positive	2
		Somewhat positive	2
		Neither negative nor positive	4
		Somewhat negative	28
		Significantly negative	20
7	Importance of Media Literacy for Newspaper Readers		

S.N.	Topic	Responses	Numbers
		Extremely important	32
		Very important	10
		Moderately important	10
		Slightly important	2
		Not important at all	2
8	Previous Media Literacy Education		
		Yes, it was very useful	20
		Yes, but it was not very useful	8
		No, but I would like to take	18
		No, I am not interested	4
		I am not sure	6
9	Perception of Fairness in News Coverage		
		Yes, fairer	36
		Yes, a little bit fair	12
		They don't want to be fair	2
		I am not sure	6

Reading Frequency. A majority of respondents read newspapers daily, indicating a significant level of audience engagement with news media, especially daily newspapers.

Perception of Negative Bias. A significantly high number of respondents reported perceiving bias in newspapers, with negative bias being more commonly noticed than positive bias.

Most Biased News Topic. Politics is perceived as the most highly biased subject in newspapers, highlighting the need for greater scrutiny in political news reporting.

Methods for Identifying Bias. Respondents use methods such as analyzing viewpoints, language, and sources to identify bias, indicating a considerable level of media literacy among newspaper readers.

Confidence in Recognizing Bias. Many respondents express confidence in recognizing bias, reflecting a critical approach to news consumption. The majority also perceive that news coverage negatively impacts public opinion, emphasizing concerns about the media's role in shaping societal views.

Need for Media Literacy. Respondents strongly emphasize media literacy as a crucial tool for identifying bias and evaluating news content. Media education and training are important for promoting media literacy. Additionally, a considerable number of respondents reported having received media literacy education, suggesting growing awareness of the importance of understanding media bias.

Need for Neutrality, Balance, and Fairness in News. Respondents believe that newspapers can provide fair and unbiased coverage, and that neutral and balanced reporting is essential to achieving this.

Conclusion

The data from both the survey and the analysis of news coverage in Nepali national daily newspapers reveal a significant perception of bias among readers, particularly in political reporting. This underscores the urgent need for enhanced media literacy. Empowering individuals to access, analyze, and critically evaluate news content is essential. The respondents' varying levels of confidence in recognizing bias further emphasize the importance of developing media literacy skills. Newspapers and other media outlets must strive to provide fairer and more balanced news coverage to maintain credibility and trust among their audiences. Promoting media literacy is crucial for enabling individuals to critically assess the news and information disseminated through various media channels. News media must prioritize transparency, neutrality, balance, and fairness in their reporting to reduce bias and enhance their trustworthiness.

Recommendation

This research serves as a brief and symbolic study on the topic. Further research encompassing broader aspects is essential to effectively address media bias and promote media literacy. Such efforts can contribute to sustainable media credibility and the development of informed citizens.

References

Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2010). *Mass communication theory: Foundations, ferment and future*. (6th.ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Dadakhonov, A. O. (2024). Analysis of media and information literacy definitions: A qualitative approach. *Studies in Media and Communication*, *12*(2), 116–129.

Fair.org (n.d.). *How to detect bias in newspapers*. https://fair.org/take-action-now/media-activism-kit/how-to-detect-bias-in-news-media/

Kharel, P. (2006). *A study of journalism*. Nepal Association of Media Educators.

Kharel, P. (2010). *Political communication: Media, message and meaning*. Sangam Institute.

McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (5th ed.). Vistaar Publications.

Oxford Languages Dictionary. (2024). http://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/

Pinker, S. (2018, February 17). *The media exaggerates negative news. This distortion has consequences*. The Guardian.

The Aspen Institute.org. (2010 November 10). *Digital and media literacy: A plan of action*. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/digital-media-literacy-plan-action/

UNESCO (2024). *Media and information literacy*. https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy